

Just Another Stigma

Veronica D. Zamora

Covenant School of Nursing

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Mrs. Jaynie Maya, MSN, RN-C

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When I first found out that I would have to take a course in psychiatric mental health for nursing I was initially afraid. As a nursing student it never occurred to me that I would have to learn about psychiatric illnesses in depth, and much less experience working with patients affected by them. I thought that was something one would only delve into if they chose that specialty for their career. The thought of working with these patients firsthand is a bit frightening for me, because I do not know what to expect regarding their behavior. It is embarrassing to share, but I imagine them and the facilities they occupy to resemble what society has led me to believe about them. I picture angry, violent, scary, crazy, insensible people who lack self-control and are therefore distanced from us “normal” people in society. That may sound ignorant, but I believe we tend to be afraid of what we don’t know. We are quick to uphold people to the social stigma we are taught to assign them to. As a society, we tend to categorize people as if they were invaluable objects instead of being empathetic towards our peers, and genuinely attempt to understand their situation.

As a nursing student, we are expected not to judge patients or hold any discriminations against them. I have always tried my best to apply that same standard toward my peers. I always try to see things from their perception, but this is the first time I honestly don’t know enough about the subject to try and relate to those with mental illnesses. I have not had any experience with diagnosed mentally ill people. Occasionally, I have joked around with people about how they are acting bipolar, but honestly, I don’t know how a truly bipolar person acts. I have not had the opportunity to study any mental illness prior to nursing school. I imagine that it wouldn’t be ideal to deal with any mental illness (no matter how minute or grand), and it must be awfully miserable.

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I was raised to believe that we are accountable for our own actions, thoughts, and behaviors. If a child was diagnosed with ADHD, I would often hear my family's remark that the child just lacked discipline. They were spoiled and a good spanking would set them straight. If you were feeling depressed, well there's plenty to do around the house to keep you occupied so that you no longer feel that way. Therefore, any time I heard a peer talking about how they had some new diagnosis, such as anxiety, I would catch myself judging them in my mind. It wasn't until I worked in a pharmacy that I realized there were so many different medications for all kinds of mental disorders. For me, if there's a medication to fix that, then the condition is true.

At this point, I still didn't understand the mechanisms, or signs and symptoms of the disorders, but I was able to start labeling and categorizing what medications a particular illness would be associated with. I did interact with a few customers who were prescribed these medications, and some of them did act alarming. These instances were proof of how people with these mental disorders act violently and abruptly. Therefore, everything society has told us about this population of people became true in my head. If I dispensed that same medication to another patient, I was already prepared to deal with their behavior. I would warn other technicians about their anticipated response. I believe this experience caused me to develop a fear towards anyone with a mental illness. My perception was that they were unstable, unpredictable, violent, sporadic, and had the potential to cause physical harm to others around them.

I know that I have a lot to learn about mental illnesses, and that I may come off as naïve about the subject, but as I am a growing nursing student, I appreciate that I have the opportunity to learn more about these conditions. I don't want to harbor fear towards those potential patients. Instead, I would like to learn how to best interact with them in a safe manner. I would like to

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learn about the most common mental illnesses, and interventions and therapies that would be most effective for these patients. I believe society needs to be more aware/educated on how to recognize mental disorders so that more people could get the help they need.

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Table Title

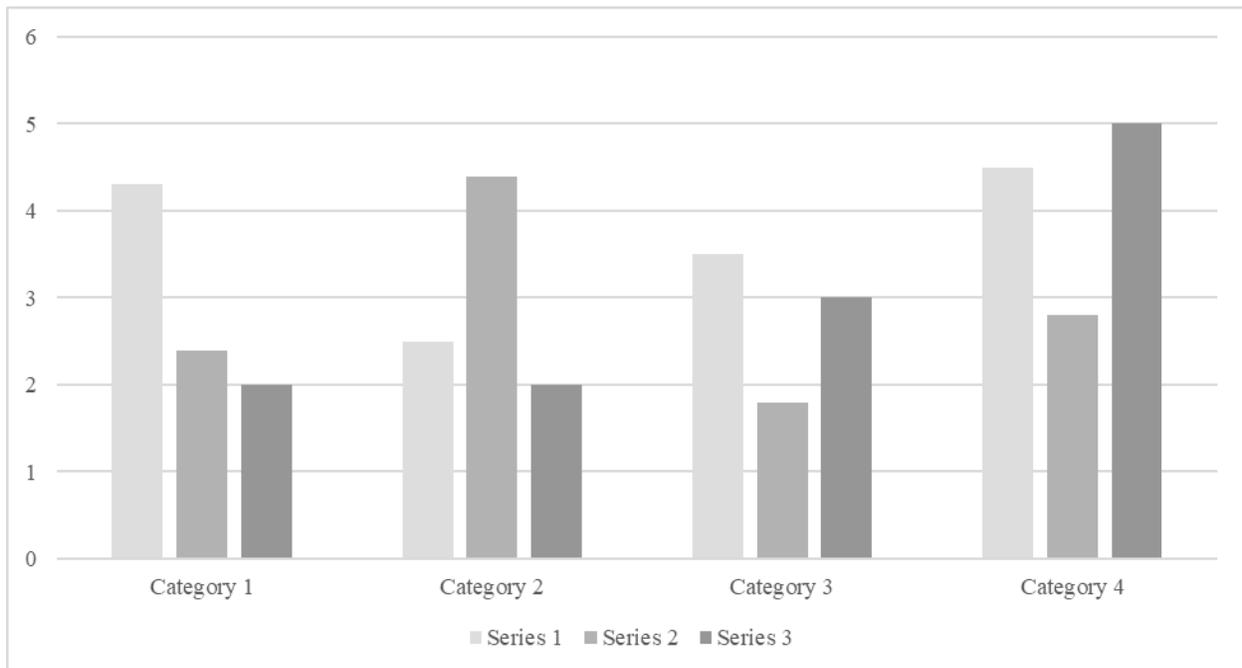
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