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<div align="center">It's Okay Not to Be Okay</div>

Mental health is a priority that often gets overlooked. In society, it can be frowned upon to even bring it up in conversation, leading to people neglecting the help they need. Oftentimes, when someone has to deal with mental health issues, they tend to neglect them themselves, leading to larger issues. This all happens because of the stigma surrounding mental health. I believe these stigmas lead to issues within ourselves and the people around us, and we should change that.

According to *Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness*, and *Healthline,* mental health stigma can be split into three different categories: public, self, and institutional. Public stigma concerns the public and societal image of people with mental health issues as a group. It is more so what others' emotions are associated with it. Self-stigma refers to the negative belief one has in oneself. Institutional stigma is mostly about how people with mental illness are treated in public institutions, work, or other organizations. These stigmas can affect the day-to-day of a multitude of people's lives, making it harder for anyone to progress.

Public stigma involves the negative or discriminatory attitudes that others have about mental illness, according to the article *Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness*. According to over 2000 American and English public survey responses, it's generally found that people tend to believe others with severe mental illnesses should be feared

and excluded, are irresponsible and need to have decisions made by them from others, and are seen as childlike and needed to be cared for. It's also a common theme for people to believe that "Unlike persons with physical disabilities, persons with mental illness are perceived by the public to be in control of their disabilities and responsible for causing them" (Corrigan and Watson). This leads to individuals with mental illnesses being considered less deserving of help or pity. Public and social stigma can also affect the personal lives of individuals with mental illness, as "social mental health stigma may lead to isolation from friends or family. People with mental health conditions may experience bullying or harassment from others—or possibly even physical violence"(Lockett). And because of the media, there are beliefs amongst society that people with mental illness are more violent and dangerous. For example, in the movie *Split (*2016), Kevin Wendell Crumb is a man who has multiple personality disorders, one of his personalities is called the Beast, where he gains superhuman strength and assaults multiple people as if he has no control over himself. This easily paints a picture depicting people with similar disorders as dangerous and vicious. This just isn't the case.

I don't believe there is a permanent solution to public stigmas against mental health, though I do believe there are ways to counteract them. As a whole, people could simply stop believing negative views regarding mental illness, and the media could stop drastically misrepresenting mental illness. Although this solution seems far from achievable, I believe we just need to educate ourselves on the many issues as well as have more contact with people who have mental illnesses. Having more contact with individuals who have mental illness will help lessen the stigma associated with them.

Self-stigma can have many effects and greatly affect an individual mentally. Some of the effects include reduced hope, lower self-esteem, increased psychiatric symptoms, difficulties

with social relationships, a reduced likelihood of staying with treatment, and more difficulties at work, as stated in *Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness*. The *Internalized Stigma Mental Illness Inventory-29* (ISMI-29) measures self-stigma using four categories: alienation, stereotype endorsement, discrimination experience, and social withdrawal. Alienation stems from feeling embarrassed, ashamed, or disappointed in oneself for being mentally ill. Stereotype endorsement happens when one applies negative stereotypes about mental illness to oneself, such as that people with mental illness are violent and can't live good, rewarding lives. Some consequences of self-stigmatizing are self-sabotage, rumination, and suicidal ideation. These effects may not only affect the individual but also those around them. Alienation can cause boundaries to form around individuals and the people who care about them, weakening their relationship. This can lead to further isolation. Self-stigma can form when people internalize the public's views on mental illness. This is an issue that gets greatly overlooked as different media outlets portray strong negative representations of people with mental illnesses, which leads to even further self-stigmatizing.

Self-stigma can be a harsh mental battle, but there are ways to combat it. One way to get past self-stigma would be to get treatment. This is easier said than done, as the self-stigma itself can make one reluctant to attend or accept treatment. The best way to go about it would be to just power through and receive the treatment necessary. One could also go to support groups with others experiencing the same self-stigma. This can create a more open and safe environment for individuals to talk about their issues since they're likely to have similar problems. Coping as a group is a good way to get through tough experiences, as it can make individuals feel more inclined to relate to the issues being presented. Overall, self-stigma can be solved, but only by

the individual's own volition and will to attend health services. All anyone can do is try and validate and encourage them to try and seek help.

According to *Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness,* institutional stigma is more systemic, involving policies of the government and private organizations that intentionally or unintentionally limit opportunities for people with mental illness. This can hurt employees at their jobs, causing a multitude of issues. Institutional stigma can cause issues such as workers with mental conditions being three times more likely to use non-psychiatric services and three and a half times more likely to have substance abuse problems, as stated in *Mental Health in the Workplace—and the cost of staying silent.* In most work environments, workers tend to keep their mental conditions to themselves in order to preserve their reputation and their jobs. Also, workers with mental conditions are less likely to be hired. "Employment rates decreased with increasing mental illness severity (none = 75.9%, mild = 68.8%, moderate = 62.7%, serious = 54.5%, $p<0.001$). Over a third of people with serious mental illness, 39%, had incomes below $10,000 (compared to 23% among people without mental illness, $p<0.001$)." (Luciano and Meara). Mental illness is overall more associated with lower employment rates due to employers and businesses viewing individuals with mental illness as a liability. Due to this, people with mental conditions are in a state of shunning themselves to be hired and maintain their jobs, leading to even larger mental illnesses.

When it comes down to institutional stigma, the best way to combat it is to keep everyone informed and understanding of the situation at hand. If businesses took more time and sent more funding to the psychiatric aspect, there would be far fewer mental conditions forming, as people would start receiving the help they need. Businesses and employers could also work on maintaining a safe environment for their employees; that way, individuals can feel less shunned

for their mental conditions. When it comes to hiring, employers should do background checks and accurately determine whether or not someone might be capable of doing their job because even the most proficient workers might have mental illness. Overall, it's best to try not to judge employees too harshly based on the mental conditions they might have.

Mental health stigmas especially affect people from minority communities. For example, individuals in the LGBTQ+ community are less likely to have health insurance, more likely to experience discrimination from healthcare staff, and more likely to discover that clinicians do not have knowledge of caring for them, as stated in *Let's Face It, No One Wants To Talk About Mental Health.* Or that for individuals in the African-American community, it can be unacceptable to talk about one's mental health issues, even within the family. Or that mental illness can be seen as a source of shame in Asian American communities, and that using mental health services may be seen as an admission that something is wrong not just with an individual but with the whole family.

The stigma surrounding mental health can be detrimental to all communities. A solution, like the ones presented before, is to just keep informing. Seminars could be held in order to inform certain communities on how to deal with mental health and the stigma surrounding it, teaching them that it's fair to use mental health services and that shame wouldn't be an issue. We could inform them on how to help individuals in their own communities lift one another up rather than drag them down.

Mental health is something that affects all of us, and shouldn't be looked down upon. You are not less human for being unwell, and it truly is a shame that that's the conclusion that's drawn from many points of society. I believe everyone should be allowed to receive the help they need, especially mental help. As a society, we have a long way to go, but I'm sure with a little

effort, we'll be able to pull through and teach love to one another, to teach each other that it is

okay not to be okay.

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