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Generalizing Anxiety

Center for Public Service
Gettysburg College

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Generalizing Anxiety

Abstract

As she began reading the list of symptoms, I was making mental check marks next to the ones that applied to me.

Fear of interacting with strangers- check. Fear that others will notice that you look anxious- check. Avoiding doing things or talking to people out of fear of embarrassment- check. Fear of situations in which you may be judged- check. Anxiety that disrupts your daily routine, work or school activities- check, check, check.

[*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, mental health, anxiety, depression, insecurity, counseling

Disciplines

Mental and Social Health | Psychiatric and Mental Health | Substance Abuse and Addiction

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](http://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

GENERALIZING ANXIETY

October 21, 2013

As she began reading the list of symptoms, I was making mental check marks next to the ones that applied to me.

Fear of interacting with strangers- check.

Fear that others will notice that you look anxious- check.

Avoiding doing things or talking to people out of fear of embarrassment- check.

Fear of situations in which you may be judged- check.

Anxiety that disrupts your daily routine, work or school activities- check, check, check.

Did I seriously just check every symptom that the counselor read? Do I have anxiety? What the @\$%? But I'm bubbly and happy and have tons of friends! I don't schlep around in an oversized trench coat avoiding eye contact with anyone who crosses my path.

I didn't want to believe that I have anxiety, and hated the thought of being put into the "anxiety box" (re: friendless, socially awkward). I couldn't come to terms with the negative associations that I had built up about people who are anxious, and I certainly didn't want to join their elite club of medicated deadbeats.

But, join their club I did because continuing on alone seemed unbearable. I struggled with social anxiety, triggered by some of the social norms here at Gettysburg: We live in an environment where Greek organizations and sports teams dominate, and I belong to neither. Looking at pictures of people laughing and drinking in fun costumes on facebook didn't help matters, because those were parties I didn't go to. And forget about relationships. It seemed like everyone was either in a committed relationship or having drunken one-night-stands with whoever happened to be on the dance floor that night. I didn't fall into either of those categories, so the feelings of being an outsider continued to creep in. I hated the library because I felt like the eyes of the world were staring at the inevitable "loser" sign stamped across my ass as I walked to the printer alone. Servo and the gym presented their own challenges, and the anxiety even followed me into the classroom, a space where I had always felt comfortable and confident. I second-guessed most of what came out of my mouth, constantly comparing myself to my peers, who always seemed either funnier or smarter.

Once I started taking anxiety medication (Hallelujah for Zoloft!), I didn't feel fine immediately, but I began to learn how to deal with it. What struck me the most though was the sort of reactions I encountered when I started to tell my friends that I had anxiety. One flat out said, "No you don't." "I don't?" I asked, intrigued. She explained that



anxiety affects people who don't have friends, and since I do, I couldn't possibly have it. What a relief! I was slightly amused at this perception, since I had held the same one. We fell into similar traps of disassociating anxiety from people who have friends, or who appear attractive, carefree and outgoing. My friend didn't want me to become grouped with the stigma that surrounds the disease, and neither did I.

Thanks to weekly counseling sessions at the Health Center, medication, and tons of support from friends and family, I have been able to debunk some of my previous beliefs about the "type" of people who have anxiety. I no longer think of myself differently, and now take responsibility for my mental health rather than blame it on the social scene at Gettysburg. Though walking around Servo alone and making class presentations may trigger my anxiety, they are not the cause.

You may notice that I am writing this anonymously. That is a choice. Maybe a part of me is still fearful of the stigma that comes with anxiety. Sad, but true. Maybe I am not advancing the cause I so full-heartedly support. But just maybe, this post will spark some conversation around the subject of mental health and help those who are struggling like I have to realize that anxiety is [more common than they think](#), and that they have no reason to be ashamed. An (anxious) girl can dream!

Anonymous Contributor

<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/10/21/generalizing-anxiety/>