Mental Health Matters

contents

stigma

ˈstig-mə

noun [C or U]

"A strong feeling of disapproval that most people in a society have about something, especially when this is unfair."

Cambridge Dictionary

As an "invisible" illness, mental health issues are often ignored and even stigmatized. However, with rising global issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, injustices, and war, our mental health is something we all need to pay more attention to. It needs to be looked at more holistically. It needs to be talked about more freely. And finally, it needs to have the stigma surrounding it stripped. There should not be shame in us seeking care and accessing services.

It is my hope that our work sparks conversations within the Macon community about mental health and creates safe places in which we can talk about our troubles and encourage each other to seek the help we need.

— Parneeta Mohapatra, Chief Editor

Mental Health
in college students
Parneeta Mohapatra

"I have struggled with depression and anxiety since high school, however, my mental health got worse once I started college," disclosed Mark**, a Mercer University junior. "Having to navigate a new environment without my family was difficult, and I never felt like I was doing the right things to make new friends."

According to the American Psychological Association, 95% of directors of centers for counseling at college campuses affirmed that the increase in students with issues in mental health was a growing concern. Pennsylvania State University found in 2019 that the need for campus mental health services increased by 30–40% even though enrollment did not increase by that big of a margin. In addition to this, suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death on college campuses, with one in ten students making a plan for suicide.

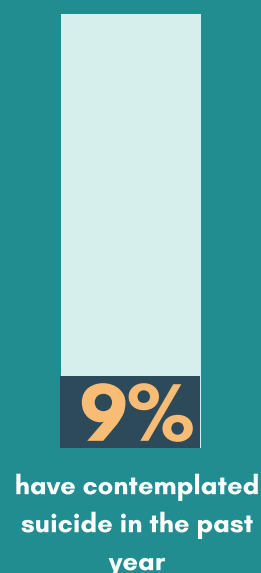**40%** of students fail to seek out help

50% rate their mental health below average or poor

7% of parents reported that their students suffered from mental health issues

80% of students report feeling stressed on a daily basis

50% have struggled greatly with anxiety, and therfore school

44% of students report symptoms of depression

25% of college women binge and purge to manage weight

9% have contemplated suicide in the past year

**Name changed to maintain anonymity

https://collegestats.org/resources/mental-health-guide/
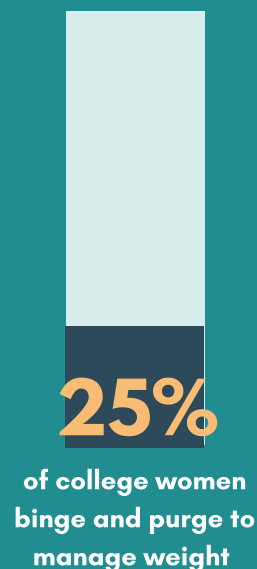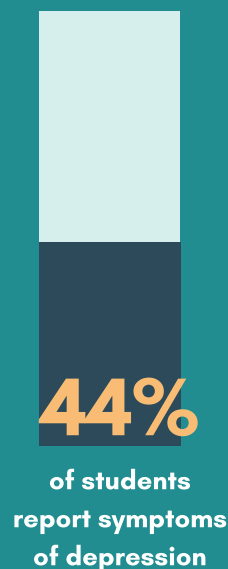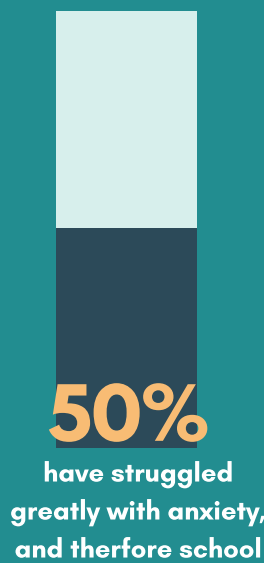
Many things may lead to the development of mental health problems in college. Factors like financial stress, pressure to succeed, and uncertainty about choices that could determine the rest of your life impact mental health. Additionally, social media is a catalyst for comparison between peers that have contributed to many insecurities. Cultural stigmas against mental health may also play a role in students receiving care for these issues.
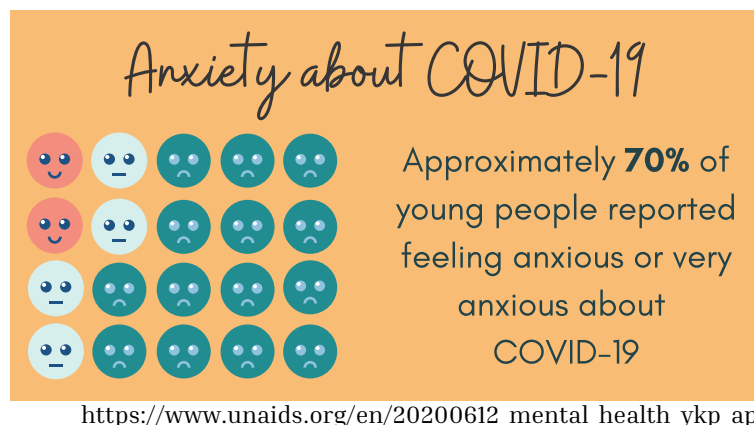
Dr. Stephanie Samar, a clinical psychologist at Child Mind Institute, says "Many college students aren't taking care of their bodies. Many are experimenting with substances and not eating very well, or sleeping very well, in a way that would support them to meet all these new challenges." Although some say drinking and smoking are done recreationally, these activities often impact mental health negatively when done for the wrong reasons. Activities such as art, journaling, exercise, or meditation may be better outlets to decrease the negative impacts of a stressful social environment.

Ivy Clarke, a Mercer University sophomore says, "Photography is wonderful for my mental health because it allows me to interact with people non-academically and I feel like I have control over my artistic vision, even when I am stressed out about schoolwork." Intentionally carving out time for yourself is a good way to manage stress surrounding schoolwork and social life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only made mental health crises worse. Many students have lost family members or seen others close to them fall really ill. Others may feel socially isolated because of online classes and the cancellation of school events.

Anxiety about COVID-19

Approximately **70%** of young people reported feeling anxious or very anxious about COVID-19

https://www.unaids.org/en/20200612_mental_health_ykp_ap

There are many solutions to combating the growing mental health crisis. Colleges should increase the presence and strength of affordable psychological resources on campus. These include developing preventative resources and creating open spaces for discussion of mental health issues. Campus psychological services should also analyze crisis response and be able to provide off-campus referrals. Mercer's Counseling and Psychological Services is a great university resource to use if dealing with mental health issues. However, as Clarke points out, "because of the lack of counselors and funding, it is extremely hard to set up consistent appointments with CAPS" which can be detrimental to students' mental health. Nevertheless, campus resources are especially important for students seeking care who may not have the financial or emotional support of their families.

Managing Mental Health

Maggie Porter

Exercise
Get some kind of activity everyday. Whether it be walking, hiking, running, or anything else, everyday.

Nutrition
Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet.

Get Creative
Many people find art and self-expression therapeutic. Even if you don't consider yourself an artists, there are so many benefits to using this part of your brain.

Cry
Let yourself cry, if needed. It releases stress and can make you feel lighter and unburdened.

Talk
Talk to someone you trust! This could mean finding a therapist but a friend, partner, parent, or someone else in your life can also be very helpful.

Unplug
Technology, especially social media, can be extremely harmful to mental health. Take a break. Comparison is the thief of joy.

Sleep
Get enough quality sleep each night.

Aromatherapy
Burn a soothing candle, use essential oils, put on a calming lotion, or take a bath with epsom salts.

Alone Time
Take some time alone. While in college, driving around, getting a snack, and taking a nap are great options when roommates are present.

Music
Listen to music that calms and centers you.

Journaling
Many people find the process of writing down their thoughts and feelings beneficial. If things are going wrong, looking back at good times can help.

Important!
Everyone struggles differently. Treatment that works for one person may not work for another. It is okay to not be okay. Things can change and will get better with time. College is challenging, even more so with COVID-19 bearing over us. Keep track of your mental health and support your friends when they need you, even if they do not ask. Though so much pressure is placed upon you, no one is perfect and no one should feel the need to be perfect. Use your resources, reach out, and get the help you need and deserve, because you matter, and your mental health matters, no matter your background.

Animals
Hug or spend time with animals! They are great companions and can improve mood and health.

Yoga and Meditation
Yoga and meditation can be calming and centering. Even practicing deep breathing can be helpful!

Campus and Community
Resources

Makenzie Hicks

College has put more pressure on me and caused me more anxiety than I have ever felt before," my roommate commented as we discussed our transition to college.

This sentiment is felt by more college students than ever before. The stresses of college, combined with the recent changes in everyday life due to COVID-19, have significantly impacted our mental health.

One of the resources students have access to on-campus is the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS is a free counseling service, here at Mercer created to help students with any psychological issues they may be experiencing, including stress, anxiety, and depression.

CAPS has had a positive impact for many students with junior Ethan Pettepher saying, "Their counselors were punctual and helpful, giving me homework assignments to work on until the next session so that I could make continued progress in achieving a better mental health status."

> **[CAPS] is extremely flexible and have continued communication through various outlets to formulate a streamlined experience.**
>
> **- Ethan Pettepher, Mercer Junior**

Another student commented that CAPS helped her not only when she was having serious family issues, but also with stress-management and study skills. She stated that the more you go, the more effective the appointments are.

Currently, 90% of students that went to CAPS reported their problems improved after seeking services, and 99% of students would recommend a friend to CAPS.

Along these same lines, 80% of students return to CAPS in the same academic year after their first appointment.

However, some students have reported having negative experiences with CAPS, with one student saying, "I felt like my appointments were rushed". This was a trend among other students, with many also saying they were hesitant about going to CAPS because there are too few staff and too many students.

> ## "My transition to college left me feeling empty and alone. I had to find somewhere to turn.
> ### – Mercer Junior
> "

This is also one of the weaknesses Dr. Piassick, director of CAPS, commented on explaining they could use more clinical staff. Another weakness, due to the shortage of staff, is that CAPS has not been able to do as much outreach as they would like.

They believe that outreach would allow students to develop better relationships with the counselors and also would be a tool to help students with managing stress and other symptoms. However, with three clinical staff and two graduate interns, they are providing as many appointments as possible.

Another concern with CAPS is the treatment of students with chronic mental health illnesses. One student specifically had been diagnosed with depression and anxiety and turned to CAPS due to the fact that her parents would not allow her to seek any psychiatric help. She felt that her experience with CAPS did not help her mental health, stating that it worsened during the course of her time with them. After her experience with CAPS, she felt as though counseling through them was best for those with tangible issues.

However, a student with an eating disorder was able to get started her treatment with CAPS quickly after they had been contacted by her mother. Though they were unable to give her the level of treatment required, they were able to help her find other resources that could.

Recently, CAPS has done an amazing job moving into Telehealth due to COVID. They have instructions on their website for students who may not be comfortable or haven't experienced Telehealth. They have also been actively increasing outreach efforts in order to provide more support during these difficult times CAPS is a good resource if you are experiencing mental health issues. Not only are they free, but they do all they can to provide support for the students on campus. They have been actively addressing some of the concerns students have and are making steps to improve their levels of care.

However, if you feel CAPS is not the best fit for you, there are other resources on campus or in Macon to consider. The Georgia Behavioral Health Center accepts most insurance companies. I recently went and enjoyed my experience with them, but the only downside is you have to know if you want medication or therapy before your first visit.

Another resource is the Mercer Family Therapy Center. One student reported having a great experience with them but recommends that you keep in mind that they are graduate students learning from your sessions. They also accept payment on a sliding scale.

If you or someone you know is having a mental health crisis contact CAPS. Not everyone's mental health journey is the same, so find the place that works best for you.

NEW DAWN

THE METHODIST HOME

COLISEUM CENTER

RIVER EDGE

MERCER MEDICINE

MERCER UNIVERSITY

**Labels are hyperlinked to office websites

Community Resources

The Georgia Behavioral Health Center (478) 238-9344	They treat more than 30 conditions, and have many different types of treatment available to fit each patient's needs. They are currently offering Telehealth meetings.
Mercer Family Therapy Center (478) 301-5970	This center is made up of advanced graduate students who provide family, couple, and individual therapy.
New Dawn 478-254-3751	This group provides clinical care based on Christian principles, but is open to all religions and faiths.
The Methodist Home (478) 751-2800	This group provides community-based counseling to children, families, and adults to treat mental health issues.
Coliseum Center (478) 765-7000	This group provides mental health care based on a behavioral model and are currently offering telehealth visits.
River Edge Behavioral Health (478) 803-7600	This group has walk-in and regularly scheduled services available for mental health and addiction recovery.
Mercer Medicine (478) 301-4111	They offer psychiatry services for many types of disorders including anxiety and mood disorders.

Telehealth vs. In-Person Mental Health Care

Sejal Patel

Strengths of Telehealth

- lower costs for patients and healthcare agencies
- patients feel more comfortable in their own home
- more specialized healthcare visits now that location is not an issue
- helps to contain the spread of illness (COVID-19)

Weaknesses of Telehealth

- difficult to locate credible and licensed professionals
- forces patient to adapt to technological disparities and failures
- older adult patients are more unfamiliar with technology
- disparities with rural and low-income areas across the country are expanding

In the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, the world has seen a major shift from in-person medical visits and healthcare delivery to virtual visits with doctors and phone calls with therapists – otherwise known as "telehealth." Students can attest to the added stress and anxiety that this pandemic has introduced and can assure the increased need for mental health care. In fact, the majority of young adults have either tried to seek virtual mental healthcare themselves or know a friend or family member that has. Over the course of the Coronavirus, the demand for telehealth has risen substantially, with an increase of 50% more patients from March and April to August through October of last year. Because doctors aren't physically there for their patients, virtual care and its effectiveness is easy to be differentiated from that of in-person.

The differences between in-person and online mental health care have taken noticeable tolls on the population. Several juniors at Houston County High School describe their experience with telehealth as "a new outlet for anxiety", as they feel mental health care is less accessible now. Although many young adults feel uneasy towards the concept of telehealth, one student says, "Mental health has become a more frequently discussed topic with my friends and I, and we reach out to check up on each other a lot." In addition, the lower cost of telehealth visits has led to more saved money for patients, who more than likely have endured financial disappointments as a result of the epidemic. With the exception of technological difficulties, the majority of patients describe their therapy sessions as even more comfortable, since they are able to speak with their therapist in the comfort of their own home, and not worry about their commute.

The delivery of mental health care in its new form – telehealth – has demanded the attention and cooperation of medical professionals around the world, to see more patients than usual in order to overcome health disparities, and has called for the understanding of patients, who have had to adjust to the obstacles of technology. According to Dartmouth and Harvard University researchers, telehealth has proved its potential in providing quality healthcare in the United States during the Coronavirus disease and is likely to be a prominent aspect in our world's healthcare system after the pandemic is over.

Sources: https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2766369 https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/digital/why-so-many-patients-still-can-t-connect-doctors-telehealth https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/tech/demand-for-virtual-mental-health-soaring-here-are-notable-trends-who-using-it-and-why

How has the *Coronavirus Pandemic* impacted Mercer students' mental health?

McKenna Kaufman

"I've lost 3 family members to COVID and watched more become extremely sick with it. **To say this has impacted my mental health is an understatement.** After being diagnosed with depression and anxiety, I thought things would get better but watching my family go through so much loss has been the most difficult part of this year. My heart goes out to anyone who has lost someone to COVID. It shakes you in a way loss never has before."
– Makenzie Hicks, Junior

"COVID-19 definitely severely injured my mental health when we first went into quarantine. **I struggled with a lot of things because I was forced to be alone.** I have been able to fortunately overcome the problems but COVID-19 was a big factor in this decrease in mental health."
- Sarah Cox, Freshman

"I feel as though I am overstimulated and do not have the time to complete everything I want to due to the rushed academic schedule. **I am hoping the mental health days will help this semester.**"
- Abby Williams, Sophomore

"Overall, the pandemic helped my mental health, though there were some negative aspects as well. It helped because, when classes were postponed and then moved online, I was able to get more sleep. I also planned to work at a camp this summer, and that got cancelled. At first I was bummed out, but looking back, it may have been a good thing that I didn't go. **My mental state certainly improved in the time that I was at home and when I began last semester because I furthered my relationship with God.** I don't know if I would have had some of the experiences I had if my camp happened as planned."
- Ben Browne, Sophomore

"(My mental health is) not awful, **I'm much less hopeful for the future than I was before the pandemic.** My social anxiety has gone up a bit as well. Overall, the pandemic has harmed my mental health."
- Robert Heaton, Sophomore

Cultural Stigma Around Mental Health

Rose Tran

Culture shapes the social environment in which we grow and develop into the people that we are now. It has such a powerful hold, often so implicitly, on what we believe to be the correct way to behave and the ideas and beliefs that we have been taught to be true. In addition to this effect that culture has on our behavior, culture also plays an extremely important role in both our physical and mental health. Whether we believe it or not, our culture shapes the way we view mental wellbeing, the extent to which we seek help, and our methods for treating mental illnesses.

The way that we are taught to deal or in some cases, not deal with mental health, can have negative effects on us, especially in college. College is a difficult adjustment for many people and often comes with a multitude of added stress to tackle. The combination of overwhelming stress and responsibility to perform well in addition to the underlying fear of reaching out to others for help often causes students to ignore their poor mental health and ultimately damage it. Lea Dulcio, a Mercer sophomore of Haitian descent, double majoring in Global Health Studies and Spanish on the Pre-Med track, talked about how there were few discussions being had about mental health growing up.

Dulcio has heard her parents say things like "Are you crazy or something?" in response to her sibling going to see a counselor. "I believe that especially in Haiti, there is a lot of emotional stress, but many people there will only turn to religion and the idea of going to a professional is looked down upon," says Dulcio. The way that mental health was stigmatized in her culture made things difficult for her in college and often caused her to feel afraid to tell anyone whenever she felt overwhelmed at school.

Dulcio has heard her parents say things like "Are you crazy or something?"

Avani Patel, a pre-nursing freshman, says that "being a pre-health student, it is very important that I understand what mental health is and know the right way to deal with it." Avani credits this to her parents being more understanding than elders in her country and having a strong support system of friends growing up here in America. However, Theresia Jahja, a junior neuroscience student, was not as lucky in this aspect as she struggled with episodes of an identity crisis as an Asian American living in the U.S. and was met with denial and frustration from her parents when she tried discussing it with them. She heard things like, "You don't need a therapist. The anxiety is just all in your head. You control your own thoughts," from her dad.

Dulcio and Jahja both acknowledged that when they got to college, resources for mental health became more available to them and they became more passionate about learning how to combat these cultural stigmas that they had surrounding mental health. Dulcio says that her family seems to be coming around on the idea of mental health and the increased discussions that they have together have allowed her to be more comfortable opening up about her problems. Jahja hopes with her major that she'll be able to raise more awareness on the importance of mental health in the Asian American community. The stigma surrounding mental health creates a barrier to how we deal with our problems but when we commit ourselves to relearning, we can combat these preconceived notions that often go unnoticed.
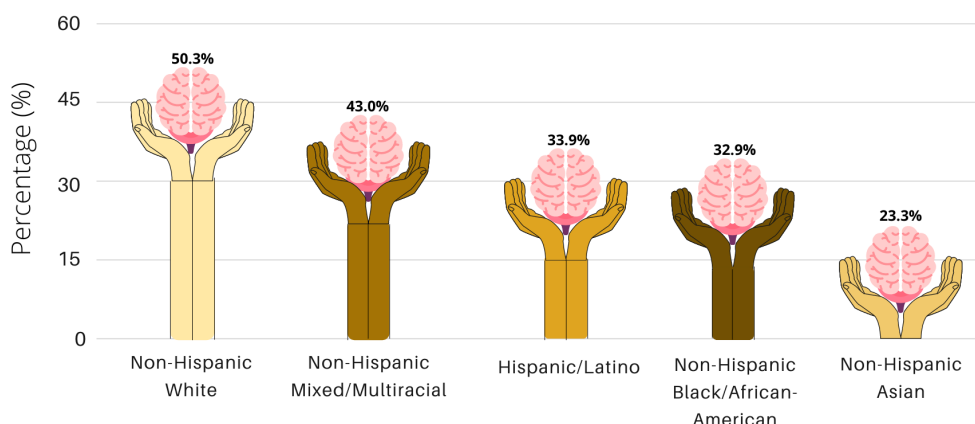
> **" You don't need a therapist. The anxiety is just all in your head. You control your own thoughts. "**

Annual Mental Health Treatment Rates
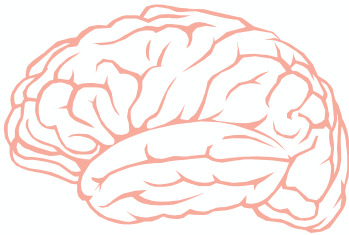### Among U.S Demographic Groups (Dec. 2020)
by: Rose Tran

Non-Hispanic White	50.3%
Non-Hispanic Mixed/Multiracial	43.0%
Hispanic/Latino	33.9%
Non-Hispanic Black/African-American	32.9%
Non-Hispanic Asian	23.3%

Percentage (%)

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness   https://www.nami.org/mhstats

How do *Mercer Students* spend their mental health days?

McKenna Kaufman

"When I'm stressed and need a mental health day, I tend to get dressed up. I take a shower. Do my hair. Get my nails done. When I feel pretty, I tend to feel more motivated because I have a little more confidence." - **Joey Carpenter, Junior**

"I like to play my guitar, listen to music, sleep in, cook meals for myself, and just relax and drink coffee." - **Sara Junod, Junior**

"Spend time with friends, play video games (and) play music." - **Ethan Nunnally, Junior**

"Self care, blast music in my car and drive around, listen to music, clean and tidy things up, watch motivational speakers, listen to podcasts and read." - **Sarah Awad, Sophomore**

"Lift weights and play video games." - **Mike Woodyard, Junior**

"When I'm trying to relax and recuperate on mental health days I usually do some sort of self care. I cleaning my room, making myself some food, and do some skincare. I usually turn off my phone, do something artistic, or call/ hang out with a friend. Also gardening/ plants help." - **Zoe Martin, Freshman**

"Watch my favorite movies or shows and go on walks." - **Elisa Rosado, Sophomore**

Culture, Stigma, and Mental Health Activism

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. KENDALL

Parneeta Mohapatra

What are your experiences with mental health?

I did the dual Master's program in social work and public health at Tulane. In the social work program, most of my peers chose the clinical track either as a therapist, a counselor, or a social worker or something along those lines. However, I was more focused on the public health side of things and addressing problems more from a population perspective, rather than an individual or clinical perspective. I studied for my Ph.D. in gerontology directly from the master's program. I learned about, of course, the types of health-related issues that older adults typically deal with, and that includes mental and physical health. Things like dementia, loneliness, isolation, grief, and loss are all associated with older age. And while I was in that program I became more interested in dying and death. People with chronic illness, especially towards the end of life, will develop problems with mental health and die in older age.

> " Our mental health will continue being affected by the events that are occurring in our world. "

What encompasses mental health issues?

I think moving forward there will be some things to pay attention to. First, there are effects of the pandemic on mental health. This is not the last pandemic or major such set of events to occur in our lifetimes, so we need to learn as much as we can to be better prepared for the next one. Our mental health is going to continue being affected by the events that are occurring in our world. Whether it's conflict, national disaster, global pandemics, social justice issues, and even less salient things like the effects of social media.

And so mental health is really about more than just having a diagnosis of depression or anxiety or PTSD or schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. These are all important, but we need to take a comprehensive view. We have to think beyond a mere diagnosis because there can be mental health impacts in situations where there's no formal diagnosis Stress is perhaps the easiest way to state that. It is so pervasive, it wears on you and affects your neuroanatomy. Another point is, we need a comprehensive approach to health. We have a healthcare system in which an oncologist deals with cancer patients but they are rarely focusing on the mental health of that patient. We need mental health professionals, along with physicians and nurses working together.


IDENTITY & CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH

CULTURE   LANGUAGE   VALUES

BELIEFS   RACE   GENDER IDENTITY

@NAMICOMMUNICATE X @avamariedoodles

How is mental health seen in different cultures?

When it comes to comparing mental health in other societies, there are a few different factors that are important to consider. Some cultures have nonmedical explanations for mental health including folk medicine, witchcraft, spirituality. These all play a role, even here in the United States, probably more than many people may realize. Additionally, imagine a poor village in a sub-Saharan African country. They're laden with so much infectious disease: malaria, HIV, tuberculosis. Add poverty, droughts, and other natural disasters on top and they don't have time to focus on mental health. In a lot of ways, being able to focus on mental health is almost a luxury. It shouldn't be that way, but it is.

A book that I'm having my Mental Health Around the World class read speaks on these issues. Crazy Like Us by Ethan Waters uses four countries as examples of how Western biomedical experts and practitioners export western views of mental health into other societies Waters argues that this is not uniformly a good thing. First of all, it's imperialistic. Secondly, many experts have gone to these countries and taught the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as the correct way to interpret mental health everywhere, ignoring cultural and local perceptions. So it's tough because, on the one hand, I want to say mental health professionals around the world need to be better educated, but we can't just apply the Western approach as a universal statement. This doesn't work either. I think that many of these other cultures have a lot to learn from us, and we have a lot to learn from them as well.
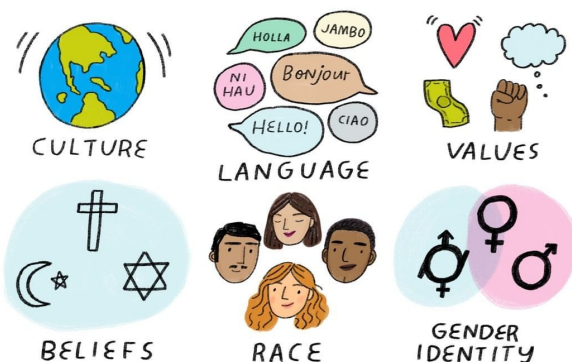
Why do you think mental health is so stigmatized?

I think part of the issue is that visible versus invisible disabilities are treated very differently. And mental health is almost entirely invisible. I say almost entirely because often you can tell someone is depressed from how they act. However, their actions don't necessarily indicate if they're depressed or merely having a sad day. That's different from someone who is paraplegic and in a wheelchair.

Another issue connects to a statement that I often say to my students and anyone else who will listen. *The brain is the final frontier of human knowledge.* Because of its unique functions, we understand much less about the brain than we do about other organs of the body. This is why we often treat people with heart disease or kidney disease differently than those with mental illness, even though they're all organ diseases. So I think part of it has to do with the nature of the brain itself. And I think René Descartes screwed us over by pushing his Cartesian mind-body duality, in which the mind is separate from the brain. But I know that it was so easy to adopt that viewpoint because it was really easy to consider the mind as being something separate from the rest of our body.
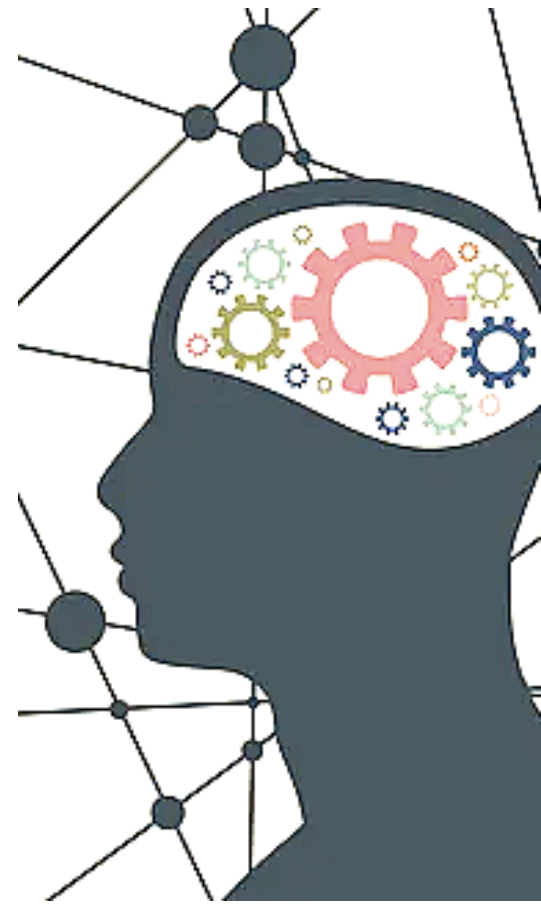
What can students and faculty do to better the conversations around mental health?

I think there are a few different things we could do. I think it would be good to have a student-led advocacy group on campus. Having constant exposure to these problems is one of the only ways to get the conversations flowing. Campus Counseling and Psychological Services need to be improved, but unfortunately, they suffer from the same issues that psychology centers at any university suffer from, so it's not unique. It's unfortunate, but it's not unique. But we need more. We need to have conversations and trainings like those surrounding Title IX, sexual assault, and substance abuse. Alongside engaging in dialogue about racial injustice and LGBT+ issues, we should talk about mental health as they relate to different communities.

On the Faculty side, I've heard some of the remarks made–or the lack of response that they have–when they encounter students dealing with mental health issues. I'd hate to ask people to spend more of their time on something, but similar to our Title IX training, we should have training on dealing with mental health crises. Seeing an increase in students seeking help for their mental health, I think some sort of formalized training would be helpful. By being more exposed to it, people will start to respond better to their peers, friends, classmates, or students with mental health issues. It also makes them realize just how common mental health problems are, bringing more awareness and positivity. These conversations and changes in attitudes will lead to eventual decreases in stigma.

Additional Resources

Makenzie Hicks

CAPS Instagram

Follow CAPS Instagram @mercer_caps for helpful Wellness Wednesdays for helpful mental health care tips.

Mindful Mercer

"Mindful Mercer is focused on helping students achieve their maximum potential and improve their mental state through the practice of mindfulness. We encourage and teach members how to be aware of themselves, their surroundings, and their relationship with others."

Podcasts

- **Therapy for Black Girls**
- **Mental Illness Happy Hour**
- **The Happiness Lab**
- **The Hilarious World of Depression**

Apps To Try

- If you're interested in meditation, try Headspace.
- If you're looking for assistance with Depressive symptoms, try.   Depression CBT Self-Help Guide.
- If you're looking for stress relief, try Sanvello.
- If you're looking for therapy, try Talkspace.
- If you want to learn coping skills, try MoodMission.

Movies

- A Beautiful Mind
- Matchstick Men
- Welcome to Me
- Melancholia
- The Skeleton Twins

Books

- This is Depression by Dr. Diane MacIntosh
- This Too Shall Pass by Julia Samuel
- Own Yourself by Dr. Kelly Brogan
- Maybe You Should Talk to Someone by Lori Gottlieb
- Be Calm by Dr. Jill Weber

AWARE

AWARE is the peer education program through CAPS. They provide programming on stress management, safe spring break, healthy self-esteem, etc as well as help us promote CAPS. This year has been a transition year. We are in the process of combining AWARE with SHAPE to create a wellness model/organization for outreach for the campus. Our goal
is to train students as peer educators who will facilitate programming that will address the overall wellbeing of Mercer students including social, mental, emotional and physical health. CAPS along with the SHAPE professional committee
made up of Student Affairs staff is developing a course (course credit) where students who enroll will be trained to facilitate these topics and help provide outreach.

Parneeta Mohapatra

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