

The Struggles of the Dining Room Table

By Sofia Caruso

Motivation; the forceful emotion pushing our minds towards the finish line, as dopamine swims throughout our systems. A feeling that often goes unnoticed, appearing in times of need, continually echoed in every “ugh I feel so unmotivated”. I am at fault for having this ignorance, not recognizing the importance of motivation and its critical role as a signal of help for my body. It is frequently undermined, but that lack of motivation can easily transfer from a joking phrase to a realization that something is not right. The feeling of this awakening can come out of nowhere.

As a college student, doing and completing all of my work was never an easy task. I live out two personas: the hardworking Biology major who understands that the work needs to be done and the young adult struggling to manage her distractions while battling ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) - to those who still refuse to believe that ADD/ADHD is an actual disorder, I urge you to engage in research on the subject and listen to my story. My brain is the source of a paradox, a never-ending battle between these two personas. While I have spent years of practicing and fine tuning my studying habits, to elevate my success, I am haunted by my past memories. Times where every inch of my body and soul screamed that I had work to do and that I needed to complete the work, yet I could not find the motivation to begin. Years of meeting with learning specialists and tutors had taught me to move on, preaching that I was better, but I could not escape the fear within. The anxious feeling of that motivation slipping away, falling back into the comfort of lacking the ability to “do”.

I was already at home when my school announced its virtual shift due to the coronavirus. This was a naive time, when many of us thought, “oh, it’s no big deal. We will be back in a few weeks.” Many were ecstatic for online courses, hopeful that grades would finally increase, saving the mentality of many stressed students. Unfortunately, I did not share similar feelings with my classmates, as I began begging my parents to allow me to return to my campus to continue my work. Naturally, they refused to let me go, too afraid to send me on a plane in the middle of a global pandemic. I began to panic that night over the situation. As a scientist, I understood the dangers of the virus and the necessity to stay inside and allow the world to heal. Yet, as a human being, I knew my flaws, but didn’t know how to admit the truth to my parents that my grades could fall. I began to think of living the nightmare I had worked hard to escape from: long nights of sitting at my desk or at my dining room table, unable to focus on work, too afraid to admit the truth that I was doing nothing when off medication. How does one admit that her success in high school was a lie? That it still does not make sense that she performed well enough to get into a top university because of her lack of motivation? More importantly, how does she admit this to her parents?

Thus, the disease began again as my university began their online schooling. The workload was overwhelming. Unlike my sisters who's high school held online classes on the same schedule they would normally have in high school, none of my professors continued to have class. In the first week alone, my work consisted of one six page essay, one formal lab report, two labs to complete online, six lectures that were between 40-50 minutes each, a 300 word write up for three classes on three reading assignments, an online discussion submission, and a poem. This work briefly diminished in the following weeks, as my days were consumed mostly by continually watching lectures. I soon realized this virtual lecture plan was more time consuming than expected, as each teacher did not recognize they were speaking at an incredibly fast pace - I had to continually pause and hurriedly write down what the teacher had said. By the weekends, I was burnt out and exhausted, lacking motivation to continue doing any work.

As time passed, I began to focus less and less on completing every task on time, as the load was too much to bear. Lectures got longer, assignments piled up, and I found myself back in my unmotivated slump. I found myself sitting at the table, staring at my laptop at the list of things to do, yet I couldn't seem to begin anything. Not only had this lack of motivation inhibited my work ethic, it drained my mind of creativity, halting the ability to think of new ideas for projects or papers. I found myself stuck in this mind numbing, repetitive cycle: wake up, wait for medicine to kick in, work, eat dinner, work, bed. On weekends, I found comfort in video games, my only access to the outside world. Yet, this comfort was intoxicating, as I slowly drifted away from reality, unaware of how much time had passed.

This issue did not go unnoticed by others, as my parents began to realize how much time I spent in the dining room on my laptop. They urged me to go see friends or to go outside, yet I could not seem to leave the cave I had buried myself within. It began to creep into my dreams, causing me to have nightmares about my failure. On the surface, my grades were increasing, and I was doing better, but the lack of motivation hurt within, convincing me that nothing was good enough. I had become the lazy villain - the love child of sloth and envy - who was jealous of the work ethic of others, unable to free herself.

I sit here now, writing this piece at my dining room table. Every Monday, it's the same routine. I tell myself that this week I will change and become more motivated. By the end of the week, I won't be surprised if I end up in the same unmotivated mentality. With only two weeks left in the semester, I don't know how to escape this nightmare. This unmotivated feeling that is at the root of my online school experience. I have no solution other than to keep writing, in hope of finding a cure. I understand that I am more fortunate than most to be healthy and have the ability to attend school. Yet, I am still suffering, eternally crying out for freedom from this state of laziness. I can only hope that this is just a minor set back and that all will normalize after

quarantine. But for now, I only see the same stack of books sitting on the table, waiting to be touched by fresh pen ink.