THE DIFFERENTIAL EMOTIONAL PROCESSING THEORY
OF MALADAPTIVE DAYDREAMING

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Abstract
This thesis presents an original contribution to knowledge in the form of the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*. This theory provides new theoretical understanding of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Maladaptive daydreaming is a widely researched topic, but research into daydreaming, that is not maladaptive, but absorptive and vividly experienced, is newly emerging, with a need for more research to be conducted. Uncertainty is evident in how to theoretically explain maladaptive daydreaming beyond psychopathological suggestions. A constructivist grounded theory methodology enabled the researcher and 16 participants to co-construct a theory that provides a theoretical understanding of maladaptive daydreaming. In line with human research requirements, ethical approval was obtained from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Board (study one: case studies approval number: H17118) and (study two: forum approval number: H18078). The research data was derived from two research stages. These were two case study interviews and an online forum that involved 16 adult participants. Extensive coding was carried out across both research stages involving memo writing and a simultaneous literature review, along with an updated literature review in 2019 to 2022. The theory presented in this thesis relates to maladaptive daydreaming, positing that maladaptive daydreaming is one pathway of a wider construct ‘absorptive daydreaming’, with features that are maladaptive, whilst the other pathway is one that relates to emotional growth that is adaptive, through emotional processing factors. Key contributions of this thesis include: a move towards seeing maladaptive daydreaming as a potential emotional processing mechanism; ideas for meeting emotional processing needs in other ways than maladaptive daydreaming; and, moving treatment towards emotional processing rather than focusing on psychopathology. In conclusion, this thesis presents the first constructed grounded theory of maladaptive daydreaming. The theory provides a new theoretical understanding that may be able to be tested and extended into other populations in order to develop interventions that may assist the worldwide maladaptive daydreaming community. This thesis’s theory of maladaptive daydreaming and the wider construct of ‘absorptive daydreaming’ suggests that maladaptive daydreaming research would benefit from adopting broader understandings of maladaptive daydreaming, to include further areas of daydreaming experience, such as immersive daydreaming, which may be the emotional growth pathway within the current theory, that was found within this current study.
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The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study is to explore the experience of a group of maladaptive daydreamer, leading to the construction of a theory of maladaptive daydreaming. As illustrated in chapter two, ‘literature review’, research has been carried out into daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming. Whilst maladaptive daydreaming has been researched and explained to some extent, the question why people experience maladaptive daydreaming that is not maladaptive, remained largely unanswered prior to this study.

General Statement

Maladaptive daydreaming is a very different experience to normal daydreaming. The literature has presented case studies related to maladaptive daydreaming experience, (Bigelsen, Lehrfeld, Jopp & Sommer, 2016; Glausiusz, 2011; Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009; Somer, 2002, 2013). Case studies have been mainly used to highlight people’s struggles with their maladaptive daydreaming (Glausiusz, 2011; Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009; Somer, 2002; Witkin, 2019). The case studies provide description of people’s struggles with concentration, as a result of the excessive daydreaming. They report additional struggles with achieving academic and life goals, also describing people’s embarrassment at daydreaming so excessively. They promote maladaptive daydreaming as having behavioral addictive factors, that involve intense feelings of remorse and hopelessness. These case studies have described maladaptive daydreaming as involving detailed and intricate fantasies, with a person daydreaming for up to six hours per day. Within this literature the case study participants further added that their daydream experiences are absorptive, vivid, like watching a movie, with numerous scenes and stories being played out. For some, the experience involved seeing themselves as taking a central role within their daydreams; others reported being observers of the events within their daydreams. Furthermore, people portrayed how they drifted off throughout the day into fantastical and elaborate worlds. The urge to engage in the daydreams had an impact on their relationships, friendships, physical and mental health, as well as their future goals and employment opportunities.

As reported in these case studies, maladaptive daydreaming includes unusual features, such as experiencing intense feelings towards the fantasy characters within the daydreams, that is not often a feature of normal daydreaming. Additionally, in all the case studies, each person expressed that they were fully aware of their real-world surroundings, whilst engaged in the daydreaming, suggesting that they did not get lost
within the daydream reality. A further unique feature of maladaptive daydreaming, as reported within these case studies, was the need to engage in kinesthetic behavior whilst daydreaming (Gardner, 1983). Reported kinesthetic behaviors included pacing, twirling on the spot, walking, running, or voicing and acting out the daydream scenarios, within that present moment. This unusual behavior was expressed to help to access, intensify and maintain maladaptive daydreaming. Most importantly, a central feature of the reported experience was the associated distress that came from being unable to control the maladaptive daydreaming; thus, majorly impacting on life.

Compared with maladaptive daydreaming, normal daydreaming can be defined as an unnoticed phenomenon, with the experience unstructured and erratic, with these momentary daydreams lasting a few minutes (Singer, 1964). Much less time is spent in normal daydreaming than the six hours per day that is reported in maladaptive daydreaming. Singer took a positive stance in relation to normal daydreaming, suggesting the importance of daydreaming abilities to apply practical problem-solving as a direct result of the daydreaming experience. Young (1988) further identified fantasy and daydreaming as a soothing and empowering process that acts as a buffer against life’s stresses and problems.

Most of the research into maladaptive daydreaming has explored the maladaptive nature of the experience, whereby the experience has been expressed as entirely dysfunctional. Initially, maladaptive daydreaming was linked to childhood trauma (Somer, 2002). Somer, who named the phenomenon, depicted maladaptive daydreaming as a coping tool, which might have been developed in early childhood, in order to cope with adversity.

The research into maladaptive daydreaming has also focused on identifying maladaptive daydreaming as being a unique clinical syndrome (Bigelsen et al., 2016). Attempts at legitimizing maladaptive daydreaming as a psychiatric disorder are evident throughout the literature. Several developmental and validation studies have aimed to create clinical measurement tools for maladaptive daydreaming (Jopp, Dupuis, Somer, Hagani & Herscu, 2018; Somer, Lehrfeld, Bigelson & Jopp, 2016; Somer, Soffer-Dudek, Ross & Halpern, 2017a). Other maladaptive daydreaming studies have looked towards uncovering further clinically relevant information, such as: compensatory themes (Somer, Somer & Jopp, 2016a); related psychiatric disorders (Somer, Somer & Jopp, 2016b; Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018); symptomology (Bigelsen et al., 2016); antecedents and maintaining factors (Somer et al., 2016b); the way in which vulnerable groups, such as recovering substance-abusers (Somer, Abu-Raya & Simaan, 2019) and
child abuse survivors (Abu-Rayya, Somer & Knane, 2019a), may be more at risk of experiencing maladaptive daydreaming; and an attempted treatment plan to reduce maladaptive daydreaming (Somer, 2018). At the time of writing this thesis, there were no current offerings within the literature that supplied a comprehensive theory of maladaptive daydreaming. The research that has focused on psychopathology may have resulted in other ideas about the origins of maladaptive daydreaming being overlooked, as a result of that research direction.

Literature into maladaptive daydreaming has suggested links with comorbid psychiatric disorders, such as OCD, ADHD and social anxiety (Somer et al., 2016b). More recent studies have suggested a comorbid link to depressive disorder and anxiety disorder, alongside the previously noted comorbid psychiatric disorders (Somer, Soffer-Dudek & Ross, 2017b). Studies undertaken since have suggested that maladaptive daydreaming might stem from resultant psychological challenges, related to experiences such as recovering from substance abuse (Somer et al., 2019) and returning in a circular fashion, towards stemming from survival of childhood sexual abuse (Abu-Rayya, Somer & Knane, 2019a). A final offering within the literature of a potential attempt to characterize maladaptive daydreaming suggested that maladaptive daydreaming has behavioral addiction features involved, (Pietkiewicz, Necki, Banbura & Tomalski, 2018). Whilst the maladaptive daydreaming behavior is maladaptive, and can be defined as pathological, it could be argued that there are limitations to the term ‘maladaptive’, which infers pathology, resulting in eliminating research into other forms of daydreaming that is absorptive. Based upon the diagnostic statistical manual-5 (DSM-5), gambling disorder is the only currently recognized behavioral addiction (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The idea of maladaptive daydreaming being a function of a behavioral addiction can be criticized due to the idea coming from an article that was based upon the experience of only one case study participant. Further research is needed to develop an understanding beyond the maladaptive daydreaming experience, and to uncover what factors might contribute to people experiencing maladaptive daydreaming. It is unequivocal from the literature that there is a need for clarity in attempting to understand maladaptive daydreaming, a gap that the present study seeks to attend to. The next section focuses on the specific problems that have led to the undertaking of this thesis, along with how this thesis, and the constructed theory of maladaptive daydreaming it posits, might contribute to the existing literature.
Statement of the Problem

What is the Specific Problem?

Although some understanding exists within the literature about the maladaptive daydreaming experience, understandably, the research has mainly focused on the distressing aspects of the phenomenon, and there is a need for exploring beyond the pathology and distress of maladaptive daydreaming. (Abu-Rayya et al., 2019a; Somer, 2002; Somer et al., 2016a; Somer et al., 2016b; Somer, Somer & Jopp, 2016a; Somer et al., 2017b; Somer & Herscu, 2017; Somer et al., 2019; Somer, Somer & Halpern, 2019b). Studies have focused on how maladaptive daydreaming might be associated with comorbid disorders (Somer et al., 2017b), such as OCD and ADHD. Those studies have explored the maladaptive impacts on people’s lives, with the obstacles of how maladaptive daydreaming affects people’s lives negatively, being widely explored in case studies (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Glausiusz, 2011; Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009; Somer, 2002; Somer, 2013).

To date, there is a knowledge gap in the research that approaches maladaptive daydreaming with a view towards constructing its findings and theory directly from the data, instead of building upon earlier knowledge (Somer, Somer & Jopp, 2016b; Schimmenti, Somer & Regis, 2019; Somer, 2018; Somer, 2019a). It is recognized that a grounded theory study has been conducted by Somer, Somer & Jopp, 2016b. Yet, upon review, that research would be better identified as a thematic analysis study, as seven themes were identified, yet no theory was constructed within the study. The current thesis is a demonstration of how a theory was constructed directly from the data, moving beyond themes.

However, the aim of this study is not whether the findings indicate a maladaptive or adaptive aspect. Instead, the aim is to enable the construction of a theory that provided more understanding of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, and to progress the research to exploring beyond pathology and distress.

Where Does the Problem Stem From?

The focus of previous research was an exploration of the distressing aspects of maladaptive daydreaming, to the detriment of other research perspectives, such as the development of a theoretical explanation. This focus stems from researchers aiming to legitimize maladaptive daydreaming as a valid psychiatric disorder (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Somer et al., 2017b; Somer & Herscu, 2017; Somer, 2018). Research has been carried out into several related areas: (a) validation and development of clinical tools (Bigelsen et al., 2016, (b) validation across countries and cultures (Abu-Raya et al.,
Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming

Who Does Maladaptive Daydreaming Affect?

This question proves to be difficult to answer. Maladaptive daydreaming research has involved individual case studies (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Glausiusz, 2011; Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009; Somer, 2002; SomerClinic, 2015), and quantitative research studies involving groups (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Somer et al., 2016a; Somer et al., 2016c; Somer et al., 2019). Currently, there is no epidemiological data with regards to prevalence of maladaptive daydreaming within the community. Informal information from social media forums on Facebook and Reddit show membership in the range of the 71,100 members on the Reddit maladaptive daydreaming group and for Facebook, 7,934 members, across the globe. Members are a range of ages, relationship statuses and employment statuses (married, single, and so on), and employment types and income levels (such as those with low incomes and well-paid professionals, for instance lawyers and academics). Members of these forums range from students to adults, and parents of young children whom the parents believe experience maladaptive daydreaming. Noticeable within these forums is the great impact on members of maladaptive daydreaming, with neither an understanding of nor an explanation for their daydream experiences. Some of these forum members express that this not knowing adds to their distress levels, thus further affecting their lives.

Where Does a Knowledge Gap Exist?

Most of the research into maladaptive daydreaming has been carried out through quantitative methods, in order to empirically verify or refute a range of hypotheses. These hypotheses have been related to ideas of the psychopathology, symptoms and measurement of the maladaptive daydreaming experience (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Schimmenti, Somer & Regis, 2019; Somer et al., 2002; Somer et al., 2016b; Somer et al., 2016c; Somer et al., 2017; Somer & Herscu, 2017; Somer, 2018; Somer, 2019). There has been a limited range of qualitative studies that have explored the lived experience of maladaptive daydreaming (Somer, 2002; Somer et al., 2016a; Somer, Somer & Jopp, 2016b; Somer et al., 2016c), and representations from the artwork of
maladaptive daydreamers (Somer et al., 2019b). These qualitative studies have nonetheless provided rich findings in relation to the experiences of maladaptive daydreamers. With the focus of the research, looking towards having maladaptive daydreaming recognized as a psychiatric disorder, this focus has resulted in a lack of theoretical understanding about maladaptive daydreaming, indicating a knowledge gap in the theoretical understanding of this wider construct.

**How Will This Study Add to the Existing Literature?**

The existing literature shows an enormous amount of research effort on the part of Professor Eli Somer, the pioneering maladaptive daydreaming researcher. Initially, he worked alone, from the Israeli Haifa University and the trauma clinic, and throughout the years since he has collaborated with other researchers. His research has shown consistent attempts at understanding maladaptive daydreaming, but yet, such a theoretical understanding is still elusive. This current study adds to the existing literature by enabling its findings and subsequent theory to be constructed from the participants’ sharing of their experiences, and resultant coding, from the case study stage and the forum stages’ data. This thesis offers a perspective of maladaptive daydreaming, offering the view that different mechanisms are involved in its conception and ongoing maintenance of the experience. *The Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, constructed from this study, provides new understanding and direction to the maladaptive daydreaming research areas.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study is to construct an explanation about the daydream experience reported in the two examined studies (study one: two case studies), and (study two: 16 participants in an online discussion forum). This thesis seeks to address a knowledge gap in the theoretical explanation of maladaptive daydreaming, aiming to construct a theory of maladaptive daydreaming, through a constructivist grounded theory framework.

The participants in this study included 16 adults, who all met the diagnostic criteria for maladaptive daydreaming, the most widely researched type of maladaptive daydreaming, (using the clinical cut off = 45/100 for the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale [MDS-16]), (Somer et al., 2017a). This study used a constructivist approach to grounded theory with the data collected through case studies and online forums (Charmaz, 2008). The case studies were semi-structured interviews conducted with two mature females, and the online forums were monitored comments made by 16 adult participants who discussed their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming across a six-
week period. Analysis of the case study interview and forum data enabled insight to be gleaned into these two studies’ participants’ reasons for engaging in such daydreaming.

**Importance of the Study**

Two key factors have been identified as determining the need for this thesis. First, research into maladaptive daydreaming has shown a lack of understanding regarding theoretical explanations of the phenomenon. Within the existing research arena, the theory focus has purely been upon psychopathology explanations, whereby maladaptive daydreaming has been explored looking towards abnormal behaviors, cognitions and experiences which differ to the social norm, exploring such daydreaming as a potential mental health disorder. Alternative non-psychopathologic explanations, including social factors, motivational factors, humanistic factors and philosophical explanations might further develop understanding beyond attempts to psychopathologize the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

Several stakeholders benefit from this study’s attempt to further a collective understanding of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. A variety of health professionals can leverage this study’s findings to aid their understanding and treatment of maladaptive daydreaming. These health professionals include general practitioners, psychiatrists and allied health workers, such as psychologists, and occupational therapists and social workers. This study has the potential to position the theory at the forefront of maladaptive daydreaming research, making a valuable contribution to both psychological research and towards a wider exploration of maladaptive daydreaming.

In addition to health professionals, this study also benefits other stakeholders, by providing guidance to people who experience maladaptive daydreaming. Knowing about this theory of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming provides these people with a new direction in which to seek assistance with emotional processing strategies. Furthermore, it benefits people who support maladaptive daydreamers, such as family, friends and partners. The theory of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming offers these carers’ additional knowledge as to how to support the person experiencing the phenomenon (Tsvieli & Diamond, 2018).

This study also benefits organizations. For instance, the constructed theory might contribute knowledge to more effective work policies, making better provisions for assisting any employees who experience maladaptive daydreaming. Within the education sector, the theory benefits educators in understanding their students’ study challenges in relation to their experience of maladaptive daydreaming. Understanding
what contributes to maladaptive daydreaming betters equip these stakeholders to understand the changes that are needed to assist and support ss.

Secondly, this study’s findings, theory and insights are beneficial for the maladaptive daydreaming community across the world. The study provides ways in which to incorporate practical methods, to be able to minimize the distress of maladaptive daydreaming. For instance, the emotional processing benefits of maladaptive daydreaming can be extended towards development of interventions. Incorporating alternative and less distressing emotional processing strategies, beyond the maladaptive daydreaming process, are a focus of future research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, Smallwood & Schooler, 2015).

To summarize, the construction of a useable theory of maladaptive daydreaming, holds the potential to fulfil the requirement to demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge.

**Theoretical Framework**

Daydreaming has been studied for over a century (Freud, 1908; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Singer, 1961, 1964, 1966, 1978; Singer & Antrobus, 1965, 1970; Singer & Brown, 1960). Daydreaming was discussed in this research in relation to its costs and benefits. There are numerous published studies on the negative aspects of daydreaming (Bybee, Luthar, Zigler & Mersica, 1997; Hartman, 1958; Mooneyham & Schooler, 2013; Singer, 1966). In relation to maladaptive daydreaming, the exploration of the negative aspects of this type of daydreaming, also appeared within the literature (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011; Bigelsen et al., 2016; Somer, 2002; Somer et al., 2016b; Somer & Herscu, 2017).

Several theories and studies are noted in this study in relation to daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming experience. These are further described in chapter two, ‘literature review’. The theories include Rachman’s *Emotional Processing Theory* (1980). Other relevant theories include *Daydreaming Content Theories* and studies (Bybee, et al., 1997; Delaney, Sahakyan & Kelley, 2010), and *Daydreaming Category Theories* (Franklin, Mrazek, Anderson, Smallwood, Kingstone & Schooler, 2013; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Mooneyham & Schooler, 2013).

Rachman’s theory of emotional processing identified some previously unknown factors related to successful and unsuccessful processing (Rachman, 1980, 2001). Previously, studies into processing had only occurred in relation to the topic of ‘information processing’, with emotional processing a new area of exploration. In relation to some of the reported experiences of the maladaptive daydreamers within the
current study, Rachman’s theory provides insight into several relevant topics of maladaptive daydreaming. These topics included the obsessive nature of maladaptive daydreaming, along with the related intrusive thoughts, together with the inappropriate expression of emotions and the lack of concentration during the experience. Rachman’s work with *Emotional Processing Theory* also provides much needed insight into unsuccessful emotional processing, with suggestions of how to achieve successful emotional processing. For instance, one idea that could be utilized from Rachman’s theory, stems from the use of imagination to rehearse difficult life situations, along with the experiencing of difficult emotions through the fantasy experience. Rachman’s theory of emotional processing supplies both theoretical and practical strategies for successful emotional processing, based upon the theory – both of which would be highly beneficial outcomes of this thesis and its research into maladaptive daydreaming. Therefore, Rachman’s theory of emotional processing is valuable to the subject of this enquiry, maladaptive daydreaming.

Childhood daydream theories have also explored the effects of daydreaming, in relation to emotion-related outcomes (Goldstein & Russ, 2000; Somer, 2002; Tower, 1985). Goldstein and Russ (2000) explored the positive function of childhood fantasy and coping skills, finding daydreaming emotionally beneficial to the children in their study. Tower (1985) found that the children in their study, who were more imaginative than other children in the study, achieved higher ratings on the study’s assessments, and were shown to be more socially adept and more emotionally self-regulated on these ratings. This study provides additional support for the potential role of fantasy and resultant emotional outcomes.

The premise of daydreaming content category theory suggests that daydreaming content can lead to different emotional outcomes (Bybee et al., 1997). A study undertaken by Bybee, and colleagues found evidence for three different types of daydream perspectives (*fantasy self, ideal self and ought self*) (Bybee et al. 1997). The fantasy self, being related to in terms of perfectionism; ideal self, referred to in relation to high standards; and, ought self, referred to in relation to how things should be. Each of these led to different emotional outcomes within their research. Their study found the most useful of these was the ‘ought’ self, which they described as the most adaptive, in relation to their participants’ mental health. The other forms of selves were described as unhelpful, leading to poorer emotional outcomes. Delaney and colleagues, (2010) provided further evidence that daydream content linked to emotional outcomes. Their study found that daydream content change resulted in poorer encoding, which then led
to resultant forgetting (of a change of context of the daydreaming towards recalling far change content versus near change content) and this led to memory task degradation. They suggested that changing the daydreaming content might offer a protection from difficult emotional events, enabling people to cope with these difficulties. Those researchers demonstrated that changing the context of daydreaming led to increased forgetting of the difficult emotional events, providing some relief to them.

The literature provided further theoretical direction, in relation to positive constructivist daydreaming theory (Franklin, et al., 2013; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Mooneyham & Schooler, 2013). Mooneyham and Schooler’s (2013) review suggested that daydreaming offered an opportunity for future thinking, relief from boredom and a tool for creativity. Describing the potential functionality of daydreaming, they suggested that because it happens throughout daily life, it must have some adaptive benefit. The suggestion of positive emotional processing through daydreaming can also be linked to a study undertaken by Franklin, et al. (2013). These researchers found that high interest episodes of daydreaming led to an increase in positive mood, suggesting that individuals could be encouraged to shift their daydreams to topics that were the most interesting, to improve mood. The literature within this section offers new theoretical explanations that have not previously been linked to the maladaptive daydreaming experience. These explanations relate to the way in which maladaptive daydreaming provides an emotional processing experience to daydreamers, through either emotional growth or emotional protection supplied by the daydream experience.

For the current constructivist grounded theory study, I employ a literature review process that is iterative and non-linear. Searches span across a range of topics including different conceptualizations of daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming. As the data analysis from both studies progressed, I also explored literature around emotions and daydreaming, using a range of terms across several disciplines. I returned to the literature after data collection and analysis. Topics were re-examined that had been explored prior to data collection, as well as new areas that had appeared due to data analysis (see Chapter Two: Literature Review for more information on these topic searches). Most of the literature was sourced after the data collection and analysis process, to be able to provide context to the study’s findings in relation to the previous literature.
**Research Questions**

This thesis incorporates two research stages: case studies and forum. Both stages adopt a constructivist grounded theory method, in order to construct theory through the means of data analysis and engagement with the resultant data. Research employing a constructivist grounded theory method treats research questions differently than other research methods. Research questions are kept general and flexible (Charmaz, 2018), which enables the constructivist grounded theory technique to be facilitated. Flexibility is key in constructivist grounded theory, as questions are adapted throughout the research study. The constructivist grounded theory researcher further adapts questions once subsequent factors are identified and constructed. Adaption of the questions occur through the phases of data collection, analysis and coding.

**Stage One: Case Study Research Questions (CS1-CS3)**

With a constructivist grounded theory methodology in mind, two initial research questions were proposed to explore the maladaptive daydreaming experience (case study research question one: ‘CS1’ and, case study research question two: ‘CS2’). These two initial research questions were asked of the two case study participants in the first stage of this thesis.

(CS1) ‘What is the main concern of people who experience maladaptive daydreaming, and how do they continuously resolve that concern?’

(CS2) ‘What are the main features of the experience of maladaptive daydreaming and how could these be resolved in a treatment context?’

A third research question (case study research question three: ‘CS3’) was constructed in relation to the CS1 and CS2 responses. This third question aimed to address that the two maladaptive daydreamers had both expressed to me different maladaptive daydreaming experiences. The third research question explored these differences by investigating:

(CS3) ‘What are the differences in the experiences of maladaptive daydreamers, and what might explain these differences?’

These three case study research questions (CS1-CS3) were later developed upon in the second stage of the data collection, that of the forum, thus further demonstrating the flexibility of grounded theory questions.
Stage Two: Forum Study Research Questions (F1-F6)

As well as the three research questions above, which were explored through the case study research stage, the case studies also generated five areas of interest for further investigation, within the forum research study.

For instance, the study’s two case participants had described the impact on their relationships of their spending large amounts of time daydreaming. As a result, the following research question (forum research question one: ‘F1’) was asked in the forum stage:

(F1) ‘How does maladaptive daydreaming impact social connections?’

The case study participants also raised the question about the experience of daydreaming being a private and potentially embarrassing experience. As such, a question about the ‘hiddenness’ of maladaptive daydreaming was asked with the forum research study. This question was the second forum research question (F2) shown below:

(F2) ‘What are the reasons for the maladaptive daydreaming experience being hidden from others?’

As a result of the participant’s discussions and coding outcomes (forum research question three: ‘F3’) was asked in relation to the participant’s control of their maladaptive daydreaming:

(F3) ‘How is control involved within the maladaptive daydreaming experience?’

Analysis of the case study participants’ data from (CS1-CS3), and the forum participant’s data (F1-F3), also constructed two further questions about the way in which their maladaptive daydreaming was fulfilling their emotional needs. These questions were (F4-F5):

(F4) ‘How does maladaptive daydreaming fulfil emotional needs?’

(F5) ‘How are emotions involved within the maladaptive daydreaming experience?’

A final area of interest that emerged from across both the overall coding of the case study and forum stages’ research questions (CS1-CS3 and F1-F5) and was thus investigated within the forum, investigated how the participants explained to themselves why their maladaptive daydreaming experiences occurred for them (F6).

(F6) ‘Why does your maladaptive daydreaming occur?’

From the coding carried out through the two collective studies (case studies and forum), the final research question in the forum (F6) was constructed through a large amount of coding of the data collected from the two studies. The level of detail and
work that enabled this research question to be constructed is shown within this theses’ research diary. This research diary is known as an ‘audit trail’ within constructivist grounded theory, and shows all the coding decisions made, including the development of questions. The ‘audit trail’ for the forum can be found in Appendix Q. The research questions from across both studies served to enable constructivist grounded theory coding and theory development to be carried out in order to construct this theses’ theory of maladaptive daydreaming.

Overview of the Research Design

Constructivist Grounded Theory

This study employs Charmaz’s (2008) constructivist grounded theory method of data collection and analysis, to enable the construction of a new theory of maladaptive daydreaming. The constructivist grounded theory method as used here aimed to explore people’s experiences, along with the related processes, with the broader aim of constructing a theory of how these processes work (Corley, 2015). Charmaz specifically expressed that theory should only be generated from the data collected, its analysis and the subjective experience of the research process, within the frame of inquiry. In this way, the constructed theory is ‘grounded in the data’ (Charmaz, 2012). The constructivist grounded theory method is useful for studies in fields with limited theory already generated. This was the case in relation to maladaptive daydreaming, and this research study therefore seeks to construct a theoretical explanation of the experience. For the purpose of this thesis, and consistent with the constructivist grounded theory research body, ‘theory’ refers to the understanding of relationships and processes between abstract concepts.

Constructivist grounded theory is a distinct method of analyzing data and constructing theory, compared with other methods. The following section provides an overview of the theoretical conceptualizations of the method.

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory researchers work through inductive methods. They use a range of skills, in order to gather, analyze, compare and conceptualize data (Charmaz, 2016). It is a qualitative method used by researchers who aim to identify patterns in data in order to construct theory (Wilson, 1996). It differs from other methods in its aim not to deduce, nor to shape theory through existing literature. The constructivist grounded theory method can be a challenging and in-depth process. At times, the time investment required in such a research process through which the
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researcher aims to tune in to the essence of an experience, and the large amount of work involved in using the method, are not always evident to the reader.

Charmaz (2014, p. 290) described the challenges and conflicts of using the constructivist grounded theory method. Charmaz advised constructive grounded theory researchers to rethink the standard thesis, with a view of looking to situate themselves within their research (Charmaz, 1997; Charmaz, 2011a). Constructive grounded theory researchers play a major role in co-constructing theory from research findings, alongside their participants. High level interview, reflective and coding skills are needed in constructivist grounded theory research (Lazenbatt & Elliott, 2005). The researcher decides which participants to recruit, the design of the study, how to interact within the study, and the data to be analyzed (Charmaz, 2017b). These decisions differ from the decisions required of other researchers (Charmaz, 2017a). Additionally, the constructivist grounded theory researcher’s beliefs, experiences, worldview, prior knowledge and assumptions determine what they are aware of within the data (Charmaz, 2015). As a result, the analysis is unique to the researcher and the study’s participants. Through the processes of reflexivity and transparency, the researcher discloses how they address issues, subsequently enhancing the rigor of their research and findings (Tobin & Begley, 2004). This is in direct contrast to the traditional scientific method wherein the researcher is a ‘neutral observer’ (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). Construction of a grounded theory is therefore not a linear process with a single direction, which can be disorienting to scientifically trained researchers. It can be a challenge for a researcher to ‘unlearn’ the conventional style of research (Charmaz, 2011b).

In summary, the theoretical conceptualization of the constructivist grounded theory method, although challenging, provides the researcher with an ability to trust the unique process and the resultant constructed theory, through the depth of their engagement with the construction process (Suddaby, 2006).

The following section provides detail of the research design for this thesis.

**Research Design**

**Study One: Case Studies**

This study generated data through two different research stages. The first study involved case studies of two females, Diane and Cassi, who met the clinical diagnostic criteria for maladaptive daydreaming. The maladaptive daydreaming clinical criteria involve three criterion a; persistent vivid and recurrent fantasies with an individual exhibiting two+ of the following in a six-month period, with at least one as criterion a.
During daydreaming, experiences are intensely absorptive and include auditory, visual or affective properties; (B) music triggers or maintains the daydreaming; (3) The daydreaming is triggered or maintained by movement (pacing, rocking or hand movements); (4) the daydreaming is often engaged in due to boredom; (5) the daydreaming intensifies in length or intensity when alone; (6) during the daydreaming if interrupted, experiences intense agitation; (7) would rather spend time daydreaming than in other areas of life (social, academic, daily chores or professional endeavors); (8) repeated attempts to control the daydreaming, but unsuccessful in these attempts.

criterion b; areas of functioning are significantly impacted by the daydreaming.
criterion c; the daydreaming disturbance is not due to substance abuse, medical conditions, nor mental health disorders. (Somer, Soffer-Dudek, Ross & Halpern, 2017).

The participants in the case study stage of this research were interviewed with six semi-structured interview questions (SSIQ), (see below for SSIQ questions one to six) developed from identified knowledge gaps in maladaptive daydreaming understanding. These two participants were asked to:

(SSIQ1) Talk about their individual experience of maladaptive daydreaming.

(SSIQ2) Reflect upon any similarities and uniqueness of their maladaptive daydreaming, compared with the experiences of other people who also experience maladaptive daydreaming.

(SSIQ3) Share their thoughts on the positives and benefits of their maladaptive daydreaming.

(SSIQ4) Reflect upon their beliefs of the origins of their maladaptive daydreaming.

(SSIQ5) Explore how the maladaptive daydreaming experience might have changed across their life.

(SSIQ6) Reflect upon the impact of their maladaptive daydreaming on their day-to-day lives.

The participants’ interview responses to SSIQ1-SSIQ6 were transcribed, then the transcripts analyzed in four coding stages: open coding, a line-by-line generation of gerunds; focused coding, the joining of codes into categories, member checking of coding outcomes: that included expressed ideas, questions about understanding, commenting about areas of importance, along with the exploration of concepts that needed further expansion. The final stage of coding was theoretical coding, whereby theoretical concepts were joined, or eliminated, or explored further through memo
writing. Throughout these coding stages extensive member checking enabled participants to provide feedback and ideas for improvement (Carlson, 2010).

Study Two: Forum

The second study examined posts made in a six-week period to a researcher developed Facebook forum in which 16 adults maladaptive daydreamers discussed their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. The findings from study one (case studies) were used to draw insight and generate questions into six areas for exploration (F1-F5) within the second study (forum). The use of the case study codes categories and concepts for the forum stage further extended the theoretical conceptualization process of the constructivist grounded theory method.

Five question areas that had been constructed throughout the six-week forum (F1-F5) were explored:

(F1) how maladaptive daydreaming affected the participants’ relationships,
(F2) the hiddenness of the experience, leading to participants’ protection of it,
(F3) levels of control of the maladaptive daydreaming experience,
(F4) participants’ struggles in relation to the daydreaming,
(F5) the link between participants’ emotional processing and maladaptive daydreaming.

A sixth main research question was constructed from the previous five questions’ data collection and coding processes:

(F6) exploration of the participants’ own explanations for their maladaptive daydreaming.

As in the two case studies open, focused and theoretical coding processes were undertaken throughout the forum study period, in addition to ongoing extensive member checking throughout the forum timeframe, with the researcher clarifying understanding and developing concepts. The coding enabled the construction of a theory of maladaptive daydreaming. This theory was subsequently provided to the participants in the question (F5) about the role of emotions in their maladaptive daydreaming, as a way of carrying out further member checking and discussion. The participants presented a consensus that the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming provided a theoretical explanation for their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming.

Further methodological detail for these two study stages is presented in chapter three ‘case study methodology’ and chapter five ‘forum methodology’.
**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are here defined to assist the reader in understanding their use and context within this document.

*Absorptive daydreaming*: A vivid, detailed and highly personal, daydreaming experience, whereby the person becomes absorbed into the experience for several reasons, and includes kinesthetic inclusion of music and/or movement, and the experience is undertaken for lengthy periods of time. (Haynes, 2022).

*Acceptance and commitment therapy*: A behavior change method based on relational frame therapy (RFT) and is explicitly orientated towards the development of greater psychological flexibility. (Zhang et al., 2018).

*Audit trail*: A systematic research diary that shows the research decision-making processes (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004).

*Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)*: A common Neurodevelopment Disorder in children and adults, marked by hyper-activity, inattention and impulsivity (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

*Behavioral addiction*: Categorized by an inability to resist urges or drives that result in harmful actions to oneself or others. Sharing characteristics with substance and alcohol abuse and include pathological gambling as the only recognized DSM-5 disorder. (Grant et al., 2013).

*Case study*: A concentrated inquiry process aimed at providing an opportunity to learn and to understand the complexities of a case (Siggelkow, 2007; Smith, 2018).

*Coding*: A process of assigning codes, for classification purposes (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018).

*Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)*: A form of psychotherapy that is based upon the idea that the way a person thinks, and acts affects how they feel (Beck, 2011).

*Compulsive fantasy*: An urge to engage in high levels of fantasy habit, often failing to control the daydream frequency (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011).

*Constructivist grounded theory*: The development of a detailed understanding of the social and psychological process, within a specific context (Charmaz, 2012).

*Default mode network (DMN)*: Brain regions, that are identified through Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging scans, to identify regions of active brain activity during daydreaming (Mason, Norton, Van Horn, Wegner, Grafton & McRae, 2007).

*Dissociation*: A mental process that involves disconnecting from feelings, thoughts, memories and self-identity (Wolfradt & Engelmann, 1999).
Dissociative identity disorder: A severe form of dissociation, previously known as multiple personality disorder, whereby a person experiences a lack of connection in their memories, thoughts, feelings, actions and sense of identity. (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Emotional growth: The ability to recognize, express and manage feelings throughout different stages of life, and to have feelings of empathy towards others (Noble et al., 2005).

Emotional protection: An emotional detachment experience that helps to protect a person from unwanted stress (Cecil & Glass, 2015).

Emotional regulation: A person’s ability to modulate an emotion or set of emotions, using techniques to manage them better. (APA Dictionary of Psychology).

Emotional processing: “A process where emotional disturbances are absorbed, and other experiences and behaviors could proceed without disruption” (Rachman, 1980, p. 51).

Fantasy proneness (FP): A disposition to engage in lifelong, deep involvement in fantasies (Bacon & Charlesford, 2018; Wilson & Barber, 1981).

Forum: A group of people that use the internet to discuss a topic of interest to them (Arigo, Pagoto, Carter-Harris, Lillie & Nebeker, 2018).


Gerunds: A form of verb ending in ‘ing’ that functions as a noun (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017).

Grounded theory: A systematic method of gathering and analyzing data, in order to generate theory that is grounded within the data under inquiry (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC): A committee that reviews research proposals that involve human participants, to ensure adherence to ethical research processes. (Marathe et al., 2018).

Kinesthetic: A behavior that involves physical movement (Somer, 2002).

Major depressive disorder: A mood disorder that causes persistent feels of sadness, loss of interest, worthlessness, that can interfere with daily functioning and that leads to significant impairments. (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
**Maladaptive daydreaming**: An intense daydreaming experience that distracts people from their real lives and involves kinesthetic behaviors to intensify the daydreaming (Somer, 2002).

**Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale – 14 items (MDS-14)**: A 14-item scale developed to measure clinical levels of maladaptive daydreaming (Somer et al., 2016c).

**Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale – 16 items (MDS-16)**: A revised version of the MDS-14 that includes an additional two items, to further validate the clinical tool for measuring levels of maladaptive daydreaming (Somer et al., 2017b).

**Member checking**: A qualitative technique that involves sharing findings with the participants, enabling them to make appropriate corrections. The technique builds the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Chase, 2017).

**Mediating pathways**: Processes that underlie an existing relationship, via the inclusion of a further variable (Somer & Herscu, 2017).

**Memos**: Recorded theoretical ideas about codes, relationships and processes during the grounded theory coding, collection and analysis of data (Glaser, 1988).

**Mental simulation**: A problem solving ability that involves the imagining of taking a specific action, to simulate outcomes, prior to the taking of the action (Miles et al., 2010; Taylor, Pham, Rivkim & Armor, 1998;).

**Mind wandering**: A shift of attention away from a task toward internal information (Smallwood & O’Connor, 2011).

**Motivational interviewing (MI)**: A counseling approach that aims to help people to explore and resolve ambivalence (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

**Normal daydreaming**: A stream of consciousness that enables detachment from external tasks (Singer, 1966).


**Positive constructive daydreaming**: A daydream style suggested by Singer as positive, and helpful (McMillan, Kaufman, & Singer, 2013; Singer, 1966).

**Pseudonym**: A name that someone uses instead of their real name. Within research, the pseudonym is used for participant confidentiality (Im & Chee, 2012).

**Psychometrics**: A field of study that explores psychological measurement and assessment (APA Dictionary of Psychology).

**Psychopathology**: The study of behavioral and psychological dysfunction that occurs within mental health (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
**Qualitative research:** A scientific method of research that focuses on meaning-making, instead of focusing on numerical information. (Baum, 1995; Birks, 2014).

**Quantitative research:** A scientific method of research that uses a numerical system to measure variables and involves analysis through statistics (Bluestein, 2018).

**Reflexivity:** A process of self-awareness, by consideration of thoughts and actions, at times adopted by some qualitative researchers (Berger, 2013; Hall & Callery, 2001).

**Saturation:** The stage in grounded theory research whereby the researcher gleans no new information from the data (Aldiabat & Navanec, 2018; Wasserman, Clair & Wilson, 2009).

**Schizophrenia:** A serious lifelong mental disorder whereby people interpret reality in an abnormal manner. May result in a combination of delusions, hallucinations, disordered thinking and behavior that results in daily functioning being impaired. (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**Social anxiety disorder:** Extreme and persistent fears related to humiliation and embarrassment in social situations, newly names in the DSM-5 from the prior term of social phobia. (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**Social phobia:** A term from the DSM-IV that was renamed social anxiety disorder in the DSM-5. At times, social anxiety disorder and social phobia are used interchangeably. (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**Theory:** A group of ideas that is intended to explain something.

**Trauma:** A response to a deeply distressing event, that results in overwhelming a person’s ability to cope and causes feelings of helplessness (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Somer & Herscu, 2017).

**Assumptions, Delimitations**

This chapter seeks to reflexively acknowledge the potential impacts of ‘assumptions’ of this research. The section identifies and addresses the study’s ‘delimitations’ - the controllable boundaries - and offers justification of these courses of action.

**Assumptions**

The reader of this thesis can assume that the importance of a structured thesis is recognized by the theses’ author (Bringer, Johnston & Brackenbridge, 2004). The author of this thesis takes this assumption seriously, and therefore aims to present a central argument, and employ a structure to guide the reader through the thesis. It can also be assumed that the researcher believes that the participants across both studies...
provided honest data. This idea is assumed because all the participants had waited for a period - between two weeks to six months - to engage in the research, whilst participant recruitment was completed.

Another assumption that can be assumed by the reader is that the level of detail, time and care taken through the research is demonstrated in the audit trails (DeCuir-Gumby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011), shown in the appendices. These audit trails provide evidence of lengthy data analysis, reflexivity and theory construction processes (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). This depth, therefore, further supports the assumption of an honest representation of the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming experiences.

The decision to use constructivist grounded theory speaks to the assumption that a theory of maladaptive daydreaming could be constructed using this method. This assumption stemmed from extensive reading about the method and attendance at Kathy Charmaz’s training on the method, and a resultant confidence in the method. Regarding constructivist grounded theory, it is assumed that the theory posited through this thesis cannot be generalizable to the general population, but that it presents an explanatory theory about the experiences and perceptions of this study’s research participants.

A few assumptions about the study’s participants can be addressed and justified. Due to a lengthy process gaining research approval then of implementing required ethical research processes, it can be assumed that no distress occurred for the participants. This assumption is supported by the way in which the participants interacted within and following their research participation; the participants reported that their participation was beneficial and useful for them (Puhan et al., 2018). It can further be assumed that the participants took seriously their research participation, and the research project itself, due to their high level of engagement within both the case study stage and the forum stage.

In terms of the maladaptive daydreaming independent assessment carried out within this study, it is assumed that each participant had a similar and thorough assessment, due to the rigorous training and assessment skills of the assessor, Kezia. Furthermore, it is assumed that the two maladaptive daydreaming assessment tools used (MDS-16 and SCIMID) did in fact accurately capture maladaptive daydreaming. This assumption was made based on the extensive reliability and validity studies that have been carried out on the assessment tools used (Abu-Rayya et al., 2019; Jopp et al., 2018; Somer et al., 2015; Somer et al., 2017; Somer et al., 2017b). The reader can also assume that this thesis has developed as the result of ongoing reflection, construction through the literature review and coding process, and that the maladaptive daydreaming
research in this study, is the author’s own work and is a true reflection of my research efforts. For each decision that has been made, it can be assumed that guidance has been sought from Doctoral supervisors, examiners and examination committee and that extensive research has been undertaken to determine the answers.

The next section will provide information on the reasons for some of the decisions that influenced this thesis. These ‘delimitations’ are neither good nor bad but contribute a detailed description of the scope of interest for this study, as they relate to the research design.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the choices the researcher has made within their research. This chapter section describes these choices within the frame of the objectives of the research.

First, constructivist grounded theory was chosen as a method for this study, based on the method’s ability to enable co-construction of a data-driven theory of maladaptive daydreaming, alongside the participants in the two research stages of this thesis (McCallin, 2003). This method was chosen for its capacity to build understanding of maladaptive daydreaming, where there was no adequate prior theory (Charmaz, 2017b).

A second delimitation of this thesis relates to the research questions used in the two study stages. Through the constructivist grounded theory method, initial research questions are developed and used to begin exploration. As more data is collected, coded and analyzed, these preliminary research questions evolve and inform further questions asked of the participants, thus creating newer research questions. It is usual for research questions to be developed in the initial stages of design and remain unchanged. In relation to this qualitative thesis, an unusual delimitation is maintaining a flexibility with the research questions, and the choice was made to embrace this flexibility. Alongside this flexibility with the research question construction process, it was important to include only appropriate and useful question decisions that were constructed from the participants’ data.

For this study to be a manageable project, further choices were made that would enable meaningful interpretations and conclusions of the research findings. One of the clearest examples of delimitations in this thesis was participant selection and exclusion. The decision was made to only collect data from people who met the clinical level for maladaptive daydreaming. The selected population also needed to be able to provide informed consent in order to participate in the research, so therefore needed to be 18
years or older. Further, this population needed to be available to engage in the research, whether through interviews or the online forum. People who did not meet these eligibility criteria were therefore excluded from the two studies. The final choice relates to conducting the forum stage through a researcher developed online discussion forum. This decision was made as maladaptive daydreamers often engage in online support practices, and thus access to this population was easier through an online platform (Stewart & Williams, 2005). With the research being conducted online, the participants could reside in any area of Australia, broadening the potential participant pool. Even with an unlimited budget and timeframe, the delimitation choices made through his research project would remain the same.

Having described the assumptions and delimitations of this thesis, the next section will briefly provide discussion of the limitations of the thesis.

**Chapter Summary**

This introductory chapter has provided information about the topics of daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming. It has established the problem of a lack of theoretical explanation for the phenomenon and has shown the need for an in-depth qualitative research study, to provide such a theoretical explanation. This study was undertaken in response to a call for further research, from within the research community and from maladaptive daydreamers around the world, to improve a shared understanding of the experience. This chapter has outlined and justified the aim of this thesis as providing a new understanding and theoretical perspective, one that will complement and extend existing knowledge.

This introduction chapter has described the research questions for the thesis and has explained the way that these questions have evolved as a result of the grounded theory process. It has introduced the methodology of constructivist grounded theory, along with this method’s theoretical conceptualizations. This chapter has provided a theoretical framework in relation to the phenomena of daydreaming and of maladaptive daydreaming. The importance of the study, and its original contribution to knowledge, has also been posited in this chapter. Finally, the chapter has introduced the assumptions, delimitations and limitations of this study.

The following chapter, Chapter Two: Literature Review, will provide an in-depth critical review and analysis of relevant literature relating to maladaptive daydreaming. The literature review process was undertaken concurrently with the coding of the data, across both study stages of this thesis, and later an updated literature review was conducted in 2022, to ensure up to date literature was added from the period.
2019 to 2022. This process is in line with the constructivist grounded theory method (El Hussain, Kennedy & Oliver, 2017). This method of simultaneously conducting the data collection and analysis, and re-engagement with the literature review, enabled the literature review to be guided by not only the existing literature and updated literature but of the results of the coding analysis (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007).

Chapter Three: Case Study Methodology, describes the method for the case study stage of this study. The chapter outlines the research procedure, including the rationale for employing constructivist grounded theory and case study methods, and the reasons why the research was undertaken. The chapter aims to provide enough detail to enable replication and demonstrates the rigor and reflexivity processes of the case study stage of the research. Finally, the coding and analysis processes of the case study data are outlined within the chapter.

Chapter Four: Case Study Findings, presents the four findings constructed from the coding of the two case study participants’ data. These four findings were: (a) a need for movement-based actions to intensify maladaptive daydreaming, (b) struggles to concentrate due to maladaptive daydreaming, (c) attempts to control maladaptive daydreaming, and (d) maladaptive daydreaming as an emotional experience. The chapter also describes the way each participant experienced maladaptive daydreaming, with illustration from participant quotes. For instance, Diane expressed her maladaptive daydreaming experience as providing her with emotional growth, whereas Cassi expressed her maladaptive daydreaming as providing a way of filling emotional gaps, in a protective manner.

Chapter Five, Forum Methodology, provides similar methodological description as in chapter three, but as pertaining the forum study stage. A full description of the research procedures, rationale and research rigor are outlined. The chapter also highlights the bridge with the case study coding outcomes and findings, showing how these were extended into the forum stage. Finally, the chapter explains the data collection, coding and analysis processes for the forum stage of the study.

Chapter Six: Forum Findings, provides the findings from the forum stage of the study. It provides an overview of the six findings constructed from both study stages: (a) the need for kinesthetic behaviors, to be able to access and intensify the maladaptive daydreaming; (b) the link to childhood trauma; (c) the different pathways that maladaptive daydreaming can develop through; (d) the maladaptive aspects of the experience; (e) the adaptive aspects of the experience; and, (f) the processing of emotions in different ways. Chapter six then provides support for these findings through
the forum participants’ comments, and through my analysis, as the researcher, of the forum data. The chapter describes and justifies the way that these six forum findings, together with the four findings from the case study stage were theoretically combined into the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*.

Chapter Seven: Discussion, offers an interpretation of the constructed understanding from across the two studies. It provides discussion of the resultant constructed theory, the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, with a visual model of the theory. The discussion then moves towards an extension of the maladaptive daydreaming theory, extending through the data, constructivist grounded theory approach and updated literature review, to a wider concept of Absorptive Daydreaming. This wider construct encapsulates maladaptive daydreaming as one pathway that has maladaptive factors, whilst another pathway is of emotional growth through the daydreaming experience, one that provides emotional growth through emotional processing factors. It draws on examples from both studies of the theory, the extant literature and discusses implications for this theory in practice. The chapter acknowledges a range of theoretical explanations that currently exist within the literature, while highlighting the originality of the theory and the thesis, and the strengths and significance of the theory. Finally, chapter seven again addresses the limitations associated with this research, along with opportunities and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Eight, Conclusion, is the conclusive chapter within this thesis. It provides a summary of the thesis in relation to the initial stated aims. It suggests that the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* meets the criteria for a significant and original contribution to knowledge and justifies this suggestion. Chapter eight summarizes the chapters of the thesis and provides information on the research context within which the study was conducted. The chapter concludes with researcher reflections on the research process and offers ideas about how the posited theory of maladaptive daydreaming could be used for a range of stakeholders.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Outline

There is substantial research on attempts to understand the experience of daydreaming. Most of the published daydream research has focused on the role of daydreaming across the lifespan (Belford, 1992; Giambra, 1974, 1989, 2000; Gold & Riley, 1985; Linklater, 2010), and its effects on daily functioning. These studies have offered valuable insights into daydreaming, but they only offer a partial understanding of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. (Full definitions of each of these experiences appear within the following, relevant sections.)

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a focused exploration and connection of the existing literature that is most relevant to the findings of the current study. Daydreaming research has occurred across a range of psychology disciplines, namely neuro psychology, abnormal psychology and developmental psychology. Fundamentally, it intends to increase understanding about maladaptive daydreaming.

This review will be structured into three sections: (a) existing knowledge and theories about normal daydreaming, (b) existing knowledge and theories about maladaptive daydreaming, and (c) what is not known about maladaptive daydreaming. This current study was undertaken to address, and potentially help to resolve, identified knowledge gaps within the literature.

This literature review will show that although there is some understanding about maladaptive daydreaming, there are still areas of uncertainty that require clarification. Preceding the literature review, two sections have been included to provide context to the literature review. These are: (a) consideration of the debated nature of literature reviews in constructivist grounded theory research, and (b) the process of searching and locating the literature for this review.

Problematising and Approaching This Review of Literature

A literature review contextualizes the research through earlier studies. Existing knowledge provides a rationale for conducting a study, which then extends earlier work (Charmaz, 2014). However, this aspect of the research process presents something of a dilemma for grounded theorist researchers (El Hussain et al., 2017). Rather than ‘forcing’ data through fixed ideas, assumptions and hypotheses, the grounded theorist aims to generate theory from data patterns (Glaser, 1992, 1998, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1965/2008). As a result, Glaser a founder of the grounded theory method, informs an avoidance of pre-reviewing a topic’s literature (Glaser, 1978, p. 3). Charmaz however,
has more recently recognized that a preliminary literature review process is needed for institutional research proposal requirements and ethics applications, and accepts as a necessity a preliminary review for constructivist grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz further suggests exploring one or more sets of literature prior to undertaking research, to review different knowledge prior to developing data driven theories and urges a tailoring of the last version of the literature review to the argument and purpose of each research study. This may include a description of the research journey across topics and disciplines. Constructivist grounded theorists (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2014) accept that the construction of a data driven theory can incorporate earlier works if there is no overriding of the inductive nature of the method within a grounded theory study where the data is favored over the literature (McGhee et al., 2007).

Further direction is provided by Thornberg (2012), who recommends several principles that might be adopted in the constructivist literature review process. These include being open to a range of different theoretical perspectives, understanding and critically reviewing the ‘spaces’ within and across existing theories, and being creative with theories and concepts.

The literature review process employed in the current study was iterative and non-linear. The reviewed literature spanned a range of topics, including different conceptualizations of daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming. As the data analysis from both studies progressed, I also explored and reviewed literature regarding emotions and daydreaming (Bacon & Charlesford, 2018; Cantó-Milà, Núñez-Mosteo & Seebach, 2016; Frick et al., 2008; Hartmann et al., 2002; Lohmar, 2017; Martarelli, Mayer & Mast, 2016; Pascual-Leone, 2018; Pinheiro, Mendes, Silva, Goncalves & Salgado, 2018).

I returned to the literature after data collection and analysis, to re-examine topics that I examined prior to data collection as well as new areas that had appeared due to data analysis (El Hussain et al., 2017). Most of this literature review chapter was prepared after the data collection and analysis process, to contextualize the study’s findings within and in relation to, previous literature. The next section describes the search processes used in the stages of this literature review.

**Search Process**

The literature search process for this review began with an exploration of the existing knowledge about daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming, to provide background for these topics. Following the data collection and analysis, more focused
searches turned to a focus on the findings from the analysis. The search process was a keyword search using a range of scholarly databases, and the keywords and focuses of these searches were guided by the study’s stage and demands. Keywords included, but were not limited to, the following terms: excessive daydreaming, compulsive daydreaming, maladaptive daydreaming, daydreaming + emotions, daydreaming + negatives, daydreaming + positives, extreme fantasizing, fantasy-prone personality, fantasy proneness, mind wandering, types of daydreaming, daydreaming theory, and immersive fantasy. Searches were made using ProQuest Research, PsychArticles, PsycINFO, Science Direct, Web of Science, and EBSCOHOST databases. Other sources of information used for the literature search included Google Scholar, books, government statistics, theses, and peer-reviewed journal articles. As a result of this search process, I identified over 240 sources as relevant material dating from the 1960s to the present. Most of the material had been published within the last 20 years, with an evident increase in publications in this field within recent years. An additional literature search was conducted in March 2022, to update the literature review, considering the length of time since submission of this thesis in mid-2020. The search identified a further five relevant journal articles, spanning three topics; (1) the impact of COVID-19 in relation to maladaptive daydreaming, (2) Psycho-social difficulties experienced by female maladaptive daydreamers, and; (3) A link to emotions in immersive daydreamers and maladaptive daydreamers. These five articles were found through a search of the PsycINFO, Web of Science and EBSCOHOST databases.

The next section begins the review of the literature, providing a context to the review by exploring the existing literature about normal daydreaming.

**Normal Daydreaming**

**What is Normal Daydreaming?**

The answer to this question is an elusive one. Daydreaming may occur in different ways and for various reasons. The literature communicates some of the established beliefs that supply a universal understanding of different types of daydreaming experiences. Researchers have used a range of names to explain the daydream experience, such as internally generated thought, zoning out, unconscious thought, offline thought, mind wandering, spontaneous thought, and fantasy (Christoff, 2012). A widely accepted definition of daydreaming is that it is a mental image of either a past situation or a situation that has not actually been experienced (McMillan et al., 2013). A daydream might be triggered by a situation, a memory, or a sensory input, such as a smell or sound.
Examples of daydreaming are helpful in attempts to determine what daydreaming is. In the works of Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychologist who authored the book, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 2006), he wrote about his captivity in a Nazi Concentration Camp. He used daydreaming to imagine his loved ones, to imagine his home back in Vienna and social situations, such as going out for dinner and attending balls. Frankl reported a means of escape through his daydreaming from the major psychological trauma he endured due to his enforced captivity. Although an extreme form of daydreaming, the benefits of short-term daydreaming for coping with adversity is noticeable in this example.

Other descriptions from the literature also suggest daydreaming as providing a means of coping with adversity (Giambra, 1978, 1980; Glausiusz, 2011; Guila, 2016). The works of Freud (1908/1962) and Singer (1961, 1964) provided two such examples of daydreaming as a coping mechanism. In the first example, daydreaming was described as a stream of consciousness that represented internal conflicts (Freud, 1908/1962), through which the daydreaming experience enabled these underlying conflicts to be resolved. Freud identified conflicts relating to wish fulfilment for children who engaged in fantasy and imaginary friend situations. For adults, Freud posited that wish fulfilment from daydreaming had an erotic nature that later leads to the experience being hidden. Freud’s ideas about daydreaming can be criticized for their emphasis on the idea that full human development occurs solely in childhood, and not across the lifespan. Further, adult daydreaming being purely erotic in nature does not seem to convincingly explain the experience. Freud’s theory also does not explain the known links between daydreaming and planning, or to the capacity of daydreaming to supply a role-play environment, or of daydreaming as a problem-solving tool (Goldstein & Russ, 2000; Taylor et al., 1998).

An alternative view, that perceives daydreaming as an essential and healthy mental process, came from the work of Jerome L. Singer, who has researched daydreaming for over 60 years (Singer, 1961, 1964). Singer suggested that the daydreaming experience is a detachment from the immediate environment, occurring for short or extended periods of time through which conscious fantasies are experienced. He suggested that daydreaming involved a range of factors. Although like Freud, he identified wish fulfillment as an element of daydreaming, Singer disagreed with Freud’s idea of conflict resolution. Instead, Singer described daydreaming as a healthy tool that enabled healthy outcomes, such as future planning, achievement of goals, and the development of hopes and ambitions (Singer, 1961). The enormous
experimental contribution of Singer’s 60 years of research into daydreaming added weight to his explanation of the potential positive role of daydreaming, a result of which is that Singer’s claims have more scientific support than do those interpretations of daydreaming offered by Freud.

The literature also examined what might explain normal daydreaming and whether it is a positive or a negative experience. These different perspectives from the literature are considered in more detail within the next section.

Explaining Daydreaming

Currently, there are two opposing perspectives about the merits of daydreaming. Some of the daydreaming research suggests that it is a negative experience that carries consequences (Hartman, 1958; Mooneyham & Schooler, 2013; Singer, 1966; Winnicott, 1971). The alternative perspective suggested daydreaming as having an adaptive and positive outcome (Blou-Hudon & Zelenski, 2016; Comer, 1990; Glausiusz, 2011; Goldstein & Russ, 2000, Goleman, 1987; Hunter, 2013; Poerio & Smallwood, 2016; Taylor et al., 1998; Tower, 1985; Tramantano, 2015; Segal & Segal, 1993; Shelley, Pham, Rivkim & Armor, 1998). Both perspectives are examined in the following sections.

Daydreaming: Resulting in Negative Outcomes

The research suggests that daydreaming can be categorized into four negative outcomes. These four categories include: (a) daydreaming contexts that can lead to memory loss, (b) daydreaming that can result in cognitive deficits, (c) daydreaming leading to eliciting unpleasant emotions and resulting in high emotional costs, and (d) daydreaming affecting mood in a negative manner. The following section provides exploration of the first of the four outcomes and investigates how daydream context can result in forgetting.

Daydreams That are More Contextually Different Result in Forgetting

Contextual images are the central feature of a daydream and provide a context for the experience. An example of ‘contextual images’ are daydream contexts associated with current or future success. The theory that context in daydreams might affect cognitive processes, such as memory, has been explored within the literature (Delaney et al., 2010; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Mar, Mason & Litvick, 2012). Daydreaming context that has been explored has included daydream features that stand out and daydreams that are intense or unique. It has been suggested that such daydreams lead to them being encoded into memory differently, with memories being recalled.
better, compared with more familiar and less intense or unique daydream contexts (McVay & Kane, 2012).

This hypothesis was explored in a study that carried out experiments whereby the context of the daydream was altered (Delaney et al., 2010). One such experiment involved 138 university students in the U.S.A. assigned one of three groups: near-change daydreams, far-change daydreams, and a control group, who did not daydream. Each group was given two lists of items to memorize, one before and one after the instructed daydreaming or control group activity. The near-change group was instructed to ‘daydream about the house that they currently live in’ for three minutes; the far-change daydream group, they were instructed ‘to daydream about their childhood family home for three minutes’; the control group, they carried out a memory task, whereby they ‘read aloud from a psychology book for three minutes and did not experience daydreaming’.

In experiment one (thinking about one’s parent’s house) the mean proportions of List two words recalled in each condition: control, near-change and far-change. An ANOVA produced a significant effect of condition. F (2, 135) = 5.75, MSE = 0.012, p<.01, η2 = 0.79. In the far-change condition, significant forgetting occurred compared to the control condition, t (90) = 3.40, p<.001 and those in the near-change condition, t(90) = 2.12, p< .05. However, there was no difference in the near-change and control groups, t (90) = 1.23, p= .022. List 2 words proportion recalled did not depend on condition, F <1 (far-change condition): M = .21, SD = .11; near-change condition): M = .25, SD = .13; control condition: M = .23, SD = 13. In the far-change condition, the more weeks that had passed for people visiting their parents’ home, meant that fewer words were recalled, meaning more forgetting than those who had recently visited their parents.

The experiment also included another experimental context shift, in experiment two. Another example of a context shift reported in Delaney and colleagues’ study was the daydream context shift of daydreaming about a recent domestic vacation versus daydreaming about an international vacation. In experiment two, results showed that more forgetting occurred when daydreaming about a domestic vacation. As in experiment one, an ANOVA was used. Mean proportions of List one words recalled showed a significant main effect of condition. F (2, 113) = 14.42, MSE = 0.022, p<.001, η2 = .20. The participants within the control condition recalled more words from List one than participants in the near-change condition, t (74) = 2.41, p<.05, who recalled more words than the participants within the far-change condition, t (74) = 2.90, p <.01.
Thinking about an international vacation was therefore associated with greater impairment in recall than thinking about the domestic vacation.

The study’s findings supported the suggestion that contextual distance in daydreaming had resulted in poor encoding, which had then led to forgetting on the memory task.

Delaney and colleagues’ findings lent some support for the idea of a relationship between daydreaming and forgetting; however, methodological issues of their study design potentially undermine the findings, and the contextual changes do not appear to be distinctive enough for daydreaming to be classified as causing forgetting. For example, the participants in the study reported that they often travelled overseas and visited their childhood homes. These were the two stimuli situations used within the study. The daydreaming context change could be altered towards stimuli higher in fantasy content, to identify a more unique and intense contextual change, to further test their hypothesis and findings.

The viewpoint that daydreaming might lead to negative outcomes, such as poorer memory, may cast the daydreaming experience in a negative light. Upon reflection though, were daydreaming to contribute to forgetting experiences such as trauma, such daydreaming might be considered differently from a negative experience. Such a reflection is not evident in the daydreaming literature, whereby one focus has been upon the costs of daydreaming. The next section explores the cost of daydreaming leading to cognitive deficits.

**Daydreaming Leading to Cognitive Deficits.** Through a review of 29 daydream studies conducted between the period of 1995 and 2012, Mooneyham and Schooler identified a range of cognitive deficits in relation to daydreaming (2013). Their review suggested that daydreaming might lead to a wide range of cognitive deficits. The most notable included deficits in working memory (Mrazek, Smallwood, Franklin, Chin, Baird & Schooler, 2012), reduced reading comprehension (Smallwood, McSpadden & Schooler, 2008), challenges to attention (McVay & Kane, 2012), reduced driving concentration (He, Becic, Lee & McCarley, 2011), and poorer random number generation (Teasdale et al., 1995). Mooneyham and Schooler’s review provided a thorough overview of the costs of daydreaming in relation to performance and it distinctly supported the theory that daydreaming carries a significant cognitive cost. Although their review provided a useful audit of the literature into the impact of daydreaming, the focus of the review was mainly on deficits in performance. Only three of the 29 studies reviewed explored a topic not regarding performance; those three
studies suggested a link between daydreaming and emotions (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Smallwood et al., 2008; Smallwood & O’Connor, 2011), which will now be explored within the following section.

**Daydreaming as Having High Emotional Costs.** Daydreams have been associated with idleness and laziness. The experience has been suggested to elicit unpleasant and strong emotions such as guilt, distraction, and embarrassment (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Mooneyham & Schooler, 2013). Explorations into the private experience of daydreaming have previously relied on personal retrospective reports by participants. A more systematic approach to gathering daydream data came from one notable study that provided evidence into the emotional costs of daydreaming (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). That study investigated the suggestion that a daydreaming mind leads to an unhappy mind. The research focused on real-time App reports from 5,000 participants from across 83 countries. The App measured thoughts, feelings, and actions throughout the day, related to daydreaming and mood. The study reported two findings. The first was that daydreaming occurs more often than previously reported by laboratory studies, with 46.9% of the sample reporting daydreaming. The second finding was that a multi-level regression suggested the participants were less happy when daydreaming, than when not daydreaming ($slope (b) = 8.79, p<0.001$) even regardless of the daydream content (e.g., pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral daydreams). This suggestion challenges claims made in other studies, that daydream context led to negative emotional outcomes (Delaney et al., 2010; Mar et al., 2012).

These findings of Killingsworth and Gilbert’s (2010) study offered new insight into the daydream experience. This study provided evidence that supports the idea that levels of daydreaming might be a strong predictor of people’s happiness. Many religious and philosophical traditions suggest that ‘being in the moment’ is a healthy way of being. The author’s suggestion ‘to be present’, and therefore experience true contentment appears simple enough. In practice, however, if the reported statistic of 46.9% of the sample were daydreaming, this prescription for greater happiness through the suppression of daydreaming appears challenging to implement. The following section will explore the literature further in relation to daydreaming and happiness.

**A Negative Relationship Between Daydreaming and Happiness.** The proposal of Killingsworth and colleagues (2010), that the content of daydreams (whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral), has no effect on resulting mood, has been critiqued as lacking empirical support and has not been replicated in other similar...
Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming

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studies. Mar et al. (2012), attempted to extend the Killingsworth and Gilbert study in a series of studies, for instance, using a series of online surveys (the Curious Experiences Questionnaire, the Satisfaction with Life Scale and other tests that measured loneliness, interpersonal support, and social connectedness) and investigating a variety of different daydream contents. Mar and colleagues found that daydream content experienced by their participants included social aspects and did interact with happiness outcomes. They identified that daydreaming about strangers led to participants feeling loneliness and the belief that they had less social support than other people. Further, they noted a gender difference in relation to daydreaming and life satisfaction. For men, the frequency of the daydreaming experience was negatively related, whereas, for women it was the vividness of the daydreams was negatively related. Both findings offered support for the theory of a negative relationship between daydreaming and happiness, as well as supporting the involvement of daydreaming content. The studies conducted by Mar and colleagues are an important extension to the research examining the ways that individual differences (gender) and daydream content affect happiness. Yet, causal direction cannot be determined from these findings.

The studies regarding daydreaming effects on mood, that have been considered above, supply further understanding in relation to the potential negative outcomes of daydreaming. The positive aspects of daydreaming that were found from this theses’ data analysis meant that a focused search of the literature was needed to be carried out and included in this literature review. The following section, therefore, considers the findings from several studies, that provide a review of studies investigating positive outcomes of daydreaming.

Daydreaming: Resulting in Positive Outcomes

The following section considers four subsequent perspectives identified from the literature regarding the idea of daydreaming resulting in positive outcomes. These four perspectives are: problem-solving through daydreaming; daydreaming as a useful coping tool; daydreaming to navigate the social world; and daydreaming as a normal, healthy, and necessary practice.

Problem Solving Through Daydreaming. Daydreaming may appear to be an unproductive activity. Yet, the strategy of problem-solving through daydreaming might lead to the creation of connections between problems. Without daydreaming, these connections might otherwise go unrecognized.

Evidence-based studies about daydreaming and problem-solving are limited. One study offered support for the perspective that daydreaming enables complex
problems to be successfully resolved (Taylor et al., 1998). In a related field to
daydreaming, Taylor et al. (1998) reviewed the benefits of mental simulation the
running through of series of events within the mind, suggested to be a similar
mechanism to daydreaming. One of the case studies reviewed was a mental simulation
example in an intensified scenario. The authors described how during the First Gulf
War in the 1990s, a U.S.A. navy tactical action officer was ordered to shoot down a
threatening aircraft. The officer used a mental simulation strategy to work through
scenarios in his mind, exploring scenarios of slow moving and erratic aircraft. The
officer determined that it could not have been a fighter plane, a helicopter, or a light
aircraft on a suicide mission, instead determining that it had to be a friendly lost
helicopter. Indeed, a recognition helicopter discovered that it was a British helicopter
that had lost its way. This poignant example demonstrates the potential usefulness of
directing mental processes for problem-solving (McGown, 2014).

Other studies that offer insight into the role of daydreaming in enabling
problem-solving provide real-world evidence examples, but experiment-based studies in
the field appear to be lacking. Although the following examples are anecdotal, they do
indicate a potential benefit of problem-solving through daydreaming.

Hunter (2013) presented two case study examples of daydreaming-related
problem-solving. The first example outlined how Einstein developed his insight for the
Theory of Relativity, by imagining what would happen if he travelled at the speed of
light (Hunter, 2013, p. 115). The second example provided was a description of how
Steve Jobs problem-solved developing the considerable number of fonts for his
Macintosh computers by using his imagination during a calligraphy class. Hunter
suggested that the use of imaginative ability that enabled gaps in knowledge to be filled
might in turn enable a deep level of problem-solving. Although unusual, Hunter’s two
examples cannot be corroborated as representing the truth, and as such their worth, in
relation to problem-solving through daydreaming, is questionable.

Real-world evidence can provide valuable insight and bring to life subject
matter, with concrete and relatable detail. Yet, caution needs to be used when reviewing
real-world examples. Real-world data, such as that offered in Hunter (2013), can lead to
interpretation, that might be over-estimated or involve personal bias. The suggestions
within such studies may lead to skepticism about the data interpretations. In relation to
daydreaming and problem-solving, there is a lack of experimental literature. The
literature that does exist might be described as minor or divergent within the field, but it
still provides some level of understanding. There is undeniably more room for scientific research into daydreaming used as a means of problem-solving.

**Daydreaming as a Useful Coping Tool.** Much of the literature has suggested that fantasy is vital for the developing human mind, particularly in relation to childhood development. Fantasy in childhood enables a child to consolidate knowledge and differentiate fantasy from reality, and it boosts vocabulary and self-regulation skills. Further, it enables safe exploration of concepts and issues that may be challenging or overwhelming. This theory of daydreaming as a useful coping tool for both children and adults has been explored throughout the daydreaming literature.

Goldstein and Russ (2000) reported positive findings within the literature in relation to childhood daydreaming. They explored the link between childhood fantasy and coping skills, by measuring children’s ability to cope with a comparable situation, as occurred in the children’s book *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1984). This book was a controversial choice, as it explored themes of maternal withdrawal, monsters, aggression and primal instincts. Goldstein and Russ selected this book for its ‘healthy conflict,’ which they suggested taught children the important life lesson that all humans have aggressive tendencies, and that this is a normal experience.

After the storytelling, Goldstein and Russ tested how the children coped with a comparative situation to that in the book, explored through a semi-structured interview and observation of the child’s play. One of their hypotheses was that children who showed a greater propensity to engage in the fantasy-related activities would also be more able to cope more successfully in such activities than children who did not engage in fantasy-related activities. They found that fantasy was useful for the children in their study; fantasy enabled them to cope with and resolve feelings, resulting in the development of cognitive and emotional abilities. Fantasy, as an essential coping skill to be developed in early childhood is not an unheard-of theory (Freeman, Feeney & Moravcik, 2011). As an example, schools try to foster creativity and imagination through their day-to-day teaching practices, to develop children’s skills and identity (Comer, 1990).

The literature also showed further examples of daydreaming used as a coping strategy, but for older children. In exploring the significant role of daydreaming in childhood, Comer (1990) described daydreaming as a method whereby successful resolution of challenges could be facilitated, helping children to function better and cope in the real-world. Comer provided two case study examples in this study illustrating children’s use of daydreaming as a resolution to their stresses. The case
study was of an 11-year-old boy who was struggling academically. The boy reported how he had fantasized about graduating first in his class at high school, and that this had been the single cause that had reassured him, contributing to his later academic success.

The second case study experience was of a girl aged 13, who described a daydream that gave her comfort. In her daydream, she had imagined her separated parents reuniting. The reunion did not happen within reality, but the daydream provided her with a means to cope with her parent's separation. Comer’s case studies lacked detail about the aspects of the daydream experiences, did not offer concrete, substantiated points, and therefore are arguably insufficient as evidence of daydreaming as a coping skill.

Substantiation through the two examples is problematic, as Comer offered no experimental evidence that for these children, they used their daydreaming as a tool, as an escape, and to cope with life’s adversities.

As with literature regarding problem-solving through daydreaming, the theory of daydreaming as a coping tool has attracted little experimental research, with a knowledge gap also notable in the literature about adult daydreaming and coping ability. Using daydreaming to cope in life is an intuitive idea for the current author, but within psychological research, such intuition can lead to errors, over-estimation, and lack of sound decision making.

**Daydreaming to Navigate the Social World.** Another area of daydream research with a limited literature base is related to the social outcomes of daydreaming. The following offers consideration of social daydreaming, as an essential learning and healthy cognitive process. Singer (1960) suggested that daydreaming enables resolution of ruminations involving other people and suggested that social daydreaming—which he argued—enables self-reflection about social standing and qualities, particularly during life transitions. One example of social daydreaming research that supports an understanding of daydreaming as a potential way to navigate the social world was explored by Poerio et al. (2016).

Poerio and colleagues’ research explored whether daydreaming about people they were close to might buffer loneliness. In their study, three groups of participants each engaged in a three-minute task: (a) social group that imagined themselves for the time in a pleasant scenario with their significant other person, (b) non-social group that daydreamed for the time just about themselves, and, (c) control group they carried out a working memory task. The participants were all rated for loneliness before the interview, before the task, and after the task. The researchers sought to explore the hypothesis that social daydreaming could restore feelings of social connectedness and
their findings supported this hypothesis. After the social daydreaming, the social group participants had less of a desire for actual social connection, suggesting that the daydream experience might have socially satisfied the study’s participants.

Poerio and colleagues’ study (2016) provided an insight into the idea that daydreaming might enable a lonely person to overcome their loneliness. In keeping with this idea, Frankl’s (2006) previously outlined use of daydreaming to cope with adversity whilst in a concentration camp also supports the idea that daydreaming can provide social benefit. There is limited literature about this theory, so caution is necessary and there are issues with basing a theory on such a limited knowledge base. Nevertheless, Poerio and colleagues’ work contributed some evidence for the idea of daydreaming as a positive mental process. If used appropriately, daydreaming might be a potential adaptive social tool. It would be interesting to extend this study into the current COVID-19 pandemic. Although this doctoral research was mostly undertaken pre COVID-19, future research directions could examine the use of daydreaming for social connection during times of isolation.

Daydreaming as Normal, Healthy and Necessary. Within the literature, at times, daydreaming is presented in a positive light, with the benefits of daydreaming highlighted. The daydreaming literature supports the idea that daydreaming is a normal, healthy, and necessary experience, one in which most people consistently engage (Comer, 1990; Goleman, 1987; Singer, 1963). It therefore is important to consider the norms of daydreaming and review the literature that addresses and assumes them.

In a New York Times, Science article, Goleman (1987), explored some of the positive psychological benefits of daydreaming. Goleman suggested that daydreaming might be helpful for people in adapting to the stresses of life through providing a method of de-stressing. Further support for the idea of daydreaming as being normal, came from Hunter (2013) who suggested eight types of positive daydreaming styles, that he defined as: effective imagination (a flexible style enabling continuous change); imaginative fantasy; intellectual imagination; empathy imagination; strategic imagination; emotional imagination; dream-style imagination; and memory reconstruction imagination. Hunter’s classification is useful, as it noted previously uncharted daydream categories. Such a diverse range of positive daydreaming styles does not appear elsewhere within the literature. At times, the daydreaming literature does not embrace further exploration into whether daydreaming might have potential benefits. Each of Hunter's eight positive daydreaming styles provides opportunities for further exploration and yet examination of Hunter’s daydreaming styles has not yet
been undertaken; for instance, there is no research on the ‘emotional imagination’
daydreaming style. This lack of extension of Hunter’s eight types of positive
daydreaming styles is certainly understandable, as Hunter provided no enhancement on
the eight types, information regarding the development of these categories, research
replicable method or further extension through successive research. This has prevented
experimental scrutinization of these eight types of positive daydream styles.

The notion that that there is a correct way of daydreaming is the main offering
from the literature. Support for this idea was posited in an article authored by
Tramantano (2015), which quoted Tramantano’s thoughts about daydreaming, “I think
every day, all children should have three hours of daydreaming, just daydreaming ...
Just sat at the window and stare at the clouds, it is good for them.” (p.113). Previously,
daydreaming in children had been described as a waste of time (Comer, 1990).

Daydreaming is normalized in further examples from Tramantano (2015). One
anecdotal example those researchers provided was of children who created a game
called ‘Bronx charades,’ whereby they each had to act out a movie scene, without words
or hand actions. This was described as better than the real charades. Another example
described two childhood summer camps through the form of daydream metaphors. One
summer camp espoused the value of non-competition and was an affluent camp; the
other was competitive and only provided children with basic activities and provisions.
Although anecdotal, these daydreaming metaphors compared the perfect world of
daydream experiences with the real-world. Tramantano’s work drew on a compelling
and creative use of stories and metaphors, to show the importance of daydreaming and
improvisation in skill-building in children.

Earlier support for daydreaming as being a normal process came from a study
conducted by Tower (1985). From a five-day observation of 43 nursery age children,
teachers rated children’s use of imaginative play. Teachers used a variety of observation
methods (behavioral, imaginative ability, and an emotional scale) and child interviews
and art scales were also used. Findings suggested that the more imaginative children
showed less fear and sadness than less imaginative children. The imaginative children
also showed more positive affect, were livelier, concentrated better and interacted more
with peers. Despite the interesting study findings, Tower’s study, now 35-years-old, has
not yet been replicated. It is unknown whether children in 1985 were imaginative than
they are now. Children currently have the potential to access the internet through a
range of digital technology and devices and have easier access to games and potential
fantasy materials. Such differences in environment and context warrant further
exploration into childhood fantasy in the current climate. Literature and research exploring daydreaming has shown a noticeable slowing down in recent years, with daydreaming research appearing less and less. For instance, most of the relevant daydreaming research was conducted and published in the period between 1960 to 2010, due to a move towards researching ‘mind wandering’, a preferred term used by the psychological literature instead of the term ‘daydreaming’. There is a need for new research and new literature that provides more knowledge about daydreaming.

The reviewed literature regarding daydreaming as a normal process indicates that fantasy might meet psychological needs, such as self-regulation, thus improving wellbeing. For children, daydreaming might enable an ability to reinforce learning. Daydreaming might also help children to see how to respond to adversity, a skill they might be able to apply to their own challenges.

**Measuring and Capturing Daydreaming**

Measurement in psychological research denotes the allocation of scores that represent a characteristic of an individual. Within psychology, the measurement of some psychological constructs, such as gender differences or birth order, can be straightforward, due to the observable nature of the behavior or processes and to the ability for researchers to provide accuracy in quantitative descriptions. In direct contrast, daydreaming is an internal process that is differently experienced by each person. Capturing and explaining the daydream experience has been the aim of daydream researchers for some time. Further, attempts to measure daydreaming has challenged researchers, notably the question of the best way to measure daydreaming. It is also not currently known whether measuring daydreaming retrospectively or in real-time is the better method.

One method of measuring daydreaming has included the use of the psychodynamic method of free association (Freud, 1908/1962). This is the sharing of words that come to mind when thinking about a topic such as daydreaming. The main criticism of the use of free association in trying to measure daydreams, is that the method could be open to being unreliable and invalid. For instance, asking a person to articulate words related to daydreaming may lead to the overproduction of reported associations.

A more structured form of measurement of daydreaming has been through self-report questionnaires. Existing forms of scientifically robust psychometric measurement of daydreaming includes the Imaginal Processes Inventory (IPA) (Singer, 1966), the Short-Imagined Processes Inventory (SIPI) (Singer & Antrobus, 1965, 1970 revised;
Huba, Aneshensel & Singer, 1981) and the Daydream Frequency Scale (DDFS) (Stawarcyzk, Majerus, Van der Linden & Argembeau., 2012). Other associated psychometrics that has also been used to measure daydreaming are the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) (Bernstein & Putnam, 1986) and the Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ) (Merckelbach, Horselenberg & Muris, 2001). Psychometric tools are useful, but require considerable time, cost, and effort, in the test validation and reliability process. Further, the self-reporting nature of psychometrics increases the potential for participants to provide incorrect responses and online access to the psychometrics is not universal. Such weaknesses undermine the validity of the tests.

Neuroimaging technology, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging scans (fMRI), has also been used to measure daydreaming. Such scans have been used to show correlations of brain regions that become either activated or de-activated during periods of daydreaming. This set of brain regions, named the ‘default mode network’ (DMN) (Mason et al., 2007), is activated during daydreaming and de-activated during goal-directed tasks. This suggests that the DMN could be an unconscious psychological baseline from which people move when they need to attend to a conscious thought or task. Knowledge of the DMN has enabled researchers to visually measure the extent of daydreaming occurrences. Such functional connectivity studies have, unfortunately, moved away from exploring daydreaming towards a focus on exploring other mental processes, such as mental illness. For instance, moving towards a better understanding of MDD (Sheline et al., 2009) and schizophrenia (Anticevic, Repovs & Barch, 2013). The use of fMRI scans carries considerable expense, and it is understandable that the focus of this area of research has moved towards understanding the role of the DMN in relation to mental illness, rather than focusing on daydreaming. There is a need for research to be justified as necessary and to fulfil the criterion of relevance. Only recently has maladaptive daydreaming been suggested as a potential psychiatric disorder (Sommer, 2013; Sommer, et al., 2016), but as fMRI research of the DMN has deviated from daydreaming, fMRI scans of maladaptive daydreamers have not yet occurred, and such research seems unlikely until the focus of research attention shifts.

A less expensive and more readily available technology that has been used to measure daydreaming has been through smart phone app technology. Investigation has considered the areas of happiness, activities and daydreaming activities (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Mood was shown to have been affected by the daydream experience, with reduced moods reported during periods of daydreaming, and increased mood reported during experiences of high interest daydreams. App technology enables real-
time reporting of daydreaming. In the 12 years since Killingsworth and Gilbert’s initial study, app technology has developed rapidly, with capacity now to safely collect, store and analyze data. With such capacity technological advancement might lead to more focused data and explicit findings, and app technology may be a suitable measurement choice for the collection of daydreaming data. Despite the potential for such improvements, the debate about the relative merits of the collection of real-time or retrospective data is still evident across the literature.

This range of measurement techniques and tools and lack of apparent ways lead to an uncertainty about how to measure daydreaming. Yet, the benefit of having such a wide range of valid and reliable measurement tools is helpful for research into constructs such as daydreaming. The importance of ongoing validation of such daydream measures is certainly recognized, for capturing and understanding the experience.

**Maladaptive Daydreaming: The Most Widely Researched Maladaptive Daydreaming**

**What is Maladaptive Daydreaming?**

A type of daydreaming that has received much research is maladaptive daydreaming. Definitions of maladaptive daydreaming within the literature appear to be similar, stemming from examples of case studies and experimental studies. The features of maladaptive daydreaming across the literature are reported consistently and includes narrative about excessive daydreaming, that ranges from four to eight hours per day. Participants in these studies reported drifting off into another reality throughout the day. Other consistent features of maladaptive daydreaming include extensive kinesthetic aspects such as pacing, moving to music, or acting and voicing what occurs within the daydreams (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Glausiusz, 2011; Martarelli, Mayer & Mast, 2016; Schupak & Rosenthal, 2013; Somer, 2002). Furthermore, maladaptive daydreaming has been suggested as an addictive phenomenon that offers an escape from the reality of life. The intensity of the daydreaming experience is also evident through reports of maladaptive daydreamers, who described deep feelings towards the fantasy characters in their highly elaborate daydreams (Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009; Somer, 2002). The outcomes of the maladaptive daydreaming experiences reported across the literature suggest a significant impact on functioning levels in the following areas, including affecting and reducing concentration ability, social interaction, self-care and reducing mental wellbeing, as well as affecting occupational and educational goals (Somer, 2002; Somer, 2013; 2018; Somer et al., 2016b; 2016c). A final theme within the literature in
relation to maladaptive daydreaming is that both the real-world and the fantasy worlds are reported as being experienced simultaneously, with no subsequent confusion of either (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011; Somer, 2013). The literature consistently reports a shared range of features characterizing to the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

Bigelsen and Schupak (2011) recorded findings like those reported in other studies, such as reported distress, shame, difficulty in controlling the experience, kinesthetic aspects and interference of social functioning (Somer, 2002; Somer, 2013, 2018; Somer et al., 2016b, 2016c). Bigelsen and Schupak found no link to trauma. Their finding led Somer, the prolific maladaptive daydreaming researcher to rethink his initial theory that maladaptive daydreaming was a trauma response, encouraging him to further explore other explanations for maladaptive daydreaming.

Such distinct definitions of the features of maladaptive daydreaming noted throughout the literature make noticeable the differences between normal daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming. These differences are considered within the next section.

Differences Between Daydreaming and Maladaptive Daydreaming

Maladaptive daydreaming and normal daydreaming have observable and distinctive characteristics. The descriptor ‘maladaptive’ indicates the negative explanation of this type of daydreaming experience. Negative aspects of maladaptive daydreaming include elevated levels of distress and inability to control the amount of time spent in the daydream experiences, reported as leading to missed opportunities in life. One example of how maladaptive daydreaming differs from normal daydreaming is that the daydream themes greatly differ. Normal daydreaming often involves features as role-playing stressful situations, problem-solving, future planning, and boredom relief (Singer, 1965). Themes, such as sexual arousal, violence and distressing events have been reported in the maladaptive daydreaming experience (Somer, 2002), but not within the literature related to normal daydreaming (Immordino-Yang, Christodoulou, & Singh, 2012; Tramantano, 2015).

Although normal daydreams have been described as a momentary detachment from the immediate environment (Singer, 1960), maladaptive daydreams are quite different. Maladaptive daydreaming has been described as highly enjoyable and eliciting elevated levels of pleasure but has also been reported as an obsessive experience wherein the maladaptive daydreamer has little control of the compulsive nature of the experience (Somer et al., 2019b). Normal daydreaming, in contrast, is perceived as facilitating a range of positive socio-emotional skills including moral reasoning, compassion, perspective-taking, deriving meaning from experiences and understanding
the implications of emotional actions (Immordino-Yang, Christodoulou, & Singh, 2012).

Another example of how maladaptive daydreaming differs from normal daydreaming stems from the need to engage in kinesthetic behaviors, to access and enhance the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Such kinesthetic behaviors are reported as excessive and include pacing, running for hours on end, twirling around, rocking, acting out the daydream, voicing and responding to the daydreaming storyline, listening to music whilst daydreaming. The kinesthetic behavior’s theme appears consistently across the maladaptive daydreaming literature and is an essential defining characteristic differentiating the experience from normal daydreaming (Somer, 2002; Somer et al., 2017b; Somer et al., 2019b). There are no reported examples within the maladaptive daydreaming literature that do not report this kinesthetic element within the maladaptive daydreaming experience. It might be that the examples chosen that do include kinesthetic elements were selected to further support the idea that maladaptive daydreaming is a genuine experience. It appears, therefore, that the kinesthetic element of maladaptive daydreaming is an essential part. Kinesthetic behaviors are included within the (MDS-16), which measures clinical levels of maladaptive daydreaming (Somer et al., 2017b), and appears in the earlier scale, (MDS-14) (Somer et al., 2016c), the use of music in relation to maladaptive daydreaming was also added to the MDS-16 scale. This aspect was added into the MDS-16 scale based on newer information and knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming. It is suggested that normal daydreaming does not require music or movement.

Unlike research into normally experienced daydreaming, the focus of maladaptive daydream research had been on the related psychopathological aspects. A range of psychopathological ideas have been offered, such as links to OCD, ADHD, dissociation, anxiety disorder, social anxiety and depressive disorders (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Somer et al., 2016b, 2017b). The struggles and distress of the maladaptive daydreaming community are communicated through the research literature, but particularly appeared in the work of Bershtling and Somer (2018), whose analysis of discourse found that the maladaptive daydreaming community was focused on striving for an official diagnosis, and for the experience to be recognized as a psychiatric disorder (Bershtling & Somer, 2018). Such psychopathological links and a seeking of a diagnosis are not recorded in the literature that explores normal daydreaming.

Maladaptive daydreaming is certainly an unusual and unique experience, compared with that of normal daydreaming. Further exploration of related factors and comorbidity
associated with maladaptive daydreaming will appear later in this literature review. The next section provides a framework that considers the beginning of maladaptive daydreaming research.

**The Beginning of Maladaptive Daydreaming Research**

In any research realm, the first scientific study investigating the topic holds influence, and can shape future research directions. The first study into maladaptive daydreaming was reported by Somer (2002). In that qualitative inquiry, six participants from an Israeli trauma clinic gave a description of their daydream experiences. Those participants described excessive daydreams that lasted for hours, and were vivid and movie-like, where they could go to escape the realities of their lives. Nine concepts were reported in the study, that were grouped into three meaningful concepts: function, theme and the dynamics of the daydreaming experience. It was notable from Somer's exploration that the study both reported a phenomenon which was not normal daydreaming, and highlighted new areas not previously reported. Somer named this style of daydreaming ‘maladaptive daydreaming’.

The importance of Somer’s (2002) study for the maladaptive daydreaming field is established; yet, as with any research, there are criticisms of this seminal study. For instance, Somer had suggested a link between trauma and maladaptive daydreaming. Initially, Somer had reported that all six participants in his 2002 study reported trauma histories. However, as the study had used a convenience sample of participants recruited from his trauma clinic, the finding of a link between trauma and maladaptive daydreaming is both expected and questionable. The convenience sample of single people mostly aged in their 20s and 30s, with severe diagnoses and trauma histories, is problematic to the integrity of that study. Such sampling limits the generalizability of the findings, and the inclusion of an over-representative group leads to biased and unreliable findings. However, the use of qualitative research in providing detail about the unknown aspects of maladaptive daydreaming, such as the need to engage in kinesthetic behaviors proved valuable and the study paved the way for future maladaptive daydreaming research.

**Types of Maladaptive Daydreaming Research**

A Google search for ‘maladaptive daydreaming’ returns many pages of self-reported information, shared by individuals who have self-identified as experiencing maladaptive daydreaming. But such a search conducted through a range of psychological databases and Google Scholar in March 2020 only generated 18 relevant peer-reviewed articles. Most of these articles were associated with the works into
maladaptive daydreaming by Somer. Twelve of which can be categorized under quantitative research and the remaining six as qualitative research.

Quantitative Studies

Two groups of quantitative studies are reported in the literature about maladaptive daydreaming. The first group incorporate four studies specific to the development and validation of clinical tools that aim to find and measure maladaptive daydreaming. The second group include studies that explore comorbidity and related factors of maladaptive daydreaming. These studies will be explored in detail in the following sections.

Validation and Development of Measurement Tools for Maladaptive Daydreaming

Daydreaming. The use of valid and reliable psychometric measurement tools is central in the application of the scientist-practitioner model within psychology. Clinical measures of psychological phenomena are utilized for two main reasons: (a) to assess a phenomenon, using a reliable, valid, and standardized test, for the purpose of diagnosis and identification; and (b) to determine the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions. This is also the case within the research area of maladaptive daydreaming.

Three clinical maladaptive daydreaming psychometric tools have undergone validation and development: MDS-14 (Somer et al., 2016c), MDS-16 (Somer et al., 2017a) and SCI-MD (Somer, Soffer-Dudek, Ross & Halpern, 2017). A review of the literature raised two important questions that needed addressing: what is being measured when using maladaptive daydreaming psychometrics and what is not being measured when using these tests? The maladaptive daydreaming measurement tools measure the frequency, intensity, distress, required behaviors and impact of the experience. They do not measure the content of the daydreams. Instead, they have focused on being able to determine clinical levels of maladaptive daydreaming.

The literature has shown a progression of development and validation attempts. Early research saw the development of the self-report maladaptive daydreaming tool (MDS-14), from data collected from 447 English-speaking individuals across 45 countries (Somer et al., 2016c). This development showed five areas related to maladaptive daydreaming: quality, control, distress, benefits and functioning. The findings of Somer and colleagues (2016c) show both good reliability and validity, alongside several methodological issues that require discussion. First was the over-representation of women: 347 of the 477 participants were women. This gender imbalance within the study means the findings may not be representative of maladaptive
daydreamers. Second the creation of the questions within the scale was problematic. That such a prominent daydream researcher shared their opinions as to which aspects to include, alongside inclusion of existing knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming, is debatable. Question development in questionnaire design often involves involvement of several researchers, pre-testing and factor analysis of results, moving beyond the opinion of one person and utilizing research methods to test validity and reliability.

The MDS-14 was later revised from 14 questions to 16 questions and renamed the MDS-16 (Somer et al., 2017b). This increase in the number of questions came as a result of the recognition of the importance of music in the maladaptive daydreaming experience. A second change made to the MDS-14 was the increase of the cut-off from the older 25/100 to a new cut-off rate of 50/100 (Somer et al., 2017a). This is a 100% increase. It would be expected that the incorporation of two new items in the scale, would lead to some level of change to the cut-off point, but such a significant increase is surprising. It is predicted that the cut-off point may continue to change across future validation studies, until it is corroborated across several studies.

The most common methods of data collection within the social sciences are self-report methods. Self-report tools offer the advantage of being easy to complete. They can be low cost, made available to people over the internet, and are useful for the first screening of a variety of characteristics. However, self-report tools also have disadvantages that can undermine their validity and reliability. Word choices, the order of questions, dishonest responding, and socially desirable responding are all potential hazards to the quality of self-report tools. To conduct clinical diagnosis, it is appropriate to move beyond self-report tools. Instead, multiple tools used together is preferable for ensuring reliable and valid measurement. Specifically, high quality data can be obtained through tools that have been developed for use by clinicians. This type of clinical tool is often used for diagnosis. Therefore, clinical tools need to be based on comprehensive and critically appraised evidence.

Within the maladaptive daydreaming literature, one such developed clinical tool was named the ‘Structured Clinical Interview for Maladaptive Daydreaming’ (SCI-MD). The development and validation process of the SCI-MD is reported in Somer et al. (2017a). The SCI-MD is a clinician-delivered interview and has three criteria sections. The first section has eight closed questions that require a yes or no answer. The other two sections of the SCI-MD require a high level of clinical skill for other disorders, such as autism and schizophrenia to be discounted. The Somer et al. (2017a) publication appeared to have two key aims beyond that of reporting the SCI-MD
development and validation process. Those authors seemed to want to further justify the existence of maladaptive daydreaming. The authors also seemed motivated to develop a clinical tool with associated cut-offs and suggest potential differential diagnoses. Both aims appear to have been accomplished through their article.

In addition to arguably achieving its aims of validating and extending the concept and treatment there appear to be developmental strengths in the research design. Two independent interviewers had conducted blind interviews; groups of maladaptive daydreamers had been matched by age and sex. Finally, an international sample had been used from across a range of countries. These aspects added methodological strength.

The article reported an in-depth process of statistical analysis that incorporated prominent levels of inter-rater reliability. Two claims made within the article evidently require further consideration. First, maladaptive daydreaming was specified as not being independent from other disorders. Second, the resulting SCI-MD tool included a new diagnostic criterion, named ‘unspecified maladaptive daydreaming.’ Neither of these speculations had appeared elsewhere in the literature and both lacked supporting evidence from the literature. The inclusion of ‘unspecified maladaptive daydreaming’ as a sub-category might enable clinicians in the future to specify a diagnostic class for people who do not meet the full criteria for maladaptive daydreaming. As with most disorders, maladaptive daydreaming may be a multidimensional phenomenon, but incorporating an ‘unspecified’ category, could lead to it becoming a potential catch-all category for a maladaptive daydreaming identification. It is not suggested that the SCI-MD is not a useful measurement tool. Instead, it is suggested that both the MDS-16 and the SCI-MD require further validation through replication and extension processes, particularly when used together. Nevertheless, the MDS-16 and the SCI-MD are the only tools currently available to researchers to measure maladaptive daydreaming, and the development and validation work that has been conducted is recognized.

Problems with the development and validation of psychometric tools are common within psychology, but the validation process of these tools is nonetheless important. Ongoing validation ensures that clinicians have access to a range of valid and robust tools that they can use to diagnose, research, and treat maladaptive daydreaming. As such, a focus on the validation of measurement tools for maladaptive daydreaming was to be expected from across the literature.
**Exploration of Comorbidity and Related Factors.**

Unlike in the literature-base about normal daydreaming, which implies that daydreaming might be a paradox with both benefits and costs, maladaptive daydreaming is presented quite differently within the literature. Within the maladaptive daydreaming literature is an evident assumption about dysfunction and distress, and this underpins maladaptive daydreaming being named a psychopathological entity. The focus of some research reported in the body of literature has been the relationships between maladaptive daydreaming and other psychopathological conditions, known as comorbidity.

Comorbidity and related factor information has been the focus within quantitative maladaptive daydreaming research (Abu-Rayya et al., 2019a; Bigelsen et al., 2016; Somer et al., 2016b, 2017b; Somer & Herscu, 2017). These studies have reported on a range of potentially related conditions. A main finding reported by Bigelsen et al., for instance, was that maladaptive daydreaming might overlap with other psychiatric disorders. Those researchers specifically offered OCD and ADHD as comorbidity conditions.

The first longitudinal study of maladaptive daydreaming (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018) reported a measurement of the factors that preceded daily maladaptive daydreaming. Measures included levels of MDD, maladaptive daydreaming, anxiety, social anxiety, OCD, levels of detachment and emotional changes. Soffer-Dudek and Somer identified that OCD was one consistent precursor to maladaptive daydreaming, meaning that OCD was the only psychopathological symptom that preceded maladaptive daydreaming episodes. Based on their findings those authors tentatively suggested that the significant elevation of OCD before and after maladaptive daydreaming in their study might indicate a shared mechanism. One observable difficulty of that study, which potentially undermines this assertion is that the OCD questionnaire used in the study only focused on compulsive symptoms of OCD, with limited measurement of the obsessive symptoms. The questionnaire may have not provided an accurate and reliable measurement of OCD. Further, the study took place online, using self-reported maladaptive daydreamers, of whom the majority were female and tested as having high clinical levels of psychopathological disorders. These are not ideal experimental conditions. It is suggested that a more robust design would use an independently assessed group matched by sex, and that the participants would meet a clinical level of maladaptive daydreaming. On a positive note, the study was the first
longitudinal study of maladaptive daydreaming and utilized data that came from a diverse international sample.

To further explore the comorbidity of maladaptive daydreaming, Somer and colleagues (2017b) explored comorbidity in 39 maladaptive daydreamers. They found high rates of comorbidity in their participant population. The highest was ADHD (76.92%). Further, 71.8% of the sample met the criteria for anxiety disorder, 66.7% met the criteria for MDD, and 53.9% met the criteria for the obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorders. Most psychopathological disorders have comorbidity factors. Knowing about conditions related to maladaptive daydreaming is therefore important in order to improve treatment outcomes.

Although it is useful to understand the comorbidities associated with an experience, the maladaptive daydreaming literature has tended to vacillate between suggestions of related disorders. Such uncertainty within even the research-based literature potentially creates confusion about the experience. For instance, the strongest finding that OCD was a consistent comorbidity feature of maladaptive daydreaming appeared across the literature, but there is a risk of losing sight of such a finding because of a confusion about related factors. Maladaptive daydream researchers have attempted to identify comorbidity factors and such exploration might encourage further understanding about the mechanisms and potential origins of maladaptive daydreaming. Yet, there is still also an obvious need within the field of maladaptive daydreaming research, for exploration beyond comorbidity factors.

**Qualitative Studies**

A small number of qualitative studies have been conducted regarding maladaptive daydreaming. These have provided rich information about the experiences of maladaptive daydreamers and have contributed to the exploration and identification of themes about maladaptive daydreaming. Consideration of these qualitative studies appears within the following section.

**Case Studies.** Case studies are a useful way of identifying current ideas, in gaining different insight into a topic that might be considered as novel and exploratory, such as maladaptive daydreaming. Case studies can provide valuable direction that can stimulate new research in a field. Within the qualitative arena of maladaptive daydreaming research, only three peer-reviewed articles have used a case study method. Two of these (Somer, 2018; Witkin, 2019), focused on generating insight into the outcomes of mixed maladaptive daydreaming treatment plans. Consideration of these two qualitative case study articles is given later in this chapter in the section titled
‘treating maladaptive daydreaming.’ The third qualitative case study was reported in Pietkiewicz et al. (2018) and is notable because it was central in determining maladaptive daydreaming as a new form of behavioral addiction. As one of only two existing explanations (trauma and behavioral addiction) of maladaptive daydreaming, consideration of the Pietkiewicz et al study is given in the later chapter section ‘existing explanations about the function of maladaptive daydreaming.’ As there are so few qualitative case studies exploring maladaptive daydreaming within the literature there is a need for further in-depth exploration of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, especially case studies and qualitative research.

**Qualitative Thematic Studies.** Qualitative research into maladaptive daydreaming is scarce, but it nonetheless offers a way of understanding the experience. These qualitative studies sought to identify and explore themes, that might build a collective understanding of the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

A phenomenological study was conducted with 21 in-depth interviews with people who self-reported maladaptive daydreaming (Somer et al., 2016a). This study was the first to emphasize emotional compensatory themes with maladaptive daydreaming. These emotional compensatory themes included competency, social recognition, and support being reported by the participants whereby the daydream theme provided the ability for people to experience emotional benefit from the daydreams. That study provided the first identification of beneficial aspects that resulted from maladaptive daydreaming whereby previous research studies had represented the experience of maladaptive daydreaming as providing only negative and maladaptive outcomes.

A second qualitative study, that requires consideration, came from Somer and colleagues (2016b). They too sought to identify themes from qualitative inquiry. Through a grounded theory approach, they investigated the maladaptive daydreaming maintenance factors of 16 maladaptive daydreamer adults. The current author questions the use of some grounded theory methods reported in that study (i.e., Glaser (1965) and Charmaz (2014)), as that article left it unclear which specific grounded theory method or methods were used. Instead of constructing one grounded theory from the data, those researchers identified seven themes from their coding: (a) maladaptive daydreaming as a talent that is innate for vivid fantasy, (b) the link between maladaptive daydreaming and social isolation, (c) trauma’s role in the development of maladaptive daydreaming; (d) maladaptive daydreaming’s rewards, (e) maladaptive daydreaming as an insatiable yearning, (f) shame and concealment associated with maladaptive daydreaming, and,
Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming

(g) unsuccessful treatment of maladaptive daydreaming. The offering of these seven themes, which had already been noted and explored through the literature, is inconsistent with the grounded theory approach, whereby one theory is derived from data. It might be suggested that no new understanding or theoretical insight was generated from that study. Further, that study was possibly not grounded theory research but instead, more of a thematic analysis study (TA).

The final qualitative thematic study reviewed was conducted by Somer and colleagues (2019b). They explored the artwork of maladaptive daydreamers and the associated themes of those people’s maladaptive daydreaming experiences. Nine individuals from nine countries each provided two pieces of art that depicted maladaptive daydreaming and themselves. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the art suggested that the self-representations involved a fragmentation of two states of consciousness ‘self and daydream self.’ Within the artwork, a representation of a richer palette of color was reported for the inner world, which the researchers determined as a positive association. In contrast, artistic characterization of the real-world, was interpreted as malfunctioning and empty. The article provided an interesting visual lens into the experiences of maladaptive daydreamers. The inclusion of the artwork within the article supplied rich qualitative evidence of the theme of emotional regulation potentially associated with maladaptive daydreaming. The explanation that maladaptive daydreaming may be an emotional regulation strategy challenges earlier explanations of the function of maladaptive daydreaming, such as those involving trauma and behavioral addiction. Due to the unorthodox nature and inclusion of artwork in the reported research, there is a risk that the significance of the findings will be overlooked. Regardless, Somer and colleagues’ research might contribute a new direction for maladaptive daydream research in considering perceptions of the maladaptive daydream experience.

Qualitative research can supplement what is already known about maladaptive daydreaming. Such research holds the capacity to contribute information to an experience that has little theoretical explanation. This is not to suggest that qualitative research is the better method for researching maladaptive daydreaming; there is space within the research arena for both quantitative and qualitative research, as both methods can add value and knowledge to the literature. Yet there is space within the literature for exploring maladaptive daydreaming, beyond the focus of psychopathology.
A Research Skepticism: Maladaptive Daydreaming as a Distinct Clinical Entity

Researchers who have conducted maladaptive daydreaming studies, have faced various challenges in their attempts to understand and explain the experience. At times, a lack of research effort was noticeable within published research. Two articles illustrated researcher’s requests for more research to be conducted, Somer (2013) and, Bershtling and Somer (2018). First, Somer (2013) informed the scientific community that further research was urgently needed into maladaptive daydreaming. At that time, there was a scant body of evidence about maladaptive daydreaming, even though, beyond scientific exploration the phenomenon had become viral on the internet and had generated media interest, YouTube videos, Facebook communities, personal blogs and online self-report articles dedicated to the topic.

The lack of research attention given to maladaptive daydreaming was also made evident in Bershtling and Somer’s article (2018). Their critical discourse analysis identified micro-politics, regarding the recognition of maladaptive daydreaming as a new mental health condition. In their article, Bershtling and Somer described the maladaptive daydreaming population’s striving for recognition and legitimization of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. They analyzed maladaptive daydreamers’ written communications online, including letters provided by maladaptive daydreamers that had been written to official organizations (government, research facilities and universities) requesting further research into maladaptive daydreaming. The article gave two examples of professional sceptics; a prominent daydream researcher, who denied the existence of maladaptive daydreaming; and a clinical psychologist who offered that maladaptive daydreaming was no different from normal daydreaming. Bershtling and Somer expressed their confusion at the politics within the academic and medical professions, questioning why some professionals might decide to not recognize new scientific knowledge.

The work of Somer (2013) and Bershtling and Somer (2018) showed a research skepticism about maladaptive daydreaming, and a lack of the existence of scientific exploration into maladaptive daydreaming. At that time, substantial anecdotal information existed about maladaptive daydreaming on the internet and in the media, which may have led to a lessening of further scientific exploration. This lack of research by other researchers to build the scientific profile of maladaptive daydreaming, which might have stemmed from changes of opinion of ideas about the origins of maladaptive daydreaming, would surely be understandable had this caused skepticism among the
research community. There is no denying the dedication of the maladaptive daydream researchers at that time, whose published research did provide support and aid to those people who experienced maladaptive daydreaming. Despite the evident research skepticism in the literature, however, the scientific profile of maladaptive daydreaming did nonetheless develop.

**Towards a Nosological Explanation of Maladaptive Daydreaming Being a Distinct Clinical Entity**

One study within the literature, conducted by Schimmenti and colleagues (2019), does aim to address the research scepticism about maladaptive daydreaming being a distinct clinical entity to other mental fantasy activities, conducted by Schimmenti and colleagues. They examined classification differences between maladaptive daydreaming and other mental fantasy activities, including normal daydreaming, mind wandering, dissociation, dissociative absorption, fantasy proneness, slugging cognitive tempo, lucid dreaming, imaginative friends and autistic fantasy (Schimmenti et al., 2019). Using a case study, Schimmenti and colleagues examined commonalities and differences between maladaptive daydreaming and the other mental fantasy activities listed above.

Maladaptive daydreaming was described within the article as a vicious cycle where comfort is sought within the daydreams from stressors that occur in life. The engagement in the daydreaming brings distress due to reduced functioning in life, achievements and relationships, which ultimately causes more daydreaming to reduce the daydreaming related distress. The maladaptive nature of maladaptive daydreaming was highlighted in the case study of Jane, aged 22, a philosophy student who reported engaging in such daydreaming for hours each day, experiencing daydreams of idealized nature, whereby she was a successful singer, in a loving relationship. This was quite different to her real-life, whereby she struggled with concentration difficulties, lacked control of the daydreaming, and her daily functioning was reported as impacted.

The article further provided a treatment plan for Jane, including CBT and ACT. Specifically, treatment included diary observation of triggers (thoughts, feelings and behaviours), rewards incorporated for intercepting maladaptive daydreaming bouts, increasing her coping skills, and regular text feedback to encourage her improvement. Mindfulness was also part of the treatment, particularly being in the present moment. After 11 months, she had an improved ability to control her immersive daydreaming, and still found enjoyment from the daydream activity, but no longer met the criteria for maladaptive daydreaming after treatment. Whilst this case study is promising in terms
of potential treatment for maladaptive daydreaming, it is uncertain how it provides an examination of the commonalities and differences between maladaptive daydreaming and other fantasy activities.

Within the article, a comparison table is offered, whereby maladaptive daydreaming is compared with normal daydreaming, mind wandering, dissociation, dissociative absorption, fantasy proneness, slugging cognitive tempo, lucid dreaming, imaginative friends and autistic fantasy, but it is uncertain where the data for the table originated from, as this is not stated.

The table suggests that maladaptive daydreaming has unique features, such as a need for privacy, embarrassment about the activity, daydreaming as time consuming, compensatory need’s themes involved in the daydreaming, and an idealized self being central to the daydreaming. The table demonstrates that maladaptive daydreaming shares some features with the other constructs. Similarity was expressed, with maladaptive daydreaming being like the imaginary friends experience in childhood, whereby intentional focused fantasising occurs, like maladaptive daydreaming. Additionally, similarity was expressed in relation to intense imagery movements (IIM), seen in childhood, where fantasy is acted out physically. It is known that maladaptive daydreaming involves kinesthetic, stereotypical movements like IIM. Yet, the article expresses that maladaptive daydreaming is a distinct clinical entity.

A rudimentary attempt was also made within the article to discount the differential diagnoses of OCD, schizophrenia, ADHD and DID as being different disorders to maladaptive daydreaming. Whilst the article provides some distinctions between maladaptive daydreaming and other constructs, there are some similarities that need to be further compared in future studies. It would be suggested that case studies of all the constructs, alongside maladaptive daydreaming, together with participant survey data would provide further comparison and strengthen a nosological definition of maladaptive daydreaming. As the article stands, it is a beginning towards a nosological definition, with extension studies required.

**A Link Between Maladaptive Daydreaming and DID**

In a 2019 article, Somer made comment on an article (Somer, 2019), written by Ross in 2018, that made a comparison between maladaptive daydreaming and DID, where Ross suggested that there might be an overlap between some cases of DID and maladaptive daydreaming, in particular poly-fragmentation (many fragments) and ‘complex’ inner worlds (Ross, 2018).
Distinctions between the two constructs were made by Somer, in relation to differences in DID not being as elaborate as in maladaptive daydreaming, that the compulsion to engage in large amounts of daydreaming is absent in DID, that there are not large amounts of characters in DID (instead alters are involved), and that the host is not aware of the fantasy nature of the absorption, nor has control as in maladaptive daydreaming.

Commonalities in the two constructs were also noted by Somer, and included high levels of absorption, complex and vivid worlds and the involvement of dissociation. He further expressed that dissociation occurs on a spectrum related to the degree of controllability or involuntariness. The main argument within the article was Somer’s attempt to explain how the two constructs were distinct, but that there might be an overlap between the two. He provided discussion about the development of fantasy alternative realities occur within childhood, as a way of ego development, emotional respite, gratification and sustenance opportunities. The example of children with imaginary companions was provided as explanation of how some children’s imaginary companions might develop into maladaptive daydreaming. Some maladaptive daydreamers, he suggested, may reincorporate imaginary companions into alters, becoming DID, creating an overlap.

Somer’s explanation of the two constructs, the similarities and the differences could be suggested to be confusing. The suggestion of similarity, relatedness, yet distinctness could provide further confusion and research sceptism. Such potential confusion needs to be resolved, and this could be using longitudinal research in exploring the two constructs.

**Further Exploration of the Relationship Between DID and Maladaptive Daydreaming**

In a later study, Ross (2021), aimed to determine the frequency of maladaptive daydreaming in 100 participants recruited from a psychiatric in-patient unit, who had high levels of dissociation and were described as highly traumatized. 49 of the sample met the criteria for maladaptive daydreaming, 28 did not and others met criteria for a range of dissociative disorders, including the most severe form of dissociation, DID. A range of measures were used to measure dissociation, maladaptive daydreaming and obsessive compulsiveness. Findings showed that the obsessive-compulsive nature of maladaptive daydreaming was consistent with previous findings (Somer, 2002). They also noted that people who engaged in maladaptive daydreaming from the sample, suffered from a range of mental health problems, with higher levels of comorbidity for
ADHD, OCD and anxiety, than DID, but the relationship with dissociation was more significant. This suggested that maladaptive daydreaming linked strongly to dissociation in trauma populations, but in maladaptive daydreaming, other comorbidities were more common than dissociation.

Whilst the study provided confirmation of previously known information, such as the high correlation with ADHD, OCD and anxiety, it did provide explanation of the two constructs relationship. It will be important for future researchers to be aware of the relationship between DID and maladaptive daydreaming. It is advised that caution will be needed in linking maladaptive daydreaming to the most severe dissociative disorder, DID. Further research will be required to unpack such a relationship.

**Existing Explanations About Maladaptive Daydreaming**

Two theoretical explanations of maladaptive daydreaming are identifiable within the literature. The first offered the explanation that maladaptive daydreaming results from childhood trauma. The second offered the explanation that maladaptive daydreaming is a behavioral addiction. These two theoretical explanations for maladaptive daydreaming will be articulated and reviewed in the following two sections.

**Trauma as an Explanation for Maladaptive Daydreaming**

Broad research has been conducted into the role of trauma in the development of maladaptive daydreaming (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Somer, 2002; Somer & Herscu, 2017; Somer et al., 2019a). Typically for acceptance of a theory, criteria must be met; for instance, the theory needs to be observable and repeatable, and adaptable to account for new data. Further, in line with the principle of *Occam’s Razor*, the simplest theoretical answer is often the correct one. As will be argued here, the literature that explores the role of trauma as an explanation for maladaptive daydreaming provides only a fragmented and restrictive theoretical explanation for maladaptive daydreaming.

In a seminar paper that first reported maladaptive daydreaming, as observed in a trauma clinic, trauma was offered as a cause for maladaptive daydreaming (Somer, 2002). A challenge to this explanation came from the only other maladaptive daydreaming case study, reported by Bigelsen and Schupak, (2011). They reported some similar findings to Somer. However, in relation to trauma, their case study participant, had not experienced any trauma through their life. Bigelsen et al., (2016) explored trauma further. In their study of 447 maladaptive daydreamers and their symptomology, trauma was not found from their study. A further challenge to trauma, as an explanation for maladaptive daydreaming, came from findings in Somer and
Herscu (2017). This study explored the relationship of childhood trauma, social anxiety and maladaptive daydreaming. The study found that childhood trauma and social anxiety no longer correlated with maladaptive daydreaming.

It is now widely accepted that trauma does not supply a universal explanation for maladaptive daydreaming although, it is recognized that trauma can be a factor, at times, within maladaptive daydreaming (Somer et al., 2019a).

Behavioral Addiction as a Partial Explanation for Maladaptive Daydreaming

A more recent theoretical suggestion names behavioral addiction as explaining related factors in maladaptive daydreaming. A behavioral addiction, also known as an impulse control disorder, involves engaging in a repeated behavior, regardless of the consequences for one’s mental health, finances, relationships, et cetera. The behavior develops over time, becomes more frequent, and results in a loss of control. Examples of behavioral addictions are addictions to pornography, exercise addiction, video games addiction, and shopping addiction.

Behavioral addiction as explaining aspects of maladaptive daydreaming has been suggested through two studies (Pietkiewicz et al., 2018; Somer, 2018). Somer reported details of a treatment plan for one maladaptive daydreamer. The treatment plan included CBT and MI. Both treatment options have evidence of success as treatment for addictions. Somer reported that the study participant had reduced daydreaming by 50% and had a 70% improvement in work and social adjustment. Although the treatment plan was successful with the participant’s behavioral changes, unexpectedly, these changes were not captured by the clinical maladaptive daydreaming outcome scales (MDS-16) and SCI-MD.

Pietkiewicz et al. (2018) reported maladaptive daydreaming as a new form of behavioral addiction. For their interpretative phenomenological analysis study (IPA), of a case study participant with maladaptive daydreaming, they employed a structured clinical interview and mental state exam. The participant in the study reported excessive internet use, along with an excessive viewing of pornography, with maladaptive daydreaming as the participant’s main concern. The authors suggested that the participant’s maladaptive daydreaming included ‘components’ of behavioral addiction, such as the daydreaming dominating thinking, mood improvement that resulted from engaging in the behavior and withdrawal symptoms when suppressing the maladaptive daydreaming.

The idea that behavioral addiction shares common features with maladaptive daydreaming has only been posited in those two case studies, is relevant for those cases,
and is not more broadly generalizable to the population. It is problematic to base such a partial explanation on such limited data, with offering only able to supply explanation to that case, instead of being able to be generalizable to the population. The theory of behavioral addiction explaining maladaptive daydreaming is not apparently consistent with the idea of theoretical parsimony; that is how a good theory should offer the simplest explanation for the evidence. The literature leads towards a two-way question needing to be addressed: ‘Does behavioral addiction lead to maladaptive daydreaming, or does maladaptive daydreaming lead to a behavioral addiction?’ The answer to this question is still ambiguous from the literature. Instead of causality, the literature suggests maladaptive daydreaming symptoms be viewed from the lens of being best interpreted as an expression of a behavioral addiction.

The explanatory and theoretical frameworks about maladaptive daydreaming suggested across the literature do not appear to be able to fully explain maladaptive daydreaming. Aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience thus remain unexplained. The two theoretical frameworks regarding maladaptive daydreaming are limited in their scope, and each can only explain a limited set of circumstances. This review of literature ascertained that not all maladaptive daydreamers have trauma histories and that not all demonstrate addictive behaviors, with some being able to choose when to daydream, and others who do not suffer distress when engaging in their maladaptive daydreaming (Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009; Somer et al., 2016a; Somer and Herscu, 2017). This review of the literature has therefore determined that there is a gap in knowledge, with a need for further development of a theoretical explanation for maladaptive daydreaming, one that extends beyond psychopathology explanations.

**Suggested New Explanations about Maladaptive Daydreaming**

With only two limited theoretical explanations regarding maladaptive daydreaming, coming specifically from the research into maladaptive daydreaming, a further literature search was undertaken alongside related explanations. This further search led to the identification of three new theoretical explanations as data analysis in the current thesis progressed. The three theoretical explanations for maladaptive daydreaming included: *Daydreaming Contents Theory*, *Daydreaming Category Theory*, and *Emotional Processing Theory*. Consideration of these theories show them as offering potential valid explanations that might further inform us about maladaptive daydreaming.
**Daydreaming Contents Theory**

Research has noted different findings about whether daydream content affects emotions or not (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Knet & Gelder, 2012; Mar et al., 2012;). Five key examples of daydream contents are: social daydreams, that serve socio-emotional functions; fantasy daydreams, that supply creativity opportunities; performance daydreams, that provide goal achievement opportunities, self-soothing daydreams, that supply relief; and problematic daydreams, that are distressing.

Upon reviewing the literature, there has been some exploration into daydream content: fantasy in forgetting (Delaney et al., 2010), changing fantasy context to forget (Mar et al., 2012), and fantasy self-context leading to emotional change (Bybee et al., 1997).

One study stood out within the literature. This study investigated the content categories of self-image within daydreaming. Conducted by Bybee and colleagues (1997), the researchers explored the relationship between three daydream selves: the ‘fantasy self,’ the ‘ideal self,’ and the ‘ought self,’ and posited mental health outcomes, as a result of daydreaming from these perspectives. The study posited that those people who were more preoccupied with the ‘ideal’ self-image had scores that correlated with MDD and reported that the ‘ought’ self-offered the most mental adaptation.

Historically, daydreaming content had been discounted as not being involved within daydreaming research. Yet the studies considered above support the theory that daydream content is involved within daydreaming. This theory could be theoretically extended to maladaptive daydreaming. Bybee et al.’s findings suggested that, depending on its context, daydreaming can be emotionally beneficial or distressing, and that daydreaming content potentially facilitates emotional change. Therefore, daydreaming might have its benefits, if experienced in a very particular way. The ability to change the daydream content seems to be a useful strategy for emotional benefit. However, this might require redirection of daydream content to more useful contexts, which might require training, and yet the ability to target daydreaming, for positive emotional outcomes, might not be so easy.

From the findings offered by Bybee et al., it could be suggested that the daydreaming content theory encourages the idea that a person might be able to change daydream content and thus change their emotional outcomes. This idea potentially resonates with the central underpinning concept around CBT (Beck, 1964; Ellis, 1959), that unhelpful thoughts, behaviors, and emotions can be adjusted through a series of strategies. Such CBT strategies involve thought challenging, whereby the context and
content of thoughts transform into something more realistic and helpful. Further exploration of daydream content and emotions might enable further explanation of maladaptive daydreaming. Such an extension could incorporate CBT strategies, to explore whether daydreaming brings emotional benefit. The literature on daydream content and emotional outcomes, could offer a new direction for maladaptive daydreaming, and may be an area of interest to extend.

**Daydream Categories Theory**

The role of theory in research is to provide a means to show and define a research problem. Theory aids in explaining and understanding problems, giving meaning to data; further, theory supplies a common language and frame of reference.

*Daydreaming Categories Theory* (Singer, 1961) is a classification theory that organized similar daydream constructs into three groups determined from the development of the measurement tool, imaginal processes inventory (IPI) (Singer & Antrobus, 1965). These three groups were named: positive-constructivist daydreaming style; which involved ‘playful, wishful and constructive images’; the guilty-dysphoric daydreaming style, which involved ‘obsessive and distressing images’; and, the poor attentional control daydreaming style, which involved an ‘inability to concentrate on external tasks, whilst daydreaming’.

The central claim regarding these three daydreaming styles was suggested across the literature, that the three styles of daydreaming might be useful, in determining either a difficulty in coping or in the developing of a coping ability through daydreaming.

Supporting evidence for this claim was offered in studies related to the further validation studies of the IPI psychometric tool (Antrobus, Singer & Greenberg, 1966; Huba et al., 1981) and the later shortened version, that was named the Second-Order Factors of Inner Experience Scale (SIPI) (Huba et al., 1981). As might be expected, these three daydreaming styles were replicated across these IPI and SIPI studies. It would be highly unlikely that any new styles of daydreaming would be identified through such psychometric tools, with no novel items included.

Across the literature exploring daydreaming styles, one main researcher, Jerome L. Singer, was a key figure. Deceased in 2019, a Professor in Psychology at Yale, Singer’s career studying daydreaming spanned from 1960 to 2009). Through his research into imagination and the waiting ability of children Singer found that children who had higher fantasy abilities showed higher levels of self-regulation, capable of being alone and wait if necessary, (Singer, 1961). Singer determined that these children were adopting the positive-constructivist daydreaming style, with its associated benefits.
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Of the three daydreaming styles, he identified only this one style as helpful to wellbeing. Singer and colleagues’ ideas about the greater usefulness of this daydreaming style, compared with the other two styles, were explored by other daydream researchers, such as Bloun-Hudon and Zelenski (2016).

Bloun-Hudon and Zelenski (2016), considered the relationships between Singer’s three styles of daydreaming. They conducted four studies, with a wide range of psychological measures including personality tests, measures of introspection, the SIPI, affect measures, and happiness scales. In terms of positive findings regarding daydreaming, they found that positive-constructive daydreaming to be more associated with personal growth, positive affect, and more purpose in life, than were the other two styles. The theory that daydreaming might be associated with psychological wellbeing was new for the 1960s; daydreaming research had previously focused on the costs of daydreaming since that time, however, recent research focus, including within maladaptive daydreaming research, has been directed more towards the other two styles of daydreaming: guilty-dysphoric and poor attentional control daydreaming.

One crucial aspect regarding the conclusions that can be made about daydreaming categories theory is that the research into daydream categories has come to a halt. However, deeper exploration of the literature casts doubts onto this perception. Rather, other terms have been suggested that might fit the idea of Daydream Categories Theory. Daydream categories have been renamed with such terms as: ‘fantasy proneness’ (Sánchez-Bernardos, Hernández Llordea, Avia & Bragado-Alvarez., 2015; Weibel, Martarelli, Häberli & Mast, 2017; Wilson & Barber, 1981), ‘excessive daydreaming’ (Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009), ‘compulsive fantasy’ (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011), the most widely used term within the literature: ‘mind wandering’ (Christoff, Gordon, Smallwood, Smith & Schooler, 2009; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Mooneyham & Schooler, 2013) and ‘maladaptive daydreaming’ (Somer, 2002). Two of these terms, relate to similar daydreaming categories, excessive daydreaming, and compulsive fantasy. Two others are determined to be distinct daydreaming categories, fantasy proneness and maladaptive daydreaming.

It is notable that exploration has been undertaken into the negative impacts of these daydreaming categories on functioning levels. An interest in the negative impacts of daydreaming is therefore evident within the literature, regarding daydreaming categories.
**Emotional Processing Theory**

The theory and working definition of emotional processing offered by Rachman, (1980), does not specifically relate to daydreaming, it has been included as a potential theory, in response to the data analysis that has occurred within this thesis. Although, this theoretical article is an older paper, it supplies a valuable contribution, supplying ideas about required factors for healthy and unhealthy emotional processing to take place.

Rachman was interested in the factors that promote and impede adaptation to emotional disturbance and the role of emotions in responding to life’s challenges. This interest stemmed from Rachman’s research examination of abnormal experiences and behaviors, particularly investigating abnormal grief, obsessions, and intrusive thoughts.

Rachman defined successful emotional processing as “a process where emotional difficulties are absorbed, and other experiences and behaviors proceed without disruption.” (1980, p. 51). He reported the signs of unsuccessful emotional processing as including obsessions, disturbing dreams, intrusive thoughts, pre-occupation, restlessness, crying, hallucinations, and agitation. His understanding of satisfactory emotional processing was heavily influenced by behavioral therapy. Emotional processing strategies were described by Rachman including habituation training, calm rehearsals of coping behaviors, repeated practice, controlled reactions, and developing a sense of perceived control in relation to the difficulties.

Consideration of the *Emotional Processing Theory* and its claims leads to necessary further examination. The *Emotional Processing Theory* was primary based on behavioral therapy strategies and ideas, and that the initial research into emotional processing was undertaken at a time when behavioral research was favored. Since the 1950s and 1960s the psychology field has tended toward a cognitive research focus, which even Rachman (2001) advocated. A move has occurred within psychology, towards a cognitive research focus. In this more recent article Rachman agreed with the claim that the *Emotional Processing Theory* needed to be updated to include aspects of cognitive-emotional processing aspects not just behavioral. Inclusion of cognitive features raises potential for the theory to include an element of personal cognitive control, whereby cognitive processes and behaviors might lead to successful emotional processing. Negative cognitive processes and behaviors, however, could equally lead to unsuccessful emotional processing and thus to resultant emotional and behavioral concerns.
Processing is a common term within psychology, often relating to constructs such as memory, perceptual, sensory, language and information. Within daydream research, a focus has been towards information processing, and Emotional Processing Theory seems to be a new offering. The theory appears to be supported by some evidence, such as from research in which emotional processing was noted in other clinical populations, for instance in men’s responses to cancer, (Hoyt, Stanton, Irwin & Thomas, 2013; Manne et al., 2007). In relation to daydreaming, Rachman’s (1980) early research included the suggestion that emotional imaginary might be a useful research consideration in exploration of emotional processing.

Emotional Processing Theory appears credible and believable, and its recognition of cognitive processes further builds on the theory's credibility and explanatory potential. The theory offers insight into psychological mechanisms that might impede or enhance emotional processing, such this theory might be able to explain maladaptive daydreaming.

New Explanations About Maladaptive Daydreaming Summary

Each of the three theoretical explanations reviewed; Daydreaming Contents Theory, Daydreaming Categories Theory and Emotional Processing Theory offer some partial explanation of aspects of maladaptive daydreaming. Yet, individually, none provides a definitive, or universal explanation of maladaptive daydreaming. It may be that these theories might provide an explanatory understanding of the maladaptive daydreaming experience if considered in concert or somehow synthesized. This review of literature has made evident that further theoretical explanation regarding maladaptive daydreaming is certainly necessary.

In addition to examining literature that provides theoretical explanation of maladaptive daydreaming, theory can be used for the development of treatments. The following section, therefore, supplies consideration of the literature that reports on treatment attempts for maladaptive daydreaming.

Treating Maladaptive Daydreaming That is Problematic

An understandable and natural progression in the maladaptive daydreaming research area, has been a move towards the development of treatment interventions to reduce any distressing elements of the experience.

While examples of treatment attempts are given across the maladaptive daydreaming literature, different treatment outcomes are reported. maladaptive daydreaming has been described as a multi-faceted entity, that includes features of dissociation, disturbances of attention, behavioral addiction, and obsessive-compulsive
features. This range of components has directed maladaptive daydreaming researchers towards different therapeutic treatment models.

Successful treatments have been reported within the maladaptive daydreaming literature. First, a case study showed the successful use of the anti-depressant medication fluvoxamine to reduce obsessive-compulsive tendencies in a lawyer who had struggled with maladaptive daydreaming since childhood (Glausiusz, 2011). Second, the successful use of a mixed treatment plan to treat a 14-year-old girl, Lee, to reduce her maladaptive daydreaming was reported (Witkin, 2019). Regarding the latter, Witkin reported that the mixed treatment plan involved a range of treatments that included: MI, CBT, assertiveness skills training, communication skills training, socialization training, psychotherapeutic exploration of the daydream themes, and ACT. Compared with Lee’s history of inpatient hospitalizations, this mixed treatment plan was described as having a positive outcome, as a result of which she was reported to have transitioned out of the hospital’s therapeutic school into a mainstream school. Lee was also reported as having developed new friendships and interests and recognized when her maladaptive daydreaming became problematic and learned to implement appropriate strategies to address it. Witkin’s article gave an encouraging positive direction for the maladaptive daydreaming literature, offering a range of treatment ideas for treating maladaptive daydreaming. It will be interesting to see whether similar mixed treatment plans might successfully be replicated in future studies to treat maladaptive daydreaming.

The literature suggests that mixed treatment plans are a valid approach that might result in reducing the negative aspects of maladaptive daydreaming. Replication of such successes might be interesting to explore. However, mixed treatment approaches for maladaptive daydreaming have also been reported as only partially successful (Somer, 2018). Somer (2018) reported employing a mixture of therapeutic models in trying to treat a 25-year-old male Israeli undergraduate student. Unlike, 14-year-old Lee in Witkin’s article, who had a complex range of diagnoses including anxiety, MDD with psychotic features, ADHD, OCD and autism; Somer’s 25-year-old male participant reported difficulties with high frequency episodes of maladaptive daydreaming and Internet addiction, along with social difficulties. The mixed therapy plan for the Somer’s participant included MI, CBT, and mindfulness training (ACT). Examples of treatment included self-monitoring of target behaviors such as exercise, scheduling activities and development of coping statements, along with limiting time spent daydreaming and using the Internet. Somer reported that this participant had
reduced his maladaptive daydreaming by 50% and had a 70% improvement in work and social adjustment. However, these levels of improvement did not show when measured on the main tool for measuring maladaptive daydreaming, the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16) (Somer et al., 2016c). The MDS-16 might require added measures of target behaviors to capture treatment improvement. The MDS-16 tool aims to show clinical levels of maladaptive daydreaming but has no capacity to measure treatment outcomes. Research into the successful treatment of maladaptive daydreaming appears to be in its infancy within the literature, with room for further development of this research area. Without a theoretical explanation of maladaptive daydreaming, development of treatment may be somewhat pre-emptive and problematic.

**Updated Literature Review From 2019 to 2022 on Maladaptive Daydreaming**

The following section provides an update on relevant maladaptive daydreaming research that has been undertaken during the 2020 to 2022 period. Three topics have been identified as relevant to this thesis from the updated literature review process. These topics are: (a) the impact of maladaptive daydreaming on a specific clinical group: psycho-social difficulties experienced by female maladaptive daydreamers, (b) a newly identified link to emotional regulation exploring two types of intensive daydreaming: immersive daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming, and (c) the impacts of COVID-19 in relation to maladaptive daydreaming. The following section explores a study conducted by Abu-Rayya, Somer & Knane in 2020, that looked to explore whether maladaptive daydreaming exacerbated psychosocial problems in a specific clinical population – female survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

**Psycho-Social Difficulties Exacerbated by Maladaptive Daydreaming Experienced by Female Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA)**

Abu-Rayya and colleague’s 2020 research looked to explore the development trajectory of the compulsive fantasy experience, named maladaptive daydreaming. Their research was based on reports of previous findings of psychological injuries that were sustained during childhood experiences that were adverse (Somer, 2002). They suggested that maladaptive daydreaming, like other dissociative experiences, might have initially been developed in childhood by imaginative children who experienced adverse childhoods. The purpose of their study was to elucidate the role that maladaptive daydreaming plays in the lives of female survivors of CSA.

Measurement of maladaptive daydreaming was conducted using the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale: 16 items, (MDS-16) assessment tool, in 194 participants aged 18-56 years, with 99 being female survivors of CSA and 95 control participants, who had
no reported clinical history of sexual abuse. Additionally, a range of psychosocial indices were used to measure social isolation, social phobia, self-esteem, quality of social relations and psychological distress that assessed current MDD, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms.

Based on previous findings in the literature, Abu-Rayya et al., (2020), hypothesized that CSA female survivors would report more distress related to increased maladaptive daydreaming, associated with isolation, social anxiety, MDD, and reduced self-esteem in comparison to participants from a control group who had no reported clinical history of CSA. Secondly, that maladaptive daydreaming would be associated with distress, MDD, lowered self-esteem and social anxiety among CSA female survivors.

The study found that in comparison to the control group, CSA female survivors reported lower self-esteem levels, higher levels of social phobia, MDD, anxiety and psychological distress, that impacted their social relations and unexpectedly that CSA female survivors had a high unemployment status. Additionally, the study showed that CSA female survivors experienced maladaptive daydreaming to a higher extent than the control group, thus supporting a connection between CSA and maladaptive daydreaming tendency, also supporting previous literature into childhood trauma (Somer, 2002; Somer et al., 2016a).

Such a study cannot claim a maladaptive daydreaming prevalence of the finding of 33% among female survivors of CSA. Instead, it has identified a specific at-risk clinical group that would warrant continued investigation, alongside investigation into other target specific vulnerable populations, to explore the impact of maladaptive daydreaming on psychological functioning.

The study determines some limitations that are worth noting. The small sample of Israeli Arab female survivors of CSA, limits the generalizability of the findings and it would be necessary to replicate the study across a range of cultures, and among male survivors of CSA. Additionally, measurement of maladaptive daydreaming clinical levels was conducted using the MDS-16 alone, instead of the usual MDS-16 and Structure Clinical Interview for Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCI-MD), which together provide a stronger level of validity and reliability. It is recognized that the study demonstrates useful preliminary findings that would be strengthened through longitudinal research. On a practical note, the idea of screening female survivors of CSA for maladaptive daydreaming could improve the clinical service quality and treatment development for survivors of sexual abuse.
A Link to Emotional Regulation in Immersive Daydreamers and Maladaptive Daydreamers

Within the literature, a new and welcome research direction is evident, with one noteworthy study that moved beyond exploring increased daydreaming that is not always maladaptive, known as immersive daydreaming. In West and Somer (2019), they looked to explore the overlap and discrepancies between immersive daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming factors in relation to creativity, empathy and emotional regulation abilities. For immersive daydreaming, a non-pathological type of daydreaming, it was expected to find characteristics that were positive, which included increased empathy, emotional regulation and creativity. Immersive daydreaming is an intentional daydreaming, which involves a large capacity for imagination, and it was expected that this style of daydreaming would provide immersive daydreamers with a source of creative inspiration through the daydreams. It was also expected that immersive daydreaming would enable a heightened capacity for empathy. On the other hand, based on previous research findings (Somer, 2002; Somer, 2017; Witkin, 2019), these studies found that maladaptive daydreaming is a highly sociable and emotional experience. Further, maladaptive daydreaming is used to retreat into fantasy, in order to manage difficult emotions and simulate desires and unmet needs. Therefore, based on this previous research, it was predicted to find poor emotional regulation, reduced creativity and higher affective empathy (the ability to experience emotions of others), in the maladaptive daydreamer participants.

Within the West and Somer (2019) study, 542 participants from 52 countries participated in their online study of maladaptive and immersive daydreaming, recruited from a range of maladaptive daydreaming online forums. A battery of self-reported tools were used to measure maladaptive daydreaming components, together with measures of interpersonal reactivity, emotional regulation difficulties and creative behaviours. Within the 542 participants, 216 (40%) self-reported diagnoses of unspecified mental health conditions.

First, for the immersive daydreaming components, it was found that with regards to empathy, the hypothesis was partially supported, with empathy increasing if only in a fictional context, being directed towards fantasy characters, and not externally into the real-world. In relation to emotional regulation, instead of the expected finding that this would increase, this was not the case, and immersive daydreamers had poorer emotional regulation processes than was expected, yet these were slightly less than the maladaptive daydreaming participants’ reports. For creativity, there was no support to
the expectation that immersive daydreaming would mean an increase in creative output and did not predict creativity scores in any direction.

For the maladaptive daydream component, there was significantly poorer emotional regulation ability in those participants, partially supporting the initial hypothesis. In relation to empathy, those participants experiencing the maladaptive daydreaming component, as expected, demonstrated higher affective empathy and reduced creative output. These findings provide further support to previous ideas of maladaptive daydreaming, and for the newly identified immersive daydreaming, as a mechanism for escape from difficult emotions.

Considering treatment implications, the findings from this study suggest that any form of daydreaming that is intensified, whether it involves maladaptive or immersive components, is not effective as a long-term strategy for emotional regulation. For maladaptive daydreaming characteristics that are maladaptive, emotional regulation techniques could be a major component for treatment of distressing factors of the experience. But, based on the study’s findings, for immersive daydreamers, they would also benefit from learning emotional regulation techniques.

Upon critical review of the West and Somer (2019) study, four limitations were identified that may have impacted the findings. First, most of the participants were in North America (48.5%) and Europe (30.6%). Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable across all cultures, and may provide information from a North America/European context. It would be required to conduct a wider geographical study in the future as further exploration.

Second, it might have been that empathy measures within the study might have been impacted by the self-reported diagnoses of unspecified mental health conditions; comorbid health components, such as MDD. More specific formalised mental health diagnoses are needed in future studies. Third, the self-reported nature of the study might also have impacted upon the results, and a longitudinal clinician assessment would strengthen the methodology in future research. Finally, the measurement tool used to identify creative outputs may not have captured creative ability, thus leading to outputs only being measured. Future studies would benefit from locating other measures that are able to capture creative ability.

In conclusion, this pivotal study leads to a welcome change within the literature towards the idea that there is a spectrum for the experience of intensive daydreaming, beyond the maladaptive components, which has been the major focus throughout the prior literature.
**Maladaptive Daydreaming Related to Dysfunctional Emotional Regulation**

Green, West and Somer (2020) conducted network analysis to explore relations between maladaptive daydream symptoms and behaviors, with a particular focus upon emotional regulation difficulties. Their aim was to explore the central elements of maladaptive daydreaming symptoms, along with the identification of clusters of symptoms, and expand to a wider understanding of such symptoms and emotional regulation difficulties.

In their study, Green and colleagues (2020) recruited 542 maladaptive daydreaming participants, from 56 countries, to conduct online surveys into maladaptive daydreaming and emotional regulation difficulties. The MDS-16 was used to measure levels of maladaptive daydreaming, with a clinical cutoff of 50, whereby a higher score suggested more impairment. The Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale was also completed by the maladaptive daydreaming participants.

Two network models were generated through statistical analysis. The first network model indicated three nodes: (a) kinesthetic and music (where music was used to maintain the daydreaming), (b) yearning (annoyed if interrupted from daydreaming), and (c) impairment (the hindering of life goals because of the daydreaming). A second extended network model showed a node, whereby the difficulty of controlling the daydreaming was the central main concern of maladaptive daydreamers. These findings are in line with previous findings (Somer et al., 2019; Jopp et al., 2019), strengthening understanding about maladaptive daydreaming components such as impairment, yearning, control and kinesthetic factors.

As in the previous two studies into emotional regulation and maladaptive daydreaming, the current study above, offers emotional regulation therapy, as an evidence-based intervention that can provide therapeutic improvement to maladaptive daydreamers, looking to manage emotions in an adaptive manner, rather than through the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Together, these three studies provide a direction in maladaptive daydreaming research, towards the idea that maladaptive daydreaming is related to emotional processes. Moving towards a treatment model, suggested by this author, will be a welcome move for those in the maladaptive daydream community who experience ongoing distress as a result of engaging in the daydreaming.
Attachment Style and Emotional Regulation in Relation to Maladaptive Daydreaming

A third study that extended the research into emotional regulation in relation to maladaptive daydreaming was conducted by Sandor and colleagues in their 2021 exploration of attachment styles and difficulties in emotional regulation in both maladaptive daydreamers and people who experience daydreams in a normal manner, without the maladaptive characteristics. Previously, within the maladaptive daydreaming research, a gap was apparent to the study authors, whereby attachment had not been researched in maladaptive daydreamers. Sandor and colleagues determined that attachment style in maladaptive daydreaming needed to be explored, because children with healthy attachment were more likely to follow pathways to personality development that were normal, whilst insecure attachment in childhood might create a vulnerability to following personality development pathways that are less healthy, such as those experienced in maladaptive daydreaming. Further, emotional regulation provides the ability to function in life and in the workplace, in social and in interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it was important to explore whether maladaptive daydreaming was an attempt to protect, thus providing security, intimacy, positive emotions at times, and a means of coping with negative emotions.

In their study, two stages of recruitment of 717 participants occurred, 106 determined as maladaptive daydreamers: (a) from Facebook forums, 243 participants were recruited, with 48 screened as experiencing maladaptive daydreaming; and, (b) 474 Hungarian university students, with 58 screened as experiencing maladaptive daydreaming. Measures included self-report questionnaires being completed in the measurement of maladaptive daydreaming; these included measuring the importance of relationships for self-ambivalence, distance from relationship, devaluation of self; confidence in relationships; self-advocacy and dependency/independence.

Specific attachment styles were suggested to be for maladaptive daydreamers, an ‘ambivalent-fearful’ style with large deficits in emotional regulation. For the normal daydreamers, a ‘secure-independent’ style was found, with normal emotional regulation compared to maladaptive daydreamers. Within maladaptive daydreamers, the ‘ambivalent-fearful’ attachment style included a push-pull need for intimacy; with a yearning for closeness, but being uncomfortable in becoming close, with a high value being placed upon relationships – with a need to be approved by others. Further, that style involved a perception of self being less valuable than others, not believing that others would love or respect them, therefore leading to a distancing towards others, and
being unable to trust that others could be relied upon when needed. This then led to an avoidance, whereby negative emotions were held back, and the seeking of support was seen as a weakness, leading to isolation and, as a result, the development of a pseudo-independence and increased reliance on their maladaptive daydreaming experience.

On the other hand, the ‘secure-independent’ attachment style found in normal daydreamers, showed a higher confidence in relationships, with a positive sense of self and a positive perception of others being emotionally available, with closeness not difficult for them.

Further the study’s findings also found that maladaptive daydreaming showed a higher level of deficits in emotional regulation compared to normal daydreamers, with maladaptive daydreamers experiencing intense negative emotions, that led to a reduction in an ability to concentrate, therefore impacting daily functioning and impulse control. Ultimately, for the maladaptive daydream participants, negative emotions were released within the fantasy experience, rather than within the real-world, suggesting that there were severe attachment injuries and significant emotional regulation deficits in the maladaptive daydreamers. This important large-scale study into maladaptive daydreaming further builds on attempting to understand the process by which maladaptive daydreaming develops, and the factors that contribute to the onset of it. The study’s findings provide new direction for treatment in relation to understanding about how early childhood attachment might contribute to maladaptive daydreaming. Treatment could explore early childhood attachment and seek to build healthier adult attachments, whether through interpersonal relationships or within the therapeutic relationship, and could also look to increase ability in emotional regulation through the teaching of evidence-based emotional regulation strategies. Across all three articles into the relationship of emotional processes to intensive daydreaming, emotional regulation therapy is indicated as being a step forward in the treatment of maladaptive daydreaming and immersive daydreaming.

**Impacts of COVID-19 in Relation to Maladaptive Daydreaming**

Within the literature on maladaptive daydreaming from 2020 onwards, the focus on specific clinical groups, types of intensive daydreaming, and the link to emotional regulation processes, has moved towards a wider exploration of psycho-social functioning in the context of the continuing COVID-19 global pandemic. The next section will highlight two studies that were deemed appropriate to be included into this updated literature review on maladaptive daydreaming, demonstrating a change in the
direction of research towards understanding the impacts of a major stressful situation within the world for maladaptive daydreamers.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing situation across the world, that initially emerged in December 2019. A range of strategies have been used to stop the spread of the virus, through initiating behavior changes, lockdowns, contact tracing, social distancing, quarantine, working from home practices, wearing face masks and an increase in hand hygiene. In relation to the psychological consequences of COVID-19, early reports suggested that 38% of the general population had related psychological distress (Moccia et al., 2020). Maladaptive daydreaming entails difficulties with concentration, more worries about the future, obsessions, social anxiety, lower life satisfaction, mental exhaustion, boredom, MDD, anxiety, lowered happiness, emptiness, impaired ability to study or maintain household tasks and compulsive habits. With the increase in psychological distress in the general population due to the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be expected that such psychological consequences would be experienced in maladaptive daydreamers, particularly in the context of self-isolation. It is parsimonious to expect that maladaptive daydreaming would increase, along with a reduction in mental health and psychosocial functions would markedly deteriorate.

Such findings are evident in Somer et al., (2020), a large-scale online multi-country study, with a large international sample of 1,565 adults from over 70 countries. A range of measures were used to measure behaviors during the pandemic, mental health diagnoses, change in daydreaming related to COVID-19, change of control of daydreaming related to COVID-19 and COVID-19 related change in psychosocial functioning. The study found that maladaptive daydreamers who observed lockdowns reported spending more time in fantasy, experiencing increased vividness and intensity within their daydreams, and experienced a stronger urge to daydream than non-maladaptive daydreamers. Additionally, maladaptive daydreamers with comorbid anxiety and MDD similarly reported increased daydreaming urges due to the pandemic and difficulty in controlling the behavior. Across the range of measures, maladaptive daydreamers reported more deterioration in their lives and increased psychological distress.

The article provides a behavioral addiction explanation for the reported intensive activation in maladaptive daydreaming during a major world stressor, the COVID-19 pandemic. A self-medication hypothesis was used in the article (Suh et al., 2008), suggesting that maladaptive daydreaming might be an avoidant behavior. Other
behavioral addictions that were offered to support this idea were increases in substance use, smartphone use, internet use and gaming use due to COVID-19. Whilst the study does build and strengthen existing knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming as potentially being involving as behavioural addiction features to fantasy and absorption. The article posits itself as further evidence of maladaptive daydreaming as a mental disorder, and positions maladaptive daydreaming as the self-soother for emotional distress, alongside other explanations such as forced intimacy, disruption to routines, boredom, enforced home confinement distress and the inability to distract from the daydream urges. Taken together, this range of explanations for the increase in maladaptive daydreaming behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic, offer practical assessment and treatment approaches for mental health professionals. Knowing that maladaptive daydreaming might have features of a behavioral addiction, means that addiction approaches for treatment could be beneficial. Further, screening for maladaptive daydreaming in a wider mental health context could identify psychologically vulnerable people who are at risk of the negative features of maladaptive daydreaming. Currently most mental health professionals are unaware of maladaptive daydreaming. The idea of maladaptive daydreaming being a behavioral addiction needs to be approached with some caution as, within the DSM-5 (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013), there is only one behavioral addiction noted, that is ‘gambling addiction’. With the wide range of suggestions offered within the article explaining the results found in the study, the behavioral addiction hypothesis fails to consider how maladaptive daydreaming was used to emotionally cope with a difficult event (the pandemic), using self-soothing.

Several limitations were identified within the article. First, as in previous studies exploring maladaptive daydreaming, the participants were mostly female 77%, meaning that the findings are not generalizable to the general population. This sex bias appears to be a trend within the maladaptive daydreaming literature. Secondly, the research was conducted during the early stages of the pandemic, whereby most countries were in lockdown with major restrictions in place. Pre-pandemic measures were not taken of the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming prior to the pandemic. Self-report information was collected on pre and post maladaptive daydreaming behaviors. A follow-up study would be beneficial, as in most countries’ lockdowns are not as prevalent, and restrictions have been eased. It would further build on existing knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming, to understand if maladaptive daydreaming has returned to pre-pandemic rates or reduced or even increased.
Remaining within the context of literature that was conducted into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the reported heightened levels of maladaptive daydreaming, the following section will explore research that looked to resolve a range of factors that might have led to elevated maladaptive daydreaming during the pandemic, as reported in Metin et al’s study (2021).

**Investigation Into the Mediating Factors of Elevated Maladaptive Daydreaming During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, studies showed that maladaptive daydreamers had intense and elevated frequency in their daydreaming, heightened anxiety and depression levels, impacts on social relationships, and diminished performance in occupational, educational, social and related important areas within their lives. Metin et al’s., 2021 study demonstrates how during the pandemic, lockdown measures, along with personal factors such as personality traits (extraversion and introversion), a history of pre-existing mental health conditions and level of education exacerbated maladaptive daydreaming.

The study involved 1,796 participants from Italy, Turkey, the UK and the USA undertaking a Qualtrics survey during April and May 2020, the early part of the pandemic. Short version questionnaires were used to measure maladaptive daydreaming, perceived stress, extraversion and introversion, emotional stability, major depression history, self-quarantine and education level. Some differences in maladaptive daydreaming were noted across the countries, with the UK participants reporting the highest increase in maladaptive daydreaming, but this increase was deemed inconsequential to the study. At that time the UK was experiencing a major long-term lockdown, with large numbers of deaths from COVID-19.

Hypotheses explored included the idea that introverts, who prefer solitude over engaging socially with others, would be less affected by lockdown measures, but would have more opportunity to engage in daydreaming, and therefore their maladaptive daydreaming would increase as a result of the isolation measures. On the other hand, those people with higher extraversion and higher emotional stability were expected to be less affected by lockdown measures, not needing to engage in maladaptive daydreaming as much. Further, it was offered by the authors that people with emotional instability, such as pre-existing MDD, would experience greater stress levels during lockdown. The adversities of the lockdown, such as being confined at home, not being able to control the situation, loneliness, disruption to daily routines and associated sadness, along with stimulus deprivation, would lead to distress being regulated through
maladaptive daydreaming as a mental process to relieve stress associated with those adversities. A final offering was that those with a higher education level would have more ability to cope with the adversities of the lockdown and would not need to engage in maladaptive daydreaming at an increased level.

The study found that factors, including lockdown measures, personality traits (introversion and extraversion), level of education, pre-existing mental health conditions; MDD and perceived stress, exacerbated maladaptive daydreaming during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study provides a conceptual framework for understanding factors that intensify maladaptive daydreaming in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. It widens its offerings to suggestions of how to intervene with vulnerable and susceptible populations. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the importance of understanding clinical history and personality characteristics to be able to explain elevated maladaptive daydreaming during the pandemic. This study confirms the previous study (Somer et al, 2020) that those people experiencing lockdown restrictions and with pre-existing mental health conditions reported more time in maladaptive daydreaming fantasies.

Metin and colleague’s 2021 study further supports the idea that maladaptive daydreaming provides a route to managing challenging emotions. In the long term, it could be offered that this type of emotional regulation strategy is not effective. Instead, maladaptive daydreaming could be suggested to be an unsuccessful attempt at stress regulation. Thus, relieving emotional tension. In conclusion, the factors identified in this study, could be used to identify vulnerable people, who might need closer clinical monitoring during the continuing pandemic.

**Knowledge Gaps and Conclusion**

This literature review has found gaps in knowledge within the daydreaming and related maladaptive daydreaming knowledge (particularly from the maladaptive daydreaming literature). One such gap includes the lack of a theoretical explanation of the causes of maladaptive daydreaming. Further, there is a need to expand beyond current research efforts. This current study is a response to the call from maladaptive daydreaming researchers for such an extension of scientific exploration within the field. The review also exposed that there are insufficient qualitative studies into maladaptive daydreaming. As a result, there is a need to expand qualitative exploration of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, beyond researching psychopathology.

A marked shift is evident within the literature emphasizing a push by the maladaptive daydreaming community to further understand the maladaptive
daydreaming experience. These groups are keen to understand the origins, function and treatment options for the experience, but these goals are still unaccomplished. This thesis responds to the call for such theoretically focused research, with the Australian context comparable to many global northwestern contexts. Therefore, the research within this thesis demonstrates relevance beyond a purely Australian focus of maladaptive daydreaming research towards an international significance of maladaptive daydreaming.
Chapter Three: Case Study Methodology

This Thesis’s Ontological Position

The following section ‘This Thesis’s Ontological Position’ has been added based upon examiner feedback and is relevant for both studies within this thesis, but has only been added into the first methodological chapter, in order to avoid repetition of information across the two methodological chapters.

Within this thesis, ontological reflection has occurred and has assisted in answering how the entities within my research are categorized and the interrelationships of these entities.

To determine the ontological perspective that I subscribe to within this Doctoral research, I considered the following five questions:

(1) ‘How do I know what I know?’
(2) ‘What is real to me?’
(3) ‘What are the objects in my research?’
(4) ‘What are the relationships between them?’; and,
(5) ‘What am I talking about and not talking about within this research?’

How do I know what I know?

I know what I know through my direct experience within this research. I acknowledge the role of perception in my knowledge. Assumptions made in this research were based on my own experience, with some based-on knowledge that has been imparted from others based on their experiences, and some has come from inferences made by logic. Ultimately, these assumptions come through the lens of my perception.

My understanding of and interaction within this research stemmed from constructs of human behavior and I intuitively understand the subjectivity of some of these perceptions, such as not being able to know things outside of my perception.

In summary, my knowledge was constructed from things I infer, through my experiences, and the way that my brain processes both.

What is real to me?

I acknowledge that the following ontological concepts are real to me: the ‘psychological space of now’, involving a meta-awareness of self and environment in time; and that science is a process of knowledge that entails unbiased observation and the systematic exploration of phenomena and the physical world. I also acknowledge that many people experience daydreaming, and have an inner ‘state of mind’, in different ways and for different reasons. Further, I believe that people can express their
own experiences, and that I, as a researcher, enable such people to express their own experiences of a similar phenomenon, such as their daydreaming experiences. Additionally, I also hold the following views in relation to mental functioning, mental disorder and emotion ontology.

In relation to mental functioning, I endorse the view that mental functioning represents all components of ‘ordinary’ functioning, which are not psychiatric in nature. This includes such entities as believing, thinking, perceiving and consciousness (both individual and collective). This view emphasizes a first person, experiential perspective for human mental function.

With regards to a mental health ontology, this view follows the outline of the DSM-5 and OCD diagnostic criteria (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013), which group different disorders for different clusters of symptoms into groups such as ‘mood disorders’ and ‘personality disorders. Through this ontological view, the assumption is that mental health disorders result from a variety of underlying theories, that extend beyond purely biological explanations.

Concerning the emotional ontological viewpoint within this Doctoral research, this view categorizes and includes mood, emotion, subjective feelings, facial expressions and emotional-based behaviors and provides the perspective that emotions are expressed through multiple explanations, rather than through one main explanation.

I also subscribe to several factors related to my personal knowledge and skills within this research, including my clinical knowledge and training in the use of the DSM-5 (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and my abilities, training and skill as a qualitative researcher – particularly in relation to the value of subjectivity in such a qualitative research study, such as within this Doctoral thesis. Finally, I attest to my subjective role as the lone qualitative researcher, and the way in which I co-constructed the theory within this thesis.

**What are the objects in my research?**

The objects within this research are objects or phenomena that exist within the real-world and can therefore be observed and measured. These research objects are:

- The participant’s reports of their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming, in the form of their spoken words from the interviews and from within the forum, that were transcribed into written words, and that appear within the quotes throughout this thesis.
The coding of information and subsequent theme codes that were constructed from the data collected across the two studies, that appear within the audit trails within the appendices.

My reflexive words that appear throughout the thesis and within the reflexivity sections, along with the memos that were written throughout the research evaluation and analysis stages.

The combination of codes together that resulted in one eventual code, that represented the point of saturation and led to the construction of the theory within this thesis, as represented in the audit trails within the appendices section.

The resultant thesis as an expression of the co-construction of the theory, alongside the participants in the studies and further expansion of the theory through the process of addressing examiner feedback, with a more fine-tuned thesis and theory as a result.

**What are the relationships between them?**

In answering this question, I considered how my research links with the discipline of psychology and how this links to wider domains within society, and how my research provides a significant contribution to psychology.

The research within this thesis provides a further explanation for maladaptive daydreaming through the theory that was co-constructed in this research study. The theory provides a link between what is already known, along with new knowledge and links maladaptive daydreaming to an emotional processing operation, that can be either maladaptive or adaptive. Within psychology, research exploration has provided large amounts of knowledge about human experiences and behaviors, yet there is still much that is unknown. Like completing a jigsaw, each theory provides a coherent picture within the discipline of psychology. I consider this thesis’s theory to provide a piece that has been added to the jigsaw in relation to psychology, human experiences of maladaptive daydreaming and inner fantasy experiences, along with another explanation for the phenomenon. I believe that having a range of theoretical explanations holds value for society and the wider community. I have provided exploration about the way in which the theory within this thesis might be used by a range of stakeholders within the discussion section, in order to inform how this theory links to the experience of maladaptive daydreaming, in particular offering ideas on developing individual treatment for those people whose maladaptive daydreaming has become problematic. I believe that undergoing the examiner feedback process of addressing problematic
areas within this thesis, provided a link to a more robust theory, one that drew together the research process that occurred and provided a wider explanation about maladaptive daydreaming. For these reasons, I believe that this Doctoral thesis demonstrates a significant contribution to my discipline of psychology.

What am I not talking about within this research?

As a final part of this ontology section, I provide reflective answers and rationale to the question ‘what am I not talking about within this research?’ to bring together this thesis’s ontological position. Within this thesis, I talk about the following:

- My pre-existing knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming that I had prior to commencing this Doctoral research. Instead, I talk about subsequent literature reviews and the knowledge obtained through them, once the research studies had commenced, as required for constructivist grounded theory research.

- Areas of personal interest to me about maladaptive daydreaming, that came from the experience of being the researcher within this study. Instead, the topics of coding and questioning within this research were driven from the data and the coding.

- My assumptions of meaning about the reported experiences of the maladaptive daydreaming. Rather, further questions were asked of the participants to clarify meaning, whereby I returned to the participants to further explore and clarify.

- My knowledge as a clinician were not incorporated into the research phases. Instead, my approach was from the perspective of a qualitative researcher in an academic context.

- Other researchers’ interpretations of the analysis of the data obtained from this research were not included within this thesis. Instead, analysis came from the interactions between me and the participants as we co-constructed the interpretations of the data and the coding.

- Literature on maladaptive daydreaming that was published post-submission had been included in this thesis, as doing so further informed and provided an up-to-date review of the knowledge base, related to this Doctoral research.

- Quantitative data has not been included, such as numbers or statistics that might have been obtained as a result of this study, because this research is a qualitative research study.
Chapter Overview

Chapter Three, Case Study Methodology, explains the methodology for this first research study, which involved two case studies (Diane and Cassi: these pseudonyms were created by this study’s researcher, with names that had no personal meaning to her). The chapter will begin by outlining the qualitative framework used, along with outlining the methodology of constructivist grounded theory used within this case study stage of the research. It will then provide detail on the research methods adopted, such as the semi-structured interviews, several stages of coding, and the process of creating memos; the chapter will then explain the processes of ethical human research that were followed. Lastly, the chapter will also outline how the concern of research rigor was addressed in this first study.

Introduction: The Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is a group of methodologies that provide different theoretical underpinnings about what is known (Dew, 2007). Qualitative researchers attempt to let the data speak and aim to be flexible in their interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013). The characteristics of a qualitative researcher include: (a) being flexible, (b) being able to recognize personal bias, (c) being open to others’ involvement in the socially constructed nature of reality, (d) being sensitive to the needs of others, and (e) adopting a creative approach to the research process (Mills & Birk, 2014). These characteristics are different to those valued within quantitative research, whereby the quantitative researcher adopts an objective approach to the empirical measurement of data (Baum, 1995). The quantitative researcher does not become emotionally invested within the data analysis or theory construction. Instead, they use statistics and look to be able to generalize findings to the general population (Ritchie, 2001).

Within qualitative research, the relationship between the participant and the researcher is embraced. Qualitative research is a ‘subjective’ process and is as valuable a research methodology as quantitative research (Baum, 1995; Ritchie, 2001). Qualitative research can investigate questions about ‘what’ was meant and ‘how’ it was said, and aims to discover ‘why’ (Charmaz, 2008). It enables the individual perspectives of the participants to be explored, allowing them to be heard. Furthermore, qualitative researchers adopt an epistemological stance that values “people’s personal views, in an
attempt to reduce the distance between them and their research participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20).

I now describe the constructivist grounded theory research approach, which I have used as a methodology for both studies in this thesis.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory Research Paradigm**

My goal of generating a theory of maladaptive daydreaming seemed to me to be best suited to a grounded theory methodology. Corley (2015) details, “the heart and soul of grounded theory methodologies is engaging a phenomenon from the perspective of those living it” (p. 601). I was seeking to develop a deep understanding of maladaptive daydreaming, engaging in a creative and adaptive manner through implementation of the grounded theory method. Corley further states, “this engagement with those living the phenomenon and attempting to understand it from their perspective is why grounded theory is such a powerful approach for gaining new theoretical insights” (p. 601). The flexibility of the grounded theory method appeared to me to be a compelling way in which to explore the unique phenomenon named maladaptive daydreaming.

My initial research into the types of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014, 2015, 2016; Corley, 2015; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Howard-Payne, 2015; McGhee, et al., 2007a, 2007b; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) made evident key components of the methodology. These components incorporated theoretical sampling (Draucker, Martsoff, Ross & Rusk, 2007), emergence, coding stages, constant comparison and theoretical memo writing. The potential logical organization that grounded theory could provide for my research appealed to my preference for being organized. I soon discovered that, although there are guidelines and techniques for conducting grounded theory research, there is no guidebook for conducting a grounded theory study. Grounded theory can at times be chaotic and anxiety provoking.

An understanding of the history of grounded theory helped to articulate and justify my employment of the constructivist grounded theory approach rather than classical grounded theory.

In 1967, Barney Glaser, an American research sociologist, and Anselm Strauss, both from the University of Chicago, published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This classic text presented a new method that aimed at theory generation. During the next 20 years they extended the method through a series of books and articles (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987). It was in 1990 that Strauss and colleague Juliet Corbin deviated from the original methodology and provided further direction regarding techniques of ‘how’ to carry out grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin,
This drew a response from Glaser, who controversially stated that Strauss and Corbin’s approach was not grounded theory and was a methodological guidebook for forcing a theory (Glaser, 1992).

In exploring the merits of a grounded theory approach for this thesis, I needed to consider several theoretical considerations to ensure that I chose a grounded theory approach that aligned with my own epistemological and ontological perspectives. There are three main research approaches for researchers conducting grounded theory research: Glaser’s classical grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), Strauss and Corbin’s interactionist grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Each grounded theory approach requires consideration of their theoretical differences.

Howard-Payne (2015, p. 52) explored the theoretical differences that grounded theory researchers might face when selecting a grounded theory paradigm. One of these theoretical differences was with regards to the role of the researcher. For instance, Glaser’s classical grounded theory requires the researcher to be an objective observer, who is detached and who maintains a neutral stance on the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This objectivity enables the researcher to generate novel information from the data, rather than validate any pre-conceived ideas that might arise ‘from’ the researcher about the research experience. In contrast with Glaser’s objective observer, Strauss and Corbin’s interactionist grounded theory approach advocates for the researcher to be fully engaged with the data and advocates that the research approach acknowledges this involvement throughout the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This researcher involvement continues as data is collected, coded and analyzed, and it is the interaction of the researcher with the data that enables original theory to be formulated.

When initially considering my role and involvement as a researcher in the present study, I felt that my perspective did not align with Glaser’s classical style of grounded theory, largely due to the level of pre-reading I had already undertaken into maladaptive daydreaming. This pre-reading was a necessary part of applying for a Ph.D. and securing a supervision team. Having identified classical grounded theory as a poor fit, I began to consider an interactionist grounded theory approach. I could see myself engaging with the research in an active way, through recording theoretical memos about my thoughts, opinions, assumptions and coding choices. I am an organized person, and I could see myself aligning with the coding guidelines established by Strauss and Corbin. I also agreed with Strauss and Corbin’s advocation of a partial review of the literature prior to the collection of the data. McGhee and colleagues (2007) suggested...
that interactionist grounded theory could allow acknowledgement of the researcher’s previous experience and pre-existing knowledge of a phenomenon. Thus, at the early stages of methodological consideration, I was initially aligned with Strauss and Corbin’s style of grounded theory.

With further exploration into the grounded theory method, such as through more in-depth reading particularly during the early research design stages, I had a sense that my role within the research might extend beyond observation and interpretation. I believed that my involvement in the research might extend towards a deeper construction process. I could not ignore this involvement and required an approach that would embrace flexibility, an awareness of my role and what I would bring to the research. Further reading about grounded theory (Charmaz, 2015, 2016; Corley, 2015; McGhee, et al., 2007) led me towards Kathy Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory approach, which I found aligned with my values, beliefs and worldview, along with the nature and the purpose of both studies.

Charmaz (2006) has defined a systematic and flexible approach for collecting and analyzing data, with the aim of being a part of the theory construction process. Her approach reflects some aspects of the original principles of grounded theory, and includes simultaneous data collection and analysis, inductive coding and theoretical sampling. However, Charmaz identifies an interaction that takes place during the research process, whereby researchers co-construct the data alongside the participants. It was important for me to “account for the researcher’s position, as well as that of the participants” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 402). Unlike Glaser’s objective protocol (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1978), constructivist grounded theorists are required to acknowledge and specify their role within theory development. Charmaz encourages a preliminary literature review, with data collection occurring through open-ended interviews instead of through one single question and advises flexibility in the data analysis stage. She also suggests that constructivist grounded theory is developed through credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. The constructed theory needs to resonate as valid and useful within the research area, and needs to provide a theoretical explanation of the experience, which is equally credible and original (Martin, Clifton, Brennen & Durham, 2018).

In following Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory approach, I acknowledge my role throughout the research process, along with the context in which the research was conducted and that I had undertaken a preliminary literature review process (Wolfswinkel, Furtmueler & Wilderom, 2013). I also provide details throughout this
thesis about the co-construction process that I followed across both studies. Additionally, I detail the actions and processes involved using audit trails for both studies (see Appendices P and Q) and how I worked towards the co-construction of the findings from the two case studies. This co-construction process of the case study findings is further outlined within the three stages of data analysis, described later in this chapter.

Before outlining the principles and processes guiding the research process employed in this study, including case study research, sampling and participant recruitment, data analysis, reflexivity and ethics, I would first like to provide an explanation of the origins of this research into maladaptive daydreaming. This will provide further insight into my methodological decisions, and my decision to use case study research in the first study of this thesis.

**Origins of This Thesis**

The idea for this research arose through my working in private practice as a psychologist. I was carrying out a clinical assessment with a new client, whose referral stated an anxiety disorder. Towards the end of the psychological assessment, she asked if she could disclose something that she had never told anyone before. I encouraged her to feel comfortable to do this, and she disclosed a behavior that she felt was unhealthy and problematic for her. She described experiencing a high level of daydreaming throughout the day, often accompanied by pacing, taking upwards of four hours of her day. She described feeling embarrassed about the daydreaming, but explained that it was a highly emotional experience, whereby she felt love towards some of her daydream characters. I was intrigued that she had been experiencing this since her early childhood years, and that she reported not dissociating but instead being present in both the real-world and her fantasy world simultaneously.

After this appointment, I conducted a month of research using the internet, typing in ‘excessive daydreaming’, for example, within a variety of search engines. Through this searching, I discovered the term ‘maladaptive daydreaming’. I printed out one article that described the phenomenon (Somer, 2002) and provided this to the client. Together we explored her experience and identified that she was indeed experiencing a type of daydreaming called maladaptive daydreaming. Seeing her relief in having a name for this problematic behavior she had been experiencing was the main driver for me to carry out this research. Additionally, the existing research that had been carried out into maladaptive daydreaming at that time was very limited, as outlined in chapters
one and two. I wanted to expand the research area by contributing further research, from a different perspective: to construct a theory of maladaptive daydreaming.

**Case Study Research**

Case study research is a concentrated inquiry process that aims to provide an opportunity to learn and facilitate understanding of the complexities of a case. A case can be an individual entity, such as a person; an environment, such as a school classroom; or a specific event, such as a terrorist incident (Sigglekow, 2007). In relation to this thesis, two cases were explored. I was interested to learn what was significant about the individuals, based on their experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming. Additionally, both case study participants were mature aged (in the 30 to 50 years age range), enabling me to explore maladaptive daydreaming across their lifespan.

My approach to case study research was that of exploration. I used the case studies as an early study, seeking to co-construct theory as a result of exploration of the data across ‘both’ studies involved in this thesis. My approach entailed making choices as to how much and for how long I would study the complexities of the two cases. The case study process provided me with an opportunity to look for the particular, instead of examining the ordinary features, thus in essence examining the unique aspects of each case.

When deciding to employ a case study methodology process for this first study, I was aware of the need to engage in a dual research process. Through this dual research process, I would be aiming to understand the cases and their experiences of these two participants’ maladaptive daydreaming, while also co-constructing knowledge for the eventual readers of the case studies. I therefore kept in mind the question, ‘what can be learned about the cases that the reader should know?’

Throughout the case study research process, I was also aware of the role of comparison, whereby the two case studies would be compared with other existing and future case studies. I was thus mindful while analyzing the data that I needed enough details to enable such comparisons to be made. Documenting these processes is time consuming, especially during the issue development stage. To ensure robust research, I addressed these complex processes through detailed analytical coding and triangulation across the two studies. (Hall & Callery, 2001; Lazenbatt & Elliott, 2005). For the triangulation process, my focus was to retain attention on an in-depth understanding of the two cases. I checked the findings with my two supervisors and engaged in reflective discussions with my supervisors, giving me diverse insights into the cases. This triangulation process was reassuring, as it allowed me to check that my findings from
the two cases were valid and understandable. At this point, I was aware not to have my
attention drawn away from understanding the two cases themselves.

During the analysis and initial recording of the findings of these two case
studies, my approach was to attend to the two cases simultaneously between the two
cases, to gain a depth of insight about the developing findings. The case study findings
will be explored and discussed in chapter four, ‘case study findings.’

Research Questions, Sampling and Participant Recruitment

Research Questions

This thesis has been designed using a qualitative research methodology and
specifically, was undertaken using a constructivist grounded theory. These two
approaches mean that the case study research questions needed to be treated differently
than in standard quantitative research. This is because a constructivist grounded theory
approach allows for research questions to adapt and change, through the processes of
coding and analysis.

Initially, one main research question was created for this first study stage (case
studies). This research question was: ‘How is maladaptive daydreaming experienced by
the two case study participants and what would explain this?’ This research question
was flexible enough to enable the participants’ experiences of their maladaptive
daydreaming to become apparent. Within the constructivist grounded theory approach
to research, research questions adapt, as insights are generated from the findings from
coding. This was the case within this case study research, whereby the coding outcomes
led to a number of findings, which in turn enabled the generation of further research
questions. These new research questions were:

(CS1) ‘What is the main concern of people who experience maladaptive
daydreaming, and how do they continuously resolve that concern?’

(CS2) ‘What are the main features of the experience of maladaptive
daydreaming and how could these be resolved in a treatment context?’
and,

(CS3) ‘What are the differences in the experiences of maladaptive daydreamers,
and what might explain these differences?’

These three case study research questions, shaped by the findings from the two
case studies, informed further exploration options for the case study participants, as well
as forming the basis of an initial direction for the second study (the forum), whereby
they were also asked of the forum participants.
Sampling and Participant Recruitment

Following the construction of the research questions, I had the task of determining and managing the processes of sampling, data collection and analysis of the case study data. Through these processes I drew on the methodological literature, which guided me through the ethical and methodological challenges related to this case study research.

Birks and Mills (2011) stated that grounded theorists adopt both purposeful and theoretical sampling techniques. This style of combined sampling starts with “excellent informants”, who have experienced the phenomenon, who can share their insights in a reflective manner (Morse, 2012b, p. 231). Purposeful sampling may use criteria such as gender or age. Once data patterns are identified from the purposeful sampling, the grounded theorist commences theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling can be conducted with new or existing participants, and be conducted towards the end of a study, to allow for obtaining new data. This enables resolution of theoretical challenges and the noting of how the constructed theory fits the new data.

I had decided to research two case study participants, instead of just one case study, as I wanted to explore within and across the two case studies at a deep level. Both participants were also included in the second research study (the forum). This latter involvement lent itself towards ‘theoretical sampling’, and the two case study participants were included alongside a new sample of participants to test the case study findings and crosscheck the forum findings.

Several methods of participant recruitment were considered. Initially, I considered a recruitment method of gaining access to participants through a standard pathway, by advertising throughout the Australian Psychological Society website research link or linking to university student populations or through health-related settings. Further research I conducted into the maladaptive daydream population, however, suggested that potential participants might be more accessible through online maladaptive daydreaming forums, which was confirmed by the pre-eminent maladaptive daydreaming researcher, Professor Eli Somer, during an in-person meeting. I therefore designed a website for the study, which allowed submission of an expression of interest form, and I publicized the website link through the existing online maladaptive daydreaming forums on Reddit and Facebook.

Potential participants who submitted expressions of interest were provided with the 'study information handout’ (see Appendix C) and ‘informed consent form (case studies)’ (see Appendix D). These initial respondents were given two weeks in which to
consider taking part in the study and return the informed consent form. This recruitment process generated 20 potential participants from which I could choose the two case study participants. Four participants who had expressed their interest in participating were not eligible for the study (being under the age of 18). Another 14 participants were unable to commit to a time or a date for the interview process. The two participants selected were the only potential participants who met all criteria for inclusion, were available to interview within the timeframe of the study and were keen to participate. These two selected participants were mature-aged females, as compared with the other younger participants, mainly aged in their early 20s and 30s. This mature-aged demographic further linked to my interest in being able to explore how maladaptive daydreaming progressed across the lifespan. When informed that two participants had been selected, the other 14 participants communicated that they wanted to participate in the second stage of the research, which would be the Facebook forum that I had set up for this maladaptive daydreaming research. I retained their contact details in a secure database.

The following section will describe the two case study participants (Diane and Cassi), outline the three stages of data analysis, and further inform about the ethics and reflexivity adopted within this study.

**Participant One: Diane**

Diane (pseudonym) is a 36-year-old woman, resided in a large city in Australia. She was married with a small child and worked within a creative job. Diane provided an in-depth view into her lifelong experience of maladaptive daydreaming. She stated that she had experienced extensive daydreaming for as long as she could remember. Diane described a difficult childhood that included childhood trauma. The interview was the first time that Diane had spoken in any depth about her maladaptive daydreaming. Whilst Diane did identify with other maladaptive dreamers, she provided new insights to me about how her own maladaptive daydreaming experience differed from other people’s maladaptive daydreaming. Diane’s responses to the interview questions led to one overriding finding: that, for her, maladaptive daydreaming provided a positive emotional processing outcome, one that allowed her a different way of experiencing emotional growth than other people.

**Participant Two: Cassi**

Cassi (pseudonym) was a 51-year-old woman and was also from a large city in Australia. She was married and had two adult children, and, at the time of the interview was studying online. Cassi described life as being very difficult, due to engaging in high
levels of maladaptive daydreaming daily. Like Diane, Cassi expressed that she had
daydreamed from as far back as she could remember; also, like Diane, Cassi too
disclosed a childhood trauma. In direct contrast with Diane’s enthusiasm to be talking
about her maladaptive daydreaming for the first time, Cassi’s responses revealed a level
of weariness about her maladaptive daydreaming experience over the years. Cassi’s
responses to the interview questions led to a similar overall finding as to Diane,
whereby maladaptive daydreaming provided her with a protective environment, that led
her to be able to emotionally process difficult times in her life. Although Cassi’s
maladaptive daydreaming was described as a negative experience, it nevertheless
provided her with an emotional processing tool, to enable her to navigate the stresses
within her life.

Data Collection Method and Procedure

Diane and Cassi were contacted via email, and the aims and methodology of the
study were explained to them. Once they had returned their signed informed consent
sheets, a clinically trained independent assessor named Kezia contacted them by email
in order to organize a Skype assessment. As there were no assessments of maladaptive
daydreaming at the time, the decision was made to use maladaptive daydreaming
assessment tools. This assessment involved the participants undertaking the
Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16) and the Structured Clinical Interview for
Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCI-MD), to ensure that both met the criteria for
maladaptive daydreaming (these two scales are provided at Appendix F). A clinical cut-
off of 45 for the MDS-16, based on Somer’s validation research studies (Somer et al.,
2016, 2018), was used to identify clinical levels of their maladaptive daydreaming.
Once the independent assessor had confirmed the two participants had met the criteria, I
contacted both participants to organize the interviews.

For these face-to-face interviews, both participants chose to meet me in a hired
serviced office, within their localities. Data was digitally recorded and was collected
using a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix E). Examples of the questions
within the semi-structured interviews were, ‘How would you explain maladaptive
daydreaming to another person?’, ‘How would you describe to me how you experience
your maladaptive daydreaming?’, and ‘What do you notice is unique about your
maladaptive daydreaming?’ These questions were designed to allow the participant to
reflect upon their experience of maladaptive daydreaming, and to generate rich data. I
included further questions that enabled the participants to explore the origins of their
experience, identify its impact on their functioning and their relationships, and reflect on the maladaptive daydreaming experience across their lifespan.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, and were audio recorded using an iPad with the AudioNote App. I directly transcribed the recorded interviews into the qualitative software program QSR-NVivo and checked these verbatim transcripts for accuracy. I then member checked the transcripts by providing each participant with the transcript of their interview for them to make suggestions and request changes. Participants had two weeks for this member checking, and neither participant requested any change to the transcripts.

Once the interview transcripts were finalized, the coding analysis could be commenced. The three stages of coding: open coding, focused coding and theoretical coding, will be described and detailed below. The following coding decisions are examples of the coding that were undertaken, with a full audit trail showing all decisions available in Appendices P and Q.

**Stage One: Open Coding Data Analysis**

Open coding was the first stage of data analysis of the two case study interview transcripts. I iteratively coded back and forth between the two interview transcripts and code lists to recode and redefine the codes. At the same time, as part of the analysis, memo recording was undertaken during the interview and transcription processes.

During open coding, each line or chunk of information was coded separately. I had previously attended a training course with recently the deceased Kathy Charmaz, who had taught the group that gerunds are verbs that end in ‘-ing’ but take the form of a noun or a noun phrase; she explained to us that in open coding gerunds are useful for identifying underlying processes (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). For this first study, I adopted the Charmaz style of generating gerunds for each chunk of information, line by line. Examples of gerunds from the case study were ‘linking to escape’, ‘managing stress’, ‘identifying with other’s experiences’, ‘using maladaptive daydreaming to be creative’, and ‘expressing their maladaptive daydreaming as a unique experience’.

A constant comparison process was carried out during open coding, through which the participants’ words were compared with the gerunds, to determine consistency within the coding. This was aided with the qualitative software program (QSR-NVivo) to highlight chunks of text then to link these chunks of text to gerunds, which generated a comprehensive list of gerunds for later coding stages. Further, during this open coding I also conducted intensive theoretical memo writing about the gerunds.
that were generated, the decisions I made and how the codes explained the participants’ experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming.

The open coding process was completed when I found that I had coded all the interview data into gerunds. In total, this open coding generated 380 gerunds. All 380 coding decisions for the case studies have been added into an audit trail. An audit trail technique is a systematic recording and presentation of data that has been gathered and it is used by constructivist grounded theorists to provide a transparent map of the analysis of data. Once the open coding stage was completed, I was able to move onto the next phase of data analysis, which was focused coding.

**Stage Two: Focused Coding Data Analysis**

Focused coding is the breaking down of the data into conceptual codes, with the aim of moving from the descriptive gerunds towards conceptual codes. To do this, gerunds were further coded to identify which codes could be joined into concepts.

Through focused coding I made decisions about the coding based on prior research, and from the perspective of seeking a new understanding of maladaptive daydreaming. For instance, if a code linked to a concept that had already been identified in the research body of maladaptive daydreaming, I included this in a concept titled ‘previous research’. Codes in the previous research concept included ‘trauma’, ‘kinesthetic’, ‘creativity’ and ‘negatives’, all of which had been identified with regards maladaptive daydreaming in previous research.

Examples of newly identified findings of maladaptive daydreaming were ‘linking emotional needs to the experience’, ‘experiencing positive outcomes from the daydreaming’, and ‘having control or not of the daydreaming’. These concepts were worthwhile as my aim was to co-construct a grounded theory of maladaptive daydreaming that provided new insight into the experience (Charmaz, 2006). With the focused coding completed, I now move onto detailing the final stage of coding, which was theoretical coding.

**Stage Three: Theoretical Coding Data Analysis**

The final phase of the data analysis was the process of theoretical coding. This involved re-reading both transcripts and re-familiarizing me with the previous coding stages and their outcomes. I then examined the participants’ quotes, keeping in mind the coding that had already been conducted. I again used the qualitative software program QSR-NVivo, to sort the numerous theoretical memos and combine codes into theoretical codes and returned to the participants’ quotes to check these. Pages eight and 14 of the audit trails, provided in Appendix P, provide details of the codes that were
combined. I also contacted both participants at different stages to carry out member checking with them, my ideas around coding decisions and the way I was understanding these theoretical codes, and in the process gathered further data from the participants about their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming.

During theoretical coding, I continually and iteratively worked between the coding, theoretical memos, audit trail and the participants’ transcribed words, to provide me with a theoretical understanding of the two participants’ experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming. Both case study participants described throughout the interviews how maladaptive daydreaming fulfilled an emotional need for each of them. The theoretical coding findings from the case study data showed that emotional processing needs were being fulfilled for both participants in different ways. I repeated the theoretical coding process, to identify further new information, and once I could identify no new information, it was apparent that I had reached a level of saturation. At that point I ascertained that the analysis process was complete for the two case studies.

Having provided a description about the three coding stages, I now provide an outline of the ethical issues that needed to be addressed for this first study.

**Operationalization and Ethical Requirements**

After choosing the appropriate methodological frameworks, along with designing the interview questions and obtaining University approval to proceed, I sought to ensure ethical research processes and approval to collect data. Ethics are “norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior” (Resnik, 2011, p. 1), and establishing ethical research processes and conduct is an important stage. Ethical issues needed to be addressed throughout the research process, at each stage. In line with human research requirements, ethical approval was obtained from Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Board (study one: case studies approval number: H17118) and (study two: forum ethical approval number: H18078).

Careful consideration was given to these issues to ensure that the research guaranteed high integrity, avoided carelessness or negligence, ensured participant confidentiality, and demonstrated a respect for the research area and the participants (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009).

**Ethical Requirement One: Researching Vulnerable People**

Research into maladaptive daydreaming, undertaken by Schupak and Rosenthal (2009) suggested that people who experience the phenomenon might have a history of trauma, emotional issues or mental health diagnoses. It was therefore important for me to base the study on established ethical guidelines. In their 2011 article, Sharkey et al.
(2011) outlined several ethical problems regarding conducting research with vulnerable people, which ethics committees may consider. I incorporated a range of their suggested ethical guidelines into this thesis. The main ethical consideration suggested by Sharkey et al. relevant to the present research was that regarding participant anonymity, particularly within the writing up of findings. This involved my selecting pseudonyms for the participants to ensure privacy protection. I did so, by selecting names that had no personal relevance to me or to the participants. Another of the considerations suggested by Sharkey et al. (2011) was that of ensuring participant eligibility. Within this research, Kezia, an independent assessor, was involved, and she assessed the two case study participants prior to the interviews.

A final ethical consideration of researching vulnerable people, based upon Sharkey et al. (2011), was that of the need for a full debrief process, to enable the participants to be informed of the outcomes of the research and an appropriate ending of the research process. As both case study participants would be involved in the second study (forum), this debrief and ending was managed in a different way, whereby the participants were fully debriefed about the findings from their case studies and were kept up to date with the progress of recruitment of the second research study (forum), with regular email updates about this process.

**Ethical Requirement Two: The Perceived Dual Role of the Researcher**

There was a risk that the two case study participants might have confused my role as a researcher with my role as a psychologist. I made it known to the participants throughout the study that my role was that of a researcher, and not of a psychologist. This clarifying information was provided prior to the interviews and was included within the informed consent sheet and participant handout. The informed consent sheet was provided to the participants two weeks prior to the interview, to ensure that they understood the process of the study, the methodology and the safety designs in place, including my role within the research.

**Ethical Requirement Three: The Risk of Potential Identification of the Participants**

It was important to be able to ensure confidentiality of the two participants. To this end, I implemented four processes. Firstly, each participant was guaranteed that any identifying information would be removed from any quotes, or in any future published or presented works. Secondly, the participants were allocated a pseudonym. They preferred my doing this than choosing names for themselves. These pseudonyms have been used within this thesis and associated articles to de-identify the participants.
Thirdly, all emails and contact with the participants used the neutral subject-line of ‘daydreaming study’, as I wanted to ensure that they did not experience any potential embarrassment. Fourthly, the audio recorded interview files and their transcripts were stored on a double password-locked computer, with access only available to me.

**Ethical Requirement Four: Participant Confidentiality**

In terms of the location of the interviews, it was important to carry out the taped interviews in a private and confidential location. I encouraged both participants to choose the time and location of their own interview, and both chose to meet me in a serviced office. Further, as part of the data collection process, each participant was provided with a copy of their interview transcript and had the option to suggest changes as needed and were included throughout the data analysis stages. It was important for me to ensure that the participants were comfortable about their participation in the study.

**Researcher Position: Reflexivity Statement**

As a qualitative researcher, I am mindful that I have played a central role in the interpretation of the data in this research study. I appreciate that the research has been co-constructed, and is a joint product of the participants, our relationship and myself. I realize that qualitative research is a ‘subjective’ experience, and that meanings are negotiated social contexts, whereby another researcher would unfold a different story from me. As such, I aimed to position myself within this research, through the process of reflexivity.

Reflexivity is a process that is both challenging and time consuming. In qualitative research, reflexivity is an important tool, which helps to situate the research project, aiming to enhance the understanding of the topic under investigation. In the current study, I attempted to embrace reflexivity, aiming to weave it throughout this thesis. This has required a large amount of effort from me, involving reflection, journaling and the writing of numerous memos.

The process of reflexivity has involved me turning a critical gaze towards myself, involving introspection and reflection. I have carried out this process over the different stages of my Doctoral research, using a research journal and memos to do so. These stages included those of the research design, ethics approval, participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis. Each stage brought its own challenges for critical self-reflection (Nyika, 2018). During my reflexivity journey, I have explored my values, cultural background, beliefs, political stance, my internal world, and my reactions and biases. At the same time, I have also explored the mutual meanings from
within the research relationship. This inter-subjective reflection has involved exploring how unconscious processes may have structured the relations between the participants and myself. As a part of this process, I have considered the emotional investment that I made and have retained in the research relationship. As a starting point, I will share salient and significant elements of one of these first memos, which I wrote about meeting the first participant, Diane.

The memo was written within an hour of the interview ending, as I wanted to capture my reactions. My initial reaction of discomfort soon changed to that of comfort, as the interview with Diane progressed. This was mainly due to Diane speaking at a deep level about her maladaptive daydreaming. I recall being surprised at the level of disclosure during the interview. It was as though Diane had made the decision to tell all about her experience of maladaptive daydreaming, and she did this from the very beginning. This honesty led to my feeling of connection with Diane. I recall being nervous during parts of the interview, as I was so highly invested in the research. At times I experienced some level of worry that I would not collect the level of data that I needed. But it was observable to me that Diane would not allow this to occur. She was determined to provide me with a full, rich and insightful account of her lived experience of maladaptive daydreaming.

During the interview with Diane, I found myself engaging in comparison. Two of these moments of comparison I feel are important enough to be included here. The first occurred when Diane was describing her intricate daydream worlds. She provided such a depth of explanation around her fantasy life that the difference in her daydreaming experience was evident; Diane’s daydreams reminded me of fantasy movies. This was very different from my own daydreaming experiences, which in contrast were more practical, whereby I might practice, or role play, a scenario in my head, plan the future, or imagine a perfect outcome. This comparison made me appreciate that maladaptive daydreaming is dissimilar to the experience of normal daydreaming. This realization provided me with a renewed confidence within the interview, that my research was valid, valuable and needed.

The second moment of comparison brought some level of conflict for me. This conflict came when Diane explained that she had never told anyone in her life about her maladaptive daydreaming. Whilst I could understand keeping her inner world secret, a private and personal space, I was conflicted; I struggled to understand how she had kept it secret from her husband. One feature of maladaptive daydreaming is pacing and mouthing what is occurring in the daydreaming for hours throughout the day. I
struggled to believe how Diane might have been able to keep this a secret. I put myself into Diane’s perspective, making a comparison whereby I would have wanted my husband’s support with the maladaptive parts of the experience. I realized, though, that Diane was both protective of and embarrassed about her experience.

The experience of conducting the interview with the second participant, Cassi, was different from that with Diane. The interview with Cassi started off on a personal level, as she was interested in me as a psychologist and as a doctoral candidate. She had many questions to ask me. I was keen to build rapport with Cassi, and I wanted her to feel comfortable. As a psychologist I would usually engage in limited disclosure about myself, but as a qualitative researcher who was aiming to co-construct knowledge alongside the participant, I felt it important to share some personal detail. If I expected Cassi to share her experience, I needed to share some of my background. At this point, I was aware not to focus too much on my professional training or background, as this could have created a power issue. Instead, I focused on a shared interest of how I had discovered maladaptive daydreaming through my internet searches. This selective disclosure appeared to put Cassi at ease, and I gained the impression that Cassi might have expected me not to answer any of her questions. This belief might have come about because Cassi spoke about seeing many mental health professionals over the years. I wondered if she might have experienced those health professionals not engaging in self-disclosure during this process. I recall it feeling like a challenge from Cassi to open up about myself.

At times throughout the interview with Cassi, there were some moments of awkwardness for me. The first of these occurred when Cassi began describing her thoughts on the origins of her maladaptive daydreaming. Her voice changed to an angry tone, and this surprised me: not that she was directing her anger towards me, as that was not the case, but that the change had happened so quickly. I was also surprised at my own reaction to her starting off her interview in this way. It was almost as though Cassi was again challenging me in some way. As Cassi continued to speak, however, it became evident to me as she described experiencing ongoing anger problems, which occurred when she was around people. This anger was what I had just experienced. I was relieved that this was not due to anything I had said or done.

From the beginning of the interview with Cassi, I could sense a practiced story, as if the narrative she was sharing had never been challenged or told in a different way. I was aware that I would be asking some probing questions, which might have led to challenging this narrative. I did want to hear Cassi’s narrative, but I also wanted to
attempt to tap into her ‘unsaid’ stories. I was aware that I did not want to force Cassi to change her story, so at times I checked in with myself to ensure that I was not pushing her to do so, if she did not wish to be challenged. I realized that I was almost managing myself throughout the interview.

I also realized that Cassi was being protective of her experience, which could explain her guardedness about her story. Although Cassi was guarded at times during the interview, there were moments of emotional connection. At times, I experienced strong emotional reactions when Cassi was disclosing her story. As an experienced psychologist, I was surprised at my reactions; but witnessing her distress and being in a research setting meant that I could not use my psychological skills to alleviate her distress, as it would have been inappropriate within the interview setting. I needed to sit with my own emotional reactions and allow her to experience her own reactions. These times of disclosure were confronting for me. One such moment that stood out to me was when Cassi was describing her disappointment that mental health professionals had no knowledge of maladaptive daydreaming, or even how to help her. Rather than personalizing this as blame towards my profession, I noticed feeling equally disappointed for her and for other maladaptive daydreamers. Unbeknown to Cassi, we had shared a moment of connection and humanness.

As with Diane, Cassi’s interview brought some level of comparison within me. The main comparison moment came when Cassi described feeling like a failure due to her daydreaming, because it affected her concentration and academic productivity. Hearing her talking about not meeting the goals in her life is an opposite experience from my own. I originated in the United Kingdom and was raised in Yorkshire where productivity is highly valued. As a child I was independent, capable and organized. Throughout my life, I have achieved many personal goals, in both my professional life and academic endeavors, amongst other areas. I am a highly organized and highly effective person. Hearing Cassi talk about her opposite experience enabled me to connect with her once more, relating to the frustration that she was stating. I was experiencing a similar frustration on her behalf, for the impact that maladaptive daydreaming had on her inability to meet her potential.

The reflexivity outlined above, through the examples of insights recorded in memos enabled me to explore a range of experiences from the two interviews. The process of reflexivity also extends beyond the interview stage into the data analysis stage. Firstly, during the stages of transcribing and data analysis, I was undergoing some level of disruption within my own life. At that time, I changed psychology jobs a
few times, trying to find the best fit of clinic days to allow my full-time doctoral studies to be viable. I did feel disrupted during the data analysis phase, having to fit coding into small slots of time. This meant that it took me longer than I had expected, and I became concerned that the two participants would lose interest in being involved in the study. This was not the case though, and I found it interesting to experience some level of chaos myself, allowing me to experience an impact upon my performance like the participants’ reported disruption caused by their maladaptive daydreaming.

The personal and subjective experience of conducting qualitative research also became evident at the data analysis stage. It became obvious to me that I was heavily emotionally invested in this research project. This emotional investment became known when I had completed the transcribing of the two interviews. Within grounded theory research, it is common to engage in a process called member checking, which involves sending the transcripts to the participants (Thomas, 2017). Undergoing the process of member checking was a stressful one for me. I had concerns that the participants would make major changes to their transcripts, potentially affecting my findings. I was feeling protective of the data within the transcripts and handing over control to the participants; this part of the co-construction felt challenging to me (Velardo, 2018). Both participants were given a two-week period in which to review the transcripts. I was confused when, after the two weeks, both participants stated that they were completely happy with the transcripts, and that no changes were required. I reflected upon this, and decided that if I were a participant, I probably would have wanted some level of changes to be made. However, I realized that because I am a researcher, this need to review or request changes might have come from my academic training and my style of personality, which are examples of my difference from the two participants.

My emotional investment into this research was additionally evident to me throughout the coding of the two interview transcripts. Initially, my supervisors and I carried out a one-hour coding process. This was my first coding experience, whereas both my supervisors are skilled qualitative researchers. This joint coding enabled me to build my confidence in my coding skills. Following that coding session, moving onto coding independently as a lone researcher was not as nerve-wracking as I had anticipated. I found independent coding to be smooth at first; creating a list of gerunds was easy for me. But the stage that did provoke some heightened emotions in me was that of coding the gerunds to categories: for me, this was anxiety provoking and unenjoyable, and I was concerned about getting it wrong or making the wrong coding decisions. This nervousness did dissipate once I began to re-code and join categories.
together. The process of memo writing and recording through a research journal also helped me to overcome this nervousness. Furthermore, involving the participants, who agreed with my decisions and my findings, also helped to alleviate these worries. I have since been reassured by other grounded theory researchers that it is normal to be so heavily emotionally invested, and that they too felt overwhelmed during the chaos of the coding process.

**Research Rigor**

For a qualitative research study to be determined trustworthy and valid, the research needs to be conducted in a fair and ethical manner, aiming to reflect the participants’ experiences (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1980, 1997). With this research rigor in mind, therefore, I designed the study in adherence with guidelines offered by Mays and Pope (2000) and Morse (2005):

1. Choosing case study research and the grounded theory approach by matching these techniques to the research questions.
2. Articulating the research strategy, method, questions and sampling process in a transparent manner.
3. Ensuring I maintained a systematic audit trail, using a research diary, which shows the decision-making processes.
4. Providing a description of the context of the research, to enable findings to be related and compared with other settings.
5. Completing member checking, whereby participants reviewed the transcripts and the theoretical findings.
6. Ensuring confidentiality, whilst still providing rich detail of the participants’ experiences.
7. Reflecting upon the experiences, beliefs and values that might have influenced the study.
8. Ensuring the study was worth conducting and would provide a useful contribution to the collective knowledge base.

I also aimed to follow Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory guidelines (2006, 2014). These guidelines included the processes of simultaneous data collection and analysis; coding for processes; using comparative methods; developing conceptualizations from the data; focusing on theory construction; conducting theoretical sampling; and testing the concepts that did not fit with the findings. I have aimed as best as I can to present findings that have met these research rigor guidelines.
Chapter Summary

This chapter has explained how this first study within this research (the case studies) was conducted. It included detailing the study’s qualitative approach and the constructivist grounded theory framework, in relation to the two case studies. This chapter has described the research methods, data collection, the research purpose and questions, data analysis and coding, and the ethical considerations and the research rigor involved in the study. The next chapter will outline the findings generated from this case study research stage.
Chapter Four: Case Study Findings

Chapter Overview

Chapter Four: Case Study Findings, explains the findings from the case study stage of this research, which were described in chapter three. The chapter will begin by examining the way in which two case study participants articulate experiencing their maladaptive daydreaming. The chapter then investigates the four findings from the two case study participants’ (Diane and Cassi) interviews.

As will be illustrated in this chapter, Cassi implies that her maladaptive daydreaming experience provides her with a way of filling in the emotional gaps left in her life. Diane in contrast, expresses that her maladaptive daydreaming experience provides her with means for obtaining emotional growth, through experiencing many fantasy-lives.

Similar Findings Between the Two Case Study Participants

The constructivist process of analysis of the two case studies uncovered thought-provoking and similar findings between the participants. These findings were: (1) movement-based behaviors; (2) the struggle with concentration; (3) controlling the experience; and (4) an emotional experience. These findings were both a part of, and integral to, these two participants’ experiences of maladaptive daydreaming, and therefore call for further exploration.

Finding One: Movement-Based Behaviors

A common behavior reported by both participants was the requirement to incorporate movement-based behavior into their daydream experiences. They both described this movement behavior as including pacing, twirling items, running, rocking, and acting out the content of their daydreams. This behavior is consistent with other research into maladaptive daydreaming; in fact, movement is a necessary part of maladaptive daydreaming, and is one of the diagnostic criteria of the maladaptive daydreaming Scale known as MDS-16 (Somer, 2016).

Diane supplied insight into the intensity of her physical movement, related to her childhood maladaptive daydreaming.

I would physically escape the house and I would pace or walk in circles in the backyard ... And, I would spend hours and hours just jogging, walking, and running. But my physical pace reflected the pace of the daydream ... I get faster when it gets intense. (Diane)
Diane’s description of escaping her childhood home illustrates to me that her childhood was a stressful one, interesting me to learn more about her escape into her daydreams.

Diane further described periods throughout her adult life when her movements during maladaptive daydreaming had become problematic, explaining that a basic walk could unlock the maladaptive daydreaming at once. Now, as an adult, and having a small child, Diane expressed the need for a level of forced control over her maladaptive daydreaming experiences. She told me that at times she would achieve this control by linking her exercise time with allowed maladaptive daydreaming time: “I would incorporate my daydreaming into exercise, so I would go for a run and allow myself to daydream the whole time.” (Diane). This allows Diane to avoid being pulled into her maladaptive daydreaming when caring for her child and thus she can allow such daydreaming activities to only take over when it is suitable to her.

Like Diane, Cassi, for example, described her experience of incorporating such intense movement into her daydreams in her childhood; “When I was about seven years old, just by sitting on a bench and skidding my feet along the ground, I wore out a pair of new shoes over a few hours.” (Cassi)

Here Cassi spoke about her experience of disappearing into her daydreams, even as a young child. She reported that she had not realized that she had been engaged in such an intense movement-based behavior that had resulted in her footwear being destroyed. There are several explanations for the involvement of movement in Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming experience. The act of movement might have enhanced the intensity of her maladaptive daydream experience. Alternatively, an explanation might be that the intense movement started a hypnotic-like state.

When Cassi talked about the occurrence of this movement-based behavior throughout her life, a sense of embarrassment was noticeable to me. She described hiding the daydream experience and these intense movement-based behaviors throughout her childhood from the people within her life. “It was very embarrassing, and being an only child, I could hide a lot of it.” (Cassi)

Cassi supplied an example of when this movement-based behavior occurred at a later stage in her early years. She described one specific situation during her teenage years that left her with another lasting memory. I can understand that engaging in intense movement such as pacing, twirling, or rocking could bring about embarrassment for any child. Cassi knows that this behavior is unusual, compared with the behaviors of other children, resulting in her engaging in this behavior whilst alone. She shared the following memory:
And, when I was a teenager, I wore out a pathway between my bedroom door and my window, just from pacing. But no-one had known how it had happened. (Cassi)

This description highlights the intensity of the pacing that Cassi engaged in while daydreaming. To be able to wear a pathway into her bedroom flooring, from one part of the room to another, determines to me how often Cassi engaged in daydreaming throughout her teenage years. She did not want to explain the pathway to her parents, with Cassi once again showing embarrassment about her pacing and daydreaming.

For both Diane and Cassi, using movement to be able to intensify their daydreaming worlds had been a consistent behavior since their childhood years. They both described their maladaptive daydreaming behaviors as problematic and embarrassing at times. For them, this link between movement and the daydreaming experience must have been confusing for them throughout the years, until they discovered that the negative part of their daydreaming had a recognized name, maladaptive daydreaming. Cassi described her relief when she made this discovery: “I cried as I read articles on the behavior. The pacing up and down, and other repetitive movements. Talking to myself. Secret world’s that evolved over time. It was all there.” (Cassi)

Cassi used these words to describe the moment when, only recently, she realized that her daydreaming and the associated unusual movement-based behaviors had a name: ‘maladaptive daydreaming.’ I could hear the relief in Cassi’s voice when she told me about her discovery of maladaptive daydreaming. Here for the first time Cassi had the name for her daydreaming experience and its associated unusual movements, and this gives her a level of solace. I can relate to Cassi’s need to understand the experience and how emotional it would be to discover the name of her experience.

Both Diane and Cassi divulge feeling ‘crazy’ at times due to engaging in these intense movement-based behaviors whilst experiencing their daydreams. They both compare themselves with ‘non-maladaptive daydreamers,’ articulating that they know that the movement involved with their maladaptive daydreaming is an unusual behavior and is a strange sight for other people to see. Both Diane and Cassi set up that when other people daydream it is normal not to incorporate movement, so they understand their experience of daydreaming is outside of this norm.

Alongside the embarrassment of these unusual movement-based behaviors during daydreaming, both Diane and Cassi expressed an added similar experience in
their maladaptive daydreaming. This similarity, Finding Two, is their struggle over the years with their concentration, due to their maladaptive daydreaming. These struggles with concentration due to maladaptive daydreaming will now be outlined.

**Finding Two: The Struggle With Concentration**

Finding two pertains both Diane and Cassi’s expressed struggles with concentration levels throughout their seminal school years, adult studies, and later life challenges, due to their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. Cassi for example expressed the following, in relation to her struggles with her concentration:

*Life now, for me, is exceedingly difficult... it takes me like three to four times longer... to do my assignments... I have little concentration. It is daydreaming to the point, that its problematic... in the past, to the point, where it is quite destructive to my life... it definitely affected my schooling, in that I would be daydreaming, instead of concentrating on whatever I needed to be concentrating on. But it got me through those tough years. (Cassi)*

Cassi’s struggle to concentrate, described above, was unmistakable in her voice. The fatigue of the maladaptive daydreaming experience for Cassi is present in both her current life and in the past. She spoke with mixed emotions about her ongoing struggles with concentration, and the difficulty of returning to her studies in her adult life. Whilst achieving high marks in her studies, she expressed that the extra effort of completing assignments, which took three to four times longer than for other students in her course, was an ongoing battle. In hearing Cassi’s battle with her inability to concentrate, the amplitude of the maladaptive daydreaming experience resonates with me. To have to struggle to such an extent, daily, is difficult to hear; but at the same time, hearing Cassi’s determination to achieve her goals is inspiring. Cassi’s opinion of her maladaptive daydreaming is that it serves as a way of coping with her stress, with associated benefits—such as needing to take the extra time to concentrate on her studies, which leads to her being awarded distinctions in her studies.

Diane equally described her maladaptive daydreaming as problematic at times with regards to her concentration. She talked about her lack of concentration, due to retreating into her maladaptive daydreaming worlds. She recounted the ways that this lack of concentration had affected her schooling throughout her childhood and teenage years. However, despite her struggles with concentration, she expressed that especially during her teenage years her maladaptive daydreaming had supplied a way of negotiating through this crucial time of identity formation.
Although Diane described struggling at times with her concentration due to her maladaptive daydreaming, she also named one way that she had been able to improve her concentration levels. As Diane explained, she had noticed that when she took her daily ADHD stimulant medication it was easier for her to switch in and out of her maladaptive daydreaming, with the medication aiding her ability to concentrate. This provided her with some current relief from her struggles with concentration. Thus, Diane has a means of managing the concentration aspect, which Cassi does not. The concentration difficulty has affected Cassi at higher levels than Diane.

For both Diane and Cassi, although at times they both struggle with their concentration due to their maladaptive daydreaming, they have also overcome this difficulty on occasions, and achieved goals in life, in terms of parenting duties, interpersonal relationships and study and occupational goals.

Having so far outlined how the two case study participants required movement to intensify their maladaptive daydreaming and highlighted their struggles with concentration due to their maladaptive daydreaming, I will now move to exploring the third finding. This finding regards the ways that these participants had tried to control their maladaptive daydreaming experiences throughout the years.

**Finding Three: Controlling the Maladaptive Daydreaming Experience**

Throughout the two case study interviews both Diane and Cassi claimed that they have had some element of control of their maladaptive daydreaming at times over the years. Cassi, for instance, described her current experiences of maladaptive daydreaming as debilitating, and thus affecting her studies, making meeting her assignment deadlines an ongoing struggle. She offered that her maladaptive daydreaming allowed her to control her stress, although at the time of participating in this research she explained that she was currently struggling to function in her day-to-day life, studies and relationships. Due to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, anger and an inability to focus, she does recognize her maladaptive daydreaming as a functional experience. She presents maladaptive daydreaming as providing her with a way of coping with difficulties in her life. This had not always been the case for Cassi, however, as she had in the past been able to turn her maladaptive daydreaming on and off at will. In the statement below, she describes that at an earlier point in her life, for a period, she did not require the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

*I mean, I had years, where it was controllable... there was a good 25 years... yes, for me, it could be controlled. I could turn it on and off... I do suppose it was like logging into a game and playing for a while. (Cassi)*
The analogy of logging into her maladaptive daydreaming experience like a computer game suggests to me that Cassi experiences an element of enjoyment from her daydreaming. Instead of emotionally requiring the maladaptive daydreaming, as had been the case during stressful periods of Cassi’s life, when Cassi’s life was calm, she can draw on her maladaptive daydreaming for enjoyment and can choose when to do so.

I was surprised that both Diane and Cassi have, at times, been able to control their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. For instance, hearing that Cassi has been able to control her maladaptive daydreaming experience for 25 years surprised me. This was the first time I have heard of a person successfully controlling the maladaptive daydreaming experience and having the ability to choose when to daydream. I can understand why Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming might have recently flared within the previous two years, as that timeframe had seen the loss of two family members, with whom she described she had been especially close. “It came back full on two years ago, they both died... I was close to them. The grief... it is debilitating... So, it came back heavy.” (Cassi)

During that stressful time in her life, Cassi needed a space in which to come to terms with her emotions around this loss. As in earlier times of stress, her maladaptive daydreaming increased and her ability to control the daydreaming experience lessened. The duality of Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming was beginning to become evident to me. I was beginning to understand that Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming occurs for different emotional reasons, and that her control over her maladaptive daydreaming experience is directly associated with what she is experiencing in her life.

Diane’s ability to control her maladaptive daydreaming experience, in contrast, offers a distinct perspective. Diane spoke at length about how both her maladaptive daydreaming experience and daily life had changed since becoming a parent. Diane described previously spending up to six hours a day experiencing a range of different worlds, stories, characters and intense movement-based behaviors within her maladaptive daydream experience. More recently, however, the amount of time she spent in maladaptive daydreams had reduced to around one hour per day. Diane explained this element of current control, or even limited engagement in maladaptive daydreaming, as being due to her no longer wanting to escape her life. This was particularly due to having a small child, and not wanting to miss her child’s growth. She described being mindful that she no longer had the choice to zone out into a fantasy world and instead needed to spend more time in her real-life. This explanation of
control was similar with that offered by Cassi, who also suggested that her maladaptive daydreaming experience was an escape from life and its associated stresses.

One further challenge that Diane also noted was the impact of maladaptive daydreaming on her sleep. At times, the daydreaming was uncontrollable and led to her experiencing fatigue from the associated lack of sleep. Sometimes, she recalled, it took as long as three hours for her to fall asleep. Diane expressed that, more, she had developed an interesting control strategy to be able to fall asleep easier, which I found to be an interesting and creative strategy.

_I send my characters to bed. I daydream that, whatever is happening in my daydream, that now they will wind down and they go to bed. I have a very calm daydream, where whatever stresses that are unfolding, is resolved and have a quiet, calm daydream and get to sleep that way._ (Diane)

This ability to control her daydream characters and events brought about some reflection for me. I was beginning to understand that the maladaptive daydreaming provided Diane and Cassi with a tool through which to resolve their emotions. Diane, for instance, has the ability at times to make choices about the content of her daydreams, thus making changes within her real-world sleep habits.

Both Diane and Cassi expressed that they did not want to fully lose the experience of their maladaptive daydreaming. They value their daydream worlds, feeling deep emotions for the characters within. Instead, however, rather than losing it completely they look to gain more control over the experience. Diane and Cassi show their maturity in understanding the truth that maladaptive daydreaming might never fully end for them, but that it might in the future be successfully managed.

_You cannot cure yourself; you can only manage it. You know, and it really irritates me, because it gives people the wrong impression. As if you never have to work again at it, after you have ‘cured’ yourself. Which is not, you must be aware that, this is something that you are going to have to continually not let your guard down on._ (Cassi)

This powerful quote from Cassi shows that she has insight into her maladaptive daydreaming. Cassi described having the potential to manage her maladaptive daydreaming, so that she could once again experience its associated benefits. At the same time, however, life is stressful, which Cassi struggles to deal with emotionally, and she equally recognizes the impact of this stress on her maladaptive daydreaming experience. To me, here is another example of the different aspects of the maladaptive
daydreaming experience. There are times of positive outcomes, and there are times of negative outcomes, in relation to their maladaptive daydreaming experiences.

The fourth and final finding, which for me is the most encapsulating of the findings generated through analysis of the two participants’ interviews, is the finding that the maladaptive daydreaming is an emotional experience. I will now further explore this.

**Finding Four: An Emotional Experience**

It was noticeable to me throughout the interview analysis that both participants were heavily emotionally invested in their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. Diane, for example, described experiencing distress, sadness, grief, and loss when something happened to the characters in her daydream world; and, though they were not aware of her existence, she nonetheless experiences a feeling of enrichment at being an observer. Through observation of her characters’ lives, Diane experiences a resulting emotional benefit. For Diane, the maladaptive daydreaming is a way in which to process her emotions. This emotional processing through daydreaming is just a separate way of doing so, compared with the ways that other people processed their emotions. Diane supplied the following insight: “... these characters, I have a relationship with them, and I love them, they are important to me ... I think for me, it allows me to explore my feelings.” (Diane)

I can understand the strong connection and feelings Diane feels towards her daydream characters. They have been an important part of Diane’s life for several years and have evolved alongside Diane.

_I was able to process some of these things, through the daydreaming and I was able to function as a person, and get through my adolescence, and survive it. I do not think I would have survived, if not for daydreaming._ (Diane)

As told by Diane, the maladaptive daydreaming appears to have helped her through a difficult childhood, adolescence and later throughout her adulthood. Her maladaptive daydreaming allows her a protective and safe place in which to process her emotions. Over time, Diane does not need this emotional space as much:

_I guess because my child is having all these new emotions, and these feelings, I do not need the emotional hit from my daydreams. Because my child brings so much emotion into my life._ (Diane)

The maladaptive daydreaming has therefore previously supplied Diane a means of escaping life, to be able to safely experience her emotions during times of emotional
challenge. This appears to have recently changed with Diane now needing to remain grounded so she can experience her child. Thus, it appears she is moving away from requiring the daydreams to fulfil her emotional needs, towards real-life doing so. At this point, I wonder if this will remain so, as emotional needs can change, and her need for emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming might return, with this tool being available as a future emotional space.

Cassi too supplied insight into the emotional aspects of her maladaptive daydreaming by expressing similar deep feelings and intense emotions towards her characters; “One character, who is unlike me, she is close. I have a lot of feelings for her. I suppose, it is like a child, you know, because in one way or another, she is my creation.” (Cassi)

This poignant reflection from Cassi caught my attention. The importance to her of her daydreaming was marked. Cassi further described her maladaptive daydream experience as being a safe and secret place, unlike the real-world. I could begin to appreciate the attraction of such a safe place in which to process emotional aspects of life, with characters she has created and whom she trusts, who have evolved alongside her.

On the other hand, throughout the interview Cassi also described periods of intense and disruptive maladaptive daydreaming, which had occurred during highly emotional times in her life. She described times of struggle during childhood, adolescence, and more recently throughout adulthood. Cassi described struggling to regulate her emotions at times throughout her life and being unable to manage her elevated levels of anger and anxiety. This had resulted in Cassi avoiding the real-world, and the social opportunities on offer. She did, however, describe experiences of close relationships, building on the relationship with her husband and raising her child. Interestingly to me, it was during this 25-year adult timeframe that Cassi had developed the ability to turn the maladaptive daydreaming on and off at will. During this time, she reported that her maladaptive daydreaming did not negatively affect her. In the past two years, her maladaptive daydreaming had only recently resurfaced, escalating to the point of uncontrollably engaging in the daydream experience. Its return was triggered by the loss of two close relatives two years ago. For Cassi, as well as for Diane, it appears that the maladaptive daydreaming fulfills emotional needs. The daydreaming environment enables a calm space, away from the uncontrollable reality of real-life, where safe processing of these emotional situations can occur.
As with other case studies, there is much to learn from Diane and Cassi about maladaptive daydreaming. The processes of employing a constructivist grounded theory methodology—of conducting coding and re-coding of the interview transcripts, to the point of saturation—provided me with a deep and rich insight into both participants’ maladaptive daydreaming experiences. The analysis of their interview data supplied me with the above four findings about the way that Diane and Cassi experienced their maladaptive daydreaming. One overriding finding from this data analysis was that of their emotional needs being fulfilled by their maladaptive daydreaming. This overriding finding provided me with a deeper understanding of the experience of maladaptive daydreaming and will now be explored in the next section, which will outline the different emotional ways that Diane and Cassi experienced their maladaptive daydreaming.

Differential Emotional Finding for Diane

Emotional Growth by Experiencing Numerous Fantasy Lives

In the case of Diane, the emotional aspects fulfilled by maladaptive daydreaming relates to Diane’s emotional growth through experiencing many fantasy lives. Throughout her interview Diane described the way in which she used her maladaptive daydreaming to experience and process challenging emotions, such emotions that originally stemmed from childhood abuse. She often spoke about needing to experience her characters’ lives and perspectives to resolve her own strong emotions. Sometimes, Diane reported, her daydream stories were of a negative and distressing nature. Diane supplies further clarification of this in her following comment; “For me, it allows me to explore my feelings… My daydreams are very feeling-heavy… because I have all these characters with different lives.” (Diane)

Woven throughout Diane’s interview responses were assertions of the highly emotional experience of her maladaptive daydreaming. Through the analysis process, it became evident to me that maladaptive daydreaming had helped Diane to grow emotionally. This was particularly shown from her early childhood recollections, which as she described was the beginning of her maladaptive daydreaming.

...because of the abuse, was ongoing at that time. I found that extremely distressing. I found it difficult to deal with. I was able to you know, process some of these things... and survive it. That is when the daydreaming began. (Diane)

Diane reported to me a stressful, chaotic and traumatic childhood, which was difficult for her to relay and similarly difficult for me to hear. I can certainly understand...
that any child experiencing such a childhood might retreat into a safe fantasy world, somewhere always available and safe, with many choices of stories in which to plunge oneself. Initially, the characters in Diane’s childhood worlds were a version of herself, but these changed when Diane entered adolescence. A tumultuous time for any young adolescent, Diane described using her maladaptive daydreaming to explore her identity, her beliefs, her needs, and expressed that maladaptive daydreaming had helped her to process related difficult emotions. During that time, Diane’s characters evolved from being like her and towards a world with multiple generations—and potentially multiple perspectives. For Diane, it appears that the maladaptive daydreaming was a tool that enabled her to process her difficult emotions.

_I feel like, sometimes the whole purpose of my daydreams, it feels like, it’s to get to the complete understanding and resolution, of yes, I completely understand this, but you can only feel the payoff of that, if there has been that pain._ (Diane)

In a sense, negative experiences within her maladaptive daydreaming allow Diane to explore scenarios and her feelings towards these. This provides her with a practice environment for further developing an emotional skillset, including compassion, empathy, and an ability to relate better to her loved ones, thus enhancing her emotional state.

This positive interpretation of her maladaptive daydreaming as an adaptive mechanism remained plain in her explanation of the role of perspectives within her maladaptive daydreaming experience. In her following statement, Diane described finding herself acting out conversations of the characters from multiple perspectives within her maladaptive daydreams; “But I am not always the same side of the conversation. One day, I might daydream one conversation, and the next day, I might replay the same story from a distinct perspective.” (Diane)

Being able to access multiple viewpoints and put herself into her character’s experiences appears to have benefit Diane in her real-life. Through her interview, Diane showed prominent levels of empathy, often reporting a strong ability to understand from other people’s perspectives. Diane has learnt to respect other people’s experiences from seeing the many different lives and emotional experiences during her maladaptive daydreaming. “You know, how these different characters see these different events, and I feel like I am a more well-rounded person, being able to access these different points of view.” (Diane)
Maladaptive daydreaming as a growth experience is a new perspective on maladaptive daydreaming and is not noted within the scientific literature, whereby the literature focused on the maladaptive nature of maladaptive daydreaming. It might be that, for Diane, maladaptive daydreaming supplies growth at times. Instead of daydreaming being maladaptive, it could be described as adaptive. It might also be that, for Diane, the experience of emotional growth could invalidate the psychopathological aspects for her.

Diane reported being able to access different viewpoints, with her daydreaming always being available. Despite the challenges the daydreaming presented to her, Diane uses it successfully to think and feel.

For Diane, the emotional growth she experiences from maladaptive daydreaming far outweighed the difficulties. A remaining question at this point, in relation to Diane’s emotional growth, is whether the extent of the maladaptive daydreaming currently causes such significant distress as to be considered maladaptive. It might be that this emotional growth is unique to Diane’s situation, and that it might not necessarily supply the same emotional growth outcome for someone else.

For Diane, at times her maladaptive daydreaming is adaptive and at others it is maladaptive, but it should be noted that Diane meets the criteria for maladaptive daydreaming in-line with the inclusion criteria and independent assessment conducted prior to the study. Diane self-identifies as a maladaptive daydreamer; detailing distress, absorption, vivid daydreams, kinesthetic behaviors and the incorporation of music – all of which are required to meet the criteria for maladaptive daydreaming. The name ‘maladaptive daydreaming’ is an important identity that Diane values. Even though Diane might move between maladaptive daydreaming and a more adaptive maladaptive daydreaming, the majority of her daydreaming does cause her distress and dysfunction, and her self-identification and meeting of the maladaptive daydreaming criteria reflects her classification as a maladaptive daydreamer.

**Different Emotional Finding for Cassi**

**Filling in the Emotional Gaps Left in her Life**

In the case of Cassi, the emotional aspects fulfilled by maladaptive daydreaming, relates to how she ‘filled in the emotional gaps left in her life.’ This finding was highlighted where Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming fluctuated based on her emotional needs at highly emotional times in her life, such as during her traumatic childhood, also during her early years as a new parent, and more recently when two close family members died. There is a need for the maladaptive daydreaming to enable Cassi to process her emotional experiences through the safety of her daydreaming. In
contrast, at times in her life that were calm, during these 25 years, Cassi can choose whether to daydream. Although Cassi reported multiple unrelated struggles, such as anxiety, MDD, anger and interpersonal challenges, her maladaptive daydreaming had only recently become problematic again, adding to her daily struggle. In the two years immediately prior to the interview, her two children had moved into adulthood, two close family members had died, and Cassi had started a challenging university course. Cassi described these events as highly emotional, causing her much distress, which led to her maladaptive daydreaming becoming uncontrollable. In this sense, her maladaptive daydreaming experience has once again moved from being an enjoyable and controllable experience to be a source of angst for her.

In direct contrast with Diane’s experience, Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming is not described as a growth experience. Instead, it is visible to me that Cassi uses maladaptive daydreaming to cope with the emotional difficulties that she has experienced at times within her life. Thus, Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming supplies a protective source from difficult emotional situations. Cassi shared part of a poem about her maladaptive daydreaming, which she had written to emphasize this protective aspect; “I know I can always count on you [Daydreaming], from when I was a child... You protected me then, and you protect me still.” (Cassi)

Cassi’s language choices in her poem about her maladaptive daydreaming as being a reliable confidante suggest to me that maladaptive daydreaming provide her with consistent protection and support in what was at times a chaotic life. She understands her maladaptive daydreaming as a refuge from chaos rather than as a source of it.

In her interview, Cassi described several difficulties throughout her lifetime. During her early years, she struggled socially and often experienced isolation, at times from other children. Together with being an only child, and experiencing childhood trauma, Cassi retreats into a daydream world. This world is a place of safety, where she can control the storyline and the ‘social’ interactions that occurs. For Cassi, daydreaming functions as a place to retreat to whenever she needs to fill the gap of emotional closeness and connection. Cassi’s experiences of childhood trauma are like those of Diane’s life, leading to the use of maladaptive daydreaming for her emotional needs. This lends credence to the understanding that they have similar maladaptive daydream experiences, but that some of the outcomes of these emotional processing experiences differ for them. Diane uses her maladaptive daydreaming to experience
emotional growth, whilst Cassi uses her maladaptive daydreaming as a protective source from difficult emotional situations.

Cassi further described struggling to manage her aggressive emotions, especially her anger towards people in her everyday life, leading her to further isolate herself, and in turn resulting in her retreating further into her maladaptive daydreaming.

*Life for me now, is exceedingly difficult. I cannot leave the house… I now stay away from the triggers to my anger, which is people... the character had a family, I did not... it (daydreaming) started again two years ago, when two family members died... It is a way of coping.* (Cassi)

Cassi’s struggles with concentration, focus and strong feelings of anger are woven throughout her interview responses. She described feeling less able to function in the real-world than other people. These struggles are unlike her experiences in the worlds she created in her maladaptive daydreaming, where she experiences assertive, supportive, and caring characters who protect their family members. This contrasts with Cassi’s real-life trauma experience in her childhood, where she had experienced abuse where she was not being protected at that time from the abuse. Unlike within her real-life, the social opportunities brought by her maladaptive daydreaming experience, along with the protective aspects of her daydreaming, suggest to me that she uses the maladaptive daydreaming to fill in emotional gaps. Cassi also spoke to me about being an only child, she felt this was especially important in relation to her maladaptive daydreaming experience. Cassi told me that she felt lonely throughout her childhood, and that this loneliness at times also spanned into her adulthood. More recently, in the previous two years, her maladaptive daydreaming has intensified once again, which I believe is associated with the deaths of her two close family members, and with her two children becoming adults. I would suggest that Cassi’s experience of maladaptive daydreaming has increased recently because of these losses, and further suggest that Cassi is currently filling in the emotional gaps of these circumstances through her experience of maladaptive daydreaming.

Prior to these recent situations, for a period of around 25 years, Cassi described having an element of control, to be able to turn on—and equally to turn off—the maladaptive daydreaming. Although Cassi described struggling to relate to people in her real-life and experiencing challenges in maneuvering through interpersonal opportunities due to feeling angry, she had been able to develop some meaningful relationships throughout her life. For instance, during that 25-year period, Cassi had
built a relationship with her husband, whom she described as supportive, and who was aware of her struggles and of her maladaptive daydreaming. Also, during that timeframe, Cassi focused on being a parent to her two children, one child who needed some extra care due to being diagnosed with a developmental disorder and having physical health problems. Cassi further described being especially close to two members of her extended family and experiencing an overwhelming grief and loss at their deaths. The theme of family further appeared in Cassi’s descriptions of the content of her maladaptive daydreaming: for instance, her characters have siblings, and one main character is the protector, lending support to Cassi’s focus being upon family connections. It seems that the 25-year period of being able to control the maladaptive daydreaming, of being able to turn it on and off at will, stems from Cassi’s needs for closeness and connection in the real-world. This emotional gap was therefore fulfilled during this 25-year period by supportive and healthy, real relationships, instead of through imagined characters and daydreams. During that time, she had no need to be pulled into the all-consuming alternative world of maladaptive daydreaming.

Cassi reported that her maladaptive daydreaming had returned, at an almost uncontrollable rate. She struggled to function daily, such as in achieving her study goals, while trying to manage prominent levels of anxiety and anger. She feared for the future, particularly about how she would cope if something happened to her own family members. I wonder about how such a loss would affect her maladaptive daydreaming experience, with an emotional gap potentially appearing at future losses. Hearing of her experience during emotional times within her life, I believe that future losses can potentially trigger even more maladaptive daydreaming for her. Equally, the gap can once again be filled, if she were helped to process her emotions in a more effective real-world manner. Unknowingly, Cassi is trying to fill this emotional gap currently left within her real-world. She is working towards achieving her study goals and a potential career. She is also happy within her marriage and as a parent, and still has a supportive family, some of whom are aware of her maladaptive daydreaming. She also reported experiencing a supportive relationship with her mental health worker, with Cassi adding to her health professional’s knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming. Finally, Cassi is an active voice within the maladaptive daydreaming community, offering support to fellow maladaptive daydreamers. In Cassi’s own words, she expressed her own message of hope; “I am proof that it can be managed. I lived for 25 years without the difficulty I am having now.” (Cassi)
It was uplifting to hear Cassi express this hope that she attempts to manage her maladaptive daydreaming through the range of difficulties that she describes.

**Summary of the Two Case Study’s Different Emotional Findings**

Both Diane and Cassi expressed hope that one day their maladaptive daydreaming will be managed. They both reported understanding that their maladaptive daydreaming might never fully disappear.

*... And I think that would be my biggest piece of advice to other sufferers of daydreaming. Is that I do not think just stopping daydreaming is helpful, because you replace it with something different, that would be equally unhelpful* … *Because you cannot cure yourself, you can only manage it… As if you never have to work again at it, after you have cured yourself.* (Cassi)

Neither Cassi nor Diane choose to live without their maladaptive daydreaming experience. Such a loss will be too painful for them, given the ways that—and the extent to which—their maladaptive daydreaming has helped them through challenging times. Further, the maladaptive daydreaming characters and stories are considered too important and valuable to them. As Diane described:

*I start to really miss them and I miss these people, and I get these weird feelings of guilt, that I am not allowing them their lives. You know, I know they are not real. But I feel like I am letting them down, by not allowing them to live. ... and, if somebody said I could just get rid of it, I would not. I would not do that unless they would also get rid of the feelings of missing it.* (Diane)

Rather than Cassi’s desired future, however, Diane focused on having control over her maladaptive daydreaming, so that she would be able to daydream at will. She would like to return to the period where she did not have such difficulties because of her maladaptive daydreaming, describing the ability to control the experience as fundamental. As she noted; “… so, it is not maladaptive, when you can choose to turn it on and off, is it?” (Cassi)

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has described the findings from the analysis of two case study participant interviews. Their experiences have been outlined in-depth and reflected upon. The findings from the case studies have been presented in terms of similarities between the two participants, along with the differences of emotional processes also highlighted. The findings outlined and reflected upon are: (a) movement-based behaviors, (b) the struggle with concentration, (c) controlling the experience, and,
(d) an emotional experience. I have demonstrated that the main finding from the case studies is that maladaptive daydreaming is a different emotional processing experience for the two participants. For (Diane), emotional growth results from maladaptive daydreaming. For (Cassi), emotional protection is achieved through maladaptive daydreaming.
Chapter Five: Forum Methodology

Chapter Overview

Chapter Five ‘Forum Methodology’ provides an explanation for the second research study within this project: a six-week Facebook forum, through which 16 participants shared and discussed their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming. This chapter re-addresses the qualitative framework for this research, to then detail and explain the way the forum data was analyzed through a constructivist grounded theory methodology. It also supplies further details into the qualitative research methods adopted, such as observational research, coding, reflexivity, co-construction, and theoretical memos. Finally, this chapter supplies an in-depth review of the ethical requirements to which this second study adhered, and the research rigor of this study.

Introduction

As in the first study within this research (case studies), I continued to use a qualitative research approach for this second study (forum). As a qualitative researcher, I have aimed to be flexible in my interpretations, to also note what the data informs (Berger, 2013; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputhong, 2007). I have adopted the characteristics of a qualitative researcher in that I have looked to recognize my personal biases (Turner, 1981). I have adopted a creative approach to this process, have been open to the participants’ interpretations, and have been both flexible and thorough in my analysis. Qualitative methodology has provided me with the opportunity to explore the participants’ experiences at a deep level, allowing me to appreciate their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming more fully (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Facebook Forum Design

For this second study, I made the decision to explore maladaptive daydreaming using a confidential Facebook forum. This decision was made for two reasons.

The first reason for using a Facebook forum for data collection was because Facebook offered me direct access to a population of maladaptive daydreamers, a group that I might not normally have access to.

The second reason for my use of Facebook was that it enabled me to create a secret forum. This secret forum would be only available to the eligible participants, ensuring confidentiality for the research study.

In addition to these two main reasons, another contributing factor for my decision to use Facebook as a research platform came from a search on Google Scholar in January 2017, using the search term ‘Facebook research’. This search yielded 5.21 million results. This considerable number of search results informed me that Facebook
is a suitable and accessible method for the second research study (Vitale, Guarasci & Iannotta, 2017) that enabled me to easily access maladaptive daydreamers.

Further academic reading and research revealed a range of methodological approaches that other researchers have articulated for incorporating Facebook into research (Sharkey et al., 2011; Stewart & Williams, 2005; Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012). Examples of such research that can be carried out on Facebook are surveys, interviews and ‘data scraping’ using a data extraction tool.

In using Facebook as a research platform, I needed to address a range of methodological challenges. One of the main methodological challenges of using Facebook is based around emerging concerns within the media about the privacy and confidentiality of Facebook (Nyomi & Velempini, 2018). This challenge of using Facebook meant that I needed to be thorough in the design of the study. The forum needed to be carried out in an honest way, with the study supporting a prominent level of integrity. It was important that I avoid any carelessness or negligence, ensure confidentiality and show a respect for the research area, the data, and the participants (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009), as well as base the forum on ethical guidelines (Sharkey et al., 2011). In this study, Sharkey et al (2011) outlined several ethical considerations that Human Research Ethics Committees appraise for proposals for internet-based research with vulnerable people. Their ethical guidelines were informed by issues raised in a United Kingdom Internet-based research study called SharpTalk, that was an online forum for people who self-harmed. The forum in this current study was deliberately designed to follow Sharkey et al.’s recommendations about establishing ways of protecting vulnerable participants, ensuring researcher competency, and providing a guarantee of confidentiality and support for the participants in the forum. The ways in which related ethical requirements for the current study are resolved are detailed within a later section of this chapter, titled ‘ethical requirements.’

Methodological guidance was also provided to me from the work of Im and Chee (2012). Their article, entitled Practical Guidelines for Qualitative Research Using Online Forums, provided me with methodological guidance in three ways. First, those authors made suggestions as to keeping confidentiality using pseudonyms for participants, which I followed during the forum and later during the write-up and potential publication stages. I particularly incorporated their suggestion of the incorporation of ‘netiquette guidelines’ for the forum, to ensure that the participants’ behaviors on the forum were appropriate. Second, they suggested making sure that an online forum was the best method of data collection for an internet-mediated study,
which I did ensure. Finally, I incorporated their suggestion of daily monitoring of the content of the forum, to better ensure the safety of the participants.

Another challenge of using Facebook as a research platform came from a requirement of the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Board. The Ethics Board required me to follow all of Facebook’s Terms and Conditions when undertaking the forum research study. This meant that I had to familiarize myself fully with Facebook’s Terms and Conditions, ensuring that these were adhered to during the six-week research period. The most relevant of these terms and conditions for the forum stage of this research study was that the participants needed to use their own profiles, not pseudonym profiles, as Facebook requires its users to only have one true profile. To ensure that this term and condition was adhered to, I informed the participants of this requirement, by adding this information to the ‘informed consent form (forum)’, (see Appendix J). In line with this ethical requirement, all the participants in the forum stage used their own true profile.

**Constructivist Research Paradigm**

I have already outlined the constructivist research paradigm within the method for the first research study (case studies). This paradigm also underpinned this current second research stage (forum). Once again, as in the first research study, I acknowledge my role as a co-constructor of the data.

As a researcher who has addressed Charmaz’s constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2012, 2014), I will now specify the four philosophical assumptions that Charmaz encourages constructivist grounded theorists to use. First, there are many interpretations of reality. Second, the grounded theorist should embrace their subjective experiences. Third, grounded theorists should embed themselves fully within the research. Fourth, attempts should be made to reduce any potential power differences within the research (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018). I have tried to follow all four of these philosophical assumptions throughout the two studies in this research study.

For the whole of this research study, I have been aware that interpretation creates reality, whereby each person involved in this study has made their own different associations and meanings about maladaptive daydreaming. I have also been aware that my subjective interpretation of the participants’ meanings of their experience of maladaptive daydreaming would require me to immerse myself in reflexivity practices throughout the whole study and thesis writing process. I have also positioned the participants as experts about their maladaptive daydreaming, prioritizing their perspectives and my coding of the data, over existing theories and assumptions. I
believe that this study has successfully met Charmaz’s four philosophical assumptions for carrying out grounded theory research.

Grounded Theory Research Methodology

The goal in using grounded theory across both research studies within this thesis was to be able to construct a theory of maladaptive daydreaming. To do this, I used the key components of constructivist methodology. Charmaz (2012, 2014) proposed distinct processes in employing the constructivist methodology, which are outlined next.

The distinct processes of constructivist grounded theory analysis, as suggested by Charmaz, are open coding, focused coding, theoretical coding, and theoretical memo writing. Open coding is the first stage in a constructivist grounded theory analysis. Charmaz (2006) encourages grounded theorists to start their coding by first reading the data several times, then line-by-line coding, whereby gerunds are used to describe the processes occurring within the research study. Throughout the line-by-line coding, she encourages theoretical memos about these processes and all the coding decisions that are made. Focused coding moves the analysis from the descriptive towards a conceptual level. This involves an in-depth process of drawing connections amongst the codes by distinguishing codes together into conceptual categories and renaming them. For instance, during focused coding of the forum data, I categorized the codes labelled ‘writing,’ ‘artwork’ and ‘poetry’ together into a category named ‘creativity.’ It is during this coding stage that the recording of theoretical memos is particularly helpful; these memos make observations from the data, coding decisions and reflexivity reflections.

The final stage of a Charmaz–style coding is theoretical coding, which is a sorting process of the substantial number of theoretical memos recorded during the earlier coding stages. Memos supply a useful tool from initial coding that enable a researcher to draw on insights and categories constructed during the coding stages. Through the coding process and evaluation of memos, the grounded theorist looks towards reaching theoretical completeness, whereby each of the concepts identified during the focused coding stage fit and work within the theory.

A constructivist grounded theory approach provided me with a flexible method for collecting and analyzing the forum data. This style of approach allowed me to be open about my role in constructing the theory.

As with the case study stage, I have supplied details about the forum co-construction process through a comprehensive ‘audit trail (forum)’ (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004) presented in Appendix Q. This audit trail details the sequential processes that I undertook in the forum stage and illustrates the way that I worked.
Sampling and Participant Recruitment

As in the case study stage, for the forum stage I adopted both purposeful and theoretical sampling techniques, as suggested by Birks and Mills (2011). Additionally, as is required in constructivist grounded theory, within this thesis, a heterogeneous sample (diverse cases) was used to explore the participant’s experiences and factors that affect the process under investigation in the studies, which is maladaptive daydreaming. The comparison and contrasting that occurs in the constructivist grounded theory enables the constructivist researcher to be able to identify factors, trends and influencers of the investigated processes. This then enables theory to be constructed that is grounded within and from the data. The researcher is central to the construction process, with their knowledge of the subject and the existing literature. Along with the data from the participant’s involvement enables theoretical sensitivity, and the process of continuous theoretical sampling (where the questions were directed to more specific sources of data within the forum), until the point of data saturation is achieved is required in constructivist grounded theory. In line with heterogeneous sampling, all the participants selected for the forum met the criteria for maladaptive daydreaming, were 18 years of age or older, with access to Facebook. The participants were selected as diverse (heterogeneous) based upon differences in culture, differences in academic experiences, differences in location within Australia, differences in relationship status, differences in age and differences in psychological functioning. These decisions were made with the rationale for gaining a heterogeneous sample, because a diverse group of participants would more likely provide a generalizable phenomenon than within a homogeneous group of participants. Therefore, a heterogeneous sample helps to provide evidence that the findings do not solely explain for a particular group, place or time, which helps to establish theory that can be applied to other contexts.

Fourteen of the 16 participants in the forum were new participants for this research stage. This second study represented an opportunity to address the noted potential theoretical limitations of the case study research, and to also explore the fit of emerging findings further from the two studies together.

Participant Recruitment

Three recruitment methods were used in recruiting the 16 participants for this second study. Participant recruitment was advertised on three platforms:
(a) Facebook maladaptive daydreaming forum, (b) Reddit maladaptive daydreaming forum, and (c) An advertisement on LinkedIn. The 12 people not selected as case study participants had specified that they wanted to join the second stage (forum) of the research and, as they had asked, I had stored their contact details on a secure database. These participants had expressed their interest through the daydreaming study website expression of interest button. See Appendix H, ‘website mock-up (forum).’

The two case study participants had also expressed their interest in taking part in the forum study as well, and they were also recruited, resulting in 14 forum participants at that point. A further two forum participants were recruited via the advertisement on LinkedIn. See Appendix A, ‘participant recruitment advertisement.’

All 16 participants were provided with the ‘study information handout’ for the forum (see Appendix I), along with the ‘informed consent form (forum)’ (see Appendix J). The independent assessor, Kezia, assessed the forum participants for eligibility as maladaptive daydreamers via Skype. As with the first study (case studies), all forum study participants were adults; however, these forum participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 51, incorporating more of a range of perspectives than was achieved by the two case study participants.

**Participant Demographics**

The forum participant group consisted of 13 women and three men, all aged 18 through to 51. All participants were residents living in Australia. The group consisted of people from seven multicultural backgrounds (Indian, Australian, English, Chinese, Thai, European and American).

For privacy protection purposes, each participant was given a pseudonym; these pseudonyms are used in this thesis rather than their real names. The participant demographics are presented in *Table 1* below.
Table 1

Demographics of the Participants in the Forum

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<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Location</th>
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Data Collection and Analysis

During the six-week forum data collection period, I collected a large amount of data, in the form of Facebook status screenshots of the discussions that occurred within the forum. I checked the forum daily, keeping track of changes through Facebook’s notification system. As with the case studies, it was important for me during the forum study to become deeply familiar with the data.

The stages of the coding used within the forum data collection and analysis, as informed by constructivist grounded theory, were four-fold. These stages were data collection, open coding, focused coding and theoretical coding.

Stage One: Data Collection

When the independent assessor had confirmed to me that all 16 participants were eligible to join the forum, I created a secret Facebook forum called the ‘daydreaming study’. I then individually invited the 16 participants to join the study’s Facebook group, with a direct link sent to their specified email addresses. The secret Facebook group was only visible to them, and only available to the invited participants.
It took two weeks for all the participants to join the forum. Once all 16 of the participants had joined the forum, I welcomed everyone, and directed them to the netiquette guidelines that I had placed within the ‘files’ storage area of the Facebook group page. I explained that I would be starting out with broad questions, which had appeared from the findings of the earlier case study research, and that I would also be asking further questions based on the coding of their later forum discussions and associated coding.

The first question I asked the participants was an introductory question:
(Q1) ‘Can you tell me about your current experience of maladaptive daydreaming at present?’ The participants provided narratives around the way in which they currently experienced maladaptive daydreaming, along with discussion that led to the following questions that were put to them in the following order, as the discussions progressed forward, and coding occurred. These questions were constructed based on the participants’ responses as they explored each question, with questions informing the next questions that were asked.
(Q2) ‘Tell me about how maladaptive daydreaming affects your connection with people in your life.’
(Q3) ‘It appears that maladaptive daydreaming can be a hidden experience, one that protected in some way, a private experience. What are your thoughts about this for you?’
(Q4) ‘Can you tell me about controlling the maladaptive daydreaming throughout the years?’
(Q5) ‘Tell me about the experience of any growth, which might have come about through your maladaptive daydreaming.’
(Q6) ‘Reflect upon whether the maladaptive daydreaming fulfils some unmet need for you.’
(Q7) ‘What are your thoughts on how emotions are involved within the maladaptive daydreaming experience?’
(Q8) ‘Tell me about your emotional life outside of the daydreaming?’

Stage Two: Open Coding Data Analysis

It should be noted that stage one: data collection and stage two: open coding data analysis, simultaneously occurred. This amalgamation process was needed for the constructivist nature of this research study, as data collection, coding and question
construction processes were needed to be combined to capture the participants’ experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming.

I carried out daily monitoring of the participants’ responses to these questions and coded as proper. I coded using the qualitative software program called QSR-NVivo.) In addition, I used a pen and paper technique, whereby each line of status comments was transformed into gerunds, and then the gerunds were printed onto paper and the gerunds were then organized into individual coding themes. A full description of the coding that occurred is visible in Appendix Q, ‘audit trail (forum).’

The open coding process created a list of codes that led to the construction of further questions being asked of the participants in the forum. For instance, (Q2) ‘Tell me about how maladaptive daydreaming impacts your connections with people in your life.’ Coding of participant responses to this question showed an implication about embarrassment and hiddenness, and Q3 was constructed and put to the participants for discussion. (Q3) ‘It appears that maladaptive daydreaming can be a hidden experience, one that maybe protected in some way, a private experience. What are your thoughts about this for you?’

At times, I returned to the question responses to further code responses that the participants had added later to earlier discussions and posts. As the coding developed, I reported back the findings to the participants throughout the forum period and provided the participants with a chance to carry out member checking (Chase, 2017). The participants were encouraged to make changes, further clarify, suggest new ideas, and agree or disagree with the coding decisions I had made (Candela, 2019). The six-week forum generated 137 Facebook posts, some of which were a few lines long, but the majority incorporated up to at least three or more paragraphs of content. I also conducted extensive theoretical memo writing about the coding process. Through these theoretical memos I described the choices and the coding decisions I had made, recorded any unanswered questions in the theoretical memos, and explored my views on how the codes might begin to lead towards a theory. The open coding process was completed when all the 137 Facebook statuses had been coded. I stopped the open coding process when I found that I had so thoroughly compared the data and codes that no new codes appeared from the data. At that stage, I was able to move on to focused coding, the next stage of constructivist data analysis.

**Stage Three: Focused Coding Data Analysis**

The focused coding stage aimed at moving away from the descriptive and moving towards finding conceptual categories. To do this, I once again used QSR-
NVivo qualitative software, to focus on finding relationships amongst the codes.
Through the focused coding, I was looking at any connections that could be made amongst the codes. My intent was to find codes, in a systematic manner; to join codes, and rename them into more conceptual quality categories. For example, as can be seen in the ‘audit trail (forum)’ (see Appendix Q), I joined the codes ‘growing through the experience,’ ‘using strategies to cope,’ ‘experiencing the positives of daydreaming,’ and ‘accepting the daydreaming,’ to form the category *Benefiting from the experience*. The focused coding generated four main categories of interest: (a) growing through maladaptive daydreaming, (b) experiencing emotional processing, (c) controlling the daydreaming, and (d) aiming to understand the experience. These four first categories therefore became the basis of the later questions within the forum (Q4-Q8). During the focused coding process, I made my coding decisions based on the forum data, rather than basing my decisions on prior theories of maladaptive daydreaming, specifically on my pre-existing knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming.

Throughout this coding stage, I was mindful to find new categories from the participants’ discussions about their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. As part of reflexivity, I asked myself questions about patterns and any questions that further appeared. One such question was: ‘Do I need to focus on what is already known about maladaptive daydreaming?’ This question was in relation to the coding that showed participants expressing the negative impacts of their maladaptive daydreaming on their day-to-day functioning. This finding reflects a broader understanding of maladaptive daydreaming within the body of scientific literature on maladaptive daydreaming, and the concept is so key that it explains the name of the daydreaming as maladaptive. In relation to the question of whether to focus on what was already known about maladaptive daydreaming, I made the decision to include all the coding, whether it had been previously found in earlier maladaptive daydreaming research. This decision was based around my intention to co-construct a grounded theory from all the data that would expand upon the existing scientific literature.

Throughout the focused coding stage, I returned to the participants in the forum at times. I checked my coding decisions with the participants and asked them (Q4-Q6), based on the developing categories. I encouraged the participants to supply their thoughts, of whether they understood any of these categories as being at the core of their experience of maladaptive daydreaming. The participants provided me with further clarification during this member checking process. They confirmed to me that the categories supplied a good fit for what they experienced in their maladaptive
daydreaming. During this stage of coding, I carried out a flexible coding process, as can be seen in the ‘audit trail’ in Appendix Q. I could relate to Charmaz’s assertion that the process is an unstructured process, with multiple challenges (Charmaz, 2014). The process of carrying out unstructured coding enabled me a freedom to be flexible, and to construct categories that may not have been available from a more structured coding process.

Once I had reached the point at which I could generate no new codes, or join more together, I knew I had reached the stage of focused coding, and that I could move onto the final stage of coding: theoretical coding.

**Stage Four: Theoretical Coding Data Analysis**

During the theoretical coding of the forum data, I engaged in a sorting process of the theoretical memos that I had recorded during the earlier coding stages of data collection, open coding, and focused coding. In doing this, I was looking to reach theoretical completeness, (Charmaz, 2014), whereby each of the concepts I had found during the coding stages would now fit and work within one theory. I approached the process of theoretical coding from two perspectives. First, I supplied feedback to the participants on the findings from the two case studies, and the first findings from the coding of their forum discussions. Together these findings were beginning to construct one theory from the coding from both studies. Sorting of the theoretical memos, and earlier coding stages, had provided me with an understanding that emotions were involved in maladaptive daydreaming. Therefore, I asked two final questions (Q7-Q8). I asked the forum participants about emotions and their maladaptive daydreaming, because I was looking to further construct the emerging theory. These questions supplied new discussions from the participants about their emotional lives, their emotional abilities, and their beliefs about how emotions are imperative for their maladaptive daydreaming.

The second way I approached theoretical coding was by returning to the coding once again and incorporating the participants’ discussions about emotions into the prior coding decisions. I brought about the construction of codes together even further, to be able to disregard codes that I had found from other maladaptive daydreaming literature and to return to the participants’ Facebook status quotes as part of this process. In this way, I was seeking to further construct one theory that would supply explanation of the case study and the forum participants’ experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming.

Throughout the theoretical coding process, I returned to the codes, the audit trail, the participants’ words from the forum posts, and the theoretical memos. Through the
theoretical memo sorting, even codes that did not initially appear to fit the theory could be applied to the theory. For instance, the code of controlling the daydreaming experience did not initially appear to fit the theory. Through theoretical memo sorting and further inquiry into the memos, I was able to apply this code to the theory. This sorting led me to be able to understand that the participants were using maladaptive daydreaming to control their emotional needs, in a way that differed from other people’s behaviors. The code experiencing negative outcomes from maladaptive daydreaming, similarly, did not initially fit the theory, but further sorting of the theoretical memos made noticeable to me that this code did fit the ‘differential’ element of the theory. The code supported the view that maladaptive daydreaming could supply either a rewarding or a challenging emotional experience.

The theoretical coding made it observable that the emotional aspects of maladaptive daydreaming appeared consistently within both studies. The data suggested that participants in both studies experienced maladaptive daydreaming for emotional reasons, and that their maladaptive daydreaming could fluctuate alongside emotional changes in their lives. Some of the participants in the two studies processed their emotions in diverse ways through the experience of their maladaptive daydreaming. This differential emotional processing could lead to either growth or protection, because of the maladaptive daydreaming experiences.

Further coding of this newly generated information about the involvement of emotions in maladaptive daydreaming also led to no further coding categories, and it was at that stage that I knew that the theory was a robust one. I had reached theoretical saturation within the grounded theory methodology. In line with constructivist grounded theory, the theory was scientifically supported by the two studies, and was grounded within the data of these studies. Through the coding of data from both studies, the whole of the theoretical coding fit into one overriding theory: the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Ethical Requirements

As the forum research was carried out online, it involved a unique and lengthy ethical approval process. Twelve key ethical requirements were shown as important to be addressed for the forum research study. In this section I will outline these ethical requirements, and the ways in which I addressed these potential risks.

Ethical Requirement One: Alleviation of Potential Embarrassment

I have previously treated some maladaptive daydream clients through my psychology clinic. Through these meetings, I have understood that some people who
experience maladaptive daydreaming have an elevated level of embarrassment about the amount of time they spend daydreaming. I was aware that this daydreaming embarrassment might provide me with a challenge recruiting the forum participants, and I therefore decided that I might need to consider alternative ways to recruit the forum participants. The standard pathways of recruitment, for example, recruiting via student populations or through community health settings, needed to be discounted. Through prior contact with maladaptive daydreamers, I was aware that the internet was the main platform through which maladaptive daydreamers carry out their research into their experiences, and gain support from other maladaptive daydreamers. I therefore decided to use the internet to recruit the forum participants. The internet could help me provide privacy protection for the participants, and a private, safe and accessible space. Further, the internet would enable any eligible maladaptive daydreamer to be able to take part in the forum. As such, I chose this platform for recruitment to alleviate potential embarrassment for the participants (Arigo et al., 2018).

**Ethical Requirement Two: The Prevention of Psychological Harm**

During the forum, participants would be disclosing sensitive information about their experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming. This disclosure could trigger a psychological reaction for them, leading to a reduction in their wellbeing. It was important to prevent any psychological harm to the forum participants. With the study being conducted online and some participants living rurally, the participants may have had limited access to available mental health services. I collated a list of Australian bulk billing psychological services, including The Royal Flying Doctor service, Beyond Blue, Lifeline and Skype-facilitated Medicare Psychologists, and supplied these to the participants prior to the study (Ellis, 2013). I also supplied guidance by email as to how to access these services if required.

**Ethical Requirement Three: Prevention of Intrusion into Mental Health**

Participation in this research presented the potential for intrusion into the forum participants’ mental health. As the study required the forum participants’ maladaptive daydreaming to be determined by an independent assessor, there was the potential for the participants to become uncomfortable at the sensitivity of questions about pre-existing mental health conditions. This could have affected the study as it might have led the participants to withdraw their participation or complain about the study online. This in turn could have resulted in other participants not wishing to take part in the study, and the reputation of the study being negatively affected (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). To address this risk and eliminate feelings of potential intrusion, confidentiality
was made plain to the participants, along with the provision of transparent information about the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Furthermore, the independent assessor was guided to only collect relevant information, using only the two maladaptive daydreaming assessment tools (MDS-16 and the SCI-MD).

**Ethical Requirement Four: The Prevention of Feelings of Loss or Abandonment**

Preventing feelings of loss or abandonment because of taking part in the forum was an important ethical requirement. I was aware that the participants could potentially make a connection with other group members and could feel a sense of loss of support from the group, or a perceived abandonment, once the study ended. To prevent this from occurring, I followed the World Health Organization guidelines for good clinical research practice (Idanpaan-Heikkila, 1994). These guidelines recommended that participants be pre-informed of the length of the study (a six-week period), informed of the extent of contact after the study, and provided with feedback about the findings of the study promptly. These guidelines enabled me to engage in a ‘full disclosure’ process to the participants about the findings and the resultant theory. It also provided the participants with a suitable ‘ending’ to the research study.

As part of this ending, I also gave each participant a $50 Myer eVoucher and thanked them for their participation in the study. Furthermore, I emailed the ‘participant satisfaction survey’ (see Appendix M) to them to complete and return to me by email at their leisure. All participants expressed an interest in taking part in future research that I might carry out into maladaptive daydreaming, and—with their permission—I have stored the participants’ email addresses for any potential future research.

**Ethical Consideration Five: Perceived Dual Role of the Researcher**

It was important for me to avoid any participant confusion about my role in the forum as a researcher, as distinct from that of a psychologist. This was managed through the screening process of the participants, undertaken by an independent assessor, Miss Kezia Andrea, from The School of Psychology at The University of Leeds in the United Kingdom (UK). The participants were made aware that I am an Australian registered psychologist but that, for the purpose of the forum and its research, I was a doctoral researcher.

To reduce the possible confusion over my role, the assessment of the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming eligibility was conducted not by me, but by the independent assessor, which happened via Skype. She organized a convenient time and date for these independent assessments with the participants. The Skype assessment involved a one-hour assessment using the ‘Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16)’
and the ‘Structured Clinical Assessment for Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCI-MD)’ (see Appendix F). The assessor was only provided with the participants’ email address and Skype username, and signed and returned to me a confidentiality agreement, to commit to keeping the participants’ information private.

To further avoid the risk of the participants perceiving me as having a dual role, I started the study by posting a Facebook status on the study forum group, saying that my role was solely as a researcher and not as a psychologist. I reiterated this distinction throughout the study, explaining that I would be seeing and co-constructing a theory of maladaptive daydreaming alongside them. I also explained that on occasion I would be interacting with them in the forum space, but only to seek clarification and to ask added questions, based on what was appearing from my coding of the data. My aim of keeping this stance of ‘researcher’ was an important ethical factor within the forum.

**Ethical Requirement Six: The Prevention of ‘Forum Trolling’**

With the forum stage being conducted online, there was the potential for participants to find themselves experiencing problems with other participants in the forum, for example through forum trolling, (Im & Chee, 2012). Forum trolling is the term to describe other participants using derogatory statements, to create issues within the forum. To avoid forum trolling, I checked the discussions daily. Additionally, all participants were provided with my email address, and knew that they could contact me about any problems, or even withdraw from the study, at any time without needing to explain why. I also made the ‘netiquette guidelines’ easily accessible through the forum, guiding the participants to these guidelines on occasion, in the form of a friendly status reminder to the whole group (Wilson et al., 2012).

**Ethical Requirement Seven: The Prevention of Time Inconvenience**

Another ethical risk that needed to be considered regarded time and inconvenience to the forum participants. The forum participants might have been inconvenienced by the amount of time that they spent on the forum, such as through checking status updates, interacting with the other participants in the discussions, and reading the discussion comments. The ‘study information handout’ (see Appendix I) informed participants of their autonomous engagement in the forum space, that they could choose to interact as much or as little as they wished during the six-week period, and that there was no expectation for them to spend any specific amount of time on the forum.
Ethical Requirement Eight: The Prevention of Identification of the Participants

Throughout the forum stage, and at the thesis write-up stage, the potential for participant identification became an ethical risk. This could have occurred due to their personal characteristics being described, through the phrasing of their responses on the forum, or through the provision of identifying information. I carried out a de-identification process at the write-up stage, whereby anything that had the potential to identify a participant (for example, name, location, or any unusual careers) was eliminated or changed (Nyoni & Velempini, 2018). I also asked that the participants not supply identifying information to the other participants on the forum, or by private messaging. Further, instructions were provided to all participants on the way in which to hide their main profiles from the other participants, ensuring further heightened privacy for the participants.

Ethical Requirement Nine: The Prevention of the Provision of False Information

Global interest in the study was generated across the maladaptive daydreaming population, with many seeking to take part. This created a potential ethical risk, whereby—as the independent assessment was carried out online—potential participants could supply false information and be included in the participant pool without meeting all the inclusion criteria (Wassermann et al., 2009).

The independent assessor helped with managing this ethical risk in two ways. Firstly, she was able to determine time zones when conducting the Skype assessment appointment, forming an idea of where the person was located. Secondly, she required the assessee to show identification of their location during the Skype assessments.

Ethical Requirement Ten: The Prevention of Data Security Infringement

This research investigated a private experience, collecting data about the participants’ individual experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming. The personal nature of the information shared posed the potential ethical risk of participant concern about how their data was going to be stored and archived. In line with the Privacy Act 1988, I explained to the participants that their data would be stored in an iCloud account using a double password protected system hosted through Charles Sturt University’s Department of Information Technology. I reassured them that only I as the researcher had access to this data, with no access by a third party. I ensured that the participants were aware that, upon completion of my doctoral work, the data would be transferred confidentially to the Charles Sturt University Data Librarian and stored for a period of five years, as required of all Charles Sturt University doctoral research, and in line with the University’s research data policy.
Ethical Requirement Eleven: The Prevention of Potential Data Changes

An important part of the qualitative research process is called member checking (Chase, 2017). The process of member checking in the forum brought a further ethical risk. The member checking in the forum research study involved the forum participants being given the ability to review and make changes to their discussion comments. In relation to the qualitative research methodology, it was important to incorporate this member checking throughout the forum study. I was mindful during the member checking process that the participants might have wanted to rewrite their comments, potentially altering the data, and putting the study findings at risk. I therefore provided the participants with guidance about the member checking process. I informed them that they could request me to edit their statuses and comments, to be able to correct any errors, add detail or remove comments (Birtal., 2016). I explained that these edits needed to be requested through me, to ensure that the quality of the data was kept. To ensure that comments were not altered, I used the Facebook settings to only allow me to edit the discussions on the forum.

Ethical Requirement Twelve: The Prevention of Harm to the Researcher

Psychological research brings an element of ethical risk for the researcher. Carrying out this sensitive research could have posed a risk to me of beginning to experience problems like those reported by the participants, such as sleep problems and emotional distress. There was also a risk that I could have become de-sensitized to the participants’ stories and experiences, called ‘compassion fatigue’ (Saldaña, 2018). To reduce the potential for this risk, I undertook regular supervision from my three doctoral supervisors throughout the forum period, with weekly supervision across the six-week period. I also used reflective memo writing throughout the study, to enable my ongoing reflection.

Benefits Associated with Participating in the Forum

As with any psychological research, there are not only ethical requirements to be considered but also benefits for the participants. In this section I will outline the identified benefits that the forum participants might have experienced from their study participation. I ensured that the participants were made aware of these potential benefits through the study information handout that they received prior to their participation.

Benefit One: Altruism

The first potential benefit that might have resulted from taking part in the study relates to altruism. Altruism is the promoting of another person’s welfare before one’s own (Clark, 2010). Some of the participants might have engaged in the forum with an
altruistic motivation, to supply data that would contribute to the generation of a theory of maladaptive daydreaming. This involvement in theory construction could potentially aid other maladaptive daydreamers, thereby increasing the participants’ own wellbeing and increasing their positivity.

**Benefit Two: Catharsis**

A second potential benefit of forum participation was a positive emotional outcome, known as catharsis. It has been my experience that when people discuss their maladaptive daydreaming experiences, they report a helpful and cathartic outcome from having the opportunity to express their experiences (Clark, 2010). Therefore, a benefit of forum participation might have been that the participants experienced a similar catharsis.

**Benefit Three: Contribution Towards the Advancement of Science**

Citizen Science, also known as Public Participation in Scientific Research (PPSR), has become a growing phenomenon, with the public recognizing the benefits of taking part in research for improving knowledge through making contributions to scientific research (Aldridge, 2012). In an earlier conversation, people who experience maladaptive daydreaming had told me that they wanted to engage in ethical and safe scientific research to advance the research base about maladaptive daydreaming. Therefore, a benefit from participating could have been helping to grow the maladaptive daydreaming research body.

**Benefit Four: An Active Role in Their Own Healthcare**

The popularity and availability of the internet has meant that the general population is able to take a more active role in their own healthcare (Berger, 2013). The benefit of taking part in health condition–specific research could have supplied motivation to take part in the forum. Often, qualitative research studies are designed to be reciprocal interactions, with the participant involved at the transcription and the debrief stages (Chase, 2017). This was an added potential benefit for the forum participants, with their involvement as research contributors, not just as observed subjects. This approach to research and data collection could have further enhanced these participants’ abilities to receive help from an active role in their own healthcare.

**Benefit Five: Pride of Participating in and Finishing the Study**

My earlier discussions with people who experience maladaptive daydreaming had led me to recognize that at times they experience struggles in being able to meet their goals in life, often leaving many projects unfinished. One benefit that the participants in the forum may have experienced was a sense of achievement at having
taken part in the first constructivist grounded theory study into maladaptive
daydreaming and having completed their participation in the forum. The study had been
designed to minimize time constraints, and to ensure that this sense of achievement
from study completion could be achieved by the forum participants (Wiles, Charles,
Crow & Heath, 2006).

**Benefit Six: Supply Advancement in Treatment Interventions**

Collectively, the two studies, (case studies and forum) reflect the research aim to
understand the origins, symptoms, similarities and differences of these participants’
maladaptive daydreaming experiences. Further development in the maladaptive
daydreaming research field might include the development of evidence-based
interventions that could help the treatment of the maladaptive daydreaming population
(Somer, 2018). This advancement towards treatment intervention might be another
benefit that motivated the forum participants’ involvement in this second research
study.

**Benefit Seven: Compensation Voucher**

As an expression of gratitude for the time that the participants took to take part
in this research study, a $50 Myer Shopping eVoucher was emailed to the participants
upon completion of the research phases.

**Researcher Position: Reflexivity Statement**

As in the first research study (case studies), I have embraced the process of
reflexivity in this forum study. Within the qualitative research approach, it is important
for the researcher to reflect upon their role as a co-constructor in this research, alongside
the participants (Berger, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). As a central figure within this research,
I am aware of the need for my reflexivity, to be able to position myself within this
research. This process has been a challenging one and involved my ongoing reflection
throughout the forum study. The process of reflexivity is a time consuming one but is an
important way to situate myself within the research and supplies transparency to the
research. During the reflexivity journey, I have turned a critical gaze towards myself,
exploring my values, cultural background, political stance, my internal world, and my
reactions and beliefs. It is a process with which I believe I have fully engaged. Further,
the very nature of carrying out a constructivist grounded theory study can mean
concurrent data collection and analysis (Hall & Callery, 2001). The process of
reflexivity aided my understanding through this complex process of constructing a
grounded theory of maladaptive daydreaming. I will in this section explore the
reflexivity challenges that the forum presented to me, in the order that the challenges presented themselves.

The first day of the forum—the day when the forum group was open for questions, posts, discussions and sharing of experiences—was a mixture of excitement and nervousness for me. I was mindful of the two-week period that the participants had been waiting for the forum to generate enough participants to be able to start. I was worried that they might have lost interest and would not take part. I had invested so much time and effort over the previous two years of the doctoral candidature, for anything to go wrong. I need not have worried, as from the first day the forum participants were keen to take part fully. I realized that these types of worries would continue to occur throughout the forum, into the final stages of my doctoral thesis writing, and that the process of reflexivity would provide me with a means of managing these worries (Moghaddam, 2006). At the end of the first day of the forum, I had 15 pages of Facebook screenshots, and a new worry appeared: my capacity and speed at coding the forum data. The coding of the first day’s data took several days to complete. I became worried that the data might become too unmanageable for me, and that I would fall behind in coding the data or might hurry the coding to catch up. I realized, however, that I could implement an element of control, in the frequency that I asked the participants questions based on the coding decisions that I was engaged in.

I was surprised during the first coding, that at times I would become emotional and could empathize with some of the challenges and experiences that the participants were sharing. One instance was when a participant shared that they became psychotic, because of their psychiatrist trialing medications to reduce their maladaptive daydreaming. This example reiterated to me the importance of my research, and of trying to better understand maladaptive daydreaming. I realized that I would be emotionally influenced by some of the discussions within the forum, and that I would need to implement extra self-care during the study (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

The third question posed to the forum within the first two weeks, was about the ‘hiddenness’ of the maladaptive daydreaming. Q3: ‘it appears that maladaptive daydreaming can be a hidden experience, one that maybe protected in some way, a private experience. What are your thoughts about this for you?’ I determined a need for this question to be asked in the forum in response to the coding of one participant’s comment about experiencing embarrassment about their maladaptive daydreaming, and not telling anyone about their experiences due to this embarrassment. To my dismay, nobody answered this question on the forum; instead, other participants deviated to
other subjects, and I worried that I might have asked too personal a question too early into the study. I did realize that the nature of scientific research brings an element of uncertainty, that I needed to be open to the collection of data that I did not expect and remain flexible in my role as the researcher. I had been concerned that the ‘hiddenness’ question might have stalled the discussion within the forum. Again, I needed not to have worried, as discussions about maladaptive daydreaming continued throughout, with the participants keen to engage. The participants were friendly and polite towards one another, often offering supportive strategies and suggestions.

Initially, the participants responded directly to my questions, but as rapport was built within the forum, they began to interact together without my involvement, asking each other questions and clarifying responses. I was keen to see this, interested to watch the participants relating together in this way. It was at this stage that I became cautious of inundating the participants with too many questions, which had been generated by the ongoing data analysis over the first few weeks. I was mindful not to overwhelm the participants, or myself, in terms of the amount of data to be coded. I was also mindful of the amount of time that the forum took for me, with the daily monitoring and coding required of me.

As the forum reached the mid-point of three weeks, I noticed that the participants were supplying individual experiences of trauma and sexual abuse in their early lives. I was understandably cautious but felt that the participants knew that the forum was a confidential and safe place, and that because the participants had chosen to share their experiences together, it was important for me to allow this. The participants also were respectful in their sharing of these individual experiences, along with the way they responded together. It was at this stage that one of the participants posted on the forum that their maladaptive daydreaming had become uncontrollable and intense during the past few weeks. Upon reading this, I at once contacted the participant by private chat and email to ensure their safety, which they confirmed, and they also assured me that they had booked to see their psychologist the following day. This participant’s post also resulted in a high degree of support from the forum members towards the participant. I realized that the participants did not see me as a psychologist and did not expect psychological therapy from me; this was a relief, as it had been one of my original ethical concerns.

Interestingly, it was at this midpoint stage of the forum that this individual participants’ struggles with their mental health and the other participants’ discussions and my coding analysis led to a question about controlling the maladaptive
daydreaming experience. Participant responses to this question moved the focus of the study away from that participant’s current uncontrollable daydreaming and back to the rest of the participants’ experiences. I was intrigued to find the different experiences of maladaptive daydreaming within the forum group. It appeared to me that there were levels of maladaptive daydreaming, with fluctuating control and intensity. Some participants suggested that they considered maladaptive daydreaming as a positive and some as a negative experience. This realization of the ‘differential’ experience was the beginning of my understanding the levels involved within the theory. Towards the conclusion of the forum period, I became aware that I would need to engage in further member checking, to test the theory being constructed. This generated further nervousness for me, as telling the participants about this emergent theory brought the potential for them to disagree with it. I realized that the theory had become very precious to me, and I had become protective of it. But it was important to allow the participants to react in whatever way they needed to. So, instead of trying to prove the theory, I aimed to allow the participants to respond to the theory in whatever manner they chose; to agree, to disprove or to challenge it. The participants responded to the theory in several ways, including agreeing completely, offering other personal theories, or agreeing partially with the theory.

I continued with the focused coding of the data that had been generated from sharing the theory with the participants. This focused coding confirmed for me the fit of the theory; even the suggestions and theories that the participants had offered fit. For example, some participants had suggested that they experienced maladaptive daydreaming to manage anxiety, stress, anger, social anxiety, trauma and addiction. These ‘differential’ ways of processing their emotional world supported the theory. I was pleased that I had coded until I had reached ‘theoretical saturation’ when I could code no more, that I had asked questions based on the coding outcomes and had provided the participants with the opportunity to explore the theory (Alidabat & Navenec, 2018). Whilst engaging in theoretical memo sorting and coding, I noticed feeling confident about the coding, the outcome and the theory, knowing that I had conducted a thorough and ethical research study.

My final challenge was the naming of the theory (Morse, 2009). Constructing a name that I felt encapsulated the aspects of these participants’ maladaptive daydreaming experience was a complicated process. I was aware that I needed a name that made sense to me and others, and that would have longevity—so I could feel comfortable with it throughout my research career. I grappled with this for a few weeks, renaming
the theory on a few occasions, often losing sleep during this time. I had a sense of understanding about the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming. I was at this stage unable to express this understanding verbally. Therefore, I spent a lot of time searching plausible meanings online, that could provide me with terminology that would explain my understanding of the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming. I had considered naming the theory *The Differential Emotional Needs Fulfilment Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* and *The Differential Emotional Experiences Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, but neither of these fully encapsulated the processing of emotions via maladaptive daydreaming. Finally, I named the theory the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, as I believe that this encapsulated both the adaptive and protective emotional processing aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

**Research Rigor**

The processes of ensuring research rigor adopted during the first study (case studies) were also adopted during this second study (forum). As in the first study, I designed the forum stage by following recommendations about research rigor posited by Mays and Pope (2000). Those authors supply guidelines that can aid the construction and conduct of a trustworthy qualitative study, one that is undertaken in a fair and ethical manner and that reflects the participants’ experiences. These guidelines incorporate the following aspects, each of which I adhered to in this thesis:

1. Choosing case study research and the grounded theory approach, by matching these techniques to the research questions.
2. Articulating the research strategy, method, questions and sampling process in a transparent manner.
3. Ensuring I kept a systematic audit trail, using a research diary, which shows the decision-making processes.
4. Providing description of the context of the research, to enable findings to be related and compared with other settings.
5. Completing member checking, whereby participants reviewed the transcripts and the theoretical findings.
6. Ensuring confidentiality, whilst still supplying rich detail of the participants’ experiences.
7. Reflecting upon the experiences, beliefs and values that might have influenced the study.
(8) Ensuring the study was worth conducting and would supply a useful contribution to the collective knowledge base.

In line with the grounded theory strategies provided by Charmaz (2014), this research study conducted simultaneous data collection and analysis, as well as extensive coding, using comparative methods. Additionally, I focused on conceptualizing from the data, moving towards a theoretical understanding, to generate a theory of maladaptive daydreaming. At the same time, I tested concepts that might have disputed the theory. I have made every effort to present this research and its contribution to the field, in a manner that meets these guidelines for rigor in research.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter, Chapter Four: Forum Methodology, has described how the forum stage was conducted. The chapter explained the constructivist grounded theory methodology. It outlined the design of the forum stage, supplying description of the research methods, questions and purpose, the data collection and analysis, and the ethical requirements and the research rigor within the study.

The next chapter will outline the findings from the forum stage, provide discussion of how these findings align with the findings from the case studies, and articulate the way that these collective findings from both studies enabled the construction of the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming.*
Chapter Six: Forum Findings

Chapter Overview

Chapter Six, ‘Forum Findings,’ explains the findings from the forum stage of this thesis. It begins by providing an overview of the six forum findings, then supports these findings through the forum participants’ comments and my analysis of the forum data. The chapter supplies further description into the ways that the 16 forum participants experienced their maladaptive daydreaming.

The chapter describes how these findings, together with the findings of the case study stage (shown in chapter four), were theoretically combined into the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming. It outlines the process undertaken in this second stage of the research study of developing the theory through theoretical sampling.

Forum Findings Overview

As described in chapter five, ‘forum methodology,’ the forum involved 16 participants, with the original two case study participants also included. The forum participants supplied insight into their individual maladaptive daydreaming experiences through their interactions and comments across a six–week period within the online forum. The forum provided me with six formal findings that resulted from the analysis, about a range of subjects related to maladaptive daydreaming. Some of these findings have been articulated and examined through the scientific research body about maladaptive daydreaming; for instance, the finding of kinesthetic aspects named by the participants, and the finding of a link between childhood trauma and maladaptive daydreaming. Some of the findings from the forum analysis are new, yet to be conceptualized in the literature on maladaptive daydreaming. One such new finding is the amalgamation of findings from both the case study and forum stages of this research. This main finding was the differential aspects of the emotional processing involved in maladaptive daydreaming.

In the following sections, I will consider closely the six findings generated from the coding of the forum participants’ comments. These six findings were:

- The need for kinesthetic behaviors, for participants to be able to access and intensify the maladaptive daydreaming.
- The link between maladaptive daydreaming and childhood trauma.
- The different pathways through which maladaptive daydreaming can develop.
- The maladaptive aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience.
• The adaptive aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience.
• The processing of emotions in diverse ways through maladaptive daydreaming.

These six findings will be explained and illustrated through data extracts.

**Forum Findings That Support Existing Research**

The analysis of the coding of the forum stages’ data—the 16 participants’ comments about their maladaptive daydreaming experiences—generated six findings. Four of these findings are consistent with existing maladaptive daydreaming research, and will be investigated in this section, supported by de-identified quotes from the forum participants. These findings are: (finding one) the necessity for kinesthetic factors, involving music and movement, to be able to access and intensify participants’ maladaptive daydreaming experiences; (finding two) the link between childhood trauma and the maladaptive daydreaming experience; (finding three) the variety of explanations of pathways, which the participants used to explain how their maladaptive daydreaming developed; and, (finding four) the maladaptive aspects of maladaptive daydreaming.

**Forum Finding One: Kinesthetic Factors**

The first finding to be presented is that of the need for kinesthetic factors as part of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. The forum participants described needing to incorporate either music or movement to be able to intensify their daydreaming experiences. The kinesthetic–related aspects articulated by the forum participants included examples of them acting out their daydreams, pacing, and verbalizing what was occurring within the daydreaming, in the form of engaging in real-life vocalizing of the daydreams as they occurred. Kyla and Stephen both spoke about these movement–based behaviors. For Kyla, several kinesthetic expressions were involved with maladaptive daydreaming:

> My daydreams are always paired with movement, usually pacing or if I am walking somewhere, I will daydream, I talk and make sound effects... they have gone for five or six hours of pacing ... my poor carpet has a track worn into it.

(Kyla)

From my prior knowledge of the involvement of movement–based behaviors linked to the maladaptive daydreaming experience, I was expecting that the participants would describe some level of pacing. I did not expect to hear about such intense pacing and physical movements. Kyla’s description of her pacing echoed the experience described by Cassi, in the case study stage. In her description of her extensive pacing, Kyla, like
Cassi, asserted that she had worn a track in her carpet. In my mind, to wear a track into any surface would require a lot of repeated use. Stephen added more to the conversation of movement–based behaviors; “I certainly pull faces and chew on my fingers.”

(Stephen)

The behavior of pulling faces and chewing on his fingers is a new example to me, one that I have not previously encountered in relation to maladaptive daydreaming. This new example leads me to wonder if the participants have any awareness of their movements while engaged in their maladaptive daydreaming, and I was keen to learn more about the related kinesthetic features of the daydreaming experience.

The discussion of movement–based behaviors was the first conversation that the participants chose to share with each other on the forum. That conversation generated agreement from all the participants within the forum, with similar experiences being shared of their need for movement for themselves to be able to intensify their maladaptive daydreaming experience. Alongside movement–based behaviors, the participants also described music as a major factor in intensifying and sustaining their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. This is expressed in Drake’s following statement; “Music triggers it. I like running while listening to music because it triggers a more intense daydream.” (Drake)

In this above instance, Drake actively chooses to engage in his maladaptive daydreaming. Like Drake, Sierra supplied an insight into being able to use music to access her maladaptive daydreaming at any time. “I never go anywhere without my headphones so I can daydream while I walk.” (Sierra)

Maria supplied a different viewpoint on the need for kinesthetic factors, suggesting that such behaviors were essential for her to be able to access her maladaptive daydreaming. “... it is like my body was on autopilot which frees up my mind to wander.” (Maria)

The four examples supplied above, in relation to the kinesthetic features of maladaptive daydreaming reported by Kyla, Stephen, Drake and Maria, appear to me to be a necessary part of the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming. These four participants expressed that they utilized a kinesthetic factor to be able to heighten their maladaptive daydreaming experience. Their examples suggest that typical life events may have the potential to unlock their daydream experiences. For instance, a basic walk, physical activity or listening to their favorite music can start a hypnotic–like state, with them disappearing into their daydreams. Kyla provided an example of such an instance, along with the impact of her pacing behavior on her partner:
It stresses them out quite a lot. They do not understand that when I do my pacing and zone out that I am ok. They read my facial expressions and body language and believe that I am distressed... they asked me to stop pacing during a long session ... we had an argument I just do not know how to explain it to them.

(Kyla)

This statement shows to me that for Kyla there is a disconnect between how she feels, describing herself as feeling okay, and how those around her believe that she feels, described as distressed, based on her bodily expression. Diane shared a similar disconnect that she experienced in her childhood maladaptive daydreaming:

When I was a kid walking home from school, Mum would remark ... she could see me as I came down the street ... she could see my mouth moving and my weird jerky movement ... I thought it was less embarrassing for her to think I was mouthing a song than talking to imaginary people, so I never corrected her.

(Diane)

In this statement, Diane recognized her movement–based behaviors as unusual, and that this resulted in her not telling her mother about her maladaptive daydreaming experiences. From this statement, it appears to me that maladaptive daydreaming is a very personal experience, and that it can incite some level of embarrassment, leading to the occurrence still being private and not being disclosed to others.

The coding of the data in relation to the kinesthetic aspects of the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming experiences makes it unmistakable to me that this is an essential feature of maladaptive daydreaming for all the participants. These kinesthetic behaviors bring the participants a bittersweet encounter: both supplying a means of accessing and intensifying the daydreaming experience, and encouraging unusual movement–based behaviors, which looks strange to others.

**Forum Finding Two: Childhood Trauma**

The second finding generated through the forum coding process and already found in the existing literature is associated with some controversy. The association of childhood trauma and maladaptive daydreaming has been debated within the scientific research–base. As a result of this broader debate, I was interested in the appearance of this connection within the forum participants’ discussions. I was surprised that in the forum, five of the 16 participants that included the two case study participants, openly disclosed childhood trauma. I did not expect this level of disclosure, instead expecting that the participants would under-report rather than over-report their intimate personal
histories. Even though the forum was a confidential and private space, I did not predict that any of the participants would openly offer their insights into their experiences of childhood trauma in relation to their daydreaming. Sophia provided her reflections on her experience of childhood trauma, along with the composition of related maladaptive daydreaming; “While I was growing up ... I suffered sexual abuse ... I suffered sexual abuse again when I was 13 ... The daydreaming was a place where I could be me, but better, happier, prettier, surrounded by people who loved me.” (Sophia)

In her comment above, Sophia described her daydreaming as safe and protective, offering her the ability for a positive experience, compared with the childhood abuses that she had suffered. Sophia can create another reality, a much-improved reality in comparison with what happened to her in real-life at that time. Unlike Sophia, who already linked her maladaptive daydreaming to her trauma experiences, Stephen questioned the link between his childhood trauma and his maladaptive daydreaming; “I had a sexual abuse experience in childhood ... I often wonder the degree of impact of these events on my underlying issues ...” (Stephen)

It was surprising to me that Stephen had not previously explored how such a stressful childhood event might be an explanation for his disappearing into his daydreams. Sophia responded to Stephen’s query with a suggested explanation, almost providing Stephen with encouragement to emotionally accept the link of his trauma experience and his later maladaptive daydreaming; “I do not discredit its purpose as a response to post-traumatic stress.” (Sophia)

In the comment below, Patricia could relate to the other participants’ comments about their childhood trauma, and shared her thoughts about this; “I also had traumatic childhood experiences ... I call it ‘opting out.’ It is how I cope.” (Patricia)

I have previously heard of children who have been sexually abused using such a technique for drifting off, to be able to dissociate as a way of coping with the traumatic experience, so Patricia’s use of this as an explanation makes sense to me. I was beginning to comprehend that maladaptive daydreaming provides the participants with a safe place to process their emotions about past, current and future stressful situations. Diane supplied a deeply reflective comment about this on the forum about how she understood her maladaptive daydreaming experience:

Like by living my character’s trauma, I can process feelings of trauma and distress without getting caught up in them. (Diane)

Instead of retreating from the distressing memories of her childhood trauma, Diane uses her maladaptive daydreaming to directly address and process her difficult emotions.
This comment was the first instance within the forum data that suggests emotional processing by one of the forum participants. When asked about attributing difficult emotions to somebody else (her characters), potentially through dissociating, Diane disagreed that this was not the case for her; she was very much present within the process, observing the process as it unfolded.

**Forum Finding Three: Pathways to Maladaptive Daydreaming**

The coding of the forum data provided support for a third finding that had also been examined in the scientific literature-base. This third finding was that, in addition to trauma, there could be more pathways to the development of maladaptive daydreaming. Coding of the forum data enabled identification of four pathways to the development of maladaptive daydreaming: stress management (eating healthily, physical activity, problem solving, reducing triggers, healthy sleep and setting realistic goals), anxiety reduction (reducing caffeine, relaxation to reduce autonomic response, mindfulness, cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy), ADHD, and features of behavioral addiction. All four of these appeared throughout the coding of the forum data.

The coding of the forum data generated questions that then guided the participants’ conversation towards a discussion of their individual beliefs as to the cause of their maladaptive daydreaming. Each forum member held pre-existing beliefs about this, which they shared within the forum. Several of the participants explained their experiences using psychopathological terms, linking their daydreaming to mental health conditions. Kyla, for instance, supplied one of her explanations of her maladaptive daydreaming: “For me, daydreaming is an escape from the stresses of my life and from my anxiety... my dream friends make me feel better about my social anxiety.” (Kyla)

Kyla’s daydreaming enables her to experience social interactions in the haven of her fantasy world, unlike within the real-world, where she experiences anxiety and ongoing social difficulties. Stephen agreed, articulating that anxiety was also one of his explanations of his maladaptive daydreaming; “It is a coping mechanism for anxiety, so I procrastinate, and it has affected my academic pursuits.” (Stephen)

Both Kyla and Stephen described using their maladaptive daydreaming as a coping skill for anxiety within their real worlds but hold differing opinions as to the value of this. Kyla described her maladaptive daydreaming as a helpful coping skill, that provided her with comfort. Stephen expressed a different view, describing his maladaptive daydreaming as an unhelpful coping skill, and was one that affected him and prevented him from achieving his goals in his life.
Diane, on the other hand, expressed her belief that her maladaptive daydreaming was linked to her ADHD diagnosis, and she supplied the following statement about this; “My daydreaming comes and goes ... it is not so much at present. It is because I increased my ADHD medication.” (Diane)

Diane expressed that her fluctuating maladaptive daydreaming, which involved concentration struggles and elevated levels of anger, was currently managed by the taking of her ADHD medication, enabling her to keep some element of control over her maladaptive daydreaming experience.

While these participants linked their maladaptive daydreaming experiences to stress and mental health disorders, the coding of the various explanations offered from the participants showed an interesting lack of one potential explanation. Throughout the participants’ discussion of the different explanations, interestingly, none of them suggested they believed maladaptive daydreaming to be an independent mental health disorder.

A further explanation that some of the forum participants gave for their maladaptive daydreaming experiences was that of a connection with elevated levels of stress. Cassi provided insight into this with the following comment: “Going off in a haze ... make people think you were uninterested, while in fact it is because you are stressed and overwhelmed.” (Cassi)

Once again, the maladaptive daydreaming experience was expressed within the forum as an unhelpful coping skill. For Cassi, when she was already experiencing elevated levels of stress in her life, her maladaptive daydreaming negatively affects her real-world social interactions.

In direct contrast with Cassi’s viewpoint, Julietta made the link with positive stress. In the following comment she expressed this more positive view of her maladaptive daydreaming experiences during stressful points in her life:

*During stressful periods I would play out scenarios and as a practice for things that were coming up in my life. When I had to face the stressful situations, I had already rehearsed it in my head, therefore I feel much more capable of dealing with it.* (Julietta)

For Julietta, maladaptive daydreaming enables a harnessing of her daydreams, whereby she can role-play stressful situations prior to dealing with them in her real-life. She has been able to utilize her maladaptive daydreaming as a stress management tool, thus
enabling her some level of control within her real-life, and at such times her maladaptive daydreaming is not problematic for her.

The final explanation of an associated pathway was suggested by two of the participants, with their identification of a connection between their maladaptive daydreaming experiences and aspects of behavioral addiction. Angela’s comment about this was quite concise; “Agree that this style of daydreaming has an addictive quality, which really gets in the way.” (Angela)

Behavioral addiction is a condition whereby a person engages in a behavior repeatedly. The behaviors often cause harm, are compulsive and commonly are uncontrollable. Angela’s comment above suggested that her maladaptive daydreaming caused problems in her life. Stephen agreed with Angela, also presenting some aspects of his maladaptive daydreaming as linking to behavioral addiction. He supplied the following comment on this; “I must allow myself some time to daydream, as well, to feed the addiction.” (Stephen)

Behavioral addiction requires a person to repeatedly engage in the behavior, and thus they receive a pleasurable jolt of dopamine each time they engage in the behavior. Unfortunately, the brain becomes reliant on that behavior to receive the dopamine surge, and the behavior needs to occur ever increasingly to continue the cycle. The way that Stephen expressed how he ‘allowed’ his daydreaming does not support a theory of behavioral addiction.

Angela supplied a viewpoint that differed from that expressed by Stephen, in relation to the addictive nature of her maladaptive daydreaming experience:

*My daydreaming has addictive qualities, which really gets in the way when you need to concentrate on your studies … procrastination is a big side effect.* (Angela)

Angela struggles with being unable to control her maladaptive daydreaming experience at times, worsening the challenges of her academic pursuits. This perspective certainly fits with what would be expected in relation to maladaptive daydreaming involving aspects of behavioral addiction.

As has been outlined in this section, all the participants voiced beliefs about the origins of their maladaptive daydreaming, which differed from each other’s but none of which suggested maladaptive daydreaming was an independent mental health disorder. Instead, participants linked their maladaptive daydreaming to other mental health
disorders or to past trauma or explained it as a behavioral addiction or as a coping skill with stress.

**Forum Finding Four: The Maladaptive Aspects of Maladaptive Daydreaming**

The very term ‘maladaptive daydreaming’ defines the experience as a negative one. I had expected to find that the forum participants would confirm the relationship between their maladaptive daydreaming experiences and their associated struggles and challenges. This was certainly the case with the forum participants’ discussions of how their maladaptive daydreaming experience affected their daily functioning. This finding appeared across the whole forum six-week's period, and the negative aspects of maladaptive daydreaming were highlighted throughout all the forum coding stages.

Sierra described the cycle of becoming highly anxious and struggling with her studies, which increased her maladaptive daydreaming, and thus further interfered with her study attempts. Sierra expressed the effect of her maladaptive daydreaming on her studies in the following comment: “By the time I finished Uni, I was starting assignments after the due day even, constantly procrastinating by daydreaming, getting anxious, daydreaming to calm myself ... the cycle continued.” (Sierra)

For Sierra, maladaptive daydreaming offers a way of coping with the stress and anxieties in her life, but while at times a helpful strategy it equally and simultaneously leads to procrastination and missed study deadlines. The duality of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, whereby both negatives and positive outcomes are experienced, was evident to me.

One particularly interesting quote from Quinn showed her strength of emotion about the maladaptive nature of her daydreaming experience; “… There is a significant negative cost to all this that I am always aware of—procrastination and not achieving goals I have set for myself ... obsessively daydreaming of multiple worlds of make believe simply seems wrong and cowardly.” (Quinn)

The description of aspects of a participant’s behaviors as cowardly is confronting for me, but it shows Quinn’s insight into the size of negative impacts on her life due to her maladaptive daydreaming. I wonder if the other participants feel this way about their maladaptive daydreaming.

Angela supplied further insight about her maladaptive daydreaming experience by describing the bitter sweetness of a wonderful fantasy experience that brought her disillusionment and emptiness because it was not actually her real-life. She commented on the unexpected negative aspects of her maladaptive daydreaming in her following comment; “Sometimes I feel a sense of emptiness after daydreaming. Like I am not
satisfied ... you daydreamed of something wonderful and positive, but then come back to reality with the wish that whatever you daydreamed about was real.” (Angela)

The strong connection these participants feel with their daydream worlds was apparent through their forum discussions, and in the associated coding of these. The intensity of the maladaptive daydreaming experiences, the connection of daydreamer and their created lives with the emotional conflict resulting from this situation was described particularly emotionally by Diane in the following forum post:

*It has hit me unexpected and I cannot (do not want to) stop. I am weeping right now because one of my characters was reminiscing about a letter he wrote when he was suicidal several years ago. The feelings are just so overwhelming. I feel ridiculous with tears splashing down my cheeks over something that never happened.* (Diane)

Diane’s depth of sharing in the forum is an example of one of the participants providing me with a deep insight into their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. Diane’s comment closely resonates with the forum finding of maladaptive daydreaming being both a positive and negative—and a highly emotional—experience. For Diane, in this instance above, her maladaptive daydreaming links to a traumatic subject matter, which is suicide. This results in her feeling shame, shock and embarrassment about daydreaming about suicide. Such a strong subject matter is to me an unusual thing to daydream about, and I can understand that this elicits such a range of associated confronting emotions.

The forum data coding highlighted that maladaptive daydreaming leads to negative ramifications for some of the participants. For some, it prompts the need to engage in unusual physical actions during the daydreaming or affects their relationships. For others, the maladaptive daydreaming experiences were expressed as uncontrollable, causing an inability to focus, which undermined their academic pursuits.

I had expected the forum participants to express the negative aspects of their daydreaming but am surprised by the extent of the damage to their lives caused by it. Reading of their shame about the intensity of their maladaptive daydreaming, and their beliefs about wasting time through the experience, leads me to wonder once again about the daydreaming being both maladaptive and adaptive. Participants’ discussions of their daydreaming experiences suggest to me that it is not the daydreams that are harmful. Instead, it appears to me that it is the effects of the practice of daydreaming that is problematic, whereby the participants experience an emotional impact from their
daydreams. This emotional effect is what determines an adaptive or maladaptive outcome of this daydreaming.

**Forum Findings Not Identified in Other Research**

The next section presents two findings that have not previously been found in existing research, and they will be investigated in this section, supported by de-identified quotes from the forum participants. These findings are: (finding five) the adaptive aspects of maladaptive daydreaming; and the identification of a sixth and main finding; (finding six): The differential processing of emotions through the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

**Forum Finding Five: The Adaptive Aspects of Maladaptive Daydreaming**

Throughout the forum six-weeks’ period, the participants described using their daydreaming to effectively rehearse real-life stressful situations. Quinn explained her beliefs about this in her following statement; “Sometimes whatever issue I must face or task I must take part in, it turns into a real scene, where I must fill in the blanks ... This mostly happens because, I cannot have a conversation without a blueprint.” (Quinn)

Quinn’s description of engaging with her daydreaming experience as a safe practice environment for her real-life makes sense to me. A psychological strategy that I have earlier knowledge of is the use of visualization for positive wellbeing. The ability to explore, practice and play out scenarios, such as Quinn’s example, is a useful blueprint for real-life. Julietta similarly commented on the way that she used her maladaptive daydreaming as a blueprint for her life:

*During stressful periods, I would ‘play out’ scenarios and as a practice for things that were coming up in my life. When I had to face the stressful situation, I had already rehearsed in my head, therefore I felt much more capable to deal with it.* (Julietta)

Alongside the maladaptive daydreaming experience producing unproductivity, embarrassment and shame for some of these forum participants, they can also employ their maladaptive daydreaming as an adaptive tool. Participants’ shared experiences that the maladaptive daydreaming could at times be used in an adaptive manner. This finding raises further questions for me. For instance, for all the participants, maladaptive daydreaming had started in childhood, and I wonder what adaptive features have been present during that early stage of their maladaptive daydreaming. Have the participants utilized their maladaptive daydreaming experiences as an adaptive tool that protected them in childhood with the maladaptive daydreaming having transferred into
adulthood? Maria spoke about experiencing personal growth she had gained from her maladaptive daydreaming over the years:

*In terms of growth, I have noticed it has changed as I have aged, and I have come to realize that whatever the central theme is that I am focusing on is usually what I am lacking in real-life. As an example, I used my daydreaming scenarios that made me feel powerful and in control to compensate for feeling so out of control and powerless in the real-world. So, this really motivates me to go after what I am lacking and to really work on myself now that I am conscious of this. I have no desire to stop.* (Maria)

Maria has come to recognize the emotional growth that she experienced through her daydreaming. She can use her fantasy worlds to fulfill her real-life emotional needs, by focusing on what is lacking in her real-life. Her final comment that she does not wish to lose this adaptive ability resonates with me. Anyone with an effective emotional processing tool will, it might be presumed, treasure and value it.

Sierra supplied added insight into her maladaptive daydreaming experience, expressing the emotion of the experience; “I use daydreaming as a vehicle to feel intense emotions, like love and grief, that I do not feel in real-life. I often bring myself to tears in daydreams. In a way, I can enjoy the sadness because it is not real, and I do not suffer.” (Sierra)

This interesting quote specifically caught my attention, as Sierra described crying but not suffering, and feeling despite not emotionally engaging. Sierra experiences emotions that she lacks in her real-life, being able to enjoy these intense emotions without the pain being real.

For both Maria and Sierra, maladaptive daydreaming supports their emotional experiencing, supplying a means of fulfilling parts of their real lives that they express as lacking. I do wonder why the participants are experiencing their emotions through their daydreams. I am aware that some of the participants have described childhood trauma, mental health challenges and social difficulties. This data does not supply insight into whether those participants who use their maladaptive daydreaming for emotional processing might be explained by other factors.

Throughout the forum period, the participants wove their discussions backwards and forwards around the contrasting aspects of their maladaptive daydreaming. Some expressed their experience as intense and uncontrollable, focusing on the negative aspects. In contrast, the participants who described a higher level of functioning
presented a more balanced opinion about their maladaptive daydreaming. Certainly, they recognize the negative aspects, but also relish the positive aspects of the experience. These participants use the daydreaming for processing purposes, to practice and connect with their much-loved characters and worlds, in a place where they can safely experience and practice their emotions. These were positive features that have been found by the coding of the participants’ data.

Participants who noted the positive aspects of maladaptive daydreaming did so in plain terms. Sarah, for instance, simplified the positive aspects of her maladaptive daydreaming experience in her following statement; “I love the daydreaming, so I have never bothered trying to really control it.” (Sarah)

Sarah sees no reason to try to intervene in her maladaptive daydreaming experience; instead, she enjoys the experience, receives help from it and depicts it in positive terms. Some of the other participants also recognized that their maladaptive daydreaming had given them positive outcomes as well. For instance, Drake described harnessing the creative benefits that came from his maladaptive daydreaming:

I have always been an imaginative person. Always enjoying art, design, and visual communication. At some point I started drifting off to visualize things in my head ... I consider myself artistic due to the daydreaming, though I am not an artist. (Drake)

Sarah, who had described her daydreaming as a positive experience, also shared her view of herself as a high functioning daydreamer in the next comment:

I am a multi-tasking daydreamer ... I have several permanent storylines that I build, or I revisit. I will often develop long complicated daydreams from one interaction throughout the day. About six years ago I decided to write my stories down, it has helped me to focus. It is weird because the daydreaming has given me a creative outlet in my writing. (Sarah)

As my coding became increasingly conceptual and theoretical, the duality of the emotional aspects of maladaptive daydreaming—that it held both maladaptive and adaptive emotional aspects—became more evident. For some of the participants, maladaptive daydreaming brings adaptive emotional experiences, for others, it brings maladaptive emotional experiences. Whether adaptive or maladaptive, emotional processing is being helped through the practice of engaging in maladaptive daydreaming.
In the following statement, Sarah supplied a further example. Maladaptive daydreaming gave her the ability to draw on and engage in her creative abilities, which enabled her to be able to process her emotions; “It is weird because the daydreaming has given me a creative outlet in my writing, and the writing has given me an outlet for any negative emotions I am having.” (Sarah). Instead of processing directly through her daydreaming experience, Sarah can resolve issues by writing about her daydream worlds and the associated stories. She uses this creative writing to process feelings that might be too overwhelming to process in her real-life.

A final adaptive aspect that some of the participants explored was the ability to link maladaptive daydreaming to the associated need for movement, being able to engage in physical activity, thus getting the benefit of exercise, along with the associated reward of the daydream experience. Drake described his experience of this adaptation in the following comment: “I usually multi-task it with other things. I like running while listening to music because it triggers a more intense daydream.” (Drake). Drake’s noted ability to intensify his daydream through kinesthetic aspects raises the question of whether Drake experiences the benefits of emotional gain as well as of exercise? At this stage of my analysis, the answer to this question was becoming more comprehensible to me at that time. I was beginning to understand that maladaptive daydreaming brings adaptive benefits.

Four of the five findings examined so far—and the forum data from which they were generated—support and replicate existing findings from within the literature: (finding one) kinesthetic factors, (finding two) childhood trauma, (finding three) mediated pathways, and (finding four) maladaptive aspects. The fifth was a new finding that had not appeared previously in existing literature: (finding five) the adaptive aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming.

In addition to those five findings, the coding of the forum data lead to the identification of a sixth and main finding. This main finding was also suggested through the findings of the first research study, the case study stage. This main finding is that emotional processing is occurring via maladaptive daydreaming in separate ways: (finding six) either through a pathway of emotional protection or a pathway of emotional growth. This main finding is a fresh finding, and the two aspects will be fully described in the next section.
Forum Finding Six: The Differential Processing of Emotions Through the Maladaptive Daydreaming Experience: Main Finding

This section presents the main finding from the forum data analysis. I will outline the way in which maladaptive daydreaming is a method for the participants to process their emotions, with supportive evidence through participant quotes, for the theory that maladaptive daydreamers experienced this daydreaming for differential emotional reasons.

The aim of a grounded theory study is to find one overriding theory that supplies explanation of all the data. Throughout all the stages of my coding of the forum data, this one main finding was apparent. This main finding represented the ways that each of the participants experienced their maladaptive daydreaming for differing emotional processing reasons. With the coding of the forum data highlighting the emotional aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, I asked the forum participants: ‘What are your thoughts on how emotions are involved within your maladaptive daydreaming experience?’

In response to this question, Diane distinctly expressed that she used her daydreaming as a way of processing some of her earlier trauma:

_I feel like I use my daydreaming as an emotional processing. Like by living my characters’ traumas, I can process feelings of trauma and distress without getting caught up in them ... I think I have been doing that for a long time by making up other people to have these feelings for me and they work through them. My daydreams become very intensely emotional at that time._ (Diane).

Diane processes her emotions at arm’s length, being an observer of the process. This enables her to work through some difficult and challenging events that had occurred in her early life. The maladaptive daydreaming experience protects her from this processing becoming too intense for her to handle; maladaptive daydreaming makes processing, and later coping with this trauma manageable for her.

Maria supplied added support for the idea of using her maladaptive daydreaming in emotional processing:

_Emotions shape everything to do with my daydreaming. If I am feeling a particularly strong emotion, I will usually daydream as a way of processing that e.g., if I am overwhelmingly angry or frustrated, my daydreams become a little more aggressive or violent, which is completely different to who I am in real-life, so maybe it is an emotional outlet._ (Maria)
In her real-life, Maria is unable to express emotions in an angry, violent or aggressive manner, but she is able to incorporate these emotions into her daydreaming experience. Similarly, Quinn described her daydreaming experience as a way of forcing emotions that she was not normally able to express, or even access:

_Many times, the daydreams are emotions that I want to feel but cannot in my regular life. Things like feeling vindicated (which is not always possible in real-life), lauded behind my back (again something I will not be able to know or feel), rising above an experience._ (Quinn)

In this quote Quinn raised the thought-provoking point that real-life may not actually provide a person with the opportunities to experience a range of situations or related emotions. The daydreaming experience enables her to explore her emotional repertoire without getting caught up in the situation. It can be suggested that modern life does not enable us to experience our entire range of emotions, as expressing some emotions, such as aggression, may be inappropriate within our society.

In the following statement, Sierra further supported the use of her maladaptive daydreaming experience as a way of her feeling previously unavailable emotions:

*I use daydreaming as a vehicle to feel intense emotions, like love and grief, that I do not feel in real-life. I often bring myself to tears in the daydreams. In a way, I can enjoy the sadness because it is not real, and I do not suffer._ (Sierra)

Sierra’s quote above described that, without her daydreaming, she might not be able to access emotions such as love or grief, two particularly intense and challenging emotions. Her final statement above leads me to wonder how it would feel not to have loved or not to be able to grieve the loss of a loved one.

For some of the participants, the maladaptive daydreaming experience supplies a positive practice environment for their emotional processing and enables them to role-play how they might feel in demanding situations. Some participants, however, appear to use their maladaptive daydreaming as a way of escaping the challenges of real-life emotional situations. Instead of processing in real-life, they use their maladaptive daydreaming to process their emotions within their daydream experience. This escape from real-life stress can be found in the following comment given by Sophia:

*I have always referred to it as disappearing rather than daydreaming. My current experience of it is mellow and I can break off and come back easier currently. It is worse when I am stressed, where it can still take up a good*
amount of time. When I am busy and happy, I can go quite a while without it.

(Sophia)

Sophia’s maladaptive daydreaming is currently manageable, and this directly correlates with her current low levels of stress. Once her stress increases, so does the pull of the daydreaming. When feeling in control of her life, and is coping with her real-life stress, and her emotions are level, she no longer needs her maladaptive daydreaming experience as much. Sophia escapes from real-life stress by disappearing into her daydreaming, thus avoiding emotional processing at that time.

I was coming to understand through the forum data coding process that the participants were using their maladaptive daydreaming for distinct reasons related to their emotional needs. This emotional coping through their imagination is always available to them. Cassi summarizes this in the following comment: “When stress is under control, there is little emotional need for the daydreaming.” (Cassi)

The coding of the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming experience discussions highlighted a range of different emotionally related reasons for their maladaptive daydreaming. Maladaptive daydreaming is a way of processing earlier trauma; a stress management tool that helps to reduce high anxiety levels; or an emotional coping skill, fulfilling an unmet need. Jessica supplied her insight into this, summing up the overall experience of maladaptive daydreaming in her following statement:

*If the daydreaming is your Band-Aid, your one glass of wine that turns into ten, your crack cocaine to distract from the fact that you have no prospects and are living in a halfway house, then it will be near impossible to quit. Why? Well, what is maladaptive daydreaming? It is an enjoyable activity that happens to be addictive, yes, but at its core—it is related to our emotions. It is no coincidence that maladaptive daydreaming has a high comorbidity rate with multiple DSM diagnoses. Because to people with mental health conditions or with unmet fundamental emotional need et cetera, maladaptive daydreaming can be some light in the darkness. If you still do not understand, ask yourself this, to be a completely happy and fulfilled person with a good support network, what would be the pull of maladaptive daydreaming to them? (Barely anything.)* (Jessica)

Jessica’s statement above supports this main finding and simultaneously articulated a summary of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. In her statement, Jessica expressed the addictive nature of the experience. She relates maladaptive daydreaming to the person’s current emotional state. Someone struggling emotionally
needs maladaptive daydreaming to fulfil their emotional needs. Someone whose emotional needs are being fulfilled within the real-world have no requirement to process their emotions through their maladaptive daydreaming experience. It was with the above quote that I was aware that one of the participants had suggested the theory that I had begun to develop from my extensive coding across both study’s data (case studies and the forum).

Jessica’s words encapsulate the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* that appear from this grounded theory research study. Additionally, Jessica’s questioning of whether a person whose emotional regulation is healthy would need maladaptive daydreaming provided me with an idea for future research exploring whether real-life emotional processing strategies affect a person’s need or desire for such intense maladaptive daydreaming experiences.

In the final stages of coding of the forum data, I became interested in testing my theory with the participants. I was also interested as a final stage of the coding to explore the participants’ emotional lives outside of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. When posted and shared on the forum for the participants, the participants agreed with the suggested grounded theory. They agreed that differential emotional processing was at the core of their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. They understood the differential aspect to the theory, that the experience could be either maladaptive or adaptive. They reported experiencing emotional growth from processing their emotions first within their maladaptive daydreaming environment, prior to the real-world. Alternatively, some used the maladaptive daydreaming experience to receive help from a fully protective environment for processing their emotions. The maladaptive daydreaming experience provides the participants with a means of coping with their emotional processing needs. Diane expressed her understanding of the suggested theory in her following statement; “I do not feel that there is one single why... There are probably innumerable ‘causes’... It is all about the emotions!” (Diane)

The grounded theory had appeared across both studies. The coding of the two case study participants’ interview data gave an early indicator of what would later become the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*. Through an analysis of Diane’s interview data, Diane undergoes emotional growth through experiencing many fantasy lives. Further, I believe that Cassi, experiences maladaptive daydreaming because it provides her with a way of safely filling in the emotional gaps left in her life. Interview analysis suggested that both case study participants experienced maladaptive daydreaming, but for different emotional reasons.
This point of interest was recorded in the coding while I then progressed to the second study stage: the forum study.

I aimed to carry out the data collection and coding processes with this second study (forum), without any pre-existing biases in mind. I drew on reflexivity processes and tried to enable a theory to be constructed from the participants’ data and from my coding. I was mindful to ensure that I also tried to challenge the theory by basing the final question in the forum on the participants’ emotional lives beyond their maladaptive daydreaming. If the theory were inconsistent with the participants’ experiences and the phenomenon, I would expect the participants to comment about their emotional stability outside of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. This was not the case, and all the participants described struggling with their emotions in their real lives. Some experienced emotional challenges involving elevated levels of anger, and others described experiencing elevated levels of associated anxiety and low mood, struggling at times to express their emotions, and often finding themselves avoiding emotional situations. Stephen described his emotional life in the real-world in his following description; “I am socially inept talking about emotions and expressing emotions and ideas has also been something that has made me frustrated with myself.” (Stephen)

I can understand that being unable to express one’s emotions must be highly frustrating. Equally, to recognize one’s ability to experience emotions within daydreams would worsen such frustration. The inability to transfer this skill of experiencing emotions within daydreams to the real-world would also bring its own challenges. At other times, experiencing elevated levels of anxiety and anger in real-life can become problematic in the real-world. The pull of the daydreaming and the ability to develop a story, to be able to choose which emotions to feel, is in direct contrast to real-life. These participants’ words and explanations are powerful in explaining the draw of the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

The coding of the forum participants’ comments about their emotional lives outside of their maladaptive daydreaming enabled the theory to be articulated and grounded. The participants do struggle with their real-world emotions. They use their maladaptive daydreaming experiences to process their emotions and meet their unmet emotional needs. This is so across both the case study and the forum stages of this research, with the theory appearing across the data collected from both research studies.
Discussion of the Theory Development Across the Two Studies, Associated Reflexivity and the Theoretical Sampling Process

This thesis has involved two research studies. The first of these was two case studies, involving two maladaptive daydreaming participants. The second study involved a six-week forum, through which 16 participants discussed their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. The two research studies were undertaken separately and were also coded and analyzed separately. For the whole thesis, a constructivist grounded theory approach was adopted, with the aim of co-constructing a theory that would explain the participants’ experiences of their maladaptive daydreaming.

The findings from the case study stage of this research study were used to initially develop directions for the first questions presented to participants in the forum stage. It should be noted that the later questions presented to the forum were constructed from the coding of the discussions within the forum. There was a balance involved in the analysis of the findings, with the need for further development of the findings from the case study stage, whilst also focusing on enabling the findings to be constructed from the forum stage, and eventually theoretically combining these findings into one main theory of maladaptive daydreaming.

This section provides a reminder of the main findings from both studies, then presents the theoretical combination of the findings from both studies into the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming. Finally, this section also notes the ways that theoretical sampling was involved across the two studies and the ways that reflexivity was incorporated during the construction process of the grounded theory. I conclude this section by explaining how I theoretically combined the two studies, and how I constructed and defined the theory.

Coding of the two case study participants’ interview data, plus the forum data, highlighted one overarching main finding. This main finding was that both participants shared an emotional processing connection through their maladaptive daydreaming, although participants experienced this connection in diverse ways. In the case studies, Diane experiences emotional growth, whilst Cassi is filling in emotional gaps at times in her life. Both participants are therefore having their emotional processing needs met by their maladaptive daydreaming experiences.

Consequently, the main finding from the forum stage of this research study showed that all 16 of the forum participants experience their maladaptive daydreaming for differential emotional reasons, with the experience being either maladaptive or adaptive. They either grow from processing their emotions through their maladaptive
daydreaming or use the experience as a protective environment in which to safely process their emotions.

Theoretical sampling, an important feature of a constructivist grounded theory research study, denotes the researcher conducting their initial research and associated coding before then moving on to a new group of participants, enabling the data to progress (Charmaz, 2015; Lazenbatt & Elliott, 2005). This research study incorporated theoretical sampling by recruiting a new group of participants for the forum research stage. This new group of participants explored their own unique maladaptive daydreaming experiences, while also enabling the group to explore the findings that had appeared from the case study stage. As a means of further answering the questions raised in the case study stage, the two case study participants were also incorporated into the second study (forum). The unanswered questions from the case study analysis were incorporated into the forum questioning, for the forum participant insight. The forum stage was an opportunity for the participants to challenge the case study stage findings. I was able to purposefully seek data that might refute these findings, whilst also generating new data.

I moved iteratively between the coding outcomes from the two studies, aiming to reach theoretical saturation whereby no new data would appear from the data (Moghaddam, 2006). With the main theory from both studies that explained all the data, I was then sure that the research had been a transparent process and that I had co-constructed a grounded theory, reaching a point of saturation whereby all coding was explained by the one over-riding theory.

The reflexivity process involved in defining and naming the theory was an important one to me, as I wanted to ensure that the theory captured all the findings from across the two studies (McGhee et al., 2007).

During the case study stage’s coding, I experienced some anxiety about the potential development of a theory of maladaptive daydreaming. I recall asking myself questions, such as: ‘How am I going to develop a theory from just two case studies?’; ‘Am I expecting myself to develop a theory from the two case studies?’; ‘What if the emerging theory does not translate across from the case study stage to the forum stage?’, and ‘What if I skew the second study to fit the theory?’ My intention during the case study stage was not yet to construct a theory. Instead, it was to show findings that I could then use as a basis for the beginning questions for the forum study. As I progressed the coding stages of the case study data and undertook extensive member checking—further constructing the findings—my confidence in the findings increased.
was protective of the case study stage’s findings, but still amenable to it changing when the research moved into the forum stage. I was also aware that added theories might appear from the overall research study and was curious about the findings to come from the forum.

From the outset of the forum study period, all the participants were invested in supplying valuable insights into their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming. Fourteen of the participants had been waiting for at least six months for the research study to begin, as they had expressed their interest for the case study stage but had not been selected to take part. They had then shown their interest in taking part in the second study (forum) and waited for ethics approval for the forum stage. This motivation was evident from the first day of the forum. The participants were friendly and polite towards one another, often offering supportive strategies and solutions.

Initially, forum activity focused on responding directly to my research questions, but as rapport was built the participants began to interact, asking each other questions and encouraging one another. This presented an interesting dynamic for my coding, as I needed to incorporate the findings from the case study stage, design and pose questions based on forum coding as it was happening and enable the participants to guide the direction of their discussions. However, despite such challenges, the thoroughness of my coding and the participants’ willingness to supply insightful responses ensured that the main finding was constructed from both sets and stages of the case study and forum data.

As I reached theoretical saturation, my confidence in the constructed theory increased. No added information appeared from my further questions and associated coding. Even when I tried to refute the theory, the participants supplied further data in support of the main theory.

It was at that stage that I needed to develop a name for the constructed theory, that encapsulated my understanding of the participants’ experiences of maladaptive daydreaming. I needed a theory name that explained my understanding of the data, and the processes involved in the participants’ maladaptive daydreaming experiences. Putting my understanding of the constructed theory into words was anxiety provoking for me. As a result of my coding, I understood that the participants in both studies were experiencing emotional processing via their maladaptive daydreaming. For some, they did this through emotional growth, for others through emotional protection. The participants were able to switch between these two pathways as needed.
I considered terming the emerging theory as the *Differential Emotional Needs Fulfilment Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, but after two weeks of trying this definition, it still did not sit well for me. Some participants appeared unaware that their maladaptive daydreaming was supplying an unmet emotional need fulfilment, only seeing their maladaptive daydreaming as a negative in their lives. I wanted a definition that was more neutral and did not suggest a purely positive outcome. I was mindful that emotional processing could often be a painful process and is not always an enjoyable experience. I also wanted a useable name for the theory, and the *Differential Emotional Needs Fulfilment Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* was overly wordy. I determined that such a wordy name was not usable. I wanted to express a neutral definition of the theory, and in an easily articulated and scientific definition. I searched online for terminology for ‘emotional fulfilment,’ ‘emotional growth,’ and ‘emotional processing.’ Neither ‘emotional fulfilment’ nor ‘emotional growth’ fit the theory, as they both suggested positive outcomes. Exploration into ‘emotional processing’ supplied theoretical explanation, that encapsulated both the maladaptive and adaptive way emotional processing could occur (Rachman, 1980), and supplied psychological substance to the theory.

A final important aspect of defining the theory was the incorporation of the differential aspects of the experience. Through both the case study and the forum stages of this research, it was explicit that both the emotional growth and the emotional protection offered by the maladaptive daydreaming experience enabled emotional processing. For some of the participants this was maladaptive, whilst for others it was adaptive. As such, I named the theory the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, which I believed encapsulates the findings and insights constructed from both stages of this research study.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a description of the range of findings generated from the forum analysis, supported by quotes illustrating new and widely accepted findings. It has also explained how this grounded theory of maladaptive daydreaming was co-constructed from across the two studies. It has supplied quotes from the case study and forum participants to illustrate and articulate the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*.

The next chapter will further explain these findings and will particularly examine the key research theories for the idea of using emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming, in relation to the broader body of literature. It will conclude...
with a discussion of the significance of this constructed theory, alongside acknowledgement and consideration of the research limitations and future opportunities.
Chapter Seven: Discussion

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory research is to explore the experience of maladaptive daydreaming from a participant perspective to construct a theory that will provide an understanding of maladaptive daydreaming. Two research studies (case studies and forum) supplied the data from which the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* was constructed.

The current chapter aims to answer this study’s three research questions. These research questions are the constructed results of the data analysis stages of each of the two studies of this thesis: (1) ‘How is control relevant to the maladaptive daydreaming experience?’, (2) ‘How are emotions related to the maladaptive daydreaming experience?’, and, (3) ‘What might explain the maladaptive daydreaming experience?’

This chapter addresses reflexivity considerations and discusses the study’s major findings regarding maladaptive daydreaming. At times, this discussion’s language has been written in the first and the third person, with reflexivity in mind. This chapter also includes a discussion of the study’s main finding: that of the involvement of emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming. The chapter concludes with a review of the limitations of the study, areas for future research, and a summary.

The *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, proposed in the current research, is a multi-dimensional theory that comprises six dimensions: (a) the need for kinesthetic behaviors to be able to access and intensify the maladaptive daydreaming, (b) the link of maladaptive daydreaming to childhood trauma, (c) the different pathways that might enable maladaptive daydreaming to develop, (d) the maladaptive aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, (e) the adaptive aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, and, (f) the processing of emotions through the maladaptive daydreaming experience in differential ways. These factors are pivotal to the processing of emotions through maladaptive daydreaming and thus constitute the core features of the proposed theory.

The Processing of Emotions in Differential Ways Through Maladaptive Daydreaming

This following section presents an analysis of the key features of the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*. The main concept underpinning this theory is that the maladaptive daydreaming experience is an alternate, non-traditional method of accessing emotional processing. This idea suggests that the process of engaging in maladaptive daydreaming can at times lead to either emotional
growth or emotional protection, which then results in emotional processing through the maladaptive daydreaming experience.

The emotional growth pathway of the theory proposes that maladaptive daydreaming provides a practice environment for further developing an emotional skillset that can be applied within real-life. This emotional skillset includes, for instance, compassion and empathy and thus enhances emotional intelligence. The idea of maladaptive daydreaming as an emotional growth pathway is a new one, not explored within the existing scientific literature on maladaptive daydreaming to date.

In contrast with emotional growth, the emotional protection pathway of the theory offers that fantasy can be used to provide emotional protection, by focusing on what is lacking in the real-world to safely fulfil emotional needs through the daydream experience. This enables new perspectives to be formed through the emotional experiencing of many fantasy worlds. The experience thus becomes a source of protection from difficult emotional situations, enabling the processing of emotions from within the safety of the experience. For instance, some of the participants across the two studies were able to use their maladaptive daydreaming to process earlier trauma, aggressive feelings and social difficulties. Maladaptive daydreaming protects them from this processing becoming too intense to handle, it enables their emotions to be manageably processed, and supplies an avenue through which they can approach and experience difficult emotions. Figure 1, that follows, visually depicts the way in which the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming can be conceptualized.

To put the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming into words, the following outline of the theory in Figure 1 is provided. The top of the model shows an existing pre-disposition for fantasizing. This means that their daydreaming is very different to normal daydreaming, in that they engage in daydreaming for long periods of time, experience vivid and absorptive daydreams, and often include kinesthetic features, such as movement or music, alongside the daydreaming. The model then depicts a range of reasons for maladaptive daydreaming that were discovered through this thesis’s exploration of the phenomenon. Reasons identified include social difficulty; having comorbid mental health conditions such as ADHD, OCD, MDD and anxiety; having experienced trauma; having experienced loss within life; tapping into creativity; for enjoyment; for boredom, when highly stressed and when goals were not met within daily life. The model then includes kinesthetic behaviors and a function of behavioral addiction, whereby one or both behavioral
(kinesthetic or behavioral addiction) is involved. Then the maladaptive daydreaming experience occurs, with vivid daydreams that are highly detailed, very personal and tailored to the person’s emotional needs at that time, with the daydreaming occurring for a large period.

The resultant outcome is either emotional protection or emotional growth occurring, with the person being able to access as needed. Their emotional needs are met through the maladaptive daydreaming, where their emotions are processed through the two pathways.

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**Figure 1:** Visual Depiction of the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming.*

**Interpretation of the ‘Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming’**

The *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, as visually depicted above in Figure 1, proposes a complex interaction between factors that result in one of two types of emotional processing outcomes. From the construction of this theory three main topics are identified; these require interpretation in this section. These three main topic categories, with associated sub-categories, are explained and interpreted in this section. These topics are: structure, denoting the components within the theory (including the composition and functions of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming); perception, the way in which emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming is interpreted by maladaptive daydreamers, including awareness and flexibility of the process; and, outcomes, which is the way in which
emotional processing transpires as a result of maladaptive daydreaming, including both favorable and unfavorable outcomes. Consideration of these topic areas includes supporting evidence from the data collected and analyzed in the current study, along with reflexive commentary and consideration of extant literature and theory.

**Structure: Components Within the Maladaptive Daydreaming Experience**

A deep level of comprehension is needed to understand the global structure of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. This understanding includes recognizing more than what is already known about maladaptive daydreaming.

Within psychology, several types of theories can help in clarifying the structural organization of a phenomenon. Such theories aid with making predictions to generate related research ideas. There has been much research conducted into better explaining the structure of the maladaptive daydreaming experience; through this research, particular characteristics have been identified and supported within the literature. Known characteristics that have been identified have included: (a) interference with life (Abu-Rayya et al., 2019a), (b) associated psychopathology (Schupak & Rosenthal, 2009), (c) social difficulty (Goleman, 1987), (d) extensive immersion into the daydreaming (Hartmann et al., 2002), and, (e) shame feelings (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Understanding the overall structure of maladaptive daydreaming requires a more comprehensive lens, one that involves investigating beyond these acknowledged descriptions. In addition to these characterizations, the inner composition of the maladaptive daydreaming experience is also worth considering. The following section therefore provides consideration of the inner composition of maladaptive daydreaming, with discussion based on reflexive analysis of this current study’s participants’ perspectives and incorporated insights from relevant extant literature.

**The Internal Composition of Maladaptive Daydreaming**

An area of investigation that has attracted limited investigation to date relates to the internal composition of maladaptive daydreaming. It is still unknown at this stage whether maladaptive daydreaming requires specific thematic content to be involved within the experience. Maladaptive daydreams that involve thematic organization might be a legitimate mechanism, to enable a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. An example of a thematic structure is a daydream that involves a storyline about confidence and attractiveness. Internal thematic contents might provide further guidance beyond what is already known about maladaptive daydreaming (Somer, 2002), particularly in relation to emotional processing outcomes. For instance, a maladaptive daydream that
involves the theme of power may be a way of expressing a need to feel valuable. Such a need might be difficult to fulfil within the real-world.

One of the forum participants, Maria gave an example of such a need, with an insight about her maladaptive daydreams that results in emotional processing outcomes.

... I have come to realize that whatever the central theme is that I am focusing on, is what I am lacking in real-life ... I used daydreaming scenarios that made me feel powerful and in control to compensate for feeling so out of control and powerless in the real-world. (Maria)

For Maria, the adaptive ability of using themes within her fantasy worlds to fulfil real-world emotional requirements gives her both protection and growth-related emotional processing outcomes. The maladaptive daydreams protect her from feelings of helplessness within the real-world, while at the same time it was able to develop an understanding of a fundamental need that was not at that time met within her real-life, leading her towards increased insight into her emotional state.

Thematic content within the maladaptive daydreaming experience was also positioned as imperative for emotional processing outcomes by another forum participant, Quinn. In the following example, real-life was offered as unable to provide the necessary opportunities to experience certain situations and related emotions. “... daydreams are emotions that I want to feel but cannot in my regular life. Things like feeling vindicated (which is not always possible in real-life) ...” (Quinn)

Throughout both studies, the thematic content of daydreams was highly important to the participants. The participants often reported three selves: fantasy self, being related to in terms of perfectionism; ideal self, referred to in relation to high standards; and, ought self, referred to in relation to how things should be. By changing the perspective of characters within the content of the daydreams, participants are able to determine different emotional outcomes. Diane commented on such a content change: “But I am not always the same side of the conversation. One day, I might daydream one conversation, and the next day, I might replay the same story from a unique perspective”. (Diane)

Bybee et al. (1997) offered the idea that perspective changes within the daydream experience altered emotional outcomes. Through a series of experiments, Bybee and colleagues explored perspective changes between the three selves. Their findings showed that the fantasy and ideal selves were less helpful perspectives in relation to positive psychological wellbeing outcomes than was the ought self, which
was found to be the most adaptive to such outcomes. Knowing the usefulness of a change of perspective towards the ought self, for example, can be a way of applying such knowledge to improved maladaptive daydreams, ones that provide emotional growth.

Another study that supported this idea of thematic content as an important aspect of emotional processing outcomes, through maladaptive daydreaming, was carried out by Delaney et al. (2010). They identified that the more contextually different participants’ daydreams were, the greater associated memory degradation was, resulting in forgetting. Although not linked to emotional processing outcomes, that study contributed the fascinating theory that content changes within the daydreams in their study resulted in a change occurring within the real-world context—that is, poorer memory encoding. Memory degradation resulting from maladaptive daydreaming might be assumed to be a negative outcome. However, there are certain circumstances when the encoding of memories leads to forgetting, such as in trauma situations. It might be that maladaptive daydreaming is a way of being able to change daydream themes and context, in order to forget difficult memories.

It is proposed that the thematic content within maladaptive daydreaming can play a role in emotional processing outcomes. Further evidence of the way in which thematic content can be involved in emotional outcomes in relation to maladaptive daydreaming has come from the work of Somer et al. (2019b), in exploring maladaptive daydreamers’ artwork. They reported a richer palette of color and more of a positive perspective for the inner maladaptive daydreaming world within the themes of the artworks. The real-world on the other hand, was represented within the considered artworks as malfunctioning and empty. This example suggests that people deliberately use maladaptive daydreaming to harness thematic content, and thus results in successful processing of difficult emotions through their maladaptive daydreaming.

Two questions remain following a synthesis of components considered in this section, with regards to emotional processing; these questions require future consideration. They are: ‘does emotional thematic content represent the true state of a person, or does this become distorted within maladaptive daydreaming?’ and, ‘can thematic content be used to move a person from emotional protection towards emotional growth?’ Further exploration of these questions is encouraged within future studies into emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming.

Understanding the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming might enable thematic content to be incorporated into even more
successful emotional processing. Through the emotional protection pathway, understanding themes around the specific protection being offered—in relation to emotions and the filling of distinct gaps—might better facilitate emotional processing. Through the emotional growth pathway, an understanding of the daydream themes that relate emotional pain resolution, perspective gaining and the development of empathy and compassion, as a result of the daydreaming, might also better enable this emotional processing within the experience. Increasing insight into any experience holds value, particularly in relation to emotional processing needs (Rachman, 1980).

As a result of this consideration into the way in which thematic content is involved in maladaptive daydreaming, it is therefore suggested that further research is required, exploring the thematic content of maladaptive daydreams. Knowledge of the content of such daydreams, and the ways in which these contents fulfil emotional processing needs, is highly valuable. This knowledge can prove useful for applying thematic content from the experience, towards meeting emotional processing needs, either in the real-world or within maladaptive daydreaming. The next section supplies exploration into the global function of maladaptive daydreaming.

**The Function of Maladaptive Daydreaming**

For this section, the term *function* relates to an element that relies on another factor or factors. Identifying how something works and developing meaning that explains human experience are among the key roles of psychology. As such, consideration into the function of maladaptive daydreaming is included in this section, through two subsections addressing the acknowledged functions of maladaptive daydreaming and contemporary representations of the function of maladaptive daydreaming.

This research study’s findings show that previously acknowledged descriptions of the function of maladaptive daydreaming are apparent within analysis of the study participants’ recounts as well as in the extant literature. Newly identified functional representations of maladaptive daydreaming, involving emotional processing, are considered in a later separate section of this chapter, entitled ‘Contemporary Representations of the Function of Maladaptive Daydreaming’.

**Acknowledged Functions of Maladaptive Daydreaming.**

For some of the participants in this research study, trauma was an explanatory function of their maladaptive daydreaming. Alongside using the explanation of trauma, however, the participants supplied their individual beliefs about the function of their maladaptive daydreaming.
The participants used psychopathological terms to explain their maladaptive daydreaming, such as social anxiety, ADHD, OCD and MDD. Beyond mental health explanations, some of the forum participants explained their maladaptive daydreaming in relation to high stress levels. When used in describing the role of stress, this was at times expressed as an unhelpful function, often taking over life. Some, in contrast, described using maladaptive daydreaming as a practice environment, where they could rehearse stressful situations in their minds, leading to an ability to be able to deal with the real-world situation. Although different explanations were offered by the participants for their maladaptive daydreaming, there was no suggestion that it was an independent psychiatric disorder. The final explanation provided from the forum discussions, was the viewpoint that the function of their maladaptive daydreaming was to reduce distress that resulted from life, through the addictive nature of the experience.

Two participants in the forum study expressed their opinion that maladaptive daydreaming alleviated psychological distress, through the associated behavioral addiction activities. Angela and Stephen both agreed that their maladaptive daydreaming included addictive qualities. Angela found her maladaptive daydreaming to be uncontrollable, often getting in the way of life pursuits, such as resultant struggles with studying. Angela’s viewpoint certainly fits the idea of behavioral addiction, whereby a person is compelled to engage in the addictive behavior. Stephen, although he agreed with Angela on the related difficulties, commented on the ways that he drip-fed the daydream addiction. He implied that he set periods of time for maladaptive daydreaming. Stephen’s explanation of being able to choose whether to engage in the maladaptive daydreaming experience contradicts the way addictions are known to work. His view challenges the idea of maladaptive daydreaming being a behavioral addiction and suggest that while there may be aspects of addiction within the experience, addiction may not be a full explanation. This view was summarized by the participant Diane in the following comment: “I do not feel that there is one single why ... There are innumerable causes.” (Diane)

A variety of functional explanations have also been explored within the literature. Indeed, attempts have been made at understanding the function of maladaptive daydreaming, with an assortment of suggestions offered. Initially, trauma was posited as a functional explanation for maladaptive daydreaming (Somer, 2002). This explanation was later dismissed, following the publication of another study which concluded findings of no link to trauma (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011). Trauma was further explored in Bigelsen et al.’s (2016) development and validation study of the
Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-14), where similarly no link between maladaptive daydreaming and trauma was found. Although it is recognized that maladaptive daydreaming and trauma were documented across several articles (Somer, Somer & Jopp, 2016; Somer & Herschu, 2017).

Within the literature, a range of ideas have been offered regarding maladaptive daydreaming’s role in lessening other psychopathological conditions. Bigelsen et al. (2016) suggested maladaptive daydreaming to be a unique clinical syndrome, that overlapped with other disorders such as OCD, ADHD and anxiety disorders. Support for the idea of such an overlap came from a later study (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018) that found that OCD was the only psychopathological disorder that preceded maladaptive daydreaming episodes, thus suggesting a shared mechanism. More recently, Ross (2020, 2021), conducted studies that identified a strong link between maladaptive daydreaming, dissociation and DID in highly traumatized and dissociative inpatients. The OCD nature of maladaptive daydreaming in that sample was consistent with previous research (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018), offering support for maladaptive daydreaming overlapping with other disorders.

The idea of maladaptive daydreaming being a distinct psychiatric disorder has also been raised throughout the research literature (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Somer et al., 2017a, 2017b). One article reported on an apparent tension that was identified within maladaptive daydreamers (Bershtling & Somer, 2018) wherein an ongoing distress was evident for maladaptive daydreamers that their experience was not recognized as a distinct disorder. Yet, within the current two studies (case study and forum) conducted and reported here, the participants unexpectedly shared other beliefs about the causes of their maladaptive daydreaming, not discussing a need for diagnostic recognition. It is understandable that for some people a diagnostic label can provide an element of reassurance, for others, it can be a source of discomfort.

The literature highlighted further deliberation about the function of maladaptive daydreaming. One idea that supports the theory of maladaptive daydreaming including aspects of behavioral addiction was posited by Pietkiewicz et al. (2018). Based on case study data, those researchers identified several emergent themes that linked to components of behavioral addiction. These themes included: engaging in maladaptive daydreaming to the extent that it dominated thinking; withdrawal symptoms, when trying to stop; and increasing amounts of time spent engaged in maladaptive daydreaming. Based on these emergent themes, those researchers proposed that maladaptive daydreaming featured aspects of behavioral addiction. This proposition
differs from the findings of the current study, whereby aspects of addiction were identified but not found to be the main function of maladaptive daydreaming. Instead, upon review of the thematic data presented in the work of Pietkiewicz and colleagues, their emergent themes identified appear to demonstrate a link to emotional aspects being met through maladaptive daydreaming. For instance, the case study participant in their study was able to control their social interactions within the daydreaming, and while daydreaming did not experience the feelings of social rejection that he experienced in real-life. Further, that participant had reported using his maladaptive daydreaming to cope with difficult life situations and associated regrets, which could be described as an emotional strategy. It is also questionable to base a theory on one case study alone, and it is suggested that further exploration is needed into both the potential behavioral addiction aspects of maladaptive daydreaming and the emotion-related abilities.

Analysis of the perspectives expressed by this research study's participants and claims made in the literature have been incorporated into this study’s theory. In terms of the Diffential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming, the theory starts with a predisposition to absorptive behavior and then input stressors are experienced, such as social difficulty, mental health disorders, trauma/loss, stress, boredom, creativity or goals not being achieved. These input stressors result in one or both of the following behaviors, kinesthetic inclusion (movement-based or the incorporation of music), and/or an expression of a behavioral addiction. These behaviors then trigger the maladaptive daydreaming experience, whereby emotional disturbances can be absorbed through the maladaptive daydreaming, with resultant emotional protection, or emotional growth occurring. Regardless of whether emotional protection or growth occurs, resultant emotional processing occurs through the maladaptive daydreaming experience. It is proposed that this suggested new theory draws upon analysis of all findings from the current study and knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming contributed by the extant literature. Thus, the theory allows a variety of functional explanations to be incorporated and reflected as playing a part in the theory. It is offered that the theory draws together all these aspects resulting in a more complete understanding of the emotional processing function of maladaptive daydreaming and of the other pathway of emotional protection, through the wider construct of emotional growth, through emotional processing factors.
Contemporary Representations of the Function of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

This section considers new representations of the function of maladaptive daydreaming, as raised through the current study and the extant literature. Two contemporary representations are explored: the meeting of underlying emotional needs being met, and maladaptive daydreaming as an emotions-related tool.

The Meeting of Emotional Needs via Maladaptive Daydreaming.

The concept of emotional needs stems from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs motivation theory (Maslow, 1943). The developmental, hierarchical theory involves five tiers of human needs: physiological, safety, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization. This section considers whether the idea of meeting emotional needs through maladaptive daydreaming is a valid functional explanation.

Some of the participants in this thesis’s research studies expressed that they used their daydreams to help them to resolve difficult emotions. Examples given included the experience of extremely aggressive daydreams which upon further exploration the participants suggested were their way of working through anger. Participants described that it was not proper to express anger in social settings in the real-world. Other emotional needs, such as hyper-sexuality, were also explained as not acceptable in the real-world, but as fulfilled within the maladaptive daydreaming context. Most of the participants described the real-world as being sometimes too difficult to maneuver without the reprieve of being able to fulfill their emotional needs through the maladaptive daydreaming process. “It came back full on two years ago, they both died... I was remarkably close to them. The grief... it is debilitating... So, the maladaptive daydreaming came back heavy.” (Cassi). These words show that at times throughout Cassi’s life, her maladaptive daydreaming has provided her with an emotions-related tool that enables her to meet her emotional needs within the safety of the daydream experience. The pain of grief can be an overwhelming experience and meeting such an emotional need by grieving through daydreams appears to be a logical tool. The ability to control the daydream content and storylines is different than in real-life, where we are unable to rewind or change current life events like in the daydreams. Yet, the capacity to make changes to what occurs within maladaptive daydreams, as per the requirements of emotional needs, appears to be an adaptive outcome of the experience for the participants.

Participants described other emotional needs being met through maladaptive daydreaming. For instance, many of the participants described social difficulty in the
real-world, giving insight into their use of the daydreaming experience to meet their associated emotional needs. An example of this was noted in a statement provided by Cassi, wherein she described that the characters in her daydreams did not judge her, but rather they embraced and supplied emotional support to her, which was unlike her real-life.

The concept of meeting emotional needs through maladaptive daydreaming was further extended by the participants towards emotional growth. They expressed that they had come to realize that they gained new perspectives through their daydreams. They can empathize with other people within their real lives because they have experienced so many different scenarios in their daydreams. In the earlier scenario about experiencing emotional growth told by Cassi, the daydreams have led to an emotional need being met—namely empathy—that can be transferred to real-world social interactions. The maladaptive daydream experience is always available to her and is easily accessible for her, to enable her emotional needs to be met safely.

The view that daydreaming has a role to play, as a functional instrument, is also expressed within extant literature. The ability to be able to problem-solve and fulfil the need for awareness was supported by a study carried out by Taylor et al. (1998), in their reporting of mental simulation outcomes. Further, the emotional need of connection was reported across several daydream related studies (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Glausiusz, 2011; Schupak & Rosenthal, 2013; Somer, 2002; West & Somer, 2019). Within these studies, participants reported that they had experienced related emotions such as connection, love, reciprocal care, and support towards their daydream characters, thus fulfilling their emotional needs for belonging, companionship and trust. Socio-emotional skills such as understanding emotional-actions, perspective taking, and moral reasoning were also reported by Immordino-Yang et al., (2012), who offered the perspective that daydreaming was adaptive, whereby emotional needs such as identity and understanding could be developed through the experience. It appears that the ability to approach emotional needs fulfillment through the maladaptive daydreaming process might be valuable. At times, meeting emotional needs through such a daydream process could supply a sanctuary for overwhelming emotions.

Within the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming, emotional needs are included in the two pathways of emotional protection and emotional growth. Suggestions of how the emotional protection and growth pathways meet people’s emotional needs are expressed in Figure 1 earlier in this chapter. For the emotional protection pathway, emotional needs include stability, care
and compassion needs being met. For the emotional growth pathway, compassion, autonomy, care, and empathy needs are suggested as being met through maladaptive daydreaming.

It is suggested that healing through daydreaming, rather than through real-life, can lead to a negative interpretation of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Despite this perception, meeting emotional needs in real-life is not a skill that is directly taught to children and meeting emotional needs in a healthy manner is not something that people instinctively know how to achieve. Further, one can easily problematize or query what the healthy meeting of emotional needs even looks like. It is unknown at this stage whether emotional needs fulfilment can be developed into a conscious process, whereby a person can internally observe which emotional needs they require to be met, focusing on what is lacking within their life and develop strategies on how to meet the emotional need. Even if maladaptive daydreaming is perceived as an adaptive or maladaptive way of meeting emotional needs, it is still an accessible tool that is available to some people when required.

**Maladaptive Daydreaming as an Emotions-Related Tool.**

The term *tool* is not used here in relation to it being a coping mechanism. Naming maladaptive daydreaming as a coping mechanism can do a disservice to the research area. Coping mechanisms are a range of strategies that people take advantage of to help manage demanding situations and emotions. It is not suggested here that maladaptive daydreaming is a tool, that is only adopted to resolve difficulties. Instead of suggesting a theory of coping through maladaptive daydreaming, it is suggested that it can be used regarding a wide range of emotions, not always directed towards adverse concerns. Evidence for the suggestion of maladaptive daydreaming being an emotions-related tool arose from the analysis of the current study’s data, with support from across the research.

Across both the case study and forum data, participants shared plentiful dialogue how maladaptive daydreaming is an emotional-processing method for them. Some reported that their maladaptive daydreaming provides them with a safe and available fantasy environment, to resolve strong emotions. An example of this came from Cassi, who expressed that she used her maladaptive daydreaming to cope with emotional difficulties experienced at times throughout her life. During times of calm, she experienced maladaptive daydreaming at a lesser extent, although still using it at times as a source of enjoyment and entertainment. During times of emotional challenge, though, her maladaptive daydreaming became uncontrollable.
Other participants expressed the idea of maladaptive daydreaming being an emotions-related tool. They suggested that maladaptive daydreaming offered a secure space in which to deal with emotions, without getting ensnared in the distressing aspects. For a smaller number of the participants, in comparison, indicated that they considered maladaptive daydreaming was a safe environment that in comparison with the real-world that was for them an unsafe place in which to experience such emotions. Examples of this are articulated in the following participant comments:

“I often bring myself to tears in the daydreams. In a way, I can enjoy the sadness because it is not real, and I do not suffer.” (Sierra) “During stressful periods I would play out scenarios and as a practice for things that were coming up in my life. When I had to face the stressful situations, I had already rehearsed it in my head, therefore I feel much more capable of dealing with it.” (Julietta) “I am socially inept talking about emotions and expressing emotions and ideas has also been something that has made me frustrated with myself.” (Stephen).

Each of the three participant’s adopted maladaptive daydreaming as an emotions-related tool to process their emotions, in some way. Some of the participants used it to feel emotions that were otherwise unavailable to them; for others, they used it to rehearse real-life challenges prior to converting them to the real-life situations; and some participants related their use of maladaptive daydreaming as a means of meeting social and interpersonal emotional requirements.

The literature on daydreaming provides strength to the theory of fantasy being adopted as an emotions-related tool. Goldstein and Russ (2000) supported the idea that children who showed a greater propensity to engage in fantasy-related activities, were able to endure a healthy fantasy conflict, compared with children without this ability. This supports the idea that fantasy experiences might be used as a potential emotions-related tool.

Further endorsement for maladaptive daydreaming being an emotions-related tool comes from the findings reported in a variety of studies (Bigelsen et al., 2016; Green et al., 2020; Somer et al., 2016b, 2017b; Somer & Herscu, 2017; West & Somer, 2019). Although these studies were conducted with the intention of identifying comorbid disorders that relate to maladaptive daydreaming, they also provide support for the idea of maladaptive daydreaming being used as a tool in order to endure related disorders, such as MDD, anxiety disorders, OCD and ADHD. These studies provide similar support for the current study’s theory, whereby maladaptive daydreaming is identified as an emotions-related method. The effectiveness of imagery for positive
therapeutic outcomes has been accepted within psychological therapy for many years (McGown, 2014). For example, guided visualizations can be used to induce relaxation and relieve stress and anxiety.

It might be argued that were a person’s emotional needs to be met in the real-world, rather than through their maladaptive daydreaming, such an emotions-related tool will no longer be needed. This is certainly the case within the current study, as some of the participants explained that fulfilling their emotional needs in the real-world, leads to less maladaptive daydreaming. The emotions-related maladaptive daydreaming tool is no longer needed as much. This reversal process further supports this study’s theory of differential emotional processing. If there is another effective emotional processing tool available, such as through the real-world, then the need to continually return to maladaptive daydreams is diminished. Therefore, the development of real-world clinical tools and strategies that can be used alongside maladaptive daydreaming might bring relief from some of the reported addictive aspects of the experience. Further discussion of the clinical practice applications of this study’s theory is provided in a later section of this discussion. The next section contemplates’ whether awareness is needed for emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming to occur.

**Perception: The Way in Which Emotional Processing via Maladaptive Daydreaming is Interpreted.**

Throughout the two stages of this research study (case study and forum), the participants shared their insights into their different experiences of accessing emotional processing through their maladaptive daydreaming. The following section considers whether there is a need for people to be aware of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming and also considers the ways in which emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming can provide a flexible emotions-related tool to maladaptive daydreamers.

**Awareness of Emotional Processing Occurring Through Maladaptive Daydreaming**

The two case study participants demonstrated their awareness about their maladaptive daydreaming. Both described how they knew that their daydreaming experience was different to other peoples, largely with reference to the kinesthetic element of unusual movement that unlocked a vivid and intense daydreaming episode for them. Their contemplation about maladaptive daydreaming appears to be a result of substantial reflection. Beyond elementary reflections of the unusualness of maladaptive daydreaming, participants across both studies showed insights into the role of emotions within their maladaptive daydreaming. The participants described heightened emotional
arousal during and after the maladaptive daydreaming, including sobbing, laughing and shouting, along with experiencing a wide range of emotions, if something happened to their daydream characters. At times this heightened arousal was expressed as helpful and useful for emotional processing and at other times, the negative emotions, although recognized as required, were expressed as difficult to handle. Yet, for the participants these emotions are easier to handle through the daydream experience, than handling their emotions in real-life.

Some participants showed more awareness than others. For instance, one participant, Stephen, had not previously considered the idea of how the traumatic event of being sexually abused in childhood might explain his retreat into maladaptive daydreaming. Another participant, Diane, explained that she needed to experience her daydream characters’ lives and perspectives to resolve strong emotions from her own life. Diane relayed her maladaptive daydreaming experience as helpful for her emotional processing, even though it was somewhat a bitter sweetness. Consideration is needed into the idea of whether greater awareness of their emotional processing through their maladaptive daydreaming can lead to greater emotional processing or whether an unawareness of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming leads to less emotional processing.

Contrasting levels of insight are evident throughout the two studies. This was most represented by the two case study participants within the first study, Diane and Cassi. Diane’s maladaptive daydreaming experience could be summarized as providing her emotional growth through the experiencing of many fantasy lives. For Cassi, maladaptive daydreaming provided her with protection, whereby she could safely fill in emotional gaps left in her life. Diane expressed a depth of insight into the role of emotions in her maladaptive daydreaming and resultant emotional growth. Cassi, however, focused more on her maladaptive daydreaming as resolving trauma and providing a protective space for her to do so. As a result of this perspective, Cassi proclaimed she had gained emotional protection, that was distant from distressing real-life emotions. These observations contribute examples of the idea that insight into the role of emotional processing can enable a move towards emotional growth and away from the emotional protection pathway.

Existing case study literature into maladaptive daydreaming gives support to the view that insight into the fulfillment of emotional needs through maladaptive daydreaming might lead to positive emotional processing outcomes. Witkin (2019) reported on the conduct of a mixed treatment plan with a young adult named Lee, which
included strategies for understanding about the maladaptive daydreaming experience through therapeutic exploration. Alongside such exploration, Lee was also taught ways in which to ‘sit with’ uncomfortable emotions, through ACT strategies. As a result, Witkin reported that Lee was able to implement the newly learnt strategies, which led to an increased emotional awareness, and a resulting reduction in maladaptive daydreaming.

A second case study also reported improvement in maladaptive daydreaming as the result of a mixed treatment plan (Sommer, 2018). Employed therapeutic support strategies led to increased insight into the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Although emotional processing was not a specific focus of this second case study, the study does indicate that increased awareness about maladaptive daydreaming can be beneficial in reducing some of the associated difficulties. It would be a compelling extension of such studies, to incorporate specific emotional processing techniques that increase insight, such as self-expressive writing, art, meditation and the proper expressions of emotions.

Personal insight into the influence of emotional processing, and the role that maladaptive daydreaming plays in this, might contribute towards more successful emotional processing. Whether through maladaptive daydreaming or through real-life, emotional processing would nevertheless still occur as needed. The following example demonstrates a method of emotional processing within a real-world context, as an alternative emotional processing tool to that of maladaptive daydreaming.

Imagine a person has written a blog about an area of interest to them. They are ready to publish the blog, yet they are unable to overcome elevated levels of fear. Rather than burrowing into a cocoon of isolation and retreating into the maladaptive daydreaming, they instead engage in the following stages. First, they notice how the emotion feels within their body, and then voice the emotion: “I am afraid of being judged. I am afraid of being humiliated and that I will not be liked.” Soon after, the person enters a dialogue: “I know you are afraid; it is ok to be scared. You are thinking the worst about this situation, and you are not acknowledging that other outcomes are possible.” After this dialogue, their fear subsides, and they make the decision to publish the blog. In this instance, the person is confirming the fear, allying with the underlying emotion, and redirecting it in a new way, successfully processing the emotion and potentially no longer requiring engagement in maladaptive daydreaming.

If people know how to process their emotions in this way, they can engage in such healthy emotional hygiene strategies. This can mean still being able to access the
maladaptive daydreaming experience if required yet also being able to connect with an inner strength in the real-world if needed. Such insight can enable the understanding that emotions can be used as signposts for emotional healing. The constructed Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming is one such reflection of an increasing insight into the experience, and the stages involved. A visual depiction of the process and the theory, as presented in Figure 1. The theory might provide people with an understanding of their daydreaming, enabling them to better understand their emotional processing needs. This insight could potentially enable someone to choose whether to experience emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming or through the real-world as needed.

**A Flexibility of Emotional Processing Through Maladaptive Daydreaming.**

Insight into emotional processing seems to be useful. It is relevant to question if there are times when maladaptive daydreaming might be flexibly used for emotional processing needs.

The visual depiction of the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming shown in Figure 1, testifies to the flexibility of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming, through which emotional protection and emotional growth are at times being fulfilled. Examples of emotional processing occurring for a variety of reasons and at various times, are evident from the analysis of this study’s participants’ opinions.

An example of the flexibility of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming comes from one participant, Cassi, who reported on such fluctuations. For a calm period of 25 years, Cassi had been able to turn her maladaptive daydreaming on and off at will. When major emotional stressors reared in her life, Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming is increasingly necessary for emotional protection purposes. Such an example lends support to the differential aspect of the theory, whereby a person might be able to access emotional processing, at various times, and for assorted reasons—sometimes requiring maladaptive daydreaming to do so.

Within the current study, participants spoke about their diverse needs being met through their maladaptive daydreaming. For some it reduced stress levels, for others it enabled them to handle trauma. Some spoke about engaging in maladaptive daydreaming to process feelings that were unacceptable in the real-world, while others linked maladaptive daydreaming with further disorders such as anxiety disorders. All participants spoke about maladaptive daydreaming being uncontrollable at times, yet all contradicted this by describing maladaptive daydreaming in terms of flexibility. Some
were able to choose when to engage in the experience and others spoke about times when they were successful in emotional processing in the real-world and thus, no longer needed to engage in maladaptive daydreaming. This indicated the ability to choose when to employ maladaptive daydreaming for emotional processing reasons.

Similar findings are identifiable across the existing literature supporting the idea that the maladaptive daydreaming experience offers a flexible approach of processing emotional needs. These are considered below.

From a positive-constructivist perspective, Singer (1965) offered that daydreaming supplied a means of navigating the social world. He theorized that daydreaming is a healthy tool that enables positive outcomes. Poerio et al. (2016) also supported that daydreaming might enable particular social outcomes in finding that daydreaming buffered loneliness. This was replicated within the current study, with participants describing meeting their socio-emotional needs through their maladaptive daydreaming. Somer et al. (2016c) also offered that maladaptive daydreaming furnished people with emotional compensatory outcomes. As can be seen, through the current study’s findings, the existing literature, and the proposed theory by the current study, the maladaptive daydreaming experience indeed seems to afford emotional processing flexibility to people.

The current study’s proposed theory also illustrates the flexibility of maladaptive daydreaming for emotional processing reasons. The theory offers that a range of input stressors can lead to kinesthetic and/or addictive behaviors, that then lead to either emotional protection or emotional growth and to the resulting emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming. The theory therefore establishes a degree of flexibility for maladaptive daydreamers. Maladaptive daydreamers can access emotional processing, for several reasons, and with resulting different outcomes. Whereas, in one scenario, a maladaptive daydreamer can utilize the emotional protection pathway in order to practice processing their emotions, in another scenario they can utilize the emotional growth pathway, either way, experiencing emotional benefit. The proposed theory allows such flexibility, with the possibility for people to process a range of emotions, whether negative or positive, along with the possibility to move between the two pathways as needed.

Outcomes: The Way in Which Emotional Processing Transpires as a Result of Maladaptive Daydreaming

The label maladaptive daydreaming is suggestive of an experience that aligns with unfavorable outcomes for people. However, the current study’s findings, resulting
theory and underpinning insights from the literature indicate outcomes of emotional processing as being both favorable and unfavorable. This section considers these two outcomes, identifying and discussing the ways in which emotional resolution through maladaptive daydreaming was expressed in a positive and negative manner.

**Favorable Emotional Processing Outcomes of Maladaptive Daydreaming**

An unexpected finding from the current study, which is not noted through the maladaptive daydreaming literature, is that of maladaptive daydreaming as an adaptive and helpful way of processing emotions. Although the current study’s participants expressed their daydreaming at times as maladaptive, they also recognized that it was essential to them to have a healthy mental state. Whether the maladaptive daydreaming was employed for protection, or growth, the experience was characterized by these participants as an advanced emotional processing ability. Such a belief is evident in the words of Diane in the following explanation:

*I feel like I use daydreaming as an emotional processing. Like by living my character’s drama I can process feelings ... without getting caught up in them... I think I have been doing that for a long time by making up other people to have these feelings for me and they work through them. My daydreams become very intensely emotional at that time.* (Diane)

Additionally, Sierra provided further evidence of the belief that maladaptive daydreaming is an advanced emotional processing facility in her following words:

*I often bring myself to tears in the daydreams. In a way, I can enjoy the sadness because it is not real, and I do not suffer.* (Sierra)

Diane’s comment above shows that she was able to remain in the background of the emotional processing experience of her maladaptive daydreaming, and was able to harness the experience from a safe and protective emotional distance and achieve successful emotional processing of a difficult matter. Sierra’s words also confirmed the protective nature of maladaptive daydreaming. Although uncomfortable experiences for both participants, they were able to harness favorable emotional processing outcomes.

Some of the participants were able to engage with maladaptive daydreaming to practice scenarios that they would need to face in real-life. Others retreated to the daydreaming at times of stress, where they could resolve emotional pain. Daydreaming, as a way of improvement in life was also notable within the current study’s findings. The participants in both stages of this study described their maladaptive daydreaming as favorable for problem solving, relief from boredom, creativity expression and the
emotional resolution of difficulties. Many of the participants expressed that, alongside
the negative aspects of the experience, maladaptive daydreaming was a positive part of
their lives that they would not wish to lose. They further expressed that the maladaptive
daydreaming experience had formed a positive part of their childhood, when it had first
started.

Across the two studies, participants revealed that they were able to detach from
difficult emotions and adopt maladaptive daydreaming as an advanced emotional
processing means. Emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming might seem
counter intuitive. It can be argued that emotional processing in the real-world might be a
more beneficial process. However, it can also be argued that the ability to harness
emotions through maladaptive daydreaming can furnish people with a safe environment,
whereby they can learn to tolerate painful feelings. Further, harnessing imagery might
provide a beneficial way of positive emotional processing outcomes. An example of this
type of emotional intelligence was shown throughout the collected data and best
expressed by Diane in her reference to personal growth as a direct result of emotional
processing through her maladaptive daydreaming: “You know, how these different
characters see these different events, and I feel like I am a more accomplished person,
being able to access these different points of view.” (Diane). Diane’s emotional growth
has enabled her to process emotions through the observation of different events and
through different perspectives.

Across the two studies, the participants described shifting interchangeably
through their maladaptive daydreaming between emotional protection and emotional
growth. At times, this was based on their emotional needs. None of the participants
expressed that either emotional protection or emotional growth was a more favorable
outcome for them. Instead, they recognized maladaptive daydreaming as being a
different method of engaging in emotional processing, compared with the methods
employed by other people.

These findings are also supported across the existing literature. The concept of
daydreaming as adaptive was supported by Singer (1965). He believed that
daydreaming provides skill acquisition and emotional access to a wide range of
essential emotions and suggested that daydreaming furnishes an environment in which
emotional responses could be expressed. Singer further suggested that the style of
positive-constructive daydreaming was more associated with positive outcomes than are
other styles of daydreaming. It may be that the participants in the current study have at
times experienced positive-constructive style daydreams, whilst limiting the more unhelpful styles of daydreams.

Other studies that have specifically considered childhood daydreaming have endorsed the view that daydreaming may hold some emotional processing benefit (Goldstein & Russ, 2000; Tower, 1985; Witkin, 2019). The three studies presenting such endorsement showed that the daydreaming experience enabled children to resolve feelings and develop cognitive and emotional abilities. These studies further support the suggestion that the participants within the current study used their maladaptive daydreaming to process their emotions, even during their childhoods. These participants had said that even during their childhood years they had experienced a social connection through their maladaptive daydreaming. At times they do not require social contact in the real-world; they use their maladaptive daydreaming to combat emotions related to loneliness in childhood.

A further study that relates to favorable emotional processing outcomes was authored by Rachman (1980). Rachman’s Emotional Processing Theory identified some of the factors needed to either successfully or unsuccessfully emotionally process. Successful emotional processing was described and can be defined as “a process where emotional disturbances are absorbed, and other experiences and behaviors could proceed without disruption” (Rachman, 1980, p. 51). Rachman posited that satisfactory emotional processing included: engaging in exposure to the disturbing material; habituation training; rehearsals of coping behaviors, repeated practice; controlled reactions; a sense of perceived control; and relevant positive internal conversations. Throughout this research all participants expressed these satisfactory emotional processing traits as relatable to their maladaptive daydreaming.

The Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming draws together the findings from the current study, reflexivity and the insights provided across extant theory, to suggest that maladaptive daydreaming is a way of experiencing the processing of a range of emotions, such emotional processing that might be otherwise be unavailable to some people. The theory suggests that maladaptive daydreaming is a way of becoming more emotionally capable of adapting emotional processing needs, starting in childhood and being useful into adulthood. Furthermore, the theory offers that maladaptive daydreaming might be an advanced emotional information processing system, with resultant potential to in turn develop the ability to harness emotions in the real-world. The maladaptive daydreaming experience is a different method of resolving emotional pain. It is an alternative method to emotional
processing tools that other people can use, with maladaptive daydreaming enabling emotional processing to occur for the maladaptive daydreamers.

**Unfavorable Emotional Processing Outcomes of Maladaptive Daydreaming**

The current study and its findings also give insight into unfavorable emotional processing outcomes via maladaptive daydreaming. Instead of only eliciting only favorable emotional processing outcomes, the current study’s participants illustrated that at times, effective emotional processing might not have occurred for them, leading to unfavorable outcomes. An example of this was offered by Angela: “Sometimes I feel a sense of emptiness after daydreaming. Like I am not satisfied ... you daydreamed of something wonderful and positive, but then come back to reality with the wish that whatever you daydreamed about was real.” (Angela). Angela expressed being left with unfulfilled emotional needs, realizing that for her, maladaptive daydreaming might be a way for her to avoid real-life. The daydreaming experience has not equipped Angela with a learning environment that is emotionally protective or where emotional growth can occur. Instead, unsuccessful emotional processing might be suggested to lead towards more maladaptive daydreaming, and to potential rumination processes. As a result, avoidance of real-life can occur, thus leading to further heightened vigilance towards negative schema. The concept of unfavorable emotional processing involving maladaptive daydreaming focusing on negative situations, was illustrated by Diane in her following comment:

> It has hit me unexpectedly and I cannot (do not want to) stop. I am weeping right now because one of my characters was reminiscing about a letter he wrote when he was suicidal several years ago. The feelings are just so overwhelming. I feel ridiculous with tears splashing down my cheeks over something that never happened. (Diane)

Although the reported emotional intensity of Diane’s experience does focus on a theme of suicide, it is conceivable that Diane is engaging in emotional processing of this difficult topic. This topic might have otherwise been less easily processed in the real-world. Throughout the data, participants’ perspectives in the current study, expressed unfavorable outcomes of maladaptive daydreaming, in relation to the emotional intensity of the experience and the addictive nature of internally moving towards an avoidance of emotions.

One participant, Jessica offered the perspective that maladaptive daydreaming was a Band-Aid, involving addiction. She suggested it fulfilled emotional processing
needs, regardless of whether the emotional processing was a favorable or unfavorable experience.

If maladaptive daydreaming is your Band-Aid, your one glass of wine that turns into ten, your crack cocaine to distract from the fact that you have no future prospects and are living in a halfway house, then it will be near impossible to quit. Why? Well, what is maladaptive daydreaming? ... that happens to be addictive, yes, but at its core – it is related to our emotions. It is no coincidence that maladaptive daydreaming has a high comorbidity rate with multiple DSM diagnoses. Because to people with mental health conditions or with an unmet fundamental emotional need et cetera, maladaptive daydreaming can be some light in the darkness. If you still do not understand, ask yourself this, to be a completely happy and fulfilled person with a good support network, what would be the pull of maladaptive daydreaming to them? (Barely anything.) (Jessica)

The comment above illustrates that for these participants, maladaptive daydreaming has negative outcomes. This view was supported by all of the participants in the two studies, who had expressed an extent of damage to their lives, that included: ensuing social isolation, beliefs about wasting their lives, relationships and friendships ending, and feelings of failure.

The available literature provides a slew for support of the belief that maladaptive daydreaming significantly affects daily functioning (Bershtling & Somer, 2018; Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011; Bigelsen et al., 2016; Metin et al., 2021; Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018; Somer, 2002; Somer et al., 2019b; Somer et al., 2020). Support was offered across such studies for the maladaptive nature of the experience. Somer (2002) reported deficits including difficulty with concentration, social interaction difficulties, mental health impacts, self-care struggles, and difficulty in achieving occupational and educational goals. Emotional factors related to maladaptive daydreaming were explored by Bigelsen and Schupak (2011) whose study participants reported elevated levels of embarrassment, shame, a lack of control, and deep emotional impacts because of identifying or calling themselves ‘crazy,’ with resultant expressions of feelings of emotional vulnerability. More recently, research has focused on the impact of COVID-19, the threats of the pandemic and forced home confinement. They found that perceived stress, previous episodes of emotional instability via MDD, low education levels and introversion were factors that intensified the maladaptive nature of maladaptive daydreaming.
Unsatisfactory emotional processing has been articulated within the working model of emotional processing offered by Rachman (1980). The signs of unsuccessful emotional processing that Rachman identified, are an explicit reflection of the experiences shared by the participants in the current study, as well as throughout the literature. These signs of unsuccessful emotional processing included obsessions, disturbing daydreams, intrusive thoughts, pre-occupation, restlessness, external expressions of emotions and agitation. Rachman’s suggests that for some people emotional processing does not take place. Rachman's *Emotional Processing Theory* had been initially developed during the behavioral era and had initially excluded the role of cognition influences on emotional processing. In psychology, a person’s beliefs, evaluations and appraisals are recognized as being central to cognitive-emotional processing. For instance, if a person misinterprets an emotional disruption, then emotional processing is unlikely to occur, leading to potential rumination.

In relation to this study’s *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, unfavorable emotional processing outcomes are specifically related to the emotional protection pathway, whereby a circular pattern of engaging in maladaptive daydreaming and further protection then leads to further maladaptive daydreaming, thus demonstrating rumination. If emotional disruption occurs, a person may be unable to progress to the outcome of emotional processing. It will thus be imperative for people who adopt this proposed theory to identify whether rumination is occurring for them. If rumination is the case, they will need to explore their beliefs, evaluations and appraisals, for them to progress through to emotional processing.

**Summary**

This section has explored three topic areas in relation to emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming. The first was *structure*: The components within the theory, including the composition and functions of emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming; the second was *perception*: The way in which emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming is interpreted, including awareness and flexibility of the process; and the third was *outcomes*: The way in which emotional processing transpires as a result of maladaptive daydreaming, including favorable and unfavorable outcomes.

Consideration of the current study’s findings, the existing literature on maladaptive daydreaming and other literature and reflexive inquiry into both, contributes insight into the psychological mechanisms that might impede or enhance emotional processing through absorptive daydreaming. For some people, daydreaming
leads to either emotional protection or emotional growth. For others, maladaptive daydreaming leads to unsuccessful emotional processing, which becomes problematic due to continued repetitive attempts at emotional processing occurring through the daydreaming. This current study’s proposal recognizes these differential aspects, with the emphasis in the title: that is, the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

**Implications for Clinical Practice:**

The ‘Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming’

The Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming lends itself to the research and development of real-world clinical interventions for managing maladaptive daydreaming. The idea of the research moving away from psychopathology and distress, as explored in maladaptive daydreaming research, towards a person’s emotional life as being the pivotal point of treatment is a novel idea within this research area.

Instead of using maladaptive daydreaming for mood enhancement, existing evidence-based treatment such as ‘emotional regulation’ can be a starting point for future research. An important question to ask at this stage is, ‘what is emotional regulation and how do we do it?’ Emotions, both positive and negative, are a normal part of everyday life. For some people, emotions such as sadness, guilt, resentment, self-blame, frustration and anger, can be strong and overwhelming. The feeling of being emotionally overwhelmed is often followed by the person finding a way to stop the emotional intensity. In relation to this study, it is suggested that the maladaptive daydreaming experience is such an attempt at reducing this experience of being emotionally overwhelmed.

An alternative suggestion to the processing or avoidance of emotions through maladaptive daydreaming is that of ‘emotional regulation strategies.’ In this context, emotional regulation describes a person’s ability to manage and reflect upon their responses to emotional situations. A basic example of an emotional regulation strategy for reducing stress is a journaling activity, whereby a person writes about their emotional experiences. This healthy coping strategy may aid in diffusing difficult emotional situations. Some unhelpful emotional regulation strategies can cause harm, such as substance or alcohol abuse, self-injury, and aggression, while other emotional regulation strategies do not cause harm, such as meditation, talking with friends and attending therapy. Maladaptive daydreaming studies support the need for the incorporation of emotional regulation strategies. West and Somer, (2019) explored two
components of maladaptive daydreaming: (1) the maladaptiveness of the experience, and (2) the exploration of non-pathological daydreaming that had all of the features of maladaptive daydreaming, without the maladaptive factors, which they named immersive daydreaming. They explored overlap and distinctions between maladaptive daydreaming and immersive daydreaming and found for the maladaptive daydream component significantly poorer emotional regulation ability, yet for immersive daydreaming this was slightly less than maladaptive daydreaming. It was suggested that emotional regulation techniques could be a central component for the treatment of the maladaptive daydreaming component. This idea was also supported in studies conducted by Metin et al., (2021), who identified a need for supporting vulnerable maladaptive daydreamers during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting the need for closer monitoring of emotionally unstable, less educated, more introverted people, who they offered might benefit from emotional regulation training.

Emotional dysregulation describes the inability to be able to diffuse or handle difficult negative emotions. It is often the case that people use less than ideal emotional regulation strategies. Moving on from the basic emotional regulation strategies, such as journaling, ideas for a higher level of emotional regulation come from the therapeutic model of CBT (Ellis, 1959). The CBT model suggests that it is the interpretation of emotions that lead to the feeling that emotions are overwhelming, and to resorting to harmful emotional regulation strategies. The CBT model suggests that emotions, thoughts and behaviors are all connected, and can lead to a vicious emotional cycle. The following scenario presents an example of a vicious emotional cycle caused by using harmful emotional regulation strategies. A person’s boss walks past them in the hall and does not acknowledge them. The person then experiences high levels of disappointment, confusion and self-doubt. Their thoughts quickly turn to “what did I do?” and “she is mad at me for … ” This barrage of thoughts, then leads to the person acting upon the thoughts, going home early feeling ill, which leads to further intense emotions. CBT aims to break these vicious cycles by making a change to one part of the cycle (emotions, thoughts or behaviors). It may be that engaging in maladaptive daydreaming continues this vicious cycle. Should this be so, alternative emotional regulation strategies, such as CBT may alleviate the need for engaging in maladaptive daydreaming to such an extreme extent.

Drawing on the insights of this current and other studies and of the broader body of therapy options a range of questions might enable maladaptive daydreamers to integrate and better understand their own thought-emotion-behavior cycles. Such
exploration can provide them with guidance on where and in what ways they need to implement emotional regulation strategies, and thus reduce their maladaptive daydreaming experience. Such questions might include: ‘What thoughts trigger the most negative emotions for me?’, ‘Which are the hardest emotions for me to tolerate?’, ‘Which are the easiest emotions for me to be able to tolerate?’, ‘Which are the behaviors that I use to tolerate hard emotions?’, ‘How well do these behaviors work for me?’, ‘Do I want to continue to use these behaviors?’, ‘What beliefs do I have that perpetuate negative cycles?’, ‘What thoughts and beliefs do I have that can help me to generate positive emotions?’

Such exploration into the emotional world of maladaptive daydreamers can direct the use of emotional regulation strategies that are specific to each person. It is acknowledged at this point that the participants in this current research who reported undertaking cognitive behavioral therapy, claimed to have had no success in reducing their maladaptive daydreaming. It may therefore be more effective to focus on clinical intervention around healthy emotional regulation strategies.

Two areas of research within the literature also suggest future directions for incorporating aspects of the maladaptive daydream experience into ideas for treatment ideas. As previously described, participants in this research reported three types of daydream selves: the fantasy self, the ideal self, and the ought self. These three selves were also identified in Bybee et al.’s (1997) research on self-content, relations to mental health and associated functions. Those researchers claimed that the ‘ought’ self was highly linked to emotions, trustworthiness and altruism. They identified the ‘ought’ self as the most adaptive of the three. In relation to maladaptive daydreaming, a focus of the daydream content towards the helpful ‘ought’ self could be developed into a therapeutic strategy. This directing of the daydream content can draw on the maladaptive daydream experiences, leading towards a helpful emotional regulation experience.

The second area of research reported across the literature to contribute potential future treatment directions comes from the research conducted by Bloun-Hudson and Zelenski (2016). Their research suggested that a focus on the positive-constructivist style of daydreaming, while limiting other more negative daydreaming styles, led to an improvement of their participant’s wellbeing. That study adds weight to the possibility of using daydreaming styles to improve overall wellbeing. Future research into maladaptive daydreaming will benefit from exploring the effects of the content of the daydreams, as knowing the content can contribute guidance as to the emotional aspects that are met through that daydreaming. The daydreaming content appears to be a vital
part of the experience, and one that can be used to design treatment options. For instance, if within a daydream, a person was attractive, sensual and successful, knowing this in real-life means that the underpinning emotional needs can be identified and met in the person’s real-life, which can prove beneficial. If this person were to focus on building their confidence, improving social skills and achieving some success goals, then the need for meeting emotional needs through maladaptive daydreaming will not be needed. The person’s life would improve due to focusing on health goal accomplishment, while simultaneously meeting the emotional processing needs in their real-life can reduce any of the maladaptive aspects of maladaptive daydreaming, potentially reducing the need for it. The following sections will focus on the inductive research hypotheses; the originality, strengths and significance of the study; methodological limitations, and ideas and recommendations for future research.

**Inductive Research Hypotheses**

To enable the theory offered within this thesis to move from the observations that are specific towards broad generalizations, the following inductive research hypotheses are offered as ways to support or falsify the theory:

(H1) Explore the effects of the content of the daydreams would contribute guidance as to the emotional aspects that are being met through that daydreaming, and such knowledge would guide a person towards meeting needs within their day-to-day life, rather than through maladaptive daydreaming.

(H2) Knowledge of the ways in which emotional processing needs are being met through maladaptive daydreaming, would provide people with a choice of whether to harness maladaptive daydreaming for emotional processing growth, or whether to choose the opposite pathway of emotional processing through protection.

(H3) Exploration of the emotional world of maladaptive daydreamers would provide direction towards other emotional processing tools they could choose instead of maladaptive daydreaming.

**Originality, Strengths and Significance**

**Originality**

The *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* provides an original and significant contribution to the literature, based on analysis of data collected across two studies and reflexive analysis of the existing literature. This study is the first constructivist grounded theory study into the experience of maladaptive
daydreaming. An adult maladaptive daydreaming population was used, to construct a data-driven theory.

The *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* has added to the existing knowledgebase in a way that has not previously been done before, offering a new direction for research related to emotional processing. The theory establishes a new context within the research area and broadens the existing body of knowledge in relation to maladaptive daydreaming.

**Strengths**

This study incorporates several strengths into the employed method. The use of the constructivist grounded theory method ensures research originality and also that the research is the product of my work and ideas, alongside the participants’ involvement in the construction of the theory. The study’s theoretical findings align with Charmaz’ (2014) constructivist grounded theory criteria through gathering real-world data, to develop an original, credible, useful theory that resonates with the study participants. Furthermore, the methodological processes used across the two studies provided me with an opportunity to theoretically understand and explore maladaptive daydreaming in a new way.

The qualitative research methodology employed has brought strengths and benefits. The use of qualitative research methods has enabled an enhanced level of examination of the data, and a fluid approach to the data collection and analysis unrestricted by a rigid system of rules and enabling new directions to be explored. The open-ended structure of the qualitative process has also allowed the participants to express themselves in a creative and authentic manner, without the pressures of providing verifiable facts. Finally, this qualitative research has been shaped and guided by my research skill, my biases and my personal narrative, alongside the participants’ experiences. This has enabled me to write myself into the study, to lay bare my biases through the memo process and to not have to ignore my research instincts. The process of reflexivity enabled me to deepen and enhance the accuracy and validity of the research findings within this study.

The use of the two validated maladaptive daydreaming psychometric tools MDS-16 and SCI-MD is also a methodological strength of this study. These two psychometric tools have been validated across a number of studies and countries (Abu-Rayya & Somer, 2019a; Somer et al., 2016, 2017a; Somer, Soffer-Dudek et al., 2017; Jopp et al., 2018), with demonstrated high diagnostic capacity of maladaptive daydreaming across cultures and demonstrated good psychometric properties. It is
important for this study to utilize reliable and validated measures that can show a clinical level of maladaptive daydreaming in the study participants.

Another methodological strength of this study is that the two maladaptive daydreaming psychometric tools were delivered by one independent assessor. Assessments conducted with the participants online using Skype helped to ensure a consistency of the assessment and convenience for the participants, and no dual relationship between the researcher and participants. This study’s significance is now considered in the following section.

**Significance**

It is important for the reflexivity process of this study that this section begins with consideration of the study significance by determining the personal significance of this research to me, along with explaining why such a consideration is important. The section will then discuss why the theory has significance in a broader context. I have the belief that psychological research has the potential to shape many systems within society. For example, how our children are raised, the ways in which people with mental illness are supported, and the ways in which policy is developed. In conducting psychological research, I have aimed to understand the experiences of individuals in this study in relation to their maladaptive daydreaming. In doing so, it was important for me to keep in mind my hope that the theory constructed from this research would have real-world usability. This hope extended towards broadening the theory beyond the study’s population and towards having a clinical purpose, of potentially aiding other maladaptive daydreamers.

The significance of the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* in the broader context relates to the theory being a potential gateway for a new direction within absorptive daydreaming research. This theory has the potential to inspire a new way of understanding maladaptive daydreaming, which is a move away from considering maladaptive daydreaming as a psychiatric disorder. Instead, this theory creates a lens through which maladaptive daydreaming may be understood.

The *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* further provides new knowledge in the absence of a theoretical understanding of maladaptive daydreaming. The knowledge that differential emotional processing is occurring, through the maladaptive daydreaming experience, can be useful for people who have this experience. Considering that their maladaptive daydreaming might be supplying emotional benefit, alongside its associated negatives, can be reassuring. The
ability for emotional needs to be met in a range of ways, not only through maladaptive daydreaming, can resolve some of the problems of the experience. The proposed theory can be used by people to potentially retain the positive emotional processing benefits of the experience, while reducing some of the addictive and negative aspects. A theoretical knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming might shift how people experience it. Finally, the proposed theory can be used as a guide for the development of alternative strategies and interventions for meeting emotional processing needs.

Methodological Limitations

Every research study has its limitations and there are seven key methodological limitations of this study. For the second stage of this study, 16 participants were selected to take part in a six-week forum: thirteen females and three males. This higher number of females to male participants also characterized earlier studies of maladaptive daydreaming (Abu-Rayya et al., 2019a; Bigelsen, Lehrfeld, et al., 2016; Green et al., 2020; Jopp et al., 2018; Metin et al., 2021; Somer et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2017; West & Somer, 2019). One explanation offered for this is that females simply participate more than males in maladaptive daydreaming research; another explanation is that maladaptive daydreaming might be more prevalent in females than males. Given the lack of examination into this phenomenon, the exact cause of this elevated level of uptake of female participants involved in this maladaptive daydream study is unknown, and future research is recommended to explore this aspect. The findings of the current study should be interpreted in the context of the demographic features of the participants who contributed to this work.

A second methodological limitation of this study is that, unlike the two face-to-face case study interviews, the forum stage was conducted entirely online. This included the recruitment advertising process, informed consent process, independent assessment and the six-week forum. Online research can make it difficult, indeed impossible, to fully confirm the veracity of information provided by the participants. The decision to use online facilities for research was made for several reasons. The benefits of conducting research online, particularly in relation to maladaptive daydreaming, are stronger than the challenges, and it was decided that an online research environment meant a potentially increased response rate, greater for convenience for the participants, and enabled the incorporation of participants from anywhere in Australia.

Additionally, the independent assessor only assessed the participants’ eligibility for meeting clinical levels for maladaptive daydreaming, that has validated, reliable assessment tools. It was not her role to conduct a full clinical mental health assessment
via Skype, although all the participants did express their pre-existing mental health diagnoses to her without being asked. The focus of this study was the experience of maladaptive daydreaming, and it was not exploring comorbid mental health conditions; however, these comorbidities may be relevant in understanding maladaptive daydreaming experiences. This was the justification for not including a full mental health assessment as part of the independent assessment.

The use of a qualitative research methodology in this study also resulted in several challenges for this study. Qualitative research has not always been accepted in the research community, due to the challenges of replicability. The nature of qualitative research means that it is hard to confirm or deny results. The qualitative nature of this study may lend itself to criticism of the findings and the resulting *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, yet the benefits of using qualitative research method through the case study and forum stages, and constructivist grounded theory are recognized, alongside the limitations.

A further methodological limitation that calls for examination is in relation to the use of constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory is not specifically named as a qualitative research method, but instead can be considered a general research method (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018). The nature of constructivist grounded theory involves data collection, analysis, memos, coding processes, returning with ideas to the participants (member checking) from the data, theoretical coding, and theoretical saturation and the resultant theory construction. These processes are often iterative and simultaneous and can be difficult for the researcher to maneuver. The constructivist grounded theorist researcher aims to co-construct a theory together with the participants. In response to the criticism that quantitative research is not objective, qualitative researchers acknowledge the subjectivity that quantitative researchers might try to disguise and deny. The researcher’s biases, beliefs, positions, interpretations, perspectives and decisions are all considered during the co-construction process. Instead of problematizing this subjectivity, the constructivist grounded theorist recognizes subjectivity as strengths that can open rich directions for consideration.

A second limitation in relation to the current study’s constructivist grounded theory method, is that the volume of data analysis can be time consuming. Nonetheless, the processes of ongoing coding and returning to the participants to clarify coding decisions better enabled a conceptualizing of the underlying issues beyond the ‘noise’ of the resulting data. Initially, the process was time consuming, but as constant comparison progressed across both studies, the time required to complete the task was
reduced and the process became more manageable. As such, while a limitation of this research, these methodological choices also lent strength to the resulting findings.

A final limitation of this study is not in relation to methodological aspects, but it is a limitation related to micro-politics. This study’s proposed theory could generate a negative response from the maladaptive daydreaming community, scientific researchers, health professionals and policy makers. For instance, it is unlikely that the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* will contribute to maladaptive daydreaming entering the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (5th ed., DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Instead, the proposed theory can potentially progress the research efforts away from psychopathologizing maladaptive daydreaming, and instead towards alternative theories, such as the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*. People who experience maladaptive daydreaming might potentially rather that it be classified as a psychiatric disorder, instead of being linked to their emotional processing needs. Some people might be relieved to have an alternative explanation for their maladaptive daydreaming. It has not been my intention to find evidence for or against maladaptive daydreaming being classified as a psychiatric disorder. Instead, I have been guided by the data, and by the co-construction process of constructivist grounded theory. It is possible that maladaptive daydreaming has several pathways, some of which may be associated with psychiatric disorders. Also possible is the identification of another pathway that supports this theory of emotional processing as further explaining maladaptive daydreaming.

**Opportunities and Recommendations for Future Research**

It is suggested that the study’s aim of constructing a data-driven theory of maladaptive daydreaming has been achieved, along with answering the study’s research questions through the extension of the maladaptive daydreaming theory to the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*. This section identifies and discusses five specific recommendations and opportunities for future research that are identified because of this study and its constructed proposed theory.

A first sensible next step in examining the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* is to undertake a larger scale study, that employs a similar method, across a multi-country sample. The *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming* can form the basis of exploration of such a research study. The constructivist grounded theory process can be conducted with a new sample of participants in such a study to explore the validity of the proposed theory. It
is common in constructivist grounded theory research for such theoretical sampling, whereby a new participant group is recruited to further ground the produced theory in the data. Such theoretical sampling was employed in this study, with two groups of participants (two case studies, who took part in both the case study and forum research studies, and 14 forum participants, totaling 16 participants).

It is recommended that further research be conducted to determine the validity of the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming. Such research can determine if the theory might be extendable beyond the context of this current research study, to other participants, countries and cultures.

One of the findings from this study was that the participants in both studies gained some benefits from their maladaptive daydreaming, and that it was not always a negative experience. Maladaptive daydreaming enables some of the participants to experience social interactions within the safety of their fantasy; it is used by other participants to cope with high stress and anxiety levels, with participants able to employ role play prior to dealing with difficult issues in the real-world. Another adaptive feature of the maladaptive daydreaming experience is that it enabled some of the participants to focus on obtaining what was lacking for them in the real-world and identify these areas from their daydreaming content. An example of this daydreaming content is a fantasy involving acceptance that is not experienced within the real-world. Finally, some of the participants can harness aspects of their daydreaming world, by writing creatively about what occurs in their daydreams, and thus being able to emotionally process directly because of the daydream experience.

The adaptive features of daydreaming have been identified within the broader body of literature. For example, Franklin and colleagues (2013), found that high interest episodes of daydreaming increased positive mood. People who experience maladaptive daydreaming could try to refocus their daydreams to topics of more interest to them, thus improving their mood. This shifting of the daydreaming is echoed in this study, with one of the two case study participants describing being able to put her characters safely and calmly to bed, to enable herself to sleep contentedly.

Many of the participants within this study were female, which has also been noted in earlier maladaptive daydream studies (Abu-Rayya et al., 2019a; Bigelsen et al., 2016; Jopp et al., 2018; Somer, et al., 2016, 2017). Women have been described as experiencing emotions differently than men (Kret & Gelder, 2012). Exploring such a difference in emotional experiencing across sexes, is an important extension of the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming. Future
research can explore whether female maladaptive daydreamers experience emotions intensely than male maladaptive daydreamers. Such research can also extend the exploration of the emotional experiences across maladaptive daydreamers by exploring stages of life. For instance, the adolescent years are known to be precarious for maladaptive daydreamers (Somer et al., 2016b) and it would be useful to identify whether female adolescent maladaptive daydreamers experienced their emotions more, or less, than male adolescent maladaptive daydreamers, and whether this led to more, or less, emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming.

With no research existing about emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming until this thesis was completed, there is a need for further research into the emotional processing aspects of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Also recommended would be exploration into maladaptive daydreaming content and the effect of this on emotional processing. Finally, it is offered that there is still much more research needed to be conducted into the area of emotional processing through maladaptive daydreaming.

**Chapter Summary**

This discussion chapter has considered the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*. It has provided a visual conceptualization of the proposed theory, alongside a written characterization of the theory. It has explored examples of the ways in which the theory is represented in the two studies of this research and has expressed and interpreted particular deductions that are relevant to the proposed theory. The chapter has reiterated the element of reflexivity and incorporated into the research, supported through theoretical findings from the established literature base. Finally, this chapter has outlined and justified the strengths, the originality and significance of the proposed theory, and related research and opportunities for future research.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Chapter Outline

This chapter, Chapter Eight: Conclusion, supplies consideration of doctoral requirements, and summarizes each of the preceding seven chapters of this thesis. More than that, though, alongside detailing ‘what happened within this thesis?’, I will also discuss and rationalize each chapter and the chapters’ importance. Further to the ‘what’ and the ‘why I consider how the theory constructed provides a significant and original contribution to knowledge’. Additionally, this chapter evaluates the limitations and weaknesses of the research. The chapter concludes with my researcher reflections, which include suggestions for future work and my comments on the impact of this research, supplying ideas for use of the theory within clinical practice.

Consideration of Doctoral Requirements

When I began to embark on this doctoral research journey, I was aware that the requirements for a doctorate included that the research make a significant original contribution to knowledge. The idea seems simple enough; my research needed to focus on a new area, to enable me to create a niche for myself, to further science or to build understanding of the field. Throughout this research process, I have been mindful of needing to convince and confirm to potential examiners that this work makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge. I am aware that the conclusion chapter is one of the most important chapters of a doctoral thesis, as it supplies a proper ending to the research. I have therefore aimed for this concluding chapter to reflect upon the research and to satisfy the reader of my original contribution to the collective body of knowledge in relation to maladaptive daydreaming. Throughout the entirety of the thesis, I have aimed to produce and illustrate originality in this constructivist grounded theory research study into maladaptive daydreaming. I have also aimed to show that this research and its findings are innovative and reflexive, and that the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming does supply an original contribution to the discipline of psychology.

Summary of Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one introduced the thesis and its findings. This introduction chapter provided a vista of the related existing research, showed the research territory, and supplied detail as to how the research undertaken fits into the wider knowledge system. The chapter also aimed to show that the related body of research into maladaptive daydreaming is important, interesting and at times problematic.
The introduction chapter began with an establishment of the topic of maladaptive daydreaming and supplied background information. Following that introduction, I explained the statement of the problem that this thesis aimed to address. The specific problem was expressed as the need for a construction of theory about maladaptive daydreaming directly from data, instead of building upon earlier knowledge. I supplied related existing evidence that showed that the focus of earlier research into maladaptive daydreaming was on exploration of the distressing aspects of maladaptive daydreaming, to the detriment of other researcher perspectives. This focus was evaluated as stemming from researchers looking to legitimize maladaptive daydreaming as a valid psychiatric disorder.

This chapter explored the people that maladaptive daydreaming might affect and determined the research gaps that exist in related research, in relation to limited qualitative studies, and the lack of theoretical understanding. Furthermore, the chapter supplied how this study adds to the existing literature, the purpose of the research and the importance of the study. The chapter provided a theoretical framework that included theories and studies noted in relation to daydreaming, and specifically to research related to maladaptive daydreaming. Research questions were supplied for both stages within this study, and information was supplied into the research design of each of these stages. A full alphabetized definitions of terms list was included within the chapter, to supply clarity in the context of the study. The chapter explored the study’s assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. The introduction concluded with a summary of each of the chapters in the thesis.

**Summary of Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Chapter two situated this study within relevant existing literature. It supplied the story of the daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming literature. First, the chapter considered the debated nature of a constructivist grounded theory approach, the debate being centered around the way the literature review process is conducted alongside the coding of data.

The chapter detailed the search strategy used for the literature review. Searches of the literature led towards three focused sections: (a) existing knowledge and theories about daydreaming, (b) existing knowledge and theories about maladaptive daydreaming, and (c) what is not known about maladaptive daydreaming.

The first focused section: Existing knowledge and theories about daydreaming included daydreaming definitions, along with literature around the ways that daydreaming resulted in negative outcomes. These negative outcomes included
knowledge about context, forgetting through daydreaming, cognitive deficits, high emotional costs and a negative relationship between daydreaming and mood. The searches also resulted in literature that offered support for daydreaming leading to positive outcomes. These positive outcomes included daydreaming as leading to problem solving, the daydream experience being a useful tool, navigating the social world through the experience and that daydreaming is a normal, healthy and necessary process. The section also focused on the ways in which the literature reported on the methods of measurement efforts to capture daydreaming.

The second focused section: Existing knowledge about maladaptive daydreaming, the most researched absorptive daydreaming, included definitions of maladaptive daydreaming, along with consideration of the ways in which the literature determines differences between daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming. The section determined the start of maladaptive daydreaming research and evaluated the types of research that have been carried out into maladaptive daydreaming. These types included quantitative research studies, such as validation and development studies of psychometric tools for measurement of maladaptive daydreaming, along with exploration of comorbidity and related factors to maladaptive daydreaming. Qualitative research studies were also included in the chapter and consisted of existing case studies and studies that have explored maladaptive daydreaming themes within the daydreams. Furthermore, this second section considered a research skepticism within the literature, whereby a focus was notable of the maladaptive daydream community and researchers aiming for maladaptive daydreaming to be recognized as a distinct clinical entity. Finally, in the second focused section, existing explanations for maladaptive daydreaming were evaluated, which included trauma and behavioral addiction as factors involved in maladaptive daydreaming.

The third focused section: 'What is not known about maladaptive daydreaming?' included exploration of the literature into three new theoretical explanations for understanding maladaptive daydreaming. These included theories in relation to ‘daydreaming contents’, ‘daydreaming categories’, and ‘the involvement of emotional processing’. The literature about the treatment of maladaptive daydreaming, and gaps within this literature were also considered within this section.

An updated focused section has been added into this thesis: Updated Literature Search. This section includes research that occurred across the period 2019 to 2022, as a means of providing an update to the literature review.
The chapter determined the research gaps through evaluation of the literature into daydreaming and maladaptive daydreaming. These gaps included a lack of theoretical exploration about the origins of maladaptive daydreaming; and how the literature also showed that there were insufficient qualitative studies into maladaptive daydreaming and showed a need to expand research beyond exploring maladaptive daydreaming in the context of psychopathology. The chapter evaluated how the literature also showed that there were insufficient qualitative studies into maladaptive daydreaming and showed a need to expand research beyond exploring maladaptive daydreaming in the context of psychopathology. Therefore, the chapter concluded by articulating the importance of this theses’ studies and the contribution of this theses’ findings to the literature, thus filling the research gaps found in the literature review.

**Summary of Chapter Three: Case Study Methodology**

Chapter three explained the research design and methodology for the case study stage of this thesis. The chapter outlined the research procedures employed in the case studies, which would supply the rationale and background for why the research was carried out.

This chapter started by introducing qualitative research methodology, then described in detail the constructivist research paradigm underpinning the research. The chapter explained the research questions explored through the case study stage. The participant selection criteria for the two case study participants were also explained, along with the participants’ background information. The chapter provided detail that would enable replication of the research process by future researchers, outlining the data collection and analysis procedures, along with the coding processes, and memo stages, as well as my efforts to enhance research rigor through reflexivity. Finally, the chapter aimed to satisfy the requirement that all ethical considerations have been addressed.

**Summary of Chapter Four: Case Study Findings**

Chapter four presented a new understanding of maladaptive daydreaming, based on the two case study participants’ data. The chapter showed and discussed findings, drawing on quotes from the two case study participants, Diane and Cassi. These findings regarded: (a) the necessity of movement–based behaviors to intensify maladaptive daydreaming, (b) the struggle to concentrate due to the maladaptive daydreaming, (c) participants’ attempts at controlling the maladaptive daydreaming experience, and, (d) maladaptive daydreaming as an emotional experience for participants. The chapter then noted the ways that the maladaptive daydreaming experience was different for the two participants and supplied direct quotes from them.
in support of the findings. Diane’s maladaptive daydreaming experience provided her with a means of emotional growth. In contrast, Cassi’s maladaptive daydreaming experience provided her with a way of filling in the emotional gaps left in her life, in the protection of her maladaptive daydreaming experiences.

**Summary of Chapter Five: Forum Methodology**

Chapter five explained the research design and methodologies for the forum stage of this thesis, which was the second study. It was important to supply enough information about the forum stage to enable replication in future research studies.

This chapter explained the developmental process of the forum stage and made evident the constructivist grounded theory methodology used in the forum stage of this thesis. Methodological information was provided within the chapter, about research questions, participant selection, demographics, and data collection and analysis processes. Analysis processes included the use of memos, member checking, stages of coding and the construction process. The chapter articulated the forum’s ethical considerations, solutions to these ethical concerns, and considered the benefits associated with taking part in the forum stage. This chapter concluded with the efforts that were employed to further increase research rigor, through reflexivity, to ensure a transparent data collection and analysis process.

**Summary of Chapter Six: Forum Findings**

Chapter six listed and explained the findings from the forum study stage, which drew on the data and coding of both studies. These six findings were: (a) the need for kinesthetic behaviors, to be able to access and intensify the maladaptive daydreaming; (b) the link to childhood trauma; (c) the different pathways through which maladaptive daydreaming can develop; (d) the maladaptive aspects of the experience; (e) the adaptive aspects of the experience; and, (f) the processing of emotions in different ways. The chapter then provided support for these findings through incorporated forum participants’ comments and my analysis of the data. The chapter concluded with an exploration and a description of the way that these forum stage’s findings and the case study stage’s findings were theoretically combined into the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*.

**Summary of Chapter Seven: Discussion**

Chapter seven examined this study’s theoretical findings through a consolidation process. This process evaluated data collected from this study’s participants, existing extant theory and literature, and discussed the evolution of the data from this doctoral thesis towards construction of the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of*
Maladaptive Daydreaming and the reflexive consolidation and consideration of these elements.

The discussion chapter illustrated and supported the ways that the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming reflects, connects, contextualizes, and extends a range of other studies and theories.

The chapter included three main topic categories that had been deduced from this study’s findings related to maladaptive daydreaming: (a) structure: Including the composition and functions of emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming; (b) perception: The way in which emotional processing via maladaptive daydreaming is interpreted, including insight into the process and the flexibility of the process; and, (c) outcomes: The way in which emotional processing transpires as a result of maladaptive daydreaming, including favorable and unfavorable outcomes.

Towards the end of the chapter, several recommendations were offered for future initiatives in the research field of maladaptive daydreaming. These recommendations included the use of this study’s theory to guide clinical interventions, based around a focus on emotional processing strategies. These recommendations supplied opportunities to test the usefulness of this theory within a clinical context.

Strengths were considered that included the use of qualitative research and constructivist grounded theory methodologies, along with valid maladaptive daydreaming psychometric tools as part of this study’s research design. The significance of this study’s findings and the subsequent theory was considered and offered as a way of supplying both a new research direction and a new explanation in the research area of maladaptive daydreaming.

Within the chapter, limitations were discussed with regards to a gender bias within this research, along with the challenge of the volume of data analysis. A final limitation discussed related to the micro-politics that exist in the maladaptive daydreaming community and researchers. It was acknowledged that this thesis and its findings might prevent maladaptive daydreaming from being recognized as a distinct clinical entity.

Several recommendations were suggested for future initiatives in the research field of maladaptive daydreaming. These recommendations included the suggestion of a larger scale study that would provide an opportunity to test the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming. Such a study could be extended to look beyond a maladaptive daydreaming context, towards the wider construct of Absorptive Daydreaming. The chapter concluded with discussion of this current
research and its theory, and the ways that they might supply a way of progressing towards more adaptive experiences of maladaptive daydreaming. Discussion of this research concluded with the view that research needed to consider a person’s emotional life more closely as a pivotal point of treatment of maladaptive daydreaming.

**Significance of the Study**

Throughout this doctoral research journey, I have been mindful of the challenging standards and expectations that must be met. Additionally, I have been aware that my research needs to be innovative and creative to meet the level required of a doctorate. The work that I have undertaken, therefore, needs to supply an original contribution to knowledge, which also needs to be visible for the reader. In short, as outlined in this section, this research and thesis matter.

During the first stages of undertaking this doctorate, I was surprised at the number of people who contacted me from around the world about their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. They emailed me about their struggles with the maladaptive daydreaming experience, about their disillusionment that the research was so limited and that they were keen to engage with research as participants. I was similarly surprised that all the potential supervisors I contacted were keen to engage me as a doctoral candidate. The subject of maladaptive daydreaming appeared to me to be new and under-researched at that time of commencement of the Ph.D., which was 2017. I could sense excitement and urgency around the topic of maladaptive daydreaming.

At the beginning of this doctoral journey, having conducted some initial academic research into maladaptive daydreaming, and becoming involved with the online maladaptive daydreaming forums, it was evident to me that many people around the world experienced maladaptive daydreaming. They reported to me that they were not meeting their goals, were struggling in employment and within their relationships, and some were even attempting suicide. I could see that my research was needed and was important. These people were asking the scientific community for aid through research efforts. I responded to this with drive, aiming to engage in research that might fill the gaps in the maladaptive daydreaming research literature. It was important to me to provide support for this community, through meaningful research, and to further the body of knowledge within the area of maladaptive daydreaming.

The maladaptive daydreaming theoretical landscape at that time appeared to me to be limited and confusing. I recognized the need for research that could supply theoretical context to the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Grounded theory
seemed to me a suitable research methodology, with its ability to construct theory that would supply a new understanding of the phenomenon of maladaptive daydreaming.

This thesis aims to present a new way of understanding maladaptive daydreaming, to construct a theory that might explain the experience of maladaptive daydreaming for the participants. This new understanding of maladaptive daydreaming is based on the insights gained through two case study participants’ interview data and 16 online forum participants’ discussions. The goals of this research are achieved through case study methodology and constructivist grounded theory research methodology. These two methodologies support the construction of the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming, co-constructed directly from the participants’ data. The theory suggests that maladaptive daydreaming provides the ability for emotional processing, through either emotional growth or emotional protection. The research participants suggested that the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming resonates with their own experiences, and that the theory supplies ways in which to understand and manage their own maladaptive daydreaming experiences. I therefore posit that the theory connects, reflects, extends, and contextualizes a range of concepts in relation to emotional processing, thus supplying a significant and original contribution to existing literature.

Limitations

This section highlights the elements of the study that did not go to plan, or that did not go as well as expected. There were four such elements.

First, conducting the assessments and the forum online meant that Kezia and I maneuvered such issues to protect the data collection process, as well as the research validity of this thesis. This challenge was managed with a gentle approach, and I was mindful to do so. I did not want to upset these two potential participants, who were reporting experiencing negative symptoms of maladaptive daydreaming. Online platforms, when used to carry out a scientific research study, make communication difficult. I reminded myself at times to communicate in a concise and respectful manner.

The second potential issue is in relation to a gender bias within this thesis. During participant recruitment for the forum stage, there was initially an equal number of men and women that expressed their interest in taking part. This made me hopeful that the study would supply a gender balance, in my pursuit of the construction of a theory of maladaptive daydreaming. But upon completion of the recruitment process, there was a larger number of women than men who agreed to take part. This gender bias
can have resulted in a constructed theory that only explains the female experience of maladaptive daydreaming. But when I did share the theory with the participants on the forum, both the male and the female participants confirmed that it provided them with an explanation that also fit their experiences of maladaptive daydreaming. Future studies will benefit from equal numbers of men and women participants to expand research into this theory of maladaptive daydreaming.

The third aspect of the research that did not go to plan is the number of participants during the forum stage. I had hoped to recruit a minimum of 18 participants, but when the forum period began, I had 16 participants. I had to decide whether to wait for another two people, or to start the study with only 16 participants, as the 16 recruited had been waiting for some time for the study to begin and appeared keen to begin. I feel it was important to keep the energy that they were expressing to me. I expected that 16 participants would supply enough data for me to co-construct a data–driven theory from across the case study and the forum stages. Ideally, I would have waited for a further two participants, but being realistic, everything was in place for the study to start once I had recruited these 16. Upon reflection, I do regard the data generated from across the forum study stage to be rich data, and that beginning the forum stage with 16 participants did not negatively affect the theory construction process or the produced theory.

The final limitation is related to member checking within the case study stage. Within this doctoral research, as is required by constructivist grounded theory, the process of member checking is included as part of this methodology. Within qualitative research, throughout coding and data collection, the researcher returns to the participants for further data collection, clarification of meaning and to brainstorm alongside the participants with ideas about the experience of maladaptive daydreaming. It is the case in this research that this did occur in the second study, the forum, with a continual interaction between the forum participants and the researcher, together exploring the coding outcomes and themes that were emerging. Unfortunately, this is not the case within the first study, the two case studies. It can be the case that in qualitative research, member checking can be a problematic process, whereby participants might choose not to be involved in extending ideas from the interview transcripts, or to respond to the large number of questions their interview transcripts had raised for me as the researcher. It is recognized that the two case study participant’s decisions not to engage with the process of member checking is a limitation of this
study. I do not feel it was ethically appropriate to coerce the two participants into re-engaging with the member checking process.

**Researcher Reflections**

Following the reiteration of the design, conduct and context of this research, I here look to engage in my researcher reflections about having carried out this research. This section reflects on the impact of this thesis and the potential impacts of the *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*. It does so by exploring the discipline–specific impacts, along with the extended impact beyond the discipline of psychology, and to future work that can be conducted to test and extend this theory. The section closes with suggestions for clinical practice to aid people in their management of maladaptive daydreaming.

During my literature search, I came across a journal article by Kickbusch (1996). Kickbusch stated that there is “nothing more practical than a good theory” and “there is nothing more practical and efficient than asking the right question” (p. 5). In her article, Kickbusch praised Antonovsky for having the consistent courage to move away from theories that guide research and practice and move towards deficit models of disorders. Twenty-three years later, after constructing my data–driven *Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming*, I am left reaching a similar conclusion. The research body into maladaptive daydreaming has so far focused on the ‘maladaptive’ nature of the experience. This current work adds the viewpoint of maladaptive daydreaming being both adaptive and maladaptive, using questions, responses, conversations and perspectives, from and between the participants in this study who experience maladaptive daydreaming, all of whom met the criteria for maladaptive daydreaming, but who expressed both emotional processing occurring through adaptive and protective processes.

I started this research process with a sense of curiosity about the strangeness of the maladaptive daydreaming experience. This led to the development of interview questions and subsequent observations that involved conversations with and between people who had been experiencing maladaptive daydreaming for many years. These people generously shared their experiences with me. They asked themselves and each other questions and experimented with different answers and different perspectives. Some had managed to do this on their own previously, and some focused on exploring their daydreaming experience through online research and forums. Others had sought help from a wide range of supports, including their general practitioners, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, teachers, friends and family, as well as literature about
maladaptive daydreaming. It is obvious to me from both studies in this research that these participants wanted to further the research into maladaptive daydreaming and sought to further understand the origins of their own maladaptive daydreaming experiences. The participants in both studies directed this seeking of clarity, while my role is to follow the direction of their data. At times, this was not a straightforward process. The Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming provided most of my participants with a theoretical understanding of the origins and maintenance factors of their maladaptive daydreaming experiences. Some participants initially struggled with the suggestion that this theory of maladaptive daydreaming was an emotional processing experience and not a distinct mental health disorder. Upon reflection, though, the participants acknowledged that the experience provided them with either emotional growth or emotional protection to enable safe processing of difficult life situations—and thus engaged with the suggested theory.

The Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming is articulated within this thesis with extensive participant quotes to present what it might look like in practice. The thesis is written with the expectation that a phenomenon can be extended upon with data-driven theory, with real-world usability. The theory has the potential to be further researched, in relation to the development of ideas for the promotion of emotional processing, even beyond the maladaptive daydreaming experience. Moving the focus towards a person’s emotional life can supply a pivotal point of treatment for maladaptive daydreaming. Positioning maladaptive daydreamers as the experts in their own lives, and engaging with them in ways that enable emotional growth, aligns with Kimiecik’s (2011) suggestions about learning to listen to our emotional needs of, “helping people to become their true selves by supporting them to tell their stories, tune into how their lives feel, and explore different approaches” (p. 18).

This approach is quite different from the psychopathologizing of maladaptive daydreaming that has thus far driven the research in this area. Within this context, there is a danger that the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming can divert the attention away from maladaptive daydreaming as being recognized as a potential psychiatric disorder. It is my hope that the theory presented in this work offers a different theoretical explanation of maladaptive daydreaming, and direct future research attention further towards professional treatment options.

My intention is not to minimize consideration of the broader needs, systems, cultures, policies, services, programs or environments associated with the experience of...
maladaptive daydreaming; instead, it is to construct a data-driven theory of maladaptive daydreaming. I feel that this intention has been met within this thesis. I do not claim to have all the answers and know that this thesis is a tiny step in this direction. I am aware that other researchers are also working towards further understanding maladaptive daydreaming, working for positive change for the maladaptive daydreaming community, individuals, organizations and broader systems.

If research does move towards focusing on emotional processing benefit beyond the maladaptive daydreaming experience, this suggested theory can help to further the understanding of maladaptive daydreaming. Future research pathways can therefore focus on emotional exploration, emotional growth and emotional coping skills development. An ongoing reflective inquiry into this theory by maladaptive daydreamers can include reflection on the following two questions: ‘What are the emotional outcomes of maladaptive daydreaming for me?’, and ‘How can I attain and maintain these emotional processing needs in other ways?’

The theory itself can be further reframed using other exploratory questions delving into maladaptive daydreamer’s emotional lives, enabling people a safe emotional space to explore their answers, ideas and stories. I trust that a theory about differential emotional growth through maladaptive daydreaming will resonate with a wide population of people who experience maladaptive daydreaming. My expectation is that this theory and set of findings will provide direction for the body of research, towards addressing some of the difficulties associated with maladaptive daydreaming.

This thesis is the first constructivist grounded theory study into maladaptive daydreaming. A theory of maladaptive daydreaming is still lacking. A theory of maladaptive daydreaming is necessary, to provide knowledge, as there is currently an absence of theoretical understanding of maladaptive daydreaming. Such a theory can provide maladaptive daydreamers with a useable idea, whereby they can utilize the theory to address some of the negative aspects of maladaptive daydreaming, and harness some of the positive features of maladaptive daydreaming. The understanding that different processes are occurring, because of their maladaptive daydreaming, can give some element of relief to these maladaptive daydreamers. Further, improved understanding of the maladaptive daydreaming experience can bring benefits and lead to new treatment ideas. Treatment that enables some retention of the positive experiences of maladaptive daydreaming, such as creativity, problem-solving, and emotional benefits, will be an important extension of existing knowledge. Further, the
use of theory to reduce some of the unwanted aspects of maladaptive daydreaming will be another important research development.

The theory of maladaptive daydreaming constructed throughout this research is anticipated to contribute to the existing literature-base in a novel way. The theory offers a new context and a new direction for maladaptive daydreaming research. The goal of this research is to construct an original, credible and useful theory, and one that is relevant to the maladaptive daydreaming experience of adults. This research not only offers a significant and original contribution to the existing literature on maladaptive daydreaming, but it also extends the maladaptive daydreaming literature with rich qualitative information, and it is hoped that the theory suggested in this thesis might be useful in building on a collective understanding of maladaptive daydreaming.

I accept that the impacts of this thesis can be far reaching for the progression of maladaptive daydreaming research. I also consider that this thesis provides an empirical and original contribution to knowledge, with a new theoretical model having been constructed from the data of the two studies. I consider that I have set up the need for this research and have shown the significance and impact of the theory. I place confidence that this thesis has sufficiently articulated the details of the research and the theory to enable its use within a practitioner environment. This thesis and the emergent theory suggest that the maladaptive daydreaming research will benefit from adopting broader understandings of maladaptive daydreaming. It will be beneficial to adapt research to include further areas of the maladaptive daydreaming experience, such as exploring immersive daydreaming. Extending towards understanding more about the two pathways of the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Finally, my original contribution to knowledge is the Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming, which is a significant addition to the field because of this research.

**Chapter Summary**

This conclusion chapter has summarized each of the preceding seven chapters and explained their importance within the work. This chapter has also provided a discussion of the theory that has been constructed and presented through the research, contextualized within the broader research body, and considers the significance of the study, research context and limitations. I have concluded with a personal reflection on the process of my co-construction of the initial Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming.
Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming and the theory itself, as my significant contribution to existing knowledge.
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Student No: 11470570


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Appendix A:
Participant Recruitment Advertisement

Three types of recruitment posts/advertisements are proposed, to be able to gain access to appropriate participants. Initially, a Linked-in advertisement would be utilized, to share a general overview of the study to the general public, inviting participants to click through to the study website, to read about the study and, if they wish, to be able to contact the researcher to discuss participation. If the Linked-in advertisement does not reach the appropriate population of potential participants, then an advertisement would be utilized, to allow the Maladaptive Population forums to share a general overview of the study. The administrators of the Maladaptive Population forums would be requested to share a link about a research study, for people to look at the study website and, if they wish, to be able to contact the researcher to discuss participation. If the Maladaptive Population forums do not enable the researcher to locate two appropriate Australian’s who experience Maladaptive Daydreaming, then a Facebook advertisement, open to the public, would be used to aim to locate the two appropriate Australian’s who experience Maladaptive Daydreaming. The researcher is mindful that she does not want to overwhelm the Maladaptive Daydreaming community, and this is why she will disengage with carrying out further recruitment advertising, once the two appropriate case study participants have volunteered to participate.

The post/advertisement (Linked-in, Maladaptive Daydreaming Forums, Facebook public):

[Image: Advertisement for Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming Research]

**Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming Research**

Rachael Haynes, a Ph.D researcher at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, is seeking to invite two Maladaptive daydreamers from Australia, to be interviewed and share their stories about their experiences of Maladaptive Daydreaming. The study is due to start in mid-2017, and would involve a face-to-face interview and a wellbeing assessment. Participation would be voluntary, confidential and any information collected would be de-identified, and used to form two case studies, in exploring Maladaptive Daydreaming. Volunteers in the study will also be provided with a $50 Myer gift card, as an extension of gratitude for their participation.

If you are interested, live in Australia and are aged over 18, we invite you to look at this research study. The website link is [http://www.projectname.com.au](http://www.projectname.com.au)

To get in touch with Rachael Haynes directly, you can email her at [rhaynes@csu.edu.au](mailto:rhaynes@csu.edu.au)
Exploring Daydreaming
A research study being carried out through Charles Sturt University.

'Charles Sturt Logo'
'School of Psychology Logo'

'Image related to daydreaming'

About the study:

'Rachael Haynes, Researcher'
'Image of Rachael Haynes, Researcher'
'Image of Gene Hodgins, Primary Supervisor'
'Image of Charini Gunaratne, Secondary Supervisor'

Rachael Haynes is the Ph.D. researcher involved in this study. She is an Australian Registered Psychologist, with over ten years of working in mental health services around Australia, the UK and in offshore detention camps. Rachael has an undergraduate degree in Psychology and also a Forensic Psychology Masters. She is currently carrying out research in trauma, dissociation and daydreaming.

Dr. Hodgins is the Principle Supervisor of the Ph.D. researcher involved in this study. Dr. Hodgins has substantial experience of supervising students doing qualitative research studies. Dr. Hodgins is a Clinical Psychologist with extensive clinical and research experience regarding psychological trauma, post trauma responses and evidence based trauma counselling in various contexts and populations. Dr. Hodgins has considerable experience as a researcher, co-ordinator, supervisor and clinician within specialist mental health clinics, rural mental health contexts, primary mental health care education and training (including GP’s), Clinical Psychology intern supervision, Psychiatry Registrar supervision and student lecturing and tutoring. Dr. Hodgins is currently the Associate Head of the School of Psychology in Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga campus and works as a Senior Lecturer at the University.

Dr. Gunaratne is the Secondary Supervisor of the Ph.D. researcher involved in this study. Dr. Gunaratne has experience in quantitative and qualitative research involving participants from a wide variety of contexts. Her Ph.D entitled "Risk, Recovery and Resilience in Tsunami survivors from Sri Lanka" examined trauma and resilience. Dr. Gunaratne is a Lecturer at Charles Sturt University in Wagga and has extensive experience of providing supervision.
### About Maladaptive Daydreaming:

(Some background information, i.e. a definition of Maladaptive Daydreaming, the previous research that has been carried out and the findings from the research).

### Participation:

We are currently seeking two participants to help us to explore their experiences of Maladaptive Daydreaming. This will require about one to two hours of participation, with an extension of gratitude for participating, by receiving a $50 Myer Gift Card. The two participants will spend some time with the researcher, firstly having a wellbeing check carried out, to ensure eligibility, and secondly, to speak about their experiences of Maladaptive Daydreaming. The interview will be taped and transcribed, with the opportunity for the participant to be involved in the transcription review process. The transcripts will be used to develop two case studies about Maladaptive Daydreaming.

If you would like more about what is involved in the research study, click here:

‘Click through to the Participant Information Handout’.

Once you have read the Participant Information Handout, if you would like to participate, you can see our consent form here:

‘Click through to the Participant Information Handout’.

The next step is to contact the researcher, who will then be able to organise to discuss the study and for the opportunity to ask questions, and discuss things such as confidentiality, voluntary status, eligibility, the process and the consent process.

Email rhaynes@csu.edu.au To register your interest to participate

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<th>Page 4</th>
<th>Support Service Links</th>
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<td>We do hope that you are feeling good about your experience on this website, and in reviewing whether or not to become a participant. But there may be times, that thinking about certain things, might trigger something for a participant. If you need to talk to somebody, we would like to help to link you with some services, which might be able to help:</td>
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<td>APS Find a Psychologist Service:</td>
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<td>You can easily access a Psychologist, through the Australian Psychological Society’s ‘Find a Psychologist’ service. To do this, go to <a href="http://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist">http://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist</a></td>
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<td>Through a Medicare GP Mental Health Treatment Plan, you are able to access up to 10 sessions of psychological treatment per year. This can involve Interpersonal Therapy (counselling), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Relaxation Techniques.</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-Line Support:</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are lot of wonderful online services available to you. A list of these are shown below:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyondblue.org.au (24/7 telephone support, online chat available 3pm to 12pm 7 days a week and email responses within 24 hours).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeline.org.au (24/7 telephone support and crisis online chat support available 7pm to 4am 7 days a week).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headspace.org.au (24/7 telephone support to young adults aged 12-25, e-group chats and email support).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicidecallbackservice.org.au (24/7 telephone support of online web chat).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7cups.com (The 7 cups of tea website is a 24/7 online free counselling website, for under 15 minutes of counselling).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency Services:</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you experience a mental health crisis/emergency (self-harm episode, suicidal thoughts, not feeling safe/harmful to others), please attend a hospital as a priority, or ring 000 immediately.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C:

Study Information Handout (Two Case Studies)

Participant Information Sheet

Ph.D Researcher: Rachael Haynes

When daydreams become harmful:
Emerging themes from an Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming Population

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a Ph.D Candidate, from Charles Sturt University. You must be 18 years or over to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take as much time as you need to read this information sheet. You may also decide to discuss it with your family and friends. You will be given a copy of this information sheet.

Section 1: Purpose of the study:
We are asking you to take part in the research study, because we are trying to learn more about Australian people’s experience of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Section 2: Justification for the research:
There has been some previous research into Maladaptive Daydreaming by Professor Eli Somer, with participants in Israel in 2003, and more recently, in 2016, with online participants from around the World. But, there has not yet been an Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming study. Maladaptive Daydreaming is a newly defined disorder, which has limited scientific research within Australia. It is important to further expand upon the research which has already been carried out around the World. There are some conflicting ideas about Maladaptive Daydreaming, in terms of whether it is a mental health condition and how it might develop, for a person who experiences it. Your involvement in this study will enable further exploration to be carried out, to learn more about Maladaptive Daydreaming, how it develops and hopefully, to provide some ideas for treatment of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Section 3: Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria:
Eligibility: To be eligible to take part in the research study, you must be over 18 years of age. The Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), and a newly developed Structured Clinical Interview for Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCIMD), created by Eli Somer, (2017), will also be used to establish your eligibility to take part in this study. To be eligible to participate, your scores on the MDS-16 and SCIMD, will be required to be at a clinical level, which will confirm your experience of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

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Appendix C – Page Two

Exclusion Criteria: A number of circumstances would require your exclusion from this research study. These circumstances would include a fluctuation/episode of a pre-existing mental health condition, including: Dementia, Delirium, Psychotic Disorders, Mania and intoxication with illicit substances or alcohol. If you are experiencing a fluctuation of your mental health, this would exclude you from the research study and you would be assisted to access appropriate mental health/community/psychiatric/welfare services, as needed.

A further exclusion criteria, would be the supply of false information at the mental health assessment phase or interview phase. If false information has been identified to have been provided, the data provided would be eliminated from the study by the researcher, and you would be unable to participate in the study.

The exclusion criteria will be assessed during the mental health assessment (SCIMD) phase, by the Researcher at the interview phase.

Section 4: Procedures - Mental Health Assessment (SCIMD):
You will be asked to attend a face-to-face mental health assessment, specific for Maladaptive Daydreaming, with an Researcher. The mental health assessment (SCIMD) has been developed by Somer, (2017) and is a Clinical Structured Interview, specifically used to assess Maladaptive Daydreaming. There is no fee for this mental health assessment. This mental health assessment will take around 1 hour, and the location will be determined according to your personal preference. It may be conducted in our office, at your home, or in a park, or other confidential location as you prefer. You will be asked some questions about your past and current wellbeing. You will also be asked to complete the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), which has 16 questions and provides further information to the Researcher.

Section 5: Procedures (Interview):
You will also be asked to attend a face-to-face interview with the researcher, in order to share your experience of being a Maladaptive Daydreamer. You can choose to have the interview on the same date as the mental health assessment. The interview will take between 1 to 2 hours, and once again, the location will be determined according to your personal preference. The interview will be taped, and later transcribed. You will be offered the opportunity to see and comment on the transcripts at a later date.

Section 6: Potential risks and discomforts:
There are no potential risks to your participation. If you do feel some level of discomfort at responding to some of the questions, please feel free to ask to skip a question. If you do become distressed at any point of the study, the researcher will have already provided you with a list of support services and will be happy to support you in accessing these if you need.
Section 7: Potential benefits to participation and/or to Society:
You may find some benefit from participating in this research i.e. you might learn about the phenomenon of Maladaptive Daydreaming, you might experience some pride from taking part in the research and for your contribution towards the research into Maladaptive Daydreaming. The overall goal is to explore Maladaptive Daydreaming in the Australian population, aiming to identify and understand the main themes in Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Section 8: Payment/compensation for participation:
In acknowledgment of your contribution, if you do choose to participate in the research study, and as an extension of gratitude, you will be compensated at the mental health assessment stage with a $50 Myer gift voucher. This voucher is yours to keep, whether or not you choose to participate until the end of the study, or whether you choose to withdraw, for whatever reason.

Section 9: Potential conflicts of interest:
The researcher of this study does not have any financial interests associated with the study. The researcher is an Australian Registered Psychologist, but she will not be providing therapy/treatment in the study, instead her role will be as a Researcher.

Section 10: Confidentiality:
Any information (data) that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified to you, will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Identifying information will be changed, so that your identity will not be revealed. The information collected about you will be coded using a pseudonym (fake name) or initials and numbers, for example, 123-abc, etc. The information will be stored in the researcher’s office in a locked file cabinet or will be kept stored electronically, separately from the rest of your data, with double password access, only known by the researcher.

The data will be stored for five years after the study has been completed and then destroyed. Your signed consent will be asked for by the researcher, at the interview stage, to audio record the interview. The researcher will transcribe the recording and will provide you with a copy of the transcripts. You have the right to review and edit the transcription. When the results of the research are published, or disclosed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.
Section 11: Participation and withdrawal:
You can choose whether to be part of this study or not. If you do choose to volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you are reluctant to answer and still remain in the study.

If you do choose to withdraw your participation in the study, you can email the researcher at any stage, informing them of your withdrawal. You do not have to provide a reason for your withdrawal. Data that has been collected, including emails, interviews, signed consent forms, assessment information and typed transcripts will be immediately destroyed by the researcher. This will involve the researcher deleting any relevant data stored electronically, including files, information stored in the inbox, sent box and trash area. The researcher will also immediately shred any relevant data stored on paper, i.e. notes, signed consent forms, completed assessments and interview notes and interview transcripts.

The researcher may withdraw you at any stage from this research in line with the exclusion criteria outlined at Section 3 in this information sheet. If you are withdrawn from the study by the researcher, you will be contacted immediately by the researcher by email or telephone. The researcher will provide you with the reason for exclusion and withdrawal, and you will be able to discuss these reasons with the researcher. If needed, you will be assisted to access appropriate mental health/community/psychiatric/welfare services, as needed. If you are withdrawn from the study, the data that has been collected, including emails, interviews, signed consent forms, assessment information and typed transcripts will be immediately destroyed by the researcher. This will involve the researcher deleting any relevant data stored electronically, including files, information stored in the inbox, sent box and trash area. The researcher will also immediately shred any relevant data stored on paper, i.e. notes, signed consent forms, completed assessments and interview notes and interview transcripts.

Section 12: Alternatives to participation:
Your alternative to participation is to choose not to participate.

Section 13: Outcomes of the study
You can choose whether or not, you would like to be informed of the outcomes of the study. It is the aim of the researcher to generate a theory from the information that you provide from your participation in the study. If you do decide to be informed of the outcomes of the study, you will be provided with a summary document, with an option to contact the researcher at a later stage, if you choose. Alternatively, you can choose not to be informed of the outcomes of the study. You will be invited to make this choice by the researcher, at the face-to-face interview, and provided with a form to return to the researcher, at your leisure, stating whether or not you would like to be informed about the outcomes of the study.
Appendix C – Page Five

Section 14: Future activities
Forseeable future activities may incorporate the publication of the research findings of this study in journal articles, at conferences, at academic workshops/training events, in a book or in another written format. Any information collected will be de-identified.

Section 15: Rights of research Participants (Consent):
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your participation. You are not waiving any legal rights because of your participation in this research study.

Note: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Governance and Corporate Affairs
Charles Sturt University
Private Bag 29
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795

Tel: (02) 6338 6028
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Completion of the attached ‘consent sheet’ and return of the consent sheet to the researcher will constitute consent to participation in this research study.

Identification of researchers:

Ph.D Candidate:
Rachael Haynes, rhaynes@csu.edu.au, BSc (Psych) Hons, MSc (Forensic Psych), The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioral Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

Primary Supervisor:
Dr Gene Hodgins, ghodgins@csu.edu.au, BPsych (Honours), DClinPsy. The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioral Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

Secondary Supervisor:

www.csu.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Numbers for Charles Sturt University are 00009F (NSW), 01947G (VIC) and 02690E (ACT). ABN: 83 878 708 561

Rachael Haynes
Student No: 11470570
Appendix D:
Informed Consent Form (Two Case Studies)

Consent Form

Ph.D Researcher: Rachael Haynes

When daydreams become harmful:
Emerging themes from an Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming Population

Researchers:
Ph.D Candidate, Rachael Haynes, rhaynes@csu.edu.au, BSc.(Psych) Hons, MSc (Forensic Psych), The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioral Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

Primary Supervisor, Dr Gene Hodgins, ghodgins@csu.edu.au, BPsych (Honours), DClinPsy, The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioral Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

Secondary Supervisor, Dr Charini Gunaratne, cgunaratne@csu.edu.au, Bachelor of Arts (Psychology, Astrophysics), Ph.D, The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioral Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.

☐

I am aware that I need to be over the age of 18 to participate in this research project.

☐

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.

☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

☐

I understand that the researcher can withdraw me from the project at any time, based on the exclusion criteria, shown in the Information Statement.

☐

I understand that any withdrawal from the project, will mean that all of my data, whether stored electronically or on paper, will be destroyed immediately.

☐

I consent to:

- Participate in a mental health assessment (SCIMD) with the Researcher

☐

- Undertake the MDS-16 assessment with the Researcher

☐

- Participate in an interview with the researcher and have it recorded and transcribed

☐
Appendix D – Page Two

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researchers.

I understand that my personal information will be de-identified and that there may be a possibility that it could be used in conferences or in future publications.

I understand that de-identified quotes might be used in the future dissemination of the two case studies.

I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I will receive a $50 incentive of a Myer Gift Voucher, which I can keep, whether or not I complete the participation in the project.

I agree that the researcher will be able to provide me with a copy of the transcribed interview, and that I can choose to suggest edited information for the transcript if I wish.

Signature: ____________________________ Dated: __________

Print Name: __________________________

Note: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Governance and Corporate Affairs
Charles Sturt University
Private Bag 29
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795

Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

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CRICOS Provider Numbers for Charles Sturt University are 00005F (NSW), 01947G (VIC) and 029638 (ACT). ABN: 83 878 708 551

Rachael Haynes Student No: 11470570
Appendix E:

Semi-structured Interview Questions (Two Case Studies)

1. Give me an overview about yourself?
2. How would you explain Maladaptive Daydreaming to another person?
3. Tell me about your experience of Maladaptive Daydreaming?
4. What do you notice is unique about your Maladaptive Daydreaming?
5. What things do you experience in your Maladaptive Daydreaming which are similar to other’s experiences?
6. What are your thoughts about how the Maladaptive Daydreaming developed for you?
7. What types of things does Maladaptive Daydreaming stop you from doing?
8. In what ways does your Maladaptive Daydreaming benefit you?
9. What have you told your significant others about your experience of Maladaptive Daydreaming?
10. Tell me about your experience of how Maladaptive Daydreaming impacts your relationships?
11. What have you noticed about your Maladaptive Daydreaming over the years?
12. Tell me about your experience of talking to other’s about your Maladaptive Daydreaming?
13. What is some advice you would give to other people who experience Maladaptive Daydreaming?
14. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

The researcher will use qualitative interviewing techniques, and will use the interview questions detailed above. When using a semi-structured interview schedule, the qualitative researcher aims to explore a range of topics, using open-ended questions. Questions may often be used out of order, as the interview progresses. The use of probes and further exploration will be used by the researcher, to access more in-depth information. This style of interview allows the researcher to avoid leading the interview and to enable a relaxed and comfortable interview for the participant.

Probes that the researcher may use, might include:

- What did you mean when you said…?
- What would be an example of that?
- What did that person say?
- When you said… did you mean?

Topics of the interview:

- Background information
- Perspectives
- Origins
- Benefits
- Weaknesses
- Understanding
- Functioning
- Progression
- Support
- Similarity
- Differences
Appendix F:
Maladaptive Daydreaming Assessment Tools
The Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16) – Page One

Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16)

Directions: In answering the following questions, please refer to your daydreaming activities in the last month, if not otherwise specified. Choose the option that best fits your experience. For example, some people get so caught up in their daydreaming that they forget where they are. How often do you forget where you are when you daydream? In this example, 20% is chosen.

Questions:

1. Some people notice that certain music can trigger their daydreaming. To what extent does music activate your daydreaming?

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<td>Very often</td>
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2. Some people feel a need to continue a daydream that was interrupted by a real world event at a later point. When a real world event has interrupted one of your daydreams, how strong was your need or urge to return to that daydream as soon as possible?

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<tr>
<td>No urge at all</td>
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<td>Extreme urge</td>
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3. How often are your current daydreams accompanied by vocal noises or facial expressions (e.g. laughing, talking or mouthing words)?

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<td>Extremely frequent</td>
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4. If you go through a period of time when you are not able to daydream as much as usual due to real world obligations, how distressed are you by your inability to find time to daydream?

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<tr>
<td>No distress at all</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extreme distress</td>
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Appendix F:

(MDS-16) - Page Two

5. Some people have the experience of their daydreaming interfering with their daily chores or tasks. How much does your daydreaming interfere with your ability to get basic chores accomplished?

6. Some people feel distressed or concerned about the amount of time they spend daydreaming. How distressed do you currently feel about the amount of time you spend daydreaming?

7. When you know you have had something important or challenging to pay attention to or finish, how difficult was it for you to stay on task and complete the goal without daydreaming?

8. Some people have had the experience of their daydreaming hindering the things that are most important to them. How much do you feel that your daydreaming activities interfere with achieving your overall life goals?

9. Some people experience difficulties in controlling or limiting their daydreaming. How difficult has it been for you to keep your daydreaming under control?

10. Some people feel annoyed when a real world event interrupts one of their daydreams. When the real world interrupts one of your daydreams, on average how annoyed do you feel?

11. Some people have the experience of their daydreaming interfering with their academic/occupational success or personal achievements. How much does your daydreaming interfere with your academic/occupational success?
Appendix F:

(MDS-16) - Page Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scale</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Some people would rather daydream than do most other things. To what extent would you rather daydream than engage with other people or participate in social activities or hobbies?</td>
<td>Not at all - To the fullest extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. When you wake up in the morning, how strong has your urge been to immediately start daydreaming?</td>
<td>No urge at all - Extreme urge</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. How often are your current daydreams accompanied by physical activity, such as pacing, swinging or shaking your hands?</td>
<td>Never - Very often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Some people love to daydream. While you are daydreaming, to what extent do you find it comforting and/or enjoyable?</td>
<td>Not enjoyable at all - Very enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Some people find it hard to maintain their daydreaming when they are not listening to music. To what extent is your daydreaming dependent on continued listening to music?</td>
<td>Not dependent at all - Very dependent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scoring:**

Total Score of all 16 questions = __________

Divide by 16 = __________

The overall percentage = __________ indicating Maladaptive Daydreaming experience
## Appendix F:
The Structured Clinical Interview - Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCI-MD) – Page One

### Structured Clinical Interview for Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCID-MD)

INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWERS: Each item should be asked exactly as written. Clarification can be provided if the interviewee appears not to understand the question. Follow-up each item with further exploration or additional clarification of symptoms until you have enough information to rate the item confidently.

**Introducer:**

**Participant:**

A. In the last six months, have you experienced persistent and recurrent fantasy activity that is vivid and fanciful and also persistent and recurrent?

Yes = 1, No = 2, Yes, but less than 6 months = 3

1. While daydreaming, have you experienced an intense sense of immersion, (being completely absorbed) that includes visual, auditory (sound) or affective (feelings and emotional) properties?

Yes = 1, No = 2

2. Is your daydreaming triggered, maintained or enhanced with exposure to music?

Yes = 1, No = 2

3. Is your daydreaming triggered, maintained or enhanced with exposure to repetitive movement (e.g., pacing, rocking, hand movements)?

Yes = 1, No = 2

4. Do you often daydream when feeling distressed, or bored?

Yes = 1, No = 2

5. Does the length or intensity of your daydreaming increase in the absence of others?

Yes = 1, No = 2

6. Are you annoyed when you are unable to daydream or when your daydreaming is interrupted, curbed?

Yes = 1, N = 2

7. Would you rather daydream than engage in daily chores, social, academic or professional activities?

Yes = 1, No = 2
Appendix F:

(SCI-MD) - Page Two

8. Have you made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control or stop your daydreaming?
   Yes = 1, No = 2 [    ]

B. Does your daydreaming cause significant distress or does it impair your social, academic, occupational or other important areas of functioning?
   Yes = 1, No = 2 [    ]

C. Indicate if the disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition.
   Interviewer, ascertain that MD is not better explained by Autism Spectrum Disorders, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Dementia, Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders, Bipolar Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders, Dissociative Identity Disorder, Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders, an Organic Disorder or a Medical Condition.
   Yes = 1, No = 2 [    ]

The respondent is positive for Maladaptive Daydreaming Disorder if the answers were ‘Yes’ to: A (1); positive for one other A criterion; positive for B; and positive for C.

If individual meets criteria for MD, rate if mild, moderate or severe.

Mild: Experiences mainly distress, no obvious functional impairment.

Moderate: One area of functioning is affected (e.g., work).

Severe: More than one area of functioning is affected (e.g., work, school or social life).

Absent = 1; Present, mild = 2; Present, moderate = 3; Present, severe = 4

Rate if Unspecified MD [*]
   Yes = 1, No = 2 [    ]

[*] Unspecified MD = A form of Maladaptive Daydreaming which does not meet the full criteria for Maladaptive Daydreaming Disorder. This is the case when Criterion A is 3 (less than 6 months in duration).
Appendix G:
Permissions: Assoc. Professor Gene Hodgins

Email confirmation

Hodgins, Gene
Fri 6/9/2017 11:56 AM

To: Haynes, Rachael;

Hello,

This email is to notify members of the Human Research Ethics Committee at CSU, that I hereby give permission for Rachael Haynes, who is a PhD Candidate being supervised by me, to use my bio and photograph on her Maladaptive Daydreaming study website, for the purposes of participant information and recruitment.

If any committee members have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you.

Cheers, Gene.

Dr Gene Hodgins
Associate Head of School
Senior Lecturer & Clinical Psychologist
School of Psychology, Charles Sturt University
Room 117, Building 26 (Marchant Hall)
Boorooma Street, Locked Bag 588
Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678
Australia
Tel: +61 2 6923 2746
Email: ghodgins@csu.edu.au
www.csu.edu.au

Twitter | Facebook | LinkedIn | YouTube
Appendix G:

Permissions: Dr Charini Gunaratne

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval</th>
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| **Gunaratne, Charini**  
Thu 6/8/2017 4:27 PM |

To: Haynes, Rachael

Hello,

This email is to notify members of the Human Research Ethics Committee at CSU, that I hereby give permission for Rachael Haynes, who is a PhD Candidate being supervised by me, to use my bio and photograph on her Maladaptive Daydreaming study website, for the purposes of participant information and recruitment.

If any committee members have any questions, please contact me.

Thank you.

Kind regards,

Dr. Charini Gunaratne  
Lecturer | School of Psychology  
Charles Sturt University  
Room 123, Building 26 (Marchant Hall)  
Borraine Street  
Locked Bag 5198  
Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678  
Australia  
Tel: +61 2 8533 2775  
Fax: +61 2 8533 2775  
Email: cgunaratne@csu.edu.au  
www.csu.edu.au
Appendix G:

Permissions: – Professor Eli Somer

To
Ms. Rachael Haynes
Charles Sturt University
Australia

May 29, 2017

Dear Rachael,

I am pleased to grant you permission to use the Structured Clinical Interview for MD (SCIMD) in your doctoral research. I hope you will find the instrument useful in identifying individuals who are struggling with Maladaptive Daydreaming.

With kind regards,

[Signature]

Eli Somer, Ph.D.

199 Abba Khoushy Ave., Mount Carmel, Haifa 3498838, Israel | 3498838

Phone: 972-4-8249543 | E-mail: gsamir@univ.haifa.ac.il | Fax: 972-4-8246832

Rachael Haynes
Student No: 11470570
Appendix H:
Website Mock-Up (Forum) - Page One

www.daydreaming-study.weebly.com

About MD (screen shot 1)

About the Research Study:

This research study into Maladaptive Daydreaming is being carried out by Rachael Haynes, a Researcher and Ph.D Candidate at The School of Psychology, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW, Australia. The study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Charles Sturt University, NSW, Australia. After a meeting in Israel, between Rachael Haynes and Professor Eli Somer, permission has been provided for the research study to utilise Professor Somer's Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDIS-16) and the Structured Clinical Interview for Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCMD).

This will be the first research study into the experience of Australian Maladaptive Daydreamers.

The study has two phases:

Phase I: will explore the experience of two participants, using a case study methodology. [Near completion].

Phase II: will explore the experiences of 30 participants, through a secret Facebook group. [Seeking participants].

The current research study will be Phase II: Online Forum, as the first phase (2 Case Studies) has nearly reached completion.

If you are interested, register your interest to participate, by clicking here to get to the Participants page.

About MD (screen shot 2)
Appendix H: Website Mock-Up (Forum) - Page Two

About MD (screen shot 3)

**DAYDREAMING-STUDY**

About Maladaptive Daydreaming (MD):

The term Maladaptive Daydreaming (MD) was created by Professor Eli Somer in his work at an Israeli Trauma Clinic (Somer, 2002). Somer's initial research into Maladaptive Daydreaming, identified the following features:

- An addictive, idealised fantasy life;
- vivid and intense daydreams, with numerous scenarios and storylines;
- reports of intense feelings towards the characters in the daydreams;
- often involving movement whilst daydreaming (pacing, mouthing, acting out the daydreams and fidgeting);
- an awareness of both the fantasy World and the real World simultaneously;
- often resulting in poor social skills, as a result of spending lengthy time within the daydream state;
- reported as experiencing the daydreaming in childhood;
- reports of feelings of embarrassment at the amount of time spent daydreaming, often resulting in a hidden and unspoken experience;
- affecting people's ability to function in the real World (reducing opportunity for employment/study/relationships/friendships and affecting health and mental health);
- the seeking of ideas in the real World i.e. using Pinterest to find the perfect daydream character/outfit/scenario.

About MD (screen shot 4)

**DAYDREAMING-STUDY**

- reported as experiencing the daydreaming in childhood;
- reports of feelings of embarrassment at the amount of time spent daydreaming, often resulting in a hidden and unspoken experience;
- affecting people's ability to function in the real World (reducing opportunity for employment/study/relationships/friendships and affecting health and mental health);
- the seeking of ideas in the real World i.e. using Pinterest to find the perfect daydream character/outfit/scenario.

More recently, Rachael Haynes, a Sydney-based Psychologist, has assisted some clients who were struggling with the challenges of Maladaptive Daydreaming. Rachael became fascinated in the phenomenon, and commenced her full-time Ph.D at Charles Sturt University, exploring Maladaptive Daydreaming in February 2016.

An Australian Psychological study being carried out through Charles Sturt University.

Rachael Haynes
Student No: 11470570
Appendix H:
Website Mock-Up (Forum) - Page Three

Researchers (screen shot 1)

Researchers (screen shot 2)
Appendix H:
Website Mock-Up (Forum) - Page Four

Researchers (screen shot 3)

DAYDREAMING-STUDY

Rachael has a Bachelor of Science (with honours) in Psychology and also has achieved Master of Science in Forensic Psychology. She is currently carrying out research into Maladaptive Daydreaming, as the focus of her Ph.D.

DR CHARINIGUNARATNE
CO-SUPERVISOR

Dr. Hodgins is currently the Associate Head of the School of Psychology in Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga campus and works as a Senior Lecturer at the University.

Researchers (screen shot 4)

DAYDREAMING-STUDY

Dr. Gunaratne is one of the Co-Supervisors of the Ph.D researcher involved in this study. Dr. Gunaratne has experience in quantitative and qualitative research involving participants from a wide variety of contexts. Her Ph.D entitled "Risk, Recovery and Resilience in Tsunami survivors from Sri Lanka" and examined trauma and resilience. Dr. Gunaratne is a Lecturer at the Australian College of Applied Psychology in Melbourne, and is also an Adjunct Lecturer at The School of Psychology, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga and has extensive experience of providing supervision.

Dr. Hogg is one of the Co-Supervisors of the Ph.D researcher involved in this study. Dr. Hogg has been a faculty member of the School of Psychology at Charles Sturt University since 2012. In that time Dr Hogg has supervised over twenty-five research students in psychology, including Post-Graduate Diploma students, Honours students, and Masters students, and this year she will undertake co-supervision of two Ph.D candidates. Dr. Hogg conducts and teaches both qualitative and quantitative research methods and has significant expertise in qualitative research supervision, having successfully supervised a number of qualitative research projects to completion.
Appendix H:
Website Mock-Up (Forum) - Page Five

Phase I: Case Studies (screen shot 1)

Thank you for expressing your interest, but we have now recruited two Maladaptive Daydreamers for the Case Study Phase, with interviews being carried out over March 2018.

We are currently seeking two participants to help us to explore their experiences of Maladaptive Daydreaming. This will require about two hours of participation, with an extension of gratitude for participating, by receiving a $50 Myer Gift Card. The two participants will spend some time with a Psychologist, having a wellbeing check carried out, to ensure eligibility, and at a second session, to speak to the researcher about their experiences of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Phase I: Case Studies (screen shot 2)

The interview with the researcher will be taped and transcribed, with a later opportunity for the participant to be involved in the transcription review process. The transcripts will be used to develop two case studies about the experiences of Australian Maladaptive Daydreamers. It is likely that the two de-identified case studies would be published in academic journals.

The aim of the two case studies (Phase I), is to provide some initial exploration into the experiences of Australian Maladaptive Daydreamers. Phase II of this research study (to be announced at a later date), the online confidential Maladaptive Daydreamers forum, will provide further explanation into the experiences of Australian Maladaptive Daydreamers.
Phase II: Online Forum (screen shot 1)

Phase II: Online Forum (screen shot 2)
Appendix H: Website Mock-Up (Forum) - Page Seven

More + (Participate) (screen shot 1)

More + (Participate) (screen shot 2)
Appendix H:
Website Mock-up (Forum) - Page Eight

More + (Participate) (screen shot 3)

More + (Support) (screen shot 1)

We do hope that you are feeling good about your experience on this website, and in reviewing whether or not to become a participant. But there may be times, that thinking about certain things, might trigger something for a participant. If you need to talk to somebody, we would like to help to link you with some services, which might be able to help:
Appendix H:  
Website Mock-up (Forum) - Page Nine

More + (Support) (screen shot 2)

**DAYDREAMING—STUDY**

APS Find a Psychologist Service:

You can easily access a Psychologist, through the Australian Psychological Society's 'Find a Psychologist' service. To do this, go to [http://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist](http://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist)

Through a Medicare GP Mental Health Treatment Plan, you are able to access up to 10 sessions of psychological treatment per year. This can involve Interpersonal Therapy (counselling), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Relaxation Techniques.

On-Line Support:

There are lot of wonderful online services available to you. A list of these are shown below:

BeyondBlue.org.au (24/7 telephone support, online chat available 3pm to 12pm 7 days a week and email responses within 24 hours).

Lifeline.org.au (24/7 telephone support and crisis online chat support available 7pm to 4pm 7 days a week).

Headspace.org.au (24/7 telephone support to young adults aged 12-25, e-group chats and email support).

Suicidecallbackservice.org.au (24/7 telephone support of online web chat).

7cups.com (The 7 cups of tea website is a 24/7 online free counselling website, for under 15 minutes of counselling).

More + (Support) (screen shot 3)

**DAYDREAMING—STUDY**

BeyondBlue.org.au (24/7 telephone support, online chat available 3pm to 12pm 7 days a week and email responses within 24 hours).

Lifeline.org.au (24/7 telephone support and crisis online chat support available 7pm to 4am 7 days a week).

Headspace.org.au (24/7 telephone support to young adults aged 12-25, e-group chats and email support).

Suicidecallbackservice.org.au (24/7 telephone support of online web chat).

7cups.com (The 7 cups of tea website is a 24/7 online free counselling website, for under 15 minutes of counselling).

Emergency Services:

If you experience a mental health crisis/emergency (self-harm episode, suicidal thoughts, not feeling safe/harmful to others), please attend a hospital as a priority. or ring 000 immediately.

An Australian Psychological study being carried out through Charles Sturt University.
Appendix I:
Study Information Handout (Forum) - Page One

Participant Information Sheet

Ph.D Researcher: Rachael Haynes

When daydreams become harmful:
Emerging themes from an Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming Population

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a Ph.D Candidate, from Charles Sturt University. You must be 18 years or over to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take as much time as you need to read this information sheet. You may also decide to discuss it with your family and friends. You will be given a copy of this information sheet.

Section 1: Purpose of the study:
We are asking you to take part in the research study, because we are trying to learn more about Australian people’s experience of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Section 2: Justification for the research:
There has been some previous research into Maladaptive Daydreaming by Professor Eli Somer, with participants in Israel in 2003, and more recently, in 2016, with online participants from around the World. But, there has not yet been an Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming study. Maladaptive Daydreaming is a newly defined disorder, which has limited scientific research within Australia. It is important to further expand upon the research which has already been carried out around the World. There are some conflicting ideas about Maladaptive Daydreaming, in terms of whether it is a mental health condition and how it might develop, for a person who experiences it. Your involvement in this study will enable further exploration to be carried out, to learn more about Maladaptive Daydreaming, how it develops and hopefully, to provide some ideas for treatment of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Section 3: Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria:

Eligibility: To be eligible to take part in the research study, you must be over 18 years of age. The Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), and a newly developed Structured Clinical Interview for Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCIMD), created by Eli Somer, (2017), will also be used to establish your eligibility to take part in this study. To be eligible to participate, your scores on the MDS-16 and SCIMD, will be required to be at a clinical level, which will confirm your experience of Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Rachael Haynes
Student No: 11470570
Appendix I:
Study Information Handout (Forum) - Page Two

Exclusion Criteria: A number of circumstances would require your exclusion from this research study. These circumstances would include a fluctuation/episode of a pre-existing mental health condition, including: Dementia, Delirium, Psychotic Disorders, Mania and intoxication with illicit substances or alcohol. If you are experiencing a fluctuation of your mental health, this would exclude you from the research study and you would be assisted to access appropriate mental health/community/psychiatric/welfare services, as needed.

A further exclusion criteria, would be the supply of false information at the assessment phase. If false information has been identified to have been provided, the data provided would be eliminated from the study by the researcher, and you would be unable to participate in the study.

The exclusion criteria will be assessed during the maladaptive daydreaming assessment (SCIMD) phase, by the assessor, and monitored by the researcher during the online forum phase.

Section 4: Procedures – Maladaptive Daydreaming Assessment (SCIMD):
You will be asked to attend a skype/online maladaptive daydreaming assessment, with an assessor. The maladaptive daydreaming assessment (SCIMD) has been developed by Somer, (2017) and is a Clinical Structured Interview, specifically used to assess Maladaptive Daydreaming. There is no fee for this assessment. This maladaptive daydreaming assessment will take around 1 to 2 hours, and you will be able to choose a convenient date and time. You will be asked some questions about your past and current wellbeing. You will also be asked to complete the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), which has 16 questions and provides further information to the assessor.

Section 5: Procedures (Online Forum):
If you are eligible for the study, you will be provided with a secret group invitation to join the study on Facebook from the researcher. Secret groups on Facebook ensure that your participation in the study will be confidential, with only invited participants having access. Participation will not appear on Facebook, Google or any other internet searches. The online forum will involve up to 30 other Australian Maladaptive Daydreamers, and you will be free to share your experiences of maladaptive daydreaming on the forum. There may be times when the researcher might post questions of interest, to encourage further exploration. You can choose to participate as often or as little as you wish during this six week period. The online forum will be closed after the six week period, but an alternative Maladaptive Daydreaming facebook group will be offered, to ensure that you are able to continue to gain support.

Section 6: Potential risks and discomforts:
There are no potential risks to your participation. If you do feel some level of discomfort at responding to some of the questions/comments on the forum, you can choose to participate as often or as little as you wish. If you do become distressed at any point of the study, the researcher will be available by private chat/email, and will be happy to assist you with any problems associated with the online forum. You will have already been provided you with a list of support services and the researcher will be happy to support you in accessing these if you need.
Appendix I:
Study Information Handout (Forum) - Page Three

Section 7: Potential benefits to participation and/or to Society:
You may find some benefit from participating in this research i.e. you might learn about the phenomenon of Maladaptive Daydreaming, you might experience some pride from taking part in the research and for your contribution towards the research into Maladaptive Daydreaming. The overall goal is to explore Maladaptive Daydreaming in the Australian population, aiming to identify and understand the main themes in Maladaptive Daydreaming.

Section 8: Payment/compensation for participation:
In acknowledgment of your contribution, if you do choose to participate in the research study, and as an extension of gratitude, you will be compensated with a $50 Myer gift voucher. This voucher is yours to keep, whether or not you choose to participate until the end of the study, or whether you choose to withdraw, for whatever reason. You can choose to have this gift voucher posted or emailed to you.

Section 9: Potential conflicts of interest:
The researcher of this study does not have any financial interests associated with the study. The researcher is an Australian Registered Psychologist, but she will not be providing therapy/treatment in the study, instead her role will be as a Researcher.

Section 10: Confidentiality:
Any information (data) that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified to you, will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Identifying information will be changed, so that your identity will not be revealed. The information collected about you will be coded using a pseudonym (fake name) or initials and numbers, for example, 123-abc, etc. The information will be stored electronically, with double password access, only known by the researcher.

The data will be stored for five years after the study has been completed and then destroyed. Your signed consent will be collected by email by the researcher, prior to the maladaptive daydreaming assessment. The researcher will transcribe comments/status updates from the online forum, and will provide you with a copy of these if you wish. You have the right to review and edit the transcription. When the results of the research are published, or disclosed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.
Appendix I:
Study Information Handout (Forum) - Page Four

Section 11: Participation and withdrawal:
You can choose whether to be part of this study or not. If you do choose to volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

If you do choose to withdraw your participation in the study, you can email the researcher at any stage, informing them of your withdrawal. You do not have to provide a reason for your withdrawal. Data that has been collected, including emails, Facebook comments from the online forum, signed consent forms, assessment information and screen shots will be immediately destroyed by the researcher. This will involve the researcher deleting any relevant data stored electronically, including files, information stored in the inbox, sent box and trash area.

The researcher may withdraw you at any stage from this research in line with the exclusion criteria outlined at Section 3 in this information sheet. If you are withdrawn from the study by the researcher, you will be contacted immediately by the researcher by email or telephone. The researcher will provide you with the reason for exclusion and withdrawal, and you will be able to discuss these reasons with the researcher. If needed, you will be assisted to access appropriate mental health/community/psychiatric/welfare services, as needed. If you are withdrawn from the study, the data that has been collected, including emails, interviews, signed consent forms, assessment information and typed transcripts will be immediately destroyed by the researcher. This will involve the researcher deleting any relevant data stored electronically, including files, information stored in the inbox, sent box and trash area.

Section 12: Alternatives to participation:
Your alternative to participation is to choose not to participate.

Section 13: Outcomes of the study
You can choose whether or not, you would like to be informed of the outcomes of the study. It is the aim of the researcher to generate a theory from the information that you provide from your participation in the study. If you do decide to be informed of the outcomes of the study, you will be provided with a summary document, with an option to contact the researcher at a later stage, if you choose. Alternatively, you can choose not to be informed of the outcomes of the study.
Section 14: Future activities
Foreseeable future activities, may incorporate the publication of the research findings of this study in journal articles, at conferences, at academic workshops/training events, in a book or in another written format. Any information collected will be de-identified.

Section 15: Rights of research participants (Consent):
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your participation. You are not waiving any legal rights because of your participation in this research study.

Note: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Governance and Corporate Affairs
Charles Sturt University
Private Bag 29
Panorama Avenue
Balhurst NSW 2756
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Completion of the attached consent sheet and return of the consent sheet to the researcher will constitute consent to participation in this research study.

Identification of researchers:

Ph.D Candidate: Rachael Haynes, rhaynes@csu.edu.au, BSc (Psych) Hons, MSc (Forensic Psych), The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

Principal Supervisor: Dr Gene Hodgins, ghodgins@csu.edu.au, BPsych (Honours), DClinPsy, Three Rivers University Department of Rural Health, Faculty of Science, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

Co-Supervisor: Dr Charnni Gunaratne, Charnni.Gunaratne@acap.edu.au, Bachelor of Arts (Psychology, Astrophysics), Ph.D, The School of Psychological Sciences, The Australian College of Applied Psychology, Melbourne.

Co-Supervisor: Dr Rachel Hogg, BA Psych (Honours), Ph.D, The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.
Appendix J:
Informed Consent Form (Forum) - Page One

Consent Form

Ph.D Researcher: Rachael Haynes
When daydreams become harmful:
Emerging themes from an Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming Population
Study 2: Online Forum

Researchers:

Ph.D Candidate, Rachael Haynes, rhaynes@csu.edu.au, BSc (Psych) Home, MSc (Forensic Psych), The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

Principal Supervisor, Dr Gene Hodgins, ghodgins@csu.edu.au, BPsych (Honours), DClInPsy, The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

Co-Supervisor, Dr Charini Gunaratne, charini@gmail.com, Bachelor of Arts (Psychology, Astrophysics), Ph.D, Adjunct Lecturer, The School of Psychology, Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences, Charles Sturt University.

- I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.
- I am aware that I need to be over the age of 18 to participate in this research project.
- I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.
- I understand that the researcher can withdraw me from the project at any time, based on the exclusion criteria, shown in the Information Statement.
- I understand that any withdrawal from the project, will mean that all of my data, whether stored electronically or on paper, will be destroyed immediately.
- I understand that I own my own Facebook data and content, and that Facebook has no rights over this data.

www.csu.edu.au
The Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) Provider Number for Charles Sturt University is 00020F. ABN: 63 079 768 531
Appendix J:
Consent Form (Forum) - Page Two

- I understand that the online forum will be a secret group on Facebook, and will only available to the other participants in the forum and the researcher of the Ph.D study.
- I understand that I can use my own Facebook profile to access the online forum.
- I understand that if I choose to open another profile to protect my identity, that I am aware that this will be breaking Facebook Terms of Service.
- I understand that there will be netiquette rules for the online forum participants, to ensure online safety and identity protection.
- I understand that my personal information will remain confidential by the researcher.
- I understand that my personal information will be de-identified and that there may be a possibility that it could be used in conferences or in future publications.
- I understand that de-identified quotes might be used in the future dissemination of the results from the online forum.
- I have had the opportunity to have questions to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I will receive a $50 incentive of a Myer Gift Voucher, which I can keep, whether or not I complete the participation in the project.
- I agree that I can request the researcher to provide me with a copy of the transcribed comments from the online forum, and that I can choose to suggest edited information for the transcript if I wish.

I consent to:
- Participate in an online Maladaptive Daydreaming clinical interview (SCIMD) with an independent Assessor
- Undertake the MDS-16 (Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale) assessment with an independent Assessor
- Participate in the online secret Facebook forum, over a 6 week period.
- Adhere to the online netiquette rules for the online confidential Facebook forum.

www.csu.edu.au
CRICOS Provider Numbers for Charles Sturt University are 00009F (NSW), 01947G (ACT) and 02960E (ACT). ABN: 83 878 708 551

Rachael Haynes
Student No: 11470570
Appendix J:
Consent Form (Forum) - Page Three

 signature: __________________________  Dated: __________

Print Name: __________________________

Note: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Governance and Corporate Affairs
Charles Sturt University
Private Bag 29
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795

Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Email: erhcon@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix K:
Netiquette Guidelines (Forum)

Welcome to the Australian Maladaptive Daydreaming research study through Charles Sturt University. This phase of the research study involves up to 30 other people who have met the criteria for Maladaptive Daydreaming. On this confidential forum, you are invited to join in as much, or as little as you would like to. To ensure that everyone on the forum has a safe and enjoyable experience, please adhere to the netiquette guidelines below:

- Be respectful of other people’s perspectives;
- Be polite, kind and courteous to the other forum users;
- Do not put any identifying information on the forum, as privacy needs to be maintained for all forum users;
- Not everyone understands Internet acronyms, please comment using full words, to avoid confusion;
- Be civil. Personal differences can be handled privately through email or chat with the researcher;
- Avoid the use of profanity, or subjects related to racism, sexism or ageism;
- Do not use the forum to promote products, services or businesses;
- Stay on topic, do not post irrelevant links, comments or photographs;
- Do not use all capitals (SHOUTS) when making comments;
- Do not screenshot, share, or copy comments from the forum to any other social media or storage facility;
- If another forum user makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, please immediately contact the researcher through email or chat;
- Please do share your knowledge, ask and answer questions on the forum;
- Support and contact numbers can be accessed through the documents section of the forum. Alternatively, feel free to contact the researcher, who will assist you in accessing any support you may need.
Appendix L:
Support Service Links (Forum)

Support Service Links

We do hope that you are feeling good about your experience on this website, and in reviewing whether or not to become a participant. But there may be times, that thinking about certain things, might trigger something for a participant. If you need to talk to somebody, we would like to help to link you with some services, which might be able to help:

APS Find a Psychologist Service:

You can easily access a Psychologist, through the Australian Psychological Society's 'Find a Psychologist' service. To do this, go to http://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist

Through a Medicare GP Mental Health Treatment Plan, you are able to access up to 10 sessions of psychological treatment per year. This can involve Interpersonal Therapy (counselling), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Relaxation Techniques.

On-Line Support:

There are lot of wonderful online services available to you. A list of these are shown below:

Beyondblue.org.au (24/7 telephone support, online chat available 3pm to 12pm 7 days a week and email responses within 24 hours).

Lifeline.org.au (24/7 telephone support and crisis online chat support available 7pm to 4am 7 days a week).

Headspace.org.au (24/7 telephone support to young adults aged 12-25, e-group chats and email support).

Suicidecallbackservice.org.au (24/7 telephone support of online web chat).

7cups.com (The 7 cups of tea website is a 24/7 online free counselling website, for under 15 minutes of counselling).

Emergency Services:

If you experience a mental health crisis/emergency (self-harm episode, suicidal thoughts, not feeling safe/harmful to others), please attend a hospital as a priority, or ring 000 immediately.
Appendix M:
Participant Satisfaction Process (Both Studies) - Page One

The proposed study aims to understand the experience of thirty people who reside in Australia, and who experience the phenomenon of Maladaptive Daydreaming. It can often be the case, that when a person is engaging in a research study, that extra due care and diligence is required. This extra provision is suggested as a necessary component in the proposed study. The phenomenon of Maladaptive Daydreaming, can often exist alongside other diagnosed psychological disorders. With this in mind, it would be important for the researcher to provide a means to the participants, whereby they can express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the way that the interview was conducted and that the transcription process would be managed. The following process is suggested for enabling clients to express their views of the study:

Forum stage:

The researcher would provide ongoing opportunities during the online forum, to enable the participant to express how they were feeling, with the ability to email/private chat on the Facebook group. Once the online forum had ended, the researcher would spend an amount of time, following up with the participants by either telephone/skype/email, aiming to ensure that the participants were unaffected by the online forum, happy and able to carry on with their day-to-day life. The participants would also be provided with access to a list of resources and a method of being able to talk with a professional if they needed (see below for document).

Transcription stage:

The researcher would again contact the participants (via email/phone/or in person if needed), once the data had been collected. The participant would be able to have access to any screen shots/quotes/comments involving themselves, from the online forum. The online forum may have conversations which might affect the participants, so the researcher would provide another opportunity, to enable the participant to express how they are feeling after the researcher study. The participants could request changes to some of the data collected, and this would be determined by the researcher, aiming to keep the data pure, but also taking into consideration the wishes of the participants.
Participant Support Flyer:

How are you feeling?

We do hope that you are feeling good about participating in the research study. But there may be times, that certain questions or talking about certain things, might trigger something for a participant. If you need to talk to somebody, we would like to help to link with some services, which might be able to help. Please feel free to contact these services directly, or contact the researcher (Rachael Haynes) at rhaynes@csu.edu.au, and she will assist you to link with an appropriate service.

APS Find a Psychologist Service:

You can easily access a Psychologist, through the Australian Psychological Society's ‘Find a Psychologist’ service. To do this, go to http://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist

Through a Medicare GP Mental Health Treatment Plan, you are able to access up to 10 sessions of psychological treatment per year. This can involve Interpersonal Therapy (counselling), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Relaxation Techniques.

On-Line Support:

There are a lot of wonderful online services available to you. A list of these are shown below:

- Beyondblue.org.au (24/7 telephone support, online chat available 3pm to 12pm 7 days a week and email responses within 24 hrs).
- Lifeline.org.au (24/7 telephone support and crisis online chat support available 7pm to 4am - 7 days a week).
- Headspace.org.au (24/7 telephone support to young adults aged 12-25, e-group chats and email support).
- Suicidecallbackservice.org.au (24/7 telephone support or online web chat).
- 7cups.com (The 7 cups of tea website is a 24/7 online free counselling for under 15 minutes).

Emergency Services:

If you experience a mental health crisis/emergency (self-harm episode, suicidal thoughts, not feeling safe/harmful to others), please attend a hospital as a priority, or ring 000 immediately.
Appendix N:
Ethical Approval (Case Studies) - Page One

18 July 2017

Mrs Rachael Haynes
By email: rhaynes@csu.edu.au

Dear Mrs Haynes,

Thank you for providing additional information in response to a request from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee relating to your research proposal.

The Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement).

Based on the guidelines in the National Statement the Committee has approved your research proposal. Please see below details of your research project:

Project Title: When daydreams become harmful: Emerging themes from an Australian Maladaptive Daydream Population.

Approved until: 30 April 2018 (subject to annual progress reports)

Protocol Number: H17118 (to be included in all correspondence to the Committee)


You must report to the Committee at least annually, and as soon as possible in relation to the following, by completing the ‘Report on Research Project’ form:

- any serious and/or unexpected adverse events or outcomes which occur associated with the research project that might affect participants, therefore, the ethical acceptability of the project;
- amendments to the research design and/or any changes to the project (Committee approval required);
- extensions to the approval period (Committee approval required); and
- notification of project completion.

This approval constitutes ethical approval in relation to humans only. If your research involves the use of radiation, biochemical materials, chemicals or animals, separate approval is required by the appropriate University Committee.
Appendix N:
Ethical Approval (Case Studies) - Page Two
Appendix N:
Ethical Approval – Extension Letter (Case Studies) – Page One

1 May 2018

Mrs Rachel Haynes
Email: rhaynes@csu.edu.au

Dear Mrs Haynes,

Thank you for submitting your extension request to the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee, which was considered at the 23 April 2018 meeting.

The Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement).

Based on the guidelines in the National Statement the Committee has approved your extension request. Please see below details of your approved research project:

Project Title: When daydreams become harmful: Emerging themes from an Australian Maladaptive Daydream Population

Approved until: 30 April 2019 (subject to annual progress reports being submitted)

Protocol Number: H17118 (to be included in all correspondence to the Committee)

Progress Report due by: 30 April 2019

You must report to the Committee at least annually, and as soon as possible in relation to the following, by completing the ‘Report on Research Project’ form:

- any serious and/or unexpected adverse events or outcomes which occur associated with the research project that might affect participants, therefore, the ethical acceptability of the project;
- amendments to the research design and/or any changes to the project (Committee approval required);
- extensions to the approval period (Committee approval required); and
- notification of project completion.

This approval constitutes ethical approval in relation to humans only. If your research involves the use of radiation, biochemical materials, chemicals or animals, separate approval is required by the appropriate University Committee.

Please contact the Governance Officer on (02) 6338 4628 or ethics@csu.edu.au if you have any queries.

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Sincerely,

Mrs Sue Price
Governance Officer
on behalf of Associate Professor Catherine Allan
Presiding Officer, HREC

cc: Dr Gene Hodgins, Dr Charini Gunaratne

www.csu.edu.au

The Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) Provider Number for Charles Sturt University is 00069F. ABN 63 003 709 551.
Appendix N:
Ethical Approval – Extension Letter (Case Studies) – Page Two

17 May 2018

Mrs Rachael Haynes
Email: rhaynes@csu.edu.au

Dear Mrs Haynes,

Thank you for providing further information in response to a request from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee relating to your research proposal.

The Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement).

Based on the guidelines in the National Statement the Committee has approved your research proposal. Please see below details of your approved research project:

Project Title: When daydreams become harmful: Emerging themes from an Australian Maladaptive Daydream Population (Study 2: Online Forum)

Approved until: 30 April 2019 (subject to annual progress reports being submitted)

Protocol Number: H18078 (to be included in all correspondence to the Committee)

Progress Report due by: 30 April 2019.

You must report to the Committee at least annually, and as soon as possible in relation to the following, by completing the ‘Report on Research Project’ form:

- any serious and/or unexpected adverse events or outcomes which occur associated with the research project that might affect participants, therefore, the ethical acceptability of the project;
- amendments to the research design and/or any changes to the project (Committee approval required);
- extensions to the approval period (Committee approval required); and
- notification of project completion.

This approval constitutes ethical approval in relation to humans only. If your research involves the use of radiation, biochemical materials, chemicals or animals, separate approval is required by the appropriate University Committee.

Please contact the Governance Officer on (02) 6338 4628 or ethics@csu.edu.au if you have any queries.

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Mrs Sue Price
Governance Officer
on behalf of Associate Professor Catherine Allan
Presiding Officer, HREC

cc: Dr Gene Hodgens, Dr Chariti Gunaratne and Dr Rachel Hogg

www.csu.edu.au

Rachael Haynes        Student No: 11470570
Appendix O:

Examples of the Memo Process

My understanding today of Maladaptive Daydreaming was extended, through listening to the case study participant talk about the experience. Some of the things that I have reflected on from during the interview were:

- the importance of staying within reality, so that they can experience the one thing that they worked the most, a child.
- the usefulness of MD, in that seeing things from multiple perspectives in their dreams, can transform access to increasing their empathy for others in their real life.
- the utility of trying to stop MD, but having strategies which they can choose to implement, to relieves.
- the positive value of MD.
- The MD has changed throughout the years, with it being about a major in childhood and developing towards an emotional processing experience.
- This helps MD is different to how other’s experience it.
- The balance of having negative MDDaydreams, but understanding that experiencing the good and the bad is how life is.
- The connect of emotional needs, by experiencing an emotional inner world through MD.
- The link that MD has helped them to see, through understanding who, even in the pain of keeping them alive, at times of suicide thinking.

I am sure that there will be many more themes, and that transcribing and time to process, plus having another person involved [Rachel and Charli] will be very beneficial.

I remember at the end of the interview, that fell in line for the participant’s story and that this person had grown through so much hardship, but had gained so much insight from their experience of MD. I recall the word ‘amazing’ coming to my mind, when we were finishing up. Amazing in the sense that this was an amazing person, with great resilience and insight into their emotional life.

My initial thoughts - in bullet points:

Observations from the interview with P2:

Written on 10th May 2018

* Blurring
* Struggling to find words
* Sometimes sounded aggressive - in her responses - a growl
* Short answers - almost seemed pre-prepared
* Overweight and highly anxious
* Could only tolerate 30 mins together - in the interview
* Her ‘only child’ theory
* MD - as a way of coping with depression, anxiety and stress
* Her struggles with: concentration, focus, agoraphobia, studying
* How she felt ‘crazy’ and ‘nuts’
* Her normalising the childhood experience of MD
* Strong emotions towards her characters
* Linking OD as her creation, similar to a baby
* Uncontrollability now, compared to in the past - 25 yrs of control
* Sees MD as stress control
* Childhood sexual abuse
* Kinesthetic movements
* Would not give up her World
* Showed determination and hope for the future

Coding with Rachel and Charli on 11th May 2018:

* Withdrawing
* Introjective
* Defense mechanisms
* Daydreaming is so private - almost selfish
* Watch Offspring (tv series, where a person has lapses from reality)
* Her attempt at reducing chance of becoming aggressive, in the real World - people as anger triggers
* Practiced answers
* There is a wariness to her and her story
* The grief narrative
* Rel with their partners (both interviewees) how can they have a good relationship when they are living in a fantasy world (be critical)
* Explain that they are having functioning relationships - compared to other MD’s - doesn’t fit
* Previously turn it off and on - linked to bringing up a child - similar to the other P
* Hope that she might be able to find other ways of coping
* Daydreaming is something children do (a child’s issue)
* Across the lifespan
* Less than (in the real World), compared to more than (in the fantasy World)
* Practise social skills in the real World?
* But they use social skills in the real World - on the forums etc
* Interesting contradictions
* Juxtaposition
* Adaptive
* Stop outside the pre-ordained idea
* Can’t stop - but can manage MD
### Appendix P:
Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Case Studies) Participant 1:</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>2nd March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I carried out the interview today the first participant. I made the decision to undertake an immediate transcription process, as I felt it was important to engage with the transcription process and the data immediately.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw data analysis (Open coding) (Pen and paper)</td>
<td>23rd March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding with Co-supervisors, Charini Gunaratne and Rachel Hogg. 16 pages of transcript. 4 pages coded on this date. The following codes were identified, using gerunds to describe the processes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mastering concealment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disclosing immediately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Medicalising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compartmentalizing timeframes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concealing daydreams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Claiming experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying the destructiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describing a complex experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Controlling the experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using daydreams to think and to feel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Forming an identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shifting of time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>24th March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During today’s coding, I was attempting to code what the participant was ‘saying’, and to generate gerunds, which described the process that was occurring. Throughout today’s coding, it was clear to see some categorization i.e. emotions, control and time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw data analysis (Open coding) (Pen and paper)</td>
<td>25th March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final initial coding the last pages of participant 1’s transcript. Codes identified were:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Linking to real world events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasizing un-like-me-ness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advising of some similarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pertaining to uniqueness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explaining the story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Containing the horror</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thinking and feeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using emotional words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making sense of contradiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describing polar opposites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explaining different perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exploring viewpoints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increasing movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Declining experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix P:

Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Case Studies) Participant 1:</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw data analysis (Open coding) (Pen and paper) Contd...</td>
<td>25th March 2018 Contd..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|  | • Expressing futility of stopping  
  | • Remaining grounded for her child  
  | • Restraining the experience  
  | • Linking to past struggles  
  | • Escaping life  
  | • Determining enjoyment  
  | • Outlining helpful strategies |
| Memo | 25th March 2018 |
|  | Coding has become quicker with practice and it has been helpful to do the coding in small bursts, to ensure that I remained motivated. The codes are quite widespread now, but some themes are beginning to emerge from the data. Some interesting questions are:  
  | • Does the maladaptive daydreaming fluctuate based on the person’s life at that time?  
  | • With experience, and over time, does the person have control of the maladaptive daydreaming?  
  | • What makes the person see themselves as unique to other maladaptive daydreamers? |
| Raw data coding (Open coding) (Pen and paper) | 27th March 2018 |
|  | Re-reading of the transcript, to be able to pick up any unidentified coding. This generated the following codes:  
  | • Calming the daydreaming experience  
  | • Stopping daydreaming  
  | • Accessing entertainment at any time  
  | • Allowing freedom  
  | • Granting permission to daydream  
  | • Linking to a real life goal  
  | • Avoiding music  
  | • Planning storytelling/writing  
  | • Dreaming of success  
  | • Choosing daydreaming  
  | • Telling another person  
  | • Normalising daydreaming  
  | • Identifying childhood trauma |
| Memo | 27th March 2018 |
|  | I allowed myself a day off in-between the coding, as I was quite tired from spending all night dreaming about coding and generating gerunds. |
## Appendix P:
### Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data reduction (Open coding)</td>
<td>27th March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(QSR N-Vivo qualitative software)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I used QSR N-Vivo software to code quotes from the participant’s transcripts to a series of nodes. I created the nodes as the coding developed. I carried out coding of 104 quotes from the transcript, to 13 nodes. The nodes created were:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Addictiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Daydreaming themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Emotional processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identity formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Kinaesthetic (movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uniqueness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Data reduction (Open coding)        | 28th March 2018       |
| (QSR N-Vivo qualitative software)  |                       |
|                                     | QSR-NVivo software used to code the remaining quotes from participant 1’s transcript. Again, the nodes developed as the coding progressed. I created 14 new nodes during this coding phase. These were: |
|                                     | • Benefits            |
|                                     | • Confusion           |
|                                     | • Embarrassment       |
|                                     | • Emotional connection|
|                                     | • Futility            |
|                                     | • Impact              |
|                                     | • Limited information |
|                                     | • Online presence     |
|                                     | • Origins             |
|                                     | • Protection of the daydreams |
|                                     | • Real life examples  |
|                                     | • Reduction strategies|
|                                     | • Telling others      |

| Memo                                | 28th March 2018       |
|                                     | I have been carrying out different methods of coding, i.e. pen and paper, using qualitative software to code the gerunds and using qualitative software to code the quotes to nodes. I have been doing this constant comparison of the data, to see if similar codes emerge due to this exploration. |
## Appendix P:
### Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Data reduction (Open coding) (QSR N-Vivo qualitative software) | 28th March 2018 | I have previously coded the pen and paper gerunds, and I have now used QSR-NVivo software to code from the list of gerunds from participant 1’s transcript to nodes. I coded 177 gerunds to 11 nodes. These nodes were:  
  - Change  
  - Control  
  - Daydreaming theme  
  - Emotional processing  
  - Identity formation  
  - Kinaesthetic  
  - Limiting Information  
  - Protecting  
  - Time  
  - Trauma  
  - Uniqueness |
| Memo | 29th March 2018 | Existing research into maladaptive daydreaming has identified both kinaesthetic and trauma. So both of these nodes were not included in further data analysis, as I expected to see these occur within the interviews. Therefore, I aimed to focus on previously un-identified themes, with a view to identifying one main theme for the participant. |
| Memo | 29th March 2018 | By repeatedly coding and re-reading participant 1’s interview transcript, I have come to know the transcript fully. This provides me with a knowledge about the codes, which may be a higher level and those, which might be a lower level. Whilst I have not yet merged the codes together, I do have a good sense of which codes may go together. |
| Data reduction (Open coding) (manual sorting into physical piles) | 8th April 2018 | I carried out manual coding of the 177 gerunds, by cutting out all 177 gerunds, and manually sorting into piles. This process generated 8 main emerging codes. These codes were:  
  - Uniqueness  
  - Benefits  
  - Control  
  - Don’t know (not important)  
  - Emotional processing  
  - Negatives  
  - Scene setting  
  - Telling |
## Appendix P:
Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Five

### Audit Trail (Case Studies) Participant 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>10th April 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The physical movement of the gerunds to piles (codes) has lead me towards three main observations about participant 1’s experience of maladaptive daydreaming, these are:

- The use of maladaptive daydreaming to experience emotional growth throughout certain life stages;
- The extent of control that participant 1 has gained throughout the maladaptive daydreaming lifespan;
- The perception of a unique maladaptive daydreaming experience, compared to how she views her counterparts.

Two of these observations, were not linked to the questions, which were asked (uniqueness was asked about within the interview). Therefore, emotional growth and control are suggested to potential provide new insight.

### Focused Coding (12th April 2018) – Participant 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Code</th>
<th>Properties (Gerunds)</th>
<th>Participant’s Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Daydreaming as a positive     | Connecting with the characters; processing through daydreaming; interpreting some daydreaming as valuable; escaping life; determining enjoyment; advising of the positives; reflecting on behaviours; gaining an emotional hit; enriching through imagining. | - I would kind of leverage my daydreaming into exercise, so I would go for a run, and get to daydream that whole time.  
- I don’t really get bored.  
- Because, if I have a long wait of something, erm I have always got a daydream to explore. |
| A unique experience           | Never-ending opportunity to daydream; describing independent creativity, describing mastery; emphasizing un-like-me-ness; pertaining to uniqueness; containing the horror; determining uniqueness; comparing to other daydreamers; different character personalities. | - they are not like me.  
- terrible things happen in my daydreams.  
- my daydreams are never about me, unlike other people’s. |
## Appendix P:
### Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Six

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Coding (12th April 2018) – Participant 1</th>
<th>Properties (Gerunds)</th>
<th>Participant’s Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The destructiveness of MD</td>
<td>Expressing futility of stopping; having to avoid music; disappointing results when</td>
<td>- is because it is preventing me from kind of, fully experiencing what is going on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>writing; comparing unhelpful coping; stating forum addiction; avoiding reading;</td>
<td>- it has definitely affected my schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>restricted goals; missing her characters; relating to loss in her daydreams;</td>
<td>- daydreaming to this extent is problematic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identifying the destructiveness.</td>
<td>- has been in the past, to the point, where it has been destructive to my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An emotional experience</td>
<td>Connecting with the character; surviving trauma; escaping life; allowing freedom;</td>
<td>- and these characters that I know and loved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gaining an emotional hit; linking emotions to daydreams; benefiting from the</td>
<td>- I mean emotional arousal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experience; putting self into different emotional scenarios.</td>
<td>- because, when I come out of a daydream, I immediately want to go back in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of the experience</td>
<td>Mastering concealment; answering in a limited way; maintaining distance, protecting</td>
<td>- errr, I don’t think we have discussed it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the experience; concealing daydreaming, controlling the disclosure.</td>
<td>- it kind of something that happens when I am alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- I have never told my husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of the experience</td>
<td>Claiming experience; controlling the experience; restraining the experience; caliming</td>
<td>- My daydreams jump back and forth in time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the daydreaming; stopping daydreaming; granting permission to daydream; unlocking the</td>
<td>- I send my characters to bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>daydreams immediately; choosing daydreaming; switching methods of daydreaming;</td>
<td>- the daydream to be less intense, and kind of wind it down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limiting the daydreams; seeking more control; choosing to keep the daydreaming;</td>
<td>- I don’t do it as much these days, I feel that is because I don’t want to escape what is going on in my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lacking previous control.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity formation</td>
<td>Identifying identity; functioning in adolescence; experiencing different</td>
<td>- And a lot of my daydreams at that time, had become quite sexual, and I was able to, I think, you know when I look back at it, process some of these things, and actually come through my adolescence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perspectives; exploring viewpoints; building empathy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix P:

Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Seven

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Coding (12th April 2018) – Participant 1</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused Code</td>
<td>Properties (Gerunds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using daydreaming to think and feel</td>
<td>Processing emotions; advising of the positives; reflecting on behaviours; meeting emotional needs; gaining an emotional hit; daydreaming as always available; experiencing emotions in a different way; linking emotions to daydreaming; benefiting from the experience; transferring empathy skill to real life; understanding different viewpoints; putting self into different emotional scenarios; positioning daydreaming as a way to think and to feel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Audit Trail (Case Studies) Participant 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Coding (QSR N-Vivo qualitative coding)</td>
<td>12th April 2018</td>
<td>For this process, I have used QSR N-Vivo software to be able to identify relationships amongst the open codes, and I am aiming to look at any connections, which could be made amongst the codes. My aim is to reduce the codes in a systematic manner, whilst at the same time being able to show an audit trail, to provide extra support to my findings. I have shown how the open coding has progressed to axial coding in a table below:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Memo | 13th April 2018 | I can see across the coding experience that four codes consistently emerge, these are:  
- Identity formation  
- Control of the experience  
- Protection of the experience  
- Using daydreaming to think and feel  
The progression from open code to axial codes are shown on the following table: |
## Appendix P:
### Audit Trail (Case Studies) – Page Eight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Code</th>
<th>Focused Code</th>
<th>Theoretical Code (Until saturation has been reached)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daydreaming themes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescence; surviving trauma; daydreaming as a tool;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td></td>
<td>experiencing different perspectives; exploring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td></td>
<td>viewpoints; building empathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching with imagination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>Control of the experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Restraining; calming the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>daydreaming; stopping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futility</td>
<td>daydreaming; granting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>permission to daydream;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td>unlocking the daydreaming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing daydreaming</td>
<td>immediately; choosing daydreaming;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>seeking control;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarassment</td>
<td>Protection of the experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiddenness</td>
<td>Mastery; concealment;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictiveness</td>
<td>controlling disclosure;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>hiddenness; embarrassment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional processing</td>
<td>Using daydreaming to think and feel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection with characters</td>
<td>Processing emotions; advising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surviving trauma</td>
<td>of the positives; meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaping life</td>
<td>emotional needs; gaining an</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing freedom</td>
<td>emotional hit; experiencing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional hit</td>
<td>emotions in a different way;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefiting from experience</td>
<td>benefiting, transferring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting self into different</td>
<td>empathy to real life;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional scenarios</td>
<td>understanding different</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>viewpoints; putting self into</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emotional scenarios;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>daydreaming as a way to think and feel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emotional growth through living numerous fantasy lives**
Appendix P:
Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Nine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member checking</td>
<td>16th April 2018</td>
<td>A secure email was sent to participant 1 with the over-riding theory, which had emerged, which was 'emotional growth through experiencing numerous fantasy lives.' A list of the participant's quotes was also supplied to the participant, which demonstrated this finding. Examples, such as &quot;for me, it allows me to explore my feelings... My daydreams are very feeling heavy... because I have all of these characters with different lives... Now I have my Son, I don't daydream as much, as I get my emotional hits from my Son.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checking</td>
<td>17th April 2018</td>
<td>Participant 1 responded by email that the over-riding theory of emotional growth did explain her experience of maladaptive daydreaming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moving onto coding of Participant 2's data now.
### Appendix P:

**Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page Ten**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview - memo</td>
<td>16th March 2018</td>
<td>I ensured that I had left one week in-between carrying out participant 2’s interview. I wanted to remain open-minded and not be influenced by the first interview of any associated coding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>20th March 2018</td>
<td>I transcribed participant 2’s interview onto QSR N-Vivo qualitative software. This resulted in 9 pages of transcripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>23rd March 2018</td>
<td>I made the decision to code participant 2’s transcripts two weeks after finishing coding participant 1’s data, as I didn’t want to be influenced by any prior coding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw data analysis (Open coding)</td>
<td>1st May 2018</td>
<td>Re-familiarisation with the transcript. Initial reading of the transcripts, whereby I read the 9 pages of transcripts twice. Additionally, I also re-listened to the interview with participant 2, to be able to recall the interview, the participant’s mannerisms and nuances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw data analysis (Open coding)</td>
<td>2nd May 2018</td>
<td>I carried out coding of ‘quotes’ (the words spoken by the participant), directly onto QSR N-Vivo. I created nodes throughout the open coding period. I coded 126 segments of the interview to 23 individual nodes. These nodes were: * Trauma; * Supportive; * Strengths; * Progression; * Loss; * Kinaesthetic; * Hope; * Hiddenness; * Filling the gap; * Emotions; * Embarrassment; * Discovery; * Disclosure; * Difficulty; * Daydreaming theme; * Control; * Childhood; * Change; * Anger; * Uniqueness; * Trauma; * Time; * Struggles;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix P:
#### Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page 11

#### Audit Trail (Online Forum)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>codes into individual participants, instead focusing on the collective themes and processes. This coding generated 190 gerunds. The coding was completed manually, where the 190 gerunds were cut up into individual strips of paper, and sorted into themes and glued onto titled sheets of paper. Four main themes emerged from this coding, alongside others. But the four main themes were:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11th September 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memo: Open Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The coding process was quite a lengthy process, but was weirdly enjoyable. The amount of information was huge, just from day one, and this made me concerned about how I would manage the data. I am keeping it in mind to do the coding and then use the findings from the coding to explore within the discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12th September 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two more participants answered the question about how maladaptive daydreaming affected their lives now. One participant described daydreaming from an early life, which involved daydreaming movement and describing the length of time they daydream for. They explained that their daydreaming is an escape from stress and anxiety, and described a strong connection to their daydream characters. Two of the other participants asked this person questions about the involvement of movement and related to the link of stress management for themselves as well. The second participant described their experience, linking it to creativity, movement and being able to control it at times. This status generated a lot response from the other participants, who could relate to the academic struggles, the link to music, addictiveness and providing advice on how to manage the experience. It is very interesting to witness this 'relating to each other', where experiencing a similar thing can create an immediate connection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open Coding (NVivo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The two new participant statuses were coded into gerunds, which were then coded into NVivo, along with the pen and paper coding. The majority of coding for the two new participant's statuses were able to be coded to existing codes, with only two new codes created 'creativity' and 'addiction'.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Rachael Haynes  
Student No: 11470570
### Differential Emotional Processing Theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming

#### Appendix P:

**Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>13th May 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am aware that my coding confidence is increasing, and my ability is increasing with practice. I am mindful to focus on participant 2's data, but also at the same time keep in mind participant 1's findings - a fine balancing act. Moving onto axial coding, to be able to join codes together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused Coding</td>
<td>25th May 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have now completed the open coding. I have identified some codes, which I would like to further look at, and some, which I will not involve in the focused coding, as they have been previously researched. I am looking for something new, which has not been previously researched unless a theory emerges which does focus on previously researched theory. The axial coding has shown 4 major codes, these are 'trauma', 'control', 'positives' and 'filling the gap'. This move from open coding to focused coding, and the decisions made, is shown in the table below:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Focused Coding (25th May 2018); Participant 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Code</th>
<th>Properties (Gerunds)</th>
<th>Participant's words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (1) Trauma   | Linking to abuse; stating childhood abuse as beginning of the daydreaming; reacting with anger; identifying high stress levels; outlining isolation; identifying having a problem with anger; expressing social struggles | - I asked to keep a secret that no child should be asked to keep.  
- and then it came out later, that the rest of the family knew what he was like, and nobody told us.  
- Erm, I have a real problem with anger, so I now stay away from the triggers to my anger, which are people. |
| (2) Control  | Expressing longevity of the daydreams; controlling the daydreaming for years; expressing relief at her daydreaming; stopping in the past; changing worlds; evolving daydreams; identifying a period of calm. | - I had years where it was controllable.  
- I had years of that, where I could just turn it on or off.  
- I don't want to lose my worlds all together, I just want to control them. |
| (3) Positives| Recognising benefits of taking longer to study; managing maladaptive daydreaming; aiming to use her strengths; returning to studying; determining daydreaming as making her happy; daydreaming as calming; expressing wish to retain her worlds. | - One character, I have a lot of feelings for her... she is my creation.  
- It keeps me calm.  
- ...so much longer for me to read my stuff for University, but it has been well worth it.  
- Well, besides making me happy. |
### Appendix P:

Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Coding (25th May 2018)</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties (Gerunds)</td>
<td>Participant’s words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Filling the gap</td>
<td>____. she had a family – a big family, you know, which I didn’t have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>____. it’s like having a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>____. it is one of my escape points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>____. it hurts so lose my in-laws. It all began again then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identifying grief; pain; losing both parents-in-law; filling the gap of not having a big family in real life; imaging sibling and a family; identifying protective character; being an only child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Case Studies) Participant 2:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process undertaken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Theoretical coding)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix P:
Audit Trail (Case Studies) - Page 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Code</th>
<th>Focused Code</th>
<th>Theoretical Code (Until saturation has been reached)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Revealing; linking trauma to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>childhood abuse; reacting with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty</td>
<td>anger; the family knew;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>expressing social struggles;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiddenness</td>
<td>identifying high stress levels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional reaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity formation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling the gap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional reaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Controlling the daydreaming for</td>
<td>Filling the emotional gaps left in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 years; seeking control;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identifying a period of calm;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>daydreaming returning;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identifying control in earlier years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daydreaming as calming;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>expressing wish to retain her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>daydreaming; achieving top marks;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>managing her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maladaptive daydreaming; not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wanting to cure – but be able to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>just manage it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling an emotional gap</td>
<td>Filling the gap of not having a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>big family; expressing a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>protective character in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>daydreams, imagining siblings and a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family, losing both parents-in-law;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>daydreaming re-commencing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>due to loss; being an only child.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix Q:
**Audit Trail (Forum) - Page One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memo: Commencement of online forum</td>
<td>10th September 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I welcomed everyone to the forum, explaining that I would be asking questions, starting out with general questions, whilst zooming in as the conversation on the forum developed. The first question I asked was an introductory question ‘can you tell me about your current experience of maladaptive daydreaming (i.e. at present)?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over a 10 hour period, five of the participants shared their experience of maladaptive daydreaming. One participant outlined how the daydreaming affected their functioning and spoke about the emotions involved and the complexity of the daydreams. It was interesting to see other participants responding, agreeing and asking questions. The one thing on the thread, which stood out, was the recognition of the ‘urge’ to daydream.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A second participant outlined experiencing daydreaming most of the time, they spoke about some level of control – being able to multi-task at times, often using the daydreams as a blueprint/practice environment for real life. They described the daydreaming as a stress busting technique, an escape from reality. Once again, the other participants asked questions, aiming to seek similarity, support and connection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo: Raw data analysis (NVivo)</td>
<td>10th September 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whilst coding the Facebook status screenshot, there were a few moments whereby I felt emotional and could empathise with the participants were sharing. One of these moments was when a participant shared about the side effects of some medication and their struggles with hallucinations and paranoia. Upon reflection, it was the interaction between the two participants, which was highly emotional, as they did not know each other, but could relate together. This was evident throughout the first day of the forum, with support offered and similarities identified. The participants even asked each other questions and were interacting from the start.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Coding (Pen and Paper)</td>
<td>11th September 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This initial stage of coding was taking screenshots of the first day’s Facebook statuses. This lead to 15 A4 pages of screenshots. Each status was then coded into gerunds. I made the decision not to separate the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix Q:

### Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| codes into individual participants, instead focussing on the collective themes and processes. This coding generated 190 gerunds. The coding was completed manually, where the 190 gerunds were cut up into individual strips of paper, and sorted into themes and glued onto titled sheets of paper. Four main themes emerged from this coding, alongside others. But the four main themes were:  
  - Relating to each other (31)  
  - Struggle (23)  
  - Coping technique (18)  
  - Control (17) | 11th September 2018 | The coding process was quite a lengthy process, but was weirdly enjoyable. The amount of information was huge, just from day one, and this made me concerned about how I would manage the data. I am keeping it in mind to do the coding and then use the findings from the coding to explore within the discussions. |
| Memo: Open Coding | | |
| Two more participants answered the question about how maladaptive daydreaming affected their lives now. One participant described daydreaming from an early life, which involved daydreaming movement and describing the length of time they daydream for. They explained that their daydreaming is an escape from stress and anxiety, and described a strong connection to their daydream characters.  

Two of the other participants asked this person questions about the involvement of movement and related to the link of stress management for themselves as well. The second participant described their experience, linking it to creativity, movement and being able to control it at times.  

This status generated a lot response from the other participants, who could relate to the academic struggles, the link to music, addictiveness and providing advice on how to manage the experience. It is very interesting to witness this ‘relating to each other’, where experiencing a similar thing can create an immediate connection. | 12th September 2018 | |
| Open Coding (NVivo) | 12th September 2018 | The two new participant statuses were coded into gerunds, which were then coded into NVivo, along with the pen and paper coding. The majority of coding for the two new participant’s statuses were able to be coded to existing codes, with only two new codes created ‘creativity’ and ‘addiction’. |
Appendix Q:
Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Online Forum)</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NVivo Output</strong>&lt;br&gt;12th September 2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 pieces of gerund information was coded on NVivo to 23 nodes. Interesting the main node, which appeared was ‘relational’, which appeared on 31 occasions. This could be explained by today being the first day of the online forum and people were looking to build rapport and connect with each other. The next largest was ‘struggle’, which was discussed 23 times. Then coping ‘18’ and ‘control’ was also discussed. The large amount of variance within the conversation was expected at this early stage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Memo<br>13th September 2018<br>One more participant provided their experience of maladaptive daydreaming, which outlined some level of control, of being able to multi-task and daydream, even being able to use writing to alleviate the obsession part of maladaptive daydreaming. One other participant asked questions for details of how to learn to multi-task and how to write down the daydreams, as they struggle with these things.
Appendix Q:
Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Online Forum)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Coding (NVivo)</td>
<td>13th September 2018</td>
<td>Coding was once again carried out using NVivo, to code today’s participant’s experience of maladaptive daydreaming. No new codes emerged from this, with the gerunds able to be coded to existing nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo: Coding Supervision</td>
<td>14th September 2018</td>
<td>Today, I have had a supervision session, to discuss the outcome of the first few forum days. We also talked about the questions, which I could ask. We decided that I would not research everything that comes up in the study, even if I found things to be fascinating. Instead, I would start off by following up on unanswered questions from the first study (2 case studies) to practice theoretical sampling. The questions left unexplored were (1) the hiddenness of the experience? (2) the impact of maladaptive daydreaming on people’s relationships? (3) why some people disclose and others do not? (4) the associated embarrassment and shame? (5) what control the participants have or not? (6) the way that maladaptive daydreaming impacts the participant’s psychopathologically? (7) whether maladaptive daydreaming has a positive side to it? Even though I had these questions, I was advised to get a feel for the group, and adapt to their needs, involving them as co-researchers as much as possible, asking only questions from the data – not from curiosity. So the supervision session message was to be selective. Reflect on the questions left unanswered from the case study phase, to provide some direction at this early stage. It was a relief to know that I can be selective, as long as I can reflect and provide a rationale for my choices and decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>14th September 2018</td>
<td>I have chosen to ask about the hiddenness of the experience as my next question, for two reasons. The first reason being that one of the participants on 13th September 2018 on the forum spoke about this, of disclosing the experience and the associated embarrassment of disclosing. This hiddenness also appeared in one of the two participants in the case study phase of this research study. The very nature of maladaptive daydreaming (pacing, voicing and spending numerous hours daydreaming) makes it difficult to understand how this hiddenness is maintained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix Q:

**Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Five**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>14th September 2018</td>
<td>None of the participants have responded to my question about the hiddenness of the experience. This may be because it was within a status, in response to another participant's comment, which had mention hiddenness. Alternatively, it may have been too confronting and too early in the forum. I have decided to provide feedback to the participants about the data generated so far; that 17 pages of screenshots has been generated, which took a number of days to analyse and code. The next question I have asked on today's forum is “tell me about how maladaptive daydreaming impacts your connections with people in the real world?” This question was formulated because each of the two participants in the case study phase had described this affecting their relationships and within the forum, the coding has also lead to this appearing. This next question generated responses from five participants, who spoke about dissociation, frustration when interrupted whilst daydreaming, disappointment with ‘real people in real life’, emotional regulation/dysregulation, associated isolation and social anxiety.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Open Coding        | 18th September 2018 | The following gerunds were coded from the question about how maladaptive daydreaming affected relationships. The 146 gerunds were coded to 15 codes and these were:  
- Growth (12)  
- Struggles (27)  
- Strategies (14)  
- Mental Health (11)  
- Positives (1)  
- Beginning (5)  
- Secret (10)  
- Discovery (5)  
- Embarrassment (1)  
- Why (25)  
- Triggers (7)  
- Acceptance (2)  
- Emotions (3)  
- Control (15)  
- Other people (18) |
| Memo: Reflection   | 18th September 2018 | I am being mindful that Grounded Theory is not an exercise in counting; instead, I am looking for a co-constructed main theory, which will emerge. |
Appendix Q:
Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Six

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>20th September 2018</td>
<td>I feel it is important not to overwhelm the participants with too many questions allowing them to add to existing questions and allowing them time to explore their answers. The next question asked was about the experience of growth they might have had from maladaptive daydreaming. I did not want to focus on the struggles at this stage, so instead, I chose growth, because it had appeared in the two case studies as a main theme and other people on the forum have indicated this. Furthermore, growth has shown through in the coding to some extent – and is currently unexplored.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Open Coding (Nvivo)         | 20th September 2018| The question about growth generated 198 gerund pieces of data, which were coded to 22 nodes. Only two new nodes emerged from this line of questioning:  

(1) Why? (which I did not ask about)  
The participants chose to discuss this on over 26 occasions. The majority of the reasons why the participants thought they experienced maladaptive daydreaming was for emotional reasons i.e. emotional processing through daydreaming, or even avoidance of emotions. Yet, emotions were only mentioned on three occasions in this round of answers, as if the majority of the participants held no awareness about the emotionality of the maladaptive daydreaming experience.  

(2) Struggles.  
The participants also spoke a lot about the struggles that they experience from their maladaptive daydreaming. So, as well as trying to figure out ‘why’, the participants also wanted to share their individual struggles with each other. |
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Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Seven

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nvivo Output</td>
<td>20th September 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main newly emerging theme is 'why', with 26 individual appearances within the gerund data. The rest have already been identified previously i.e. control, growth, secret-ness, strategies and struggles. So, I am therefore interested to return to the participants to be able to check out this new emerging theme (why?), as the other main theme which is emerging is (differential emotional processing) and I am keen to know whether this would be helpful to the participants, to have a theory for why they maladaptive daydream.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memo</th>
<th>21st September 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A number of the participants have responded to the earlier question of growth (this sometimes happens that they add to statuses over a period of time, so I need to be mindful to always check back). For one, they described maladaptive daydreaming as purely a way of experiencing their emotional life, using daydreaming to process their emotions. Other people disagreed about emotional growth, but did explain that they do process their emotions through their daydreams. Some of the participants explaining this as a positive, and for others they use their daydreams to avoid their emotions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix Q:

Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Eight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Online Forum)</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEMO</td>
<td>3rd October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have made the decision to ask at a later stage about why, but for now, I have decided to ask the participants about whether their maladaptive daydreaming maybe fulfilling an unmet emotional need. I am noticing that some of the participants hold negative views about their maladaptive daydreaming and its impact on their life, i.e. believing that it is an addiction or a way of dealing with trauma/anxiety/stress. Other participants believe it holds some level of value, helping them to work through trauma, bringing about creativity, being able to process their emotions and enabling them to practice real life in a safe environment. I am nervous to ask this question to the participants, as I think the participants might focus on the negatives of the maladaptive daydreaming experience and may not be insightful into negative unmet needs being avoided. I have therefore decided to ask the question about unmet needs, without mentioning positive/negative, to give the participants the chance of a reply without leading them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEMO</td>
<td>3rd October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There have been mixed responses to the question about whether maladaptive daydreaming fulfils unmet emotional needs:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. One participant said no, that they think it is a coping skill (ineffective), which creates more needs and more problems. This person also mentioned perfectionism, that in real life problems could not be fixed perfectly, but in the daydreams everything is perfect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Another participant said yes, that it fulfils their creative need.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Another participant agreed that maladaptive daydreaming validated them giving them what they want to see and hear.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. This participant agreed that maladaptive daydreaming allowed them to experience life through the daydreaming, where the unmet needs in real life were met in the daydreaming.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. This participant agreed that maladaptive daydreaming did meet unmet desires, but identified the costs of an unrealistic fulfilment.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. This participant agreed with fulfilling unmet needs (perfectionism, anxiety, seeking validation), but focused more on forced feelings/scenarios within the daydreams i.e. processing emotions through daydreaming.</td>
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</table>
Appendix Q:
Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Nine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(7) This participant offered a mixed viewpoint, agreeing that the maladaptive daydream experience provides an escape, being able to forget about real life for a while. On the other hand, leaving a real life craving for the wonderful things experienced in the daydreams.</td>
<td>4th October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) This participant named the daydreaming as a way of processing their emotions (trauma, depression and loneliness), sometimes sparking feelings through the daydreams, when they feel numb in real life, experiencing highly emotional daydreams.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Focused coding (NVivo)

124 gerunds were generated from the participant’s Facebook responses. These were coded using NVivo to 10 nodes. This data was in response to the question ‘reflect upon whether the maladaptive daydreaming fulfills some unmet needs.’

Emotional processes were mentioned 50 times (the largest amount of discussion within this question). It is also important for the participants to understand and to know why they experience maladaptive daydreaming (explanations = 14 times discussed) and interestingly these explanations and the emotional processes outlined were all different for each participant, with some thinking that mental health was involved (trauma, anxiety, depression) and some people thinking it was an addiction, whilst some people feel that it is all about the emotional processing and for some they believe it is linked to brain function.
Appendix Q:
Audit Trail (Forum) - Page Ten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member Checking</td>
<td>10th October 2018</td>
<td>I returned to the forum after coding all of the data currently, and provided an outline of the main theme which was emerging throughout the forum period, that maladaptive daydreaming is related to emotional aspects. I therefore asked the participants 'what are your thoughts on how emotions are involved within the maladaptive daydreaming experience?' Seven of the participants agreed that emotions were very much involved in their experience of maladaptive daydreaming. For some they experience intense emotional states during their daydreaming. One participant linked it to existential angst, an other three participants spoke about using the daydreams to process their emotions as an outlet, i.e. for anger/stress/boredom/anxiety. For two others they seek to feel emotions that they cannot access in their real lives, often practising feeling things i.e. grief/love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Checking</td>
<td>11th October 2018</td>
<td>At this point, I informed the forum that I was noticing in the data analysis that it appeared to be important to the participants to know ‘why’ they experience maladaptive daydreaming. I informed them that two theories were emerging, with the main themes related to maladaptive daydreaming filling in emotional needs. But, I asked the participants what their thoughts were on ‘why’ they experience maladaptive daydreaming. As my theory is developing, which provides an explanation of why, I wanted to know if it would be useful for the participants to also learn why. For one participant they responded that they did not need to know why, whilst another agreed it would be helpful to know why. A third participant suggested that there are probably multiple reasons why. This links to my theoretical suggestion of ‘differential emotional processing’. A fourth participant agreed that it is an important question, one which they could answer that the maladaptive daydreaming was fulfilling an emotional desire that could not be met in real life. The final participant who answered expressed needing to know why as most important, so that they could work towards maximising their efficiency in real life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Q:
Audit Trail (Forum) - Page 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Online Forum)</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process undertaken</td>
<td>20th October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Today one participant posted on the forum about how their daydreaming had triggered to intense levels over the past few days. They described their daydream, and the emotions involved, telling the forum about how they 'needed' to process through their daydreaming. I have checked privately on Facebook chat that the participant was safe, and they reassured me that they are and that they had booked a Psychologist appointment shortly to get further support. I chose to include this post and its responses from the other members of the forum into future coding, as it provided further support for my emerging theory of differential emotional processing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>20th October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In response to the participant's earlier status about uncontrollably daydreaming and that the theme of control has consistently appeared across the data analysis and coding, I asked the participants their thoughts about controlling the maladaptive daydreaming across the years. I was interested in this loose end, as both participants in the two case studies had spoken at length about control/lack of control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo</td>
<td>23rd October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The final question was put to the participants on the forum, as this is the final week of the forum. As the data has been coded and analysed over the past 5 weeks, I was interested to know about the participant's emotional life outside of the daydreaming. I expected the participants to answer about whether they are more/less emotional in the real world, whether they express or suppress their emotions etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Coding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23rd October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two questions were asked of the participants (1) Can you tell me your thoughts about controlling the maladaptive daydreaming throughout the years? (2) Tell me about your emotional life outside of the daydreaming? This generated a number of rich responses, which provided further explanation about control and the emotional experiences. I did not expect to see any new data, but instead, just wanted to explore that the participants are processing their emotions (or not) through the maladaptive daydreaming, to seek to understand their day-to-day experiences of experiencing their emotions. As I expected, the majority of participants struggle to express and experience their emotional lives, with this aspect of their lives being experienced through the maladaptive daydreaming. Some of the participants actively avoiding emotional situations/experiences. For a small few, they showed some emotional regulation and growth, as a result of the maladaptive daydreaming, but often actively needing to focus on this growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix Q:

**Audit Trail (Forum) - Page 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process undertaken</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member checking: Data saturation</td>
<td>29th October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debrief</td>
<td>9th November 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**29th October 2018**

As no new information is appearing within the data analysis and coding, I believe that the saturation point has been reached. With this in mind, I opened up the forum to the participants, encouraging them to spend the final week of the study discussing anything to do with maladaptive daydreaming. I did this to enable the participants to have the opportunity to bring anything new to the data analysis. One question, which was asked by a participant, was the struggle with concentration. The other participants responded with strategies and suggestions, such as mindfulness, planning and apps, which they meditate to. Interestingly, one participant provided three strategies (1) knowing the consequences, which prevented excessive daydreaming (2) willpower (3) religious faith.

**9th November 2018**

I placed the following status on the forum, as a form of debrief and an appropriate ending to the forum:

' I would like to thank every one of you for participating in this research study. There have been some interesting findings i.e. the role of creativity, that to some extent some people have some control over the experience more than others, some see it as a positive and some see it as a negative. The main finding, which is a new theory, is the differential way that maladaptive daydreaming meets some emotional needs. Whether negative or positive, the maladaptive daydreaming is filling an emotional need (i.e. stress management, anxiety management, coping skills,'
Appendix Q:
Audit Trail (Forum) - Page 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail (Online Forum)</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process undertaken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional growth, addiction, loneliness, emotional processing/avoidance. So, this is what I will be focusing the theory around. Once again, thank you for your support in discovering this new theory of Maladaptive Daydreaming. I am now in the process of writing everything up. But, I will be in touch by email over the coming weeks, to each of you individually. Warmth and Smiles, Rachael Haynes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>19th December 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A final status update was posted asking if the participants would be happy to receive their $50 Myer voucher by the email that I have on file. I also requested pseudonyms from each of the participants to be able to protect their identities in my thesis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>