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Stigma and resilience in college students with mental illness

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In a duoethnographic study, two college students with bipolar disorder were investigated for their experiences of being college students diagnosed with mental illness. Through qualitative inquiry, it emerged that both participants have differing experiences of stigmatization due to having a diagnosed mental illness. This stigmatization occurred both from internal and external sources and varied by participant and life-domain (e.g., academic versus personal life). Feelings of stigmatization were also found to be mediated by the student's academic discipline, implying that some may be more open to issues surrounding mental illness than others. Another finding of note was that the participants demonstrated significant resilience in their management of symptoms while pursuing academics. This was often unrecognized by the participants, a type of unseen resilience that may indicate individuals with mental illness exhibit greater resilience than they perceive. This talk will cover the importance of stigma and resilience in the experiences of individuals with mental illness with a specific focus on college students. In addition to the duoethnographic data, autoethnographic data from my experiences as an individual with bipolar disorder will be used to further exemplify the complex nature of resilience and stigmatization that individuals with mental illness face, particularly in academia. If possible, research from a third study will be incorporated to add additional detail to the picture of stigma and resilience among college students with mental illness. This study examines students' experiences of stigmatization and resilience as related to their mental illnesses and includes a larger dataset.

Biography

Ren VanderLind studies phenomena related to the experiences of college students with mental illness. She is currently working on her Doctorate in developmental education with a focus on literacy and is researching how stigma and resilience affect students with mental illness in terms of their identity development. Although her degree is within education, her research agenda focuses specifically on supporting students with mental illness in their academic pursuits and development of self-concept. She is an advocate for destigmatizing mental illness and opening social discussions of this important issue.

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