



Trying To Understand 'What Made Maddy Run'

By [AILSA CHANG \(/PEOPLE/AILSA-CHANG\)](/PEOPLE/AILSA-CHANG) · 4 HOURS AGO

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Madison Holleran ran track at the University of Pennsylvania. She was popular, and beautiful — and raised in a big, supportive family in a New Jersey suburb. "By all accounts, Madison in high school was this young, happy, vibrant, wildly successful human being, who was destined — according to everyone around her — to do amazing things with her life," Fagan says.

And from the outside, Madison appeared to be thriving in college, too. But inside, she was struggling with anxiety and depression. Then, in the middle of her freshman year, Madison ended her life by jumping from a building in the middle of downtown Philadelphia.

The suicide raised a lot of questions about mental health on college campuses. And it got Fagan wanting to understand *What Made Maddy Run* — the title of her new book.

Interview Highlights

On why it was hard for Madison to talk about her struggle

She did talk about it privately with her parents, not to such a level that I think they thought this was an imminent, desperate problem they needed to solve immediately. But it was hard for her to talk about it with those who were closest to her in college because she was on a competitive track and field team at a Division I school, and the focus there was on athletic performance, and the focus was on overcoming those hurdles to become a better athlete. And that's a hard environment to say, wait a minute, I'm struggling, and I can't put my finger on what it is; it's not something physical, it's something mental.

On "Penn Face"

It's a term that those who attended or currently attend Penn used to describe this relentless pursuit of achievement, and when you look around at Penn, you see "Penn Face," which is happy, easy, everything is coming naturally — whereas below the surface, everything is like this furious pedaling.

On the compulsion to edit our lives for social media

This was something that Madison dealt with constantly, was that she knew that she was projecting an image of herself that was not real, and she articulated that to people. And yet, when she looked at her very close high school friends and what they were projecting on social media, she took it at face value. And I think we all do that to some degree.

On how she researched the real Madison

Madison's family gave me Madison's computer, which contained her iMessages and emails that she sent, that I think give her voice and often show, actually, less than you'd think about her internal mental state. So much of what she communicated was punctuated with emojis or LOL or hahaha ... and you would know this was serious, but because it was done digitally and with this punctuation of emojis, it softens everything.

On what schools can do to better help students struggling with mental health

That's the big question right now, and I think when you compare the millions of dollars that are poured into the physical health of athletes with the small potatoes that are often put into their mental health, it's really easy to see why so many student athletes don't really feel like there's a place within the athletic department for them to speak openly about how they might be feeling.


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