

Bladder Business

Expert says bathroom shyness may be phobia

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When nature calls, most people don't concern themselves with the person who might be in the bathroom stall adjacent to them. For people who suffer from paruresis, the case is very different.

More than 7 percent of the population suffers from paruresis, also called Shy Bladder Syndrome. The syndrome is derived of a social phobia that makes the affected individual fear using public bathrooms, mainly when others are around.

According to University of Memphis social work professor Steven Soifer, about 1,500 students on campus have the problem.

"Not many people know about [paruresis] or that it's easy to treat," he said.

Soifer, who co-founded the Shy Bladder Center, plans to host his first Shy Bladder Workshop in Memphis in January. The goal of the workshop is to "break down silence surrounding the topic," Soifer said.

"It's still what we call a secret phobia," he said.

Soifer, 57, said people have gone to great lengths to avoid disclosing this disorder, such as taking jobs below their qualifications and refusing to date.

He suffered with the syndrome from the time he was 11 years old until he treated himself when he was in his 40s. He said he doesn't understand why people shy away from all "bathroom issues."

"I'm constantly amazed by the things talked about publicly. Bathroom issues in our culture are taboo," he said. "People would rather talk about their sex life than peeing in a public bathroom. I find that strange."

Undecided sophomore Jaylen Holmes said that sometimes the space in public restrooms is not big enough for everyone, and it can get quite uncomfortable.

"It's awkward because the urinals aren't big enough to cover everything," Holmes said. "And you can't look at the person next to you so you just have to stare at the wall."

Mark Tyrell, therapist and co-founder of Hypnosis Downloads, said that Shy Bladder Syndrome could become a chronic illness in some cases, such as with Nick, an individual who considers himself an expert on the subject and asked not to be identified by his full name.

"I know everything there is to know about Shy Bladder Syndrome," Nick said. "My doctor calls it paruresis. I know it's pretty common but people don't like to talk about it. I've had months of cognitive therapy and analyzed my thoughts around it 'til I'm blue in the face. I could write a textbook on the subject, but I've still got



photo By Chelsea Boozer | staff

the blessed thing!”

Soifer said it can be difficult for people to find ways to deal with the disorder, though he expects change in the future.

“I hope for worldwide recognition of the issue,” he said.

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