

Active Minds helps to eliminate mental health stigmas

By Patrick Michaels
GUEST WRITER

"That keg-stand was the craziest thing I've done on a Saturday night ever! I partied with the most bizarre dudes."

How often do you hear these words: "crazy," "bizarre," "schizophrenic" or "insane"? Most people hear at least one of these words on a daily basis. However, how many of us pause to think about the impact that such words might have. How can we know if they negatively impact anybody?

Some words are taboo - you rarely hear them uttered, but when you do hear them, the world seems to pause for a moment. For example, the "N-word" is a word that as a society we have forbidden. The "N-word" is not used in everyday language, because it is a derogatory word, which promotes prejudice against people based on the color of their skin. The United States Constitution prohibits prejudice and discrimination. Thus, the decision to eliminate certain ethnic slurs is to promote a higher quality social atmosphere for all residents. We want a high quality social atmosphere without prejudice and discrimination. We want respect. We expect to be included and not judged. We would not accept Nazi Germany and their discrimination against Jewish people.

Our united stance is to prohibit discrimination and protect vulnerable populations. For example, we do not tolerate discrimination against people based on sexual orientation in our society. We protect them under the U.S. Constitution and legally punish violations of these laws. To that end, people who commit hate crimes face intense legal penalties.

As a society, we decided to protect vulnerable populations. One such group includes people with physical disabilities. Until recently, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) was

not equipped with elevators or seating areas to allow people in wheelchairs access to train travel. This meant that people in wheelchairs could not use the train system. Social psychologists refer to this as structural discrimination, which means that the buildings or facilities discriminate against a minority group and are the barrier to the person. However, now that elevators exist in CTA facilities, a person in a wheelchair can use the train system to go to the airport, go to the grocery store, go to work, and visit friends. Just like you and me, they are now given access to travel inexpensively. Believe it or not, this opens many doors to new opportunities previously not afforded to people who use wheelchairs. They are now able to accomplish their daily travel activities more autonomously. This is tremendously empowering for people with disabilities.

Another vulnerable population is comprised of those with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, severe anxiety, and/or severe depression. Did you quiver a bit? That's because of the stigma attached to those words. The reality is that mental illness is not a rare phenomenon.

In fact, 25% of all Americans will experience a mental disorder in their lifetime. Recent research suggests that about 50% of college students have qualified as depressed at some time during their college experience. Research also demonstrates that about 40-50% of people who need help for a mental disorder never seek treatment. Such individuals continue to struggle with problems like depression, anxiety, hallucinations, phobias, and/or nightmares. Even test anxiety can be very debilitating and prevent a person from academic success.

However, there are mental health resources that can help a person overcome these problems. Almost all mental health disorders are treatable, despite the fact that people do not seek treatment. Unfortunately, a large social

problem that prevents seeking mental health care is the stigma of mental illness. We do not want to be called crazy! That is the stigma of mental health care; you are "crazy" if you visit a psychologist, psychiatrist, or other mental health care professional.

For many people, the stigma of mental illness is the biggest reason to avoid treatment. They may think, "If I do not go to see a mental health care professional, then I can't get labeled as 'crazy.'" Phew, you've escaped the stigma of mental illness. Now, how are you planning to deal with the problems you're experiencing without support or outside resources? People who use mental health services will tell you that once they overcame the stigma and got treatment, they were able to feel much better. They were able to recover. They were able to perform better academically. They succeeded after they worked with a mental health care professional for the duration of treatment. Some people could finally focus on their life goals and future - they are in recovery from their mental illness.

A unique human trait is language. Just as we do not choose to use the "N-Word," we also have the ability to choose the words we do use. Many people with mental illnesses very much dislike hearing the words "crazy," "bizarre," "schizophrenic," "insanity." They feel judged and stigmatized, even despite their use of treatments to try to cure their mental illness. As college-educated adults who want to drive innovation and progress in our world, we must be cognizant of our choices. We must watch our conversations and choose to use words that do not offend people. Instead of saying "crazy" or "insane," use "wild." If you do not know what "bizarre" or "schizophrenic" means, look them up for your own personal edification.

"Changing the Conversation about Mental Health" is the mission of Active Minds. This

student organization's goal is to highlight the fact that all people have mental health and that we all must remain mentally healthy. It's a daily choice to ensure that you have great mental health. Further, we seek to raise awareness of mental health issues in our academic community. That is the reason that the College of Psychology, Active Minds, the Association of American Rehabilitation Counselors and Psi Alpha have all partnered together to bring a very powerful and free theater event to the Herman Hall Auditorium on Monday, April 25, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. This \$4000 production is a professional theater show that runs 90 minutes long and will introduce attendees to mental health issues and explain why we must fight the stigma of mental illness and the problems of prejudice and discrimination. Some psychology instructors are offering extra credit for attending the event. Ask your instructor if they are providing extra credit. The theater holds over 800 attendees. All students, faculty, and staff are welcome to attend for free. Come expand your mind and learn about mental health. You never know who in your life might need a supportive and caring friend. This can provide you with the insight to be sensitive and helpful to their needs.

For more information on the mission of Active Minds @ IIT, please visit our new webpage at <http://mypages.iit.edu/~activeminds> or email us at activeminds.iit@gmail.com. For more information on Dr. Pat Corrigan's research lab on stigma, please visit the National Consortium on Stigma and Empowerment at <http://www.stigmaandempowerment.org/>. For more information on Dr. Corrigan's multi-site collaborative National Institutes of Health funded research study on treatment adherence, please visit the Center on Adherence and Self-Determination at <http://www.adherence-andselfdetermination.org/>.

Spring 2011 IIT College of Science and Letters Teaching Enrichment Workshop

ACADEMIC HONESTY: CREATING THE ETHICAL CLASSROOM ENRICHING TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Ctrl + C

Ctrl + V

Tricia Bertram Gallant

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY COORDINATOR, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO; ADVISORY COUNCIL IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIRPERSON, INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The IIT College of Science and Letters is pleased to announce the upcoming teaching enrichment workshop: "Academic Honesty: Creating the Ethical Classroom."

The presentation "Creating the Ethical Classroom: Enriching Teaching, Learning, and Academic Integrity" by Dr. Bertram Gallant will discuss an alternative frame through which to view student cheating; one that is healthier, uses positive rather than negative energy, and has greater results for all. By the end of this workshop, participants will understand student cheating as a systemic problem that is best resolved through changing the classroom environment and changing responses to the problem.

The afternoon's activities will include the town hall meeting "Do IIT Students and Faculty Want the Same Thing? A Conversation About Academic Honesty" where IIT students, faculty, and administrators will discuss academic honesty and what should be done about it.

This workshop is sponsored by the IIT College of Science and Letters and is free and open to all IIT faculty, including adjuncts and part-time faculty, teaching assistants, post-doctoral faculty, graduate students interested in academia, etc., but registration is strongly encouraged.

To register, email Jim Maciukenas (jmaciuke@iit.edu) by April 20, 2011.

For questions about the workshop, please contact the workshop organizer, Professor Ishaque Khan (khan@iit.edu), Associate Dean, IIT College of Science and Letters, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago.

Dr. Bertram Gallant speaks at 1:30 p.m.

"Creating the Ethical Classroom: Enriching Teaching, Learning, and Academic Integrity"

Town Hall Meeting begins at 3:30 p.m.

"Do IIT Students and Faculty Want the Same Thing? A Conversation About Academic Honesty"

104 Stuart Building, IIT Main Campus | 1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., April 26, 2011



IIT College of Science and Letters
ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

