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Between Crazy and Fine

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Between Crazy and Fine

Abstract

As a young Latina, I grew up hiding the fact that I met with a therapist and that I suffered from depression and anxiety. Conversations about mental well-being or taking steps to cope with anxiety were non-existent in my community of friends and family. It was always a taboo topic, an area that we never touched. People were labeled as “crazy” and serious situations were swept under the rug. Seldom was I offered empathy or support. *[excerpt]*

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, anxiety, counseling, depression, health, Health center, homework, Latina, mental health, mental illness, Peer Learning Associates, Social Justice

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Latina/o Studies | Mental and Social Health | Psychiatric and Mental Health | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies

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.

SURGE

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

Between Crazy and Fine

[February 24, 2016](#)

As a young Latina, I grew up hiding the fact that I met with a therapist and that I suffered from depression and anxiety. Conversations about mental well-being or taking steps to cope with anxiety were non-existent in my community of friends and family. It was always a taboo topic, an area that we never touched. People were labeled as “crazy” and serious situations were swept under the rug. Seldom was I offered empathy or support.



I believed coming to college would be different.

I believed that being surrounded by a more mature and educated subset of the population would provide me a venue to be able to feel more comfortable sharing my experiences of living with a mental illness.

I was wrong. In fact, I feel more secluded.

At home most of my family members have never attended a workshop or know the proper names of mental illnesses, which in a way justified their skewed perceptions for me. Here, most students are educated, but just soon too uncomfortable to speak about it.

Although Gettysburg College promotes the importance of acknowledging and caring for our mental well-being, it feels as if we have forgotten the most critical piece— creating a welcoming and empathetic environment for those that “suffer” from a mental illness.

I have been to office hours of professors and Peer Learning Associates where I mention how anxious I feel and it always seems to be reduced. I get “Oh don’t worry, it will be fine.” And, it probably will. But, for a person who has heard this her entire life and whose anxiety is sparked so easily, that comment has no substance. Offering me a generic solution will not mitigate the anxiety and sadness I feel. Sometimes I hear “try not to be negative” or “stay positive.” To me, that just implies that I’m exaggerating or attempting to gather attention.

I attended a workshop titled “Handling Your Health” that was hosted by a few of the sororities on campus in partnership with the Health Center. When asked about symptoms or feelings, responses were superficial. “Stay positive, be positive” remained the theme, one that we’ve become so obsessed with in the Western Hemisphere.

Students didn’t mention the possibility of feeling suicidal or self-harming, having obsessive thoughts or trouble sleeping, restricting eating or even binge drinking. It was all kept at a shallow level and focused on nerves during tests. While test anxiety is applicable to a diligent student body, it does not even approach the many effects that anxiety can have on someone. It’s also doesn’t dismantle stigma around mental illness nor does it flatten the notion that “it’ll all be good if we just say it will be.”

This denial permeates our ability to openly address our health. There are days when my depression makes it impossible for me to want to get out of bed, but that is not an excuse I feel comfortable writing in an email to a professor. Instead I fake the flu or a cold to avoid sharing that actually I feel like I have two elephants sitting on my chest and I think that I am about to have a heart attack because my anxiety is so uncontrolled.

As the percentage of students diagnosed with mental illnesses [soars](#), it’s becoming clearer and clearer that we need to make this a priority. When there is a flu or virus spreading on college campuses, it makes national news and schools take safety precautions. We don’t even have a confidential door for students to enter the counseling center or an easy time getting an appointment no less open conversation or strong preventative measures. We see hand sanitizer everywhere but we don’t see signs that encourage compassion or judgement-free zones.

Saying “It’ll be fine” is not a substantive solution. Acknowledging that anxiety can be paralyzing, that it comes in unexpected waves, that it affects my friendships, that it makes finishing homework more difficult – these are things that will help. Creating an environment where I can say “I need a mental health day” and be trusted enough to be believed – that would be a step in the right direction as well.

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