OCD is not an adjective

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This past week, from Oct. 10–16, was International OCD Awareness Week—a week I never thought would have any significance for me. However, after beginning college, my struggle with mental health and anxiety heightened, and I sought out resources to help me cope with all the things I was feeling. Through therapy and a lot of support I realized what I had been struggling with my whole life, but that I was never able to understand, was obsessive-compulsive disorder or OCD.

OCD is described by the International OCD Foundation (https://iocdf.org/about-ocd/) as a mental health disorder that occurs when a person gets caught in a cycle of obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are unwanted, intrusive thoughts, images or urges that trigger intensely distressing feelings. Compulsions are behaviors an individual engages in as an attempt to get rid of the obsessions and/or decrease their distress. Sufferers of OCD experience stress and anxiety with these thoughts which can be extremely mentally and emotionally debilitating.

OCD affects 2.2 million adults in the U.S. and is equally common among men and women. The average age of onset is 19, with 25% of cases occurring by age 14. One-third of affected adults first experienced symptoms in childhood, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. (https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/facts-statistics)

OCD has become a term that is easily thrown around in everyday conversation. Common phrases include "I’m so OCD because I like my room clean" or "I’m so OCD because I’m so organized." Many people don’t understand the severity of OCD or the many forms it can take because it has been misused so much. OCD is not an adjective. The inappropriate use of terms surrounding mental health disorders invalidates and trivializes the people who suffer from them every day.
The stigma surrounding OCD, as well as mental health in general, is one I am constantly trying to break. Although our society has made massive strides towards normalizing mental health discussions, I still find that many people think that seeking help reflects that something is wrong with you. This could not be further from the truth. Recognizing that you need help is a sign of strength, and if you have the privilege of not suffering from mental health, educating yourself on mental health issues and resources is essential. When OCD and other mental health disorders are trivialized, those that suffer from them are more hesitant to seek out help or talk about their mental health struggles, putting that person in a potentially dangerous situation.

Talking about mental health is a great first step, and education is a great second one. There is a lot of misinformation regarding the people who suffer from mental health disorders, as well as the disorders themselves, but with social media and the increase in mental health advocacy for this negative stigma can slowly disappear and be replaced with empathy, understanding and support.

The University of Maine strives to ensure accessibility to mental health support systems. Counselors are available at the UMaine Counseling Center; SilverCloud ([https://umainesystem.silvercloudhealth.com/onboard/umainesystem/programs/](https://umainesystem.silvercloudhealth.com/onboard/umainesystem/programs/)) is a free online therapy tool offered to all students. As well, the Mind Spa ([https://umaine.edu/wellness/mind-spa/](https://umaine.edu/wellness/mind-spa/)) in the Student Wellness Resource Center offers daily mindfulness activities to promote positive mental health. These are just some of the tools students can use to manage their mental health while continuing to educate themselves on these important topics.
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Harold Maio 3 days ago
this negative stigma

That we are told there is a stigma to mental health issues, does not mean we are required to participate. Participating in promulgating that prejudice personally or editorially is not required of any of us.

Harold A Maio, retired mental health editor

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