

“Giving in to the stigma”

Why it's not that simple.

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Mental illness is not one-dimensional and reactions to it are not either...

In a recent book published called “The Stigma of Mental Illness - End of the

Story?” it states: “Stigma is comprised of three

social-cognitive structures: **stereotypes**, **prejudices**, and **discrimination**.”

Stereotypes might look like a belief that someone with mental illness often is “guilty” of:

- Exhibiting laziness
- Acting out violently
- Generally being incompetent
- Acting “crazy”
- Being untrustworthy or unreliable
- Being irresponsible

Do phrases or metaphors get used in the workplace that reinforce stereotypes?

Examples might be: “That student was so schitzo”

“Are they off their meds?” or as seemingly benign as

“That’s so crazy.”

Prejudice

“ Preconceived opinion not based on reason or actual experience; bias, partiality; (now) *spec.* unreasoned dislike, hostility, or antagonism towards, or discrimination against, a race, sex, or other class of people.”

Growth opportunities at your institution?

By a show of hands, have you or do you currently work for an institution that has any form of structured training related to reducing or eliminating mental health prejudice in any form?

Discrimination

In action it can have a very tangibly impact on:

- Looking for a job
- Getting a job
- Experiencing your colleagues
- Performance evaluations
- Raises
- Promotion
- Termination

There is work to be done:

“People with severe mental illnesses such as **schizophrenia** and **bipolar disorder** are among the most disadvantaged in society, and many experience social and economic hardship as a direct result of their illness.”

Matters to consider

- Can one serve as an ally without disclosing?
- What can one hope to gain by disclosing?
- Might the act of disclosing help others who have not done so?
- By coming forward and talking about one's diagnosis might one bring light to the fact that stereotypes are just that, stereotypes?
- All of these questions lead me back to my opening statement, it's not that simple

Disclosure of mental illness is a very personal matter and intersectionality with work can be complex. While the answers may not have been given here - Please continue to consider the benefits of disclosure and challenge your institution's and your own experience with stigma.

If you have a disability and choose not to disclose

Many institutions have a long way to go in this arena
and you may not feel comfortable disclosing

Tip: Handle everything related to your illness such as medical leaves with Human Resources directly and document any inappropriate lines of questioning that occur with anyone else in your workplace.

Be assertive when approached by colleagues lesser known to you. Sometimes all you have to say if questioned inappropriately is: “thank you for your concern, but it’s a personal matter.”

Remember

You choose what feels right for you

Thank you!

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References

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