Why the Minimization of the Mental Illnesses is Harmful

Have you ever heard something akin to, "Hey could you put your shoes in the cubby? I have OCD." Or maybe, " I'm so depressed today, I lost my purse last night." Or maybe even, "I was happy a second ago, but now I'm pretty bummed. I'm basically bipolar." It's phrases like these that minimize the severity of mental disorders people suffer. By taking a real mental disorder and treating it as if it were just another adjective we would use to explain ourselves, we lessen the real severity of that disorder.

Let's use a specific example. OCD or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, is "an anxiety disorder in which time people have recurring, unwanted thoughts, ideas or sensations (obsessions) that make them feel driven to do something repetitively (compulsions)" (American Psychiatric Association). It's debilitating and persistent as someone suffering through OCD would have daily interruptions and interference in their normal lives. Some common thoughts I've heard people with OCD suffer from are those that threaten the lives of their families and loved ones. Thoughts like "If I flip the light switch an odd number of times, my family will die." Or, "I need to constantly wash my hands, in order to avoid contamination." Intrusive and worrying thoughts parade throughout victims of OCD's thoughts, and it can cause extreme debilitation if in a severe case. People that suffer through OCD often suspect that their thoughts are untrue, but avoiding giving in to the intrusive and worrying thoughts is still very difficult. When someone says "I have OCD" only to list out examples of their perfectionism or emphasis on remaining clean, they minimize the severity of OCD. As I just previously explained, the reality of OCD is tiresome, and It's insulting to people that truly suffer from this terrible mental

disorder for people to relate to them with only positive things rather than the debilitation they suffer through daily.

OCD isn't the only mental disorder this happens to though. Everything from extreme anger issues to depression has been used as a "quirky" adjective some would use to describe perfectly natural aspects of their mentality. If you read my previous article regarding the severity of depression, you would know the severity and lack of support those that truly suffer from depression face on an almost constant basis. When I hear that someone is 'depressed' because they lost an item of clothing or lost a game earlier that day, I label that person as someone ignorant and uneducated. That may sound a bit harsh, but let me explain. Enough people in the world see mental illness as nothing but a hoax, and those that appropriate these illnesses for quirky one liners about how weird their psyche is are people that only contribute to this issue. Even if well intentioned, when someone uses a mental disorder as an adjective, they, as I've restated time and time again, minimize the severity of said mental disorder for themself and those around them. When people continuously do this, they only increase the ignorance surrounding mental disorders and allow themselves to spread misinformation, no matter how 'small' or 'insignificant' it may seem. It's also just offensive to those who suffer from said mental disorders and have to deal with the repercussions daily.

While seemingly insignificant, by minimizing the severity of mental illness we spread misinformation and only hurt those currently suffering from mental illness. Ignorance can be harmful, and educating ourselves about mental illness and how we can respect those going through it is one of the best things we can do now.

Written by: Layla Nahavandi
Sources:
https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ocd/what-is-obsessive-compulsive-disorder