

Speaking from Experience Living with Bipolar Disorder USA

Transcript for Chapter 3 of 9: Stigma

Avonelle –

I think stigma can be eliminated by education. Education of self and education to others but also acknowledging what your stigmas are. I mean, I definitely had my thoughts around bipolar. Although I worked in the mental health field, I still had my own thoughts about it and many of it was negative.

Alexandra & Thomas –

I'm still so full of my own stigma as well as other peoples' and the constant concern of how I'm gonna be seen.

Todd-

I had no contact with family for years and a lot of it had to do with my behavior because over the years I behaved in a certain way that...it wasn't ok. Some of it was, ya know, I had stolen some things from family members when I was younger because I didn't really understand what was going on and growing up poor I wanted to have more and that added to the stigma and people...everything adds together...and people put it all together to assume that it's all the mental illness so it makes somebody bad.

Jan –

I've had a lot of reactions when I tell people about...that I have bipolar disorder and I've had everything from...literally you can watch someone's face and it's kind of the deer in the headlights, like...wow. Ya know, like "oh my god I'm afraid of you" almost.

Tom –

In one instance what I think happened was, even though it's not legal to do so, I think the person that was interested in employing me called up a former employer and asked why I had left. And the reason why I had left that previous job was that I had had a bout of depression so severe that I couldn't work. And this company was ready to hire me; everything was going great, and then all of sudden there was nothing.

Avonelle –

When you're diagnosed with cancer, you call your family, you call your friends, you talk to your employer. Ya know, you get flowers, you get sympathy, and everyone is rallying around you, "we're here for you." Unfortunately when you're diagnosed with mental illness, which is also a life-threatening illness, you don't get that. You don't get flowers, you don't get your employer saying, "We understand, we'll schedule your time depending on your treatment." You don't get co-workers patting you on the back or giving you a hug and saying, "We understand, we're here for you." What you can get, and many have gotten, is "ok"...silence.

Tom –

I think it's really important for employers to realize that what they do really can affect a person's life.

Jan –

The hardest thing is I just want people to see me as me and not as bipolar me, ya know? And that's been hard. And that's one of the reasons that I don't tell people about it...because I want them to see me.

Avonelle –

I'm very discreet in who I tell because I think it's still...it's still so much stigma around mental illness that unfortunately it can cause harm depending on who you disclose to. However, I think it's important to disclose because it is an illness that is life-threatening and the more information people have, the more you can get support and the more they can understand your plight in living with this illness.