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Rethink

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Abstract

Watching anyone struggle with mental health disorders should never be funny- and yet, in some instances, that's exactly how it is viewed. Recently, celebrity Amanda Bynes was involuntarily committed to psychiatric hold for the second time in a year. This was following a series of very public tweets which clearly show instability in her mental health. One tweet in particular regarding a microchip she believes was implanted in her brain is markedly delusional. The media and public, however, have been sensationalizing and demoralizing her condition by treating it as just another piece of shocking celebrity news. Headlines like "Amanda Bynes' craziest tweets", "Amanda Bynes' Odd Behavior Continues", and "Amanda Bynes goes wild on twitter" are trivializing a serious situation. Any person who is involuntarily placed in a psychiatric hospital needs- and deserves- sympathy and understanding, so why is Bynes being viewed as a spectacle? [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, mental heath disorders

Disciplines

Mental and Social Health | Other Mental and Social Health | Psychiatric and Mental Health

Comments

Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College 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.

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

RETHINK

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Watching anyone struggle with mental health disorders should never be funny- and yet, in some instances, that's exactly how it is viewed. Recently, celebrity Amanda Bynes was involuntarily committed to psychiatric hold for the second time in a year. This was following a series of very public tweets which clearly show instability in her mental health. One tweet in particular regarding a microchip she believes was implanted in her brain is markedly delusional. The media and public, however, have been sensationalizing and demoralizing her condition by treating it as just another piece of shocking celebrity news. Headlines like "Amanda Bynes' craziest tweets", "Amanda Bynes' Odd Behavior Continues", and "Amanda Bynes goes wild on twitter" are trivializing a serious situation. Any person who is involuntarily placed in a psychiatric hospital needs- and deserves- sympathy and understanding, so why is Bynes being viewed as a spectacle?

In addition, this follows only months after Robin Williams' suicide attributed to his battles with depression and Parkinson's disease. Why does the media deem some mental illness as tragic, while others are subject to ridicule? Any mental illness- whether it be suffering from delusions or depression- is incredibly devastating to the individual and everyone surrounding the individual. Schizophrenia, for instance, increases the rate of a person attempting suicide by a startling 50 percent and is the leading cause of premature death among individuals with the disorder.

There is also a lack of understanding and support for individuals who struggle with mental health disorders and are hidden from the public eye. These people often become perpetual victims of institutionalization; they cycle through prisons, hospitals, and shelters. Although there has been progress made, there is still an alarming amount of stigma surrounding mental health disorders which is often a

barrier for individuals who need treatment. One stereotype is that individuals suffering from mental illnesses are violent. This myth needs to be dispelled; although a proportion of individuals suffering from psychosis does commit violent acts in higher rates than in the general population, overall mental illness tends to be incapacitating and is not a significant precursor for violence. In fact, individuals with mental illness tend to be the victims of violence more often than the perpetrators.

The systemic implications for mental health are also astounding. Individuals with manic-depressive or schizophrenic disorders comprise as much as one-third of the homeless population in the country. The number of mentally ill people in prison is disputed but is thought to be as high as one in five, greatly outnumbering the number of people in hospitals receiving treatment. Due to the nature of their illness, individuals with some mental disorders are incapable of being consistently employed, which often leads to a downward economic trend. The stress of poverty can be a risk factor for mental illness, creating an unfortunate cycle.

Clearly mental illness is a complex societal issue which needs more focus in multiple spheres. We must eradicate stigma and develop compassion as a society in order to dispel fear and move forward. Initiatives like Housing First are a step in the right direction, as they target homeless individuals with severe mental illness and provide both treatment and appropriate housing. Not only do these initiatives rescue individuals from homelessness and institutionalization and drastically improve their quality of life, but they also save millions of dollars per year.

Hopefully, we can one day work toward a future where no one is afraid to receive treatment due to fear that others will find out about their diagnosis; toward a future where we no longer sensationalize public delusions; and toward a future where individuals with mental illness are met with understanding.

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