



ANDY BAKER/GETTY

sleep and exercise. And he obsessed about whether to try getting one big study into an influential journal or to churn out lots of smaller papers.

Andrews took the riskier first approach, eventually publishing a paper in *Psychological Review* in 2009 (P. W. Andrews and J. A. Thomson Jr *Psychol. Rev.* **116**, 620–654; 2009) that received lots of publicity, including a feature about his work in *The New York Times Magazine* early in 2010. Even after that, he had trouble getting interviews, despite submitting many applications. “I was like, ‘What do I have to do to get a job?’” says Andrews, who was by then desperate, depressed and anxious.

He still has recurring depressive symptoms when he struggles with obstacles at work. His research, which challenges mainstream ideas about depression as a disorder and the role of serotonin, also raises doubts about the value of antidepressants. He has found it hard to get his work published.

TRICKY TOPICS

Sometimes, research topics can induce dark thoughts, says Alejandro Frid, who started studying endangered deer in Chile in 1990 and later investigated the effects of marine fisheries on predator–prey interactions in Alaska and British Columbia.

The more his research pointed to the damaging implications of climate change, the more angry and nihilistic he became. “By nihilism, I mean that there is no point in caring about the future because there really isn’t one,” says Frid, who is now a science coordinator at the Central Coast Indigenous Resource Alliance near Vancouver, Canada, and wrote the book *A World For My Daughter: An Ecologist’s Search for Optimism* (Caitlin, 2015). “It’s all doom. Humans are destructive and we don’t know any better. There’s no real vision worth living for.”

Depression has become a recurring topic

of conversation among environmentalists. Frid has cultivated hopefulness by focusing on ecological resilience and the human capacity for problem solving. He is also working to influence policies and human behaviours that affect the environment — approaches that helped to reshape his career and brighten his outlook.

Scientists can be wary of admitting to symptoms of depression or anxiety. But researchers who confide in colleagues say they’re often surprised by the support they receive.

Like Ramdas, Droge-Young found that when she overcame her fear of telling lab colleagues about her mental illness, others told similar stories. One had spent time in the same hospital. Faculty members contributed to a Kickstarter funding campaign for two art shows that describe her experience of depression and self-harm. Her adviser and his family attended. “People are really caring,” she says, “if you open up with your vulnerabilities.”

Not everyone feels comfortable talking to their superiors, but they should really see a professional as early as possible, says Kay. “If you think you’re struggling, that’s a good reason to get help,” he says. And if one therapist doesn’t seem like a good fit, find another, Droge-Young advises.

Allowing time for outside interests can help to alleviate work-related anxiety. For Droge-Young, that means getting outside or throwing Oscars-watching parties. Wilkins likes to rock-climb, play football and run. He also recommends developing short-term projects with quick deadlines that aren’t work-related. This year, he and a friend started entering — and winning — film competitions.

Recognizing that it is normal and even helpful to feel down when faced with complex problems may also help scientists to cope, says Andrews. He sees his own bouts of depression not as a sign of a malfunctioning brain, but as a response to important problems. That response helps him to focus. When prompted by social problems or work stresses, he says, the body reallocates energy to the brain. The hypothalamus kicks in, suppressing libido and other physical drives and inducing a fixation on negative thoughts.

Although such rumination is often seen as a bad thing, dwelling on a problem can actually help to solve it because it helps the mind to break it down into smaller components. Just like a scientist does, Andrews says. ■

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EUROPE

Call to keep funding

A group of leading European research universities is calling on the European Commission to restore funds cut from the €80-billion (US\$88-billion), 7-year pan-European research funding scheme Horizon 2020. The 21-member League of European Research Universities (LERU) says in *LERU’s Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020* that the diversion of billions to support risky research has resulted in less funding and lower application success rates. The low success rates will dissuade talented researchers from applying for Horizon research grants in future, the report authors warn. LERU calls for the commission to increase grant-scheme budgets, and warns that the commission focuses too much on technical innovation and ‘cutting-edge’ research. The authors also suggest that the commission should repeat popular funding calls to offer more chances to apply for grants and provide extra funding to support maternity and leave options at universities. They also call for the creation of large, broad panels to evaluate collaborative proposals more effectively.

POLICY

Minorities programme

A US\$5.9-million expansion of a National Science Foundation (NSF) programme aims to develop reliable career pathways in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) for people in under-represented minority groups, who comprise 8% of faculty appointments at 4-year US academic institutions. The Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate programme will provide funding to 14 universities to address issues, policies and practices that limit the advancement of people from these groups in academic science. Among the concerns that the NSF wants to address are the difficulties that people from minority groups have in navigating career transitions, such as from graduate student to postdoc and postdoc to faculty. Funded universities will collaborate on improving the advancement and retention of women of colour in faculty posts, increasing the success rate of under-represented-minority postdocs seeking STEM faculty posts and improving the experience of PhD students presenting their dissertations. The NSF offers both a Graduate Research Fellowship and a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship.