

A note from the author:

Although I know my taste in music will never be universal, I will proudly stand by Mumford and Son's album Delta as an incredible compilation of art from beginning to end. It is from this album that I was able to find the inspiration for "Darkness Visible" during a visibly dark time. Picture You transitions seamlessly into the song Darkness Visible using only a drum resonating like a heartbeat. In Picture You, the singer confesses to a fear of something unlikable yet familiar on its way, and desperately warns the person he is addressing "you don't know me like this". From here, a drum leads us into Darkness Visible, a mostly instrumental song that leaves so much space for the imagination; to visualize what you will, feel what you will. It is from those few chords; the dips and swells; the quiet murmuring of a passage from Paradise Lost in the background; the consistent, persistent drumbeat; that I try my best to write in verse what I see when I listen.

Darkness Visible is my mural of the onset of depression. The song was my paint, my words were the brushstrokes. I cannot say that when you listen to the song you won't see something different. But I do hope that were you to read my piece and follow along with the song, you'd see where my writing aligns. The way depression seems to creep up on you in a way that you can recognize, but is so subconscious and subtle that you allow yourself to doubt what's happening.

The way you start to panic as the noise of deprecating voices gets louder. The sudden pause of tension as you name what it is you're experiencing.

Then the overwhelming crash and descent into complete darkness that seems to choke off all sense of hope.

Darkness Visible offers no resolution for how we move through depression. It only offers a voice to how beautifully ugly mental illness can be. I only hope that in this writing, those who struggle with their mental health can read, interpret, and understand: the way you feel?

You are not alone.

Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Impacts on Decision Making

Christina Farmer

Stigma disrupts society's vital functions such as progress, innovation, and unity. In her essay, "Stigma: An Enigma Demystified," Lerita Coleman-Brown offers a comprehensive examination of the origins and operations of stigma. Her analysis centers around a two-pronged theory: stigma is a response to difference, and carried out by three psychological processes (affect, cognition, and behavior). Affect refers to feelings of dislike or fear of people that are different, cognition plays a role in creating stereotypes about perceived differences, and behavior involves using social control to isolate stigmatized people. These three forces come together to affect how people make decisions to stigmatize others in social situations. However, difference is arbitrary; any trait can be "different" depending on the context. In modern society, people are stigmatized for differences such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability. The stigma around disability plays an important role in Mitchell Zuckoff's book, *Choosing Naia*. This book tells the true story of Tierney and Greg's decision to have their unborn child after finding out that she has Down syndrome. The first part of the book describes their long and complicated process of making their decision. They approached their situation methodically by gathering as much information as possible from their family, friends, doctors, and counselors. It was a morally complicated choice to make, and they listened to many arguments from each side of the issue. They knew that they could afford to have the baby, but were unsure if they would be capable of taking on the responsibility of having a child with Down Syndrome. Greg's parents are very religious, and urged Tierney and Greg to keep the baby. In contrast, Tierney's family members (George, Tara, and Ernie) were the main proponents of abort-

ing the baby, but they expressed their prejudices toward Down Syndrome in roundabout ways. The second part of the book shows that although Tierney and Greg face challenges as a result of Naia's disability, they are grateful for their decision to have the child. Ultimately, Tierney and Greg's story exemplifies Coleman-Brown's three functions of stigma (affect, cognition, and behavior) in George, Tara, and Ernie's arguments for aborting a child with Down syndrome.

Stigma is driven by affect in the sense that the innate fear of the unknown can cause people to avoid those that are different. People often stigmatize the disabled community in indirect ways because they do not want to admit to their discomfort and fear. For example, Tierney's brother, George, argued that she should choose abortion because the baby would likely die from a heart defect. He told her that she could prevent the inevitable grief by aborting the baby. Later, Tierney's doctor informed her that the baby had a high chance of surviving, proving George's warning to be completely misinformed. George had used exaggerated medical concerns in order to hide his fear of having a niece with Down syndrome. Greg explained George's behavior by reflecting, "people don't want to give up the shield they have from discrimination... And people know that a child with Down syndrome will feel discrimination. And because they don't want to deal with that, people will tend to seek out information that confirms their belief that this is something you shouldn't do" (Zuckoff, 55). George was unwilling to admit that he was afraid of having a niece with Down syndrome, so he found another way to justify the abortion. George let his affect get the best of him, and gave Tierney and Greg advice based on his own fears. Luckily, Tierney and Greg were able to see through his misconceptions, and

did not let his discrimination impact their decision.

Humans have the inherent need to create order in a chaotic world. Unfortunately, this gives rise to the harmful perception of differences, and social categorization. Stigma comes into play when groups of people are stereotyped and socially rejected due to what makes them different. Stereotyped people are treated categorically, rather than individually. There are many hurtful stereotypes associated with Down syndrome, which often result in social isolation. Coleman-Brown notes that this social rejection does not end with the stigmatized individual, but extends to their family, friends, and relatives. Tierney's sister, Tara, voiced a concern for being socially excluded on the basis of having a niece with Down syndrome. She said, "I was wondering how I'm going to feel in public with this child at age two or five or ten...I knew i was going to be called on in some way to support this child, and I was thinking, 'Can I do this?' They were selfish feelings, about how this was going to affect me" (Zuckoff, 56). Tara knew that people would think differently of her when she was in public with her niece. She did not want to face the social repercussions of being associated with a disabled person. This worry motivated Tara to advise Tierney to get an abortion. Tara's reasoning exemplifies that social perception is incredibly important in today's society, and that people with disabilities are categorized in a negative way. Tierney and Greg, again, did not let Tara's personal worries and prejudices affect their decision.

The last, and most apparent method of stigmatization is behavior in the form of social control. Coleman-Brown argues that "stigmatization only occurs when the social control component is imposed, or when the undesired differentness leads to some restriction in physical and social mobility and access to opportunities that allow an individual to develop his or her potential" (155). People behave in ways that keep societal structure in order, thus limiting the opportunity for stigmatized groups to thrive. Tierney's father, Ernie, was blunt with his advice for the baby. He remarked that the "child will cause trauma and tragedy from the first breath" (Zuckoff, 71). Ernie implied that the technology used to detect Down syndrome early in pregnancy exists for the purpose of aborting babies with disabilities. He argued that since they had the knowledge and means to abort, it was their social

responsibility to not burden tax payers by using state resources. In other words, Ernie's solution to discrimination was to rid the world stigmatized people. This pattern of behavior mirrors the eugenics model of social control. In a eugenicist's eyes, people with disabilities should not be allowed to live, or have access to the resources that they need in order to thrive. Tierney and Greg were horrified by Ernie's comments and ultimately motivated to oppose his views.

Tierney and Greg's story perfectly illustrates Coleman-Brown's model of stigma, as George, Tara, and Ernie stigmatized their baby in affective, cognitive, and behavioral ways, respectively. George was afraid of having a niece with a disability, because he did not know how it would affect his future. Tara got caught up in the way people would perceive her as a result of having a niece with Down syndrome. Ernie figured that terminating the pregnancy would be for the greater good of society. In the face of this trifecta of discrimination, Tierney and Greg were able to sort out the prejudice from genuine concern, and decided to have their baby. They realized that the best way to deal with discrimination was to face it head-on, instead of shying away from it. If people with disabilities were not marginalized like they are today, Tierney and Greg would not have found their situation so difficult to navigate. They would not have worried about having a child that would be isolated and unaccommodated. The issue of being ignored goes beyond disability, affecting all marginalized communities. Although a woman should have the right to choose to abort an unwanted pregnancy, the line between abortion and eugenics gets murky when the decision to abort is based on stigma against the child. This is why the stigma against people that do not fit the mold of "normal" must come to an end. In order to eradicate stigma, society must change its ways. Coleman-Brown describes a society without stigma as being a "system in which every member of society is permitted to develop one's talents and experience one's full potential regardless of any particular attribute" (158). Once people can overcome their affective, cognitive, and behavioral urges to stigmatize, we will know an inclusive, cooperative society.

REFERENCES

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