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## Stigmatized and Getting High

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# Stigmatized and Getting High

## **Abstract**

The first time I was asked to sell my medication was after a small party sophomore year. I was starting to fall asleep in the midst of chattering people and drunken laughter. My 12 hours of focus was up. Concerned people around me started asking why I was suddenly so sleepy and without thinking about it, my boyfriend answered “Her medication has worn off, so she’s getting kinda sleepy.” Someone asked, “What type of medication does that?!” We both froze. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, learning disability, medication, ADHD, mental health, cultural health

## **Disciplines**

Disability and Equity in Education | Other Medicine and Health Sciences

## **Comments**

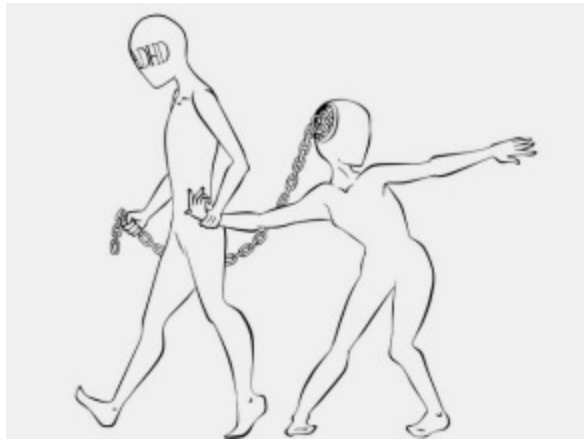
Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, 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

## STIGMATIZED AND GETTING HIGH

December 17, 2014



The first time I was asked to sell my medication was after a small party sophomore year. I was starting to fall asleep in the midst of chattering people and drunken laughter. My 12 hours of focus was up. Concerned people around me started asking why I was suddenly so sleepy and without thinking about it, my boyfriend answered “Her medication has worn off, so she’s getting kinda sleepy.” Someone asked, “What type of medication does that?!” We both froze.

I should have known what was going to come next. Admitting to using a stimulant for a learning disability

made me the perfect target for people trying to cram for the upcoming exams, but I secretly hoped no one would ask me the doomed question.

“Would you sell me some?” a friend of mine asked. “I’ll give you \$30 bucks for each one. You can just give me a couple. I just need a couple.” I thought, *YOU need it?!* With a sharp tone I responded, “No. Don’t ever ask me again.” The student looked disappointed, almost upset, yet the most disturbing part about it was that he didn’t even realize what he was asking me to do. Not only was it illegal to give away my medication, but without it my academics would also suffer. We all know what it’s like to struggle through the school year, but it’s even harder when you have a learning disability.

There are so many misconceptions about learning difficulties that I am always trying to uphold the sometimes overwhelming expectations of a Gettysburg College student. The fear of being labeled as being “lazy, crazy, stupid” kept me quiet about my struggles. I fought my creativity and my out-of-the-box thinking to be like every other student so I wouldn’t be reminded that I had something wrong with me. But now, after almost four years here I can finally stand up and say I have ADHD. Yes, the ADHD that is the constant butt of jokes and is often misunderstood. “I Have ADHD... Oh Look, Squirrel!” People make jokes about a dog that way, about being easily distracted. It’s belittling to be compared to an animal. I am a human and this disorder is not that simple. It’s not that easy.

It's as if you're sitting in class surrounded by fellow students, who are all wearing glasses. The glasses stay on their noses, making everything crisp, clear, and focused. But for me? My glasses are inches away from my face. I strain to see the board as clearly as everyone else. If something enters my peripheral vision, it seems colorful and blurred. I start to wonder what it is. Is it something I need? Will it help me learn the lesson on the board? When I realize it's nothing but a fleeting flash of light I turn back to my glasses that have magically moved farther away. I attempt to look through them once again, and it's even harder than the first time. I've now missed what was being said and everyone around me is on track.

For me it is difficult to be honest about who I am and how I work. Like other mental illnesses, taking medication has its own stigma as an attempt to be 'normal.' But for me, medication only gets me on the same playing field. I can tap into my true strength and my ability to succeed because I do take something that helps me push my glasses up my nose just a bit so I can see a little bit clearer. As positive as that sounds, ADHD medication is one of the most difficult to get, even with a diagnosis, because of its high abuse by non-ADHD students.

As someone who battles everyday with ADHD, the numbers and statistics of the abuse of stimulants for a recreational high not only is infuriating, but also extremely frustrating. Researchers have found that 30% of students abuse stimulants for academic reasons or a recreational high. Twitter explodes during final exams with mentions of the 'study drug' Adderall that helps students stay awake in order to study longer. But for students, like me, who fight their ADHD with stimulants, getting recognition as a hardworking student becomes challenging because of stimulant abuse by non-ADHD students.

When I go to the pharmacy, the suspicious tension in the air could be cut with a knife. Many times, they call my doctor to validate my prescription and I must provide two forms of identification because one just isn't enough. They want to make sure that I'm not trying to abuse it or sell it. I'm just trying to manage my body and mind.

I am always appalled when I hear that people abuse the stimulant for fun or to cram for finals. I didn't choose to have ADHD. I didn't choose to have the struggles that come with it. Many non-ADHD students don't need the medication yet their choice to use it perpetuates the problem many ADHDers have when getting help. I could make thousands of dollars off my medication, but I would be wronging myself and other students at Gettysburg that share the same battle as me.

We need to shift our view in society, change our culture on mental health, and start understanding that it's okay to struggle. It's okay to be different, but it is *not* okay to stigmatize and enjoy the illegal high of someone else's pain. You're using this to get ahead, but I'm just trying to focus in class.

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