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Anorexia Nervosa

LIFE WITHOUT ANA by Sydney Fowler

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- Signs and Symptoms
- Hospital Life
- Members of a Treatment Team
- Returning to the Real World
- Coping at College

At the age of 17, I was admitted into Children's Medical Center of Plano for the treatment of anorexia nervosa. If one were to read my hospital charts they would see that my list of reasons for being there was a mile long: underweight, low blood pressure, slow heart rate, restricting, over-exercising, depression, anxiety, and on and on. However, until halfway through my hospitalization I maintained the belief that I was not "sick enough" or "thin enough" to have an eating disorder. There is a heavy stigma surrounding mental health and very little public understanding of eating disorders, which are among the deadliest psychiatric illnesses. The perpetuation of myths and how the media sensationalizes anorexia only gives the disease more power. Nearly two years later I am still in recovery and wish to offer hope to those suffering and perspective to those who may know someone suffering or who are simply curious.

Common myths about this topic:

- Sufferers are female.
- Sufferers are between the ages of 13 and 18.
- Sufferers are rich and live in developed countries.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- There are only two types of eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia).
- You must be incredibly underweight to have an eating disorder.
- Ballet causes eating disorders.
- Those with eating disorders do not eat.
- Someone who looks healthy or is overweight cannot have an eating disorder.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- How were you diagnosed?
- What unhealthy behaviors were you engaging in?
- What is hospitalization like?
- Where can one look for help with disordered eating?
- At what age did your eating disorder develop?
- What causes eating disorders?
- Is full recovery possible?
- What has helped you in recovery? (coping skills, self-care, etc.)

Blindness

INSIDE MY WORLD by Larry Johnson

Step "Inside My World" my world as a blind child, teenager and young adult growing up in Chicago some 70 years ago. My mother used to tell people: "He's in his own little world." Indeed, seeing the world without sight is seeing it in a very different way. The world of a blind person is smaller, closer, and more personal. And yet, each of us, in fact, is "in our own little world," our own personal reality. It is our uniqueness as individuals that makes our existence so precious.

Common myths about this topic:

- All blind people read Braille.
- Blind people hear better than sighted people.
- All blind people are good musicians.
- It is embarrassing to use words like "see" and "look" when talking to a blind person.
- Blind people cannot understand colors.
- Blind people have little interest in the visual arts.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- Blind people prefer to associate with other blind people.
- Blind people are very limited in the jobs they can perform.
- Blind people are more likely to have on-the-job accidents than sighted people.
- Most blind people use guide dogs to get around.
- Most blind people cannot live alone.
- Most blind people cannot travel independently.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- Which is harder to lose your sight as an adult or as a child?
- How do you as a blind person "see" people?
- What is the hardest thing you have to deal with as a blind person?
- What do you miss most about being blind?
- Are there any advantages to being blind?
- Because you are blind, does that make your other senses sharper?
- What is something that as a blind person you haven't been able to experience to its fullest?
- What are some things that as a blind person you experience in a completely different way from a sighted person?

Black Lives Matter and Civil Rights Activist

RACISM AND THE CONCEPT OF RACE by Mario Salas

Table of Contents

- Ancient Slavery and Race Slavery
- The Invention of “Whiteness, “and the Superiority Complex
- Johan Blumenbach and the Inventions of Racial Categories
- The Inventions of White Supremacy
- The False Biology of Race
- Race: A Social Construction with Real Consequences

Racism has an origin. Though there are examples of ancient writings describing people of various cultures, the concept of race did not begin in ancient times, but with the Moorish invasion of Spain and Europe (700 AD). This led to racial inequality throughout Europe and eventually the rest of the world.

I am a so-called mixed race person that has been involved in the civil and human rights movements for many years and have suffered directly from individual racism and institutionalized racism.

Common myths about this topic:

- Race has a biological component. There is but one race, the human race, as science clearly defines it. We as human beings belong to a single species, and not to the invented species using the terms of Caucasian, Negroid, and Mongoloid.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- The term mixed race is in fact a misapplication of human biology as there is only one race.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- When, how, and why was race invented?
- How has racism affected the modern world?
- What is the difference between race and ethnicity?

Body Image and Mental Health

WATCH ME GROW by Cristina Gallegos-Atarigbe

Do you see me? Do you know me? Do you realize that your image of me affects how I view myself? I am 41 and until last year I didn't know that what my mother told me at the age of 9, I allowed to impact the rest of my adult life. The realization and the confusion of how society views beauty played a vital role in my view of myself and the events that I put myself through. How could I have allowed this to hurt my soul?

The deception of my thoughts is a liar.

Common myths about this topic:

- Body image issues are the same as eating disorders.
- Body image has everything to do with clinical stability.
- Body issues are attributed to a mental health diagnosis.
- Female vs male privilege.
- Everyone with body image issues is overweight.
- Social media is to blame for your body image.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- If you want to feel better, you just have to exercise and eat healthier.
- Only women have body image issues.
- If I look better to others, I will feel better.
- Self-esteem has everything to do with body image.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- How do you view your body?
- What is the difference between body image and an eating disorder?
 - o How do you separate the two?
- How do you maintain your mental wellness with the impact of your environment?
- Does your mental health diagnosis make it easier to deal with your body image?
- Do you take meds to help you change your mindset?
- How much and when do you feel stress?
- How well do you feel when making life changes?

Depression

BALANCING A CHEMICAL IMBALANCE by Lizzy Hernandez

There is a lot of stigma around depression and I am pleased to help clarify this legitimate and manageable illness. Depression is the result of a chemical imbalance that can affect anyone at any age, causing such severe despondency that those afflicted, and without treatment, often struggle to maintain healthy personal and professional lives. I have been familiar with this sort of disposition from a very young age; evidently I was prescribed an anti-depressant by age 9. Though being depressed at age 6 is different than at age 19, it was no less authentic. Certainly my depression has evolved as my world has expanded. Depression has been a long journey for me. Often it has been a burden and a barrier but it has also played a part in the most enlightening periods of my life.

Common myths about this topic:

- "Depression isn't a real disease."
- "It's just a mood." / "You're just sad. It will pass."
- "You are just sensitive."
- "Depression is just the result of [insert unpleasant event]."
- "You can snap out of it when you want to."
- "Men don't get depressed."
- "Discussing it will only make it worse."
- "You will never get off anti-depressants."

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- "Admitting you are feeling depressed is a sign of weakness."
- "If you are not suicidal, you are not depressed."
- "Having depression is like being bi-polar."
- "If you are depressed you have to take anti-depressants."
- "Anti-depressants cure depression."
- "Anti-depressants affect your personality."
- "If you're parents have depression you will also have depression."

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- When and how did you know you were depressed?
- What is the difference between being sad and being depressed?
- What does it feel like for you?
- How long have you been affected by depression?
- What helps you cope?
- How does it affect your relationships?
- How has it affected your character?
- How can you tell when it is getting more severe?
- What are the symptoms?
- What is the difference between anxiety and depression?

Diabetes Type I

TYPE ONE DIABADASS by Ben Herrick

I was diagnosed with type one diabetes when I was 15 years old. It really came as a shock to me considering I had never thought that something like this would ever happen to me. I was an active, healthy young man on the swim team who ate healthy foods. Throughout the past four years of my life I have been learning how to adapt to this new life, and to become a “Diabadass.”

Common myths about this topic:

- Diabetes is caused by eating too much sugar.
- Diabetics can't eat sugar.
- Diabetes is contagious.
- Diabetes can be cured with diet and exercise.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- Sugar free means a diabetic can eat it without taking insulin.
- Diabetics can't eat certain foods.
- Diabetes limits the jobs you can get.
- Diabetes means your pancreas doesn't work.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- How does being diagnosed with diabetes change one's lifestyle?
- Is working out difficult with diabetes?
- What's the difference between type one and type two diabetes?
- What does insulin do?
- Where does your insulin come from?

Homeless, Addicted, Diseased

LIFE AMONG THE JOSHUA TREES by Lemanda Del Toro

Filthy.

Spent.

Hungry.

Thirsty.

Homeless and hopeless.

I had nowhere to go. No one to turn to. My nearby family barely had the time to consider my needs and my addiction and disease of alcoholism quickly led my life to living in the desert. No one knew where I was or that I was sleeping on a mattress, under a tarp, among the Joshua trees. As many times as I desired to stop using, to stop drinking, to stop lying to protect my despair, I was powerless over my circumstances; and no matter the strength behind my will to live, I was slowly dying. My life of an alcoholic, homeless-addict, had arrived. I forgot about God and I had been HAD by the enemy.

Lost in the desert, I believed I was destined to die there. And I did.

Common myths about this topic:

- Everyone who experiences homelessness is a drug addict/alcoholic.
- Homeless people live in shelters/the streets.
- Addiction/alcoholism is not a biological disease, it's a choice.
- Homeless/addicted/alcoholic people are uneducated.
- Homeless people take advantage of the system.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- Addiction is not a medical disease.
- Homeless people are lazy.
- Trauma is an excuse to be homeless/addicted/alcoholic

Suggested questions to start the conversation:

- At what age did you become diseased by alcohol?
- At what age did you become an addict?
- At what age did you become homeless?
- What experiences contributed to your life resulting to homelessness/addiction/disease of alcoholism?
- What resources helped you come out of homelessness/addiction/disease of alcoholism?
- How has your experience of being homeless/addicted/diseased by alcohol helped you in the lives of those you serve today?
- How do you believe you were viewed by society during your experience of homelessness/addiction/disease of alcoholism?

Muslim

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A MUSLIM? by Shafik Dharamsi

Table of Contents:

- Growing up Muslim
- Perspectives on our purpose in life and the afterlife
- Defending and explaining my faith
- Bringing up children as Muslims

Common myths (a misrepresentation of the truth) about this topic:

- Islam encourages terrorism.
- Sharia is “Islamic law.”
- There is no freedom of religion in Islam.

Common misconceptions (mistaken belief) of this topic:

- Muslims reject Jesus.
- Muslim women must be veiled.
- Jihad means Holy War and is synonymous with Islam and terrorism.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- Was your introduction to the Muslim culture and Islamic faith passive or active during your childhood? How did you come to your own relationship with your faith versus what your upbringing dictated?
- If you could put the goals of the Islamic faith into one sentence, what would it be?
- What is Sharia?
- How have previous relationships, personal and professional, been affected when someone you know learns that you are Muslim?
- What are the challenges related to raising children as Muslims, and what is the solution?

Muslim

THE ONE WHO SUBMITS TO THE GOD: ARE YOU A MUSLIM? by Suleyman Tek

Islam is currently the second largest religion in the world next to Christianity. There are 1.6 billion Muslim people worldwide and an estimated 2.75 million Muslims living in the United States. Yet, particularly after the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, Islam, Muslims and the Quran have become a subject of major concern to the world media, religious groups and others.

Many articles and books have been written about this religion. Some authors depicted Islam as a separate civilization that will inevitably clash with the current dominant western civilization; other authors were more optimistic, showing interest in a constructive debate, seeking understanding. However, many of these writings continue to perpetuate misinformation and repeat the same common misconceptions, thus giving a distorted picture of what Islam is about, and what the Quran actually says. I will share personal information about this religion and its practice.

Common myths about this topic:

- All Muslim people are Arabs.
- Islam is intolerant of other faiths.
- Muslims worship a moon-god.
- The Quran was written by Muhammad.
- All Islam encourages terrorism.
- Islam oppresses women.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- Muslims do not believe in Jesus.
- Allah is exclusively the God of Islam.
- Jihad means Holy war.
- The crescent moon is a symbol of Islam.
- Muslims are ignorant and don't value education.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- What is Islam?
- What are Muslims?
- Who is Allah?
- Who is Muhammad?
- What are the Teachings of Islam?
- What is the Quran?
- How do Muslims view the Nature of Man, the Purpose of Life and the Life Hereafter?

Police

PATIENTS, NOT PRISONERS: Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System by Jesse Trevino

Table of Contents:

- Introduction
- What is mental illness?
- What happens to person with mental illness in crisis?
- How is the criminal justice system responding?
- The Mental Health Unit

People with mental illness face stigmas in society. In the criminal justice system, persons with mental illness are overrepresented. Historically, individuals in crisis have had disproportionate uses of force and excessive force against them. Progressive policing has made strides in criminal justice diversion and improving the quality of care for people in crisis.

Common myths about this topic:

- Mentally ill people are crazy and violent.
- Mentally ill people are criminals.
- Police officers want to hurt and shoot people with mental illness.
- Mental illness is not a police issue.

Common misconceptions of this topic:

- People that are mentally ill are weak or feeble minded.
- The police are not doing enough to help people with mental illness and substance dependence.
- If you are mentally ill and in crisis, you go to jail.

Suggested questions to start the conversation:

- Should I be afraid of someone with mental illness?
- What is a crisis?
- What should I do if I or someone I know is in crisis?

Refugee

HOME IS WHERE YOUR HEART CURRENTLY IS by Rehani Mbula

Table of Contents

- My Early Life in DR Congo
- Escaping with My Family
- Living in Refugee Camps
- Building a New Life in the USA

I'm Rehani Mbula, and I come from a region of crime, war, and poverty in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I left the country with my family at five years old after we struggled with the civil war that started up again in 1996. This war became an international war, which became the deadliest war since World War II. What I miss most about leaving Africa is the privilege of being a Congolese (although I miss African food terribly too). What I hate most is seeing more women and children currently being kidnapped in D.R. Congo. People consider refugees in many different ways. This is what I know about refugees. They are:

- Hard workers
- Forced to leave their countries of origin, having survived both horrible crimes and war
- Willing to leave their past suffering behind, rebuild their lives, and contribute to their new country

Common misconceptions of refugees

- Children don't receive an education when they are in refugee camps.
- Refugee status is just like any other immigrant status.
- Refugee camps are like slums.

Suggested questions to start the conversation:

- How do you feel to be called a refugee?
- What is your experience as a refugee?
- What does life look like in refugee camps?
- What are some activities refugee kids do in the camp?
- What can be done to avoid violence in most countries in Africa?
- Why is there still war in D. R. Congo?
- What do you do and how do you feel when people say bad things about refugees?

Refugee

BEING A MUSLIM AND A REFUGEE by Assadullah Amini

Table of Contents

- Life under the Taliban regime
- Fleeing home to hide from the war
- Being a minority
- Missing school
- Working for the U.S. and NATO forces as a linguist and cultural advisor in my hometown of Bamiyan, Afghanistan
- A new life in the U.S.

My name is Assadullah Amini and I am from Bamiyan, Afghanistan. My hometown is one of the most beautiful places on Earth. Once famous for the giant 2,000-years-old Buddha statues, now all you can see is two empty niches. My memory flashes back to fall of 1997 when I was only 7 years old, the last time I saw my friends and classmates. A few months later, the Taliban took over and that was the beginning of some four years of painful memory. To hide from the Taliban, the mountains became a sanctuary for my family and the villagers. Looking back, I feel like I was so close to being killed multiple times but yet I have made it. I am looking forward to a better life in this country where I will soon become a citizen. I currently attend UTSA and have a part time job with Catholic Charities of San Antonio Refugee Resettlement Agency.

Suggested questions to start the conversation:

- What is it like to leave everything behind?
- How would you feel if you are harassed because of your faith or race?
- When will there be peace in Afghanistan?
- Isn't 3 decades of war enough for Afghanistan?
- What are some challenges as a new comer to a country?
- How do you forget a bitter past and accept it in order to move on?

Refugee

FROM BAGHDAD TO TEXAS by Bashar Ahmed

Table of Contents

- Decision to leave my family and home
- Learning a new culture
- Evolving to becoming a U.S. University student at UIW
- Life lessons that made me who I am now

My name is Bashar Ahmed and I am refugee, a scholar, a father and business professional. Although my journey from Baghdad to Texas was harsh, extreme and scary, I consider myself a success story in that I was able to learn, adapt and assimilate into a very loving and accepting community. That community is UIW which has embraced me from day one with no prejudice to my refugee status and which continues to guide and support me in dealing with being separated from my family, leaving my home and learning the language and culture that is different from my own.

Baghdad was my home and, sadly, to present it is still struggling to find peace. I pray that someday all the people from Baghdad are at peace and safe from harm. I do my best to educate myself so I can be a better human being by spreading awareness and educating other's about the suffering the occurs daily in other countries. While my educational background focused primarily on government and international affairs, I also studied general business, economics, finance and accounting for a master's level degree. Presently, as a Ph.D. student, my doctoral classes have exposed me to several aspects of research and leadership development, as well as understanding the importance of building a positive rapport and sustaining it. This knowledge earned and the life lessons as a refugee have made me who I am now.

Common misconceptions of refugees

- Third world countries are inhumane
- Refugees are ignorant
- Refugees do not give back

Suggested questions to start the conversation:

- What is your experience as a refugee?
- What motivated you to pursue a higher education?
- How have universities embrace global diversity?
- What are some of the struggles faced as a refugee in the US education system?
- How can students learn about refugees arriving in the U.S.?
- How do refugees give back?
- What does society gain through education?

Tattoo Artist

BEING A PROFESSIONAL TATTOOIST AND TATTOO COLLECTOR by Kelly Edwards

I have been tattooing professionally for 19 years and have been collecting tattoos for 20. Though I have always placed an emphasis on being stylistically diverse with the kind of tattoos I do, I specialize in large-scale Americana and Japanese style art. My love for tattoos and tattooing has driven my endeavor to provide the highest quality tattoo work, customer service and experience to everyone interested. Through hard work and dedication, I strive to perfect my craft while being a humble ambassador to the legacy and rich traditions of something that has blessed my life so immensely.

Common myths and misconceptions about this topic:

- Tattooists enjoy inflicting pain, while wearers enjoy receiving it.
- People will inevitably regret getting a tattoo.
- People with tattoos are tougher than others or impervious to pain.
- Tattooed people are dangerous or unsavory, representing a lower class of society.
- Tattooists and tattooed people are uneducated.
- People with tattoos have served time in prison.
- People who get or give tattoos are of low moral character.
- Tattoos impede a person's ability to perform work or provide courteous customer service.
- Tattooed people have gang or underworld affiliations.
- People who collect large-scale Japanese style tattoos are members of the Yakuza mafia.
- Tattooed people prefer to only associate with or are only attracted to other tattooed people.
- Tattooists require little to no training...anyone can do it.
- Tattooing may only be done by those who are artistically talented.
- Tattooists are rude, mean or disrespectful to clients.
- People with tattoos are involved in drug culture.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- Do tattoos hurt?
- Did you get them all at once?
- Is it difficult to become a Tattooist or make tattoos?
- How does one train to become a Tattooist?
- Do you experience prejudice or exclusion from situations due to being a tattooed person?
- What is the motivation for getting a tattoo?
- What are people's reaction to those with tattoos?
- What are some of the challenges a tattooist faces, either in making tattoos or dealing with clientele?

Transgender

BEYOND GENDER by Morgan McCandless

I came out as transgender almost three years ago after I graduated from high school. There is a great deal of misinformation out there about people in the trans community. Come and hear what it's really like to be a young trans man in today's world.

Common MYTHS about this topic:

- Transgender people hate their bodies.
- Drag queens/kings are all transgender.
- All transgender people eventually have "the surgery."
- Most transgender people will regret transitioning.
- Taking testosterone makes trans men angry and/or experience "roid rage."
- Transgender people cannot have a fulfilling sex life.
- Being transgender is a new or modern concept.

Common MISCONCEPTIONS about this topic:

- People choose to be transgender.
- Transgender people are confused.
- Being transgender is a mental illness.
- Transgender people cannot be gay or cannot be straight.
- Someone's "real name" is their birth name.
- Allowing transgender people to use the they choose is a danger to public safety.
- Transgender people are not "real" men or "real" women.
- Someone can "tell" if someone is transgender just by looking at them.

Potential questions to start the conversation:

- What is a trans man or trans woman?
- What does it mean "to be of trans experience?"
- What is dysphoria?
- How did you realize that you're transgender?
- How did your family react to you coming out?
- How has transitioning affected your life?
- What is the hardest thing you had to deal with as a person of trans experience?
- Is there anything good about being transgender?
- What kind of prejudice do you experience as a trans man?

Interesting Facts:

- The root trans- means "across, beyond, or on the other side of" so the word transgender can be taken to mean "beyond gender."
- In Ovid's Metamorphosis, there is a character by the name of Caeneus who was born female and given the name Caenis. Caenis yielded to the sea god Poseidon and in return was granted a wish for a male body. He received invulnerability in addition and went on to become a great warrior of Thessaly.