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### Surviving in a World of Judgment

Insanity; it swims through our veins, floats in our heads, and dances on our fingertips. It surrounds us everywhere we go. We rarely notice it because of how subtle it is, but according to the National Institute of Mental Health, "an estimated 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older — about one in four adults — suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year" (The Numbers Count). I bet that's more than you thought. Whether it's you, or someone you know, we all have seen people with mental illness get criticized. Individuals with mental illnesses are negatively judged by others. Movies, television shows, songs, all portray people with mental illnesses as crazy and/or violent. In schools, kids already judge their peers, and when it comes to somebody that is different, they don't hesitate to make assumptions. Even employers judge individuals with illnesses when considering hiring someone.

How often do you hear a news reporter say a murderer had depression, watch a movie where the main character is portrayed as crazy, or hear a song with lyrics that consist of the symptoms or ideas people relate to mental health problems? Media has a huge affect on our thoughts, opinions, and ideas. According to Sane, "news and entertainment media often make the link between mental illness and violence seem much stronger than it is" (Mental Illness and Violence). If media wasn't available, we wouldn't have any access to knowledge on these concepts. The media can be very helpful in providing information, but it can also destroy a

person's moral values by influencing them to think something is worse than it is. Apparently, "a mother who allegedly murdered her daughter by suffocating her with a soft toy was suffering from 'clinically significant' depression, a jury heard today" (Pilling). Just because she suffered from depression, doesn't mean she killed her daughter. Many people are dealing with depression, and not all of them are murderers. Another example of the assumption that murderers have a mental health problem is that James Holmes, Aurora shooter, suffered from mental illness. James Holmes had a miserable love life and was even rejected on an adult casual sex website (Nicholson). Typically, if you can't find love, you feel lonely, depressed, and tired of everything. It is possible that James suffered from a mental illness, but it is also possible that he was just miserable because he felt unwanted. When judging someone, you need to understand their whole life before you assume who they are. About 17 million people a year are diagnosed with depression (Understanding Depression). Do you honestly believe all of those people are killers? I suffer from depression, and I haven't gone out and killed anyone. If you were to stop and think, you may realize that a lot of violence is gang related. These gang members go out and kill to establish their loyalty everyday. They commit various crimes, to prove they are worthy. Mental health problems don't require proving yourself; you don't have to kill for them. They happen, whether you want them to or not.

Movies also influence our opinions on mental health. In the movie *The Butterfly Effect*, Dr. Redfield says "there are no journals" (The Butterfly Effect). At this time in the movie, Evan is in a mental hospital, due to his talk of his journals, and being able to alter his life with them. We are unable to know any of the real truth of this world, so how do we know someone is actually crazy? People choose not to listen to or believe others if what they say is out of the ordinary and

this is what our society determines as crazy. Another movie that portrays insanity is *Girl, Interrupted* (also a novel by Susanna Kaysen). In this intriguing film, Susanna (played by Winona Ryder) is placed in a mental hospital. While she has not slipped into a world of insanity, most of the other patients have. According to this movie, and novel, "the only way to stay sane is to go a little crazy" (*Girl, Interrupted* Quotes). Sanity is stereotypical. If you talk to yourself, ignore the world, hurt yourself, etc, you're crazy. But in reality, nobody can decide if we are insane or not. At some point, everybody has to go a little crazy; they have to have fun.

Songs affect our opinions and moods as well. In the song *Psychotic Feeling* by *Of Montreal*, they sing the lyrics, "but can you say it doesn't feel like a skeleton has melted and the wallpaper's peeling" (*Psychotic Feeling*). This sentence just sounds like something society would call "crazy." It fits with the title of the song too. Psychotic- a person suffering from psychosis. Most people would think, whoever says that must have some sort of problem because that is completely illogical. Regardless of society's opinion though, it does not mean you are insane to think like that. It means you are creative, and have an imagination. *I Hurt Myself* by *Dark Lotus* holds several examples of media portrayal of mental illness- "I'm sitting in the dark, talking to myself. Why does everybody tell me that I need help" (*I Hurt Myself*). Society associates talking to yourself as a common theme in mental patients, which is represented here. The song also says "I wake up the room is padded" (*I Hurt Myself*). Typically, we are given the idea (mostly from media) that mental hospitals have closed off, padded, sound-proof rooms for when a patient is becoming violent or aggressive, or if they need to be separated from other people.

Another problem for these individuals is that, as we all know, kids can make very cruel judgments against their peers. Everybody has faced one, said one, or heard one. When I first

moved to Nicholasville in fifth grade, I gained a reputation. I was the girl who cut herself; the one who had problems. I made friends, but most people ignored me, or didn't want to talk to me. They called me names: cutter, emo, etc. It took a toll on my self-esteem that has stuck with me ever since. People don't think about how these judgments can hurt someone. Kids often exclude others from social activities if they are not accepted by everyone else, proven by, "it is recognised that some physical or mental disability can generate a powerful barrier to the ability to interact with society" (Klasen). Having disabilities can cause issues with making friends, feeling comfortable around others, and/or speaking to people, therefore, it is even harder to cope with a disability when you're being excluded because of it.

If you are attempting to find employment and you suffer from a mental illness, you might find the job searching a little more difficult. Employers often fear hiring a new employee if they have mental health problems. One fear employers have is that the disability "may constitute an inability to do the job" (Thompson). I believe this is ridiculous. Plenty of people with health problems hold a job, that they are quite successful in, without any issues. Another reason to deny a job to these people is because "individuals with complex needs, including psychiatric disabilities, have often been labeled as not job ready" (Myths and Facts About Mental Illness). If they were not job ready, then they wouldn't be applying for the position. A mental disorder does not mean you aren't capable of performing a task. According to NAMI, "the unemployment rate for adults living with mental illness is three to five times higher than for those without mental illness" (Unemployment). This quote speaks for itself; it is harder for a person with a mental illness to find work.

The judgment and stereotypes of people suffering from mental illness is wrong. Nobody can help who they are, especially when it comes to their health. Media, peers, and employers, all judge these people. Why should you? From my own experience, I know how much it hurts to be laughed at, judged, and excluded because of who I am. Nobody wants to be treated that way, so don't continue to pass on these hurtful judgements.

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