

MENTAL HEALTH AND BEING YOUNG IN SOCIETY TODAY

Presented at the Dalhousie Student Union Building

By

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WHO IS ROBERT S. WRIGHT?

- BSW, MSW Child & family Mental Health
 - Private Practice Therapist since 1989
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WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

- Mental health can be described as the state of our emotional/psychological functioning.
- Discussions about mental health can range from concerns about personal meaning and finding our place in the world, to managing severe and persistent mental illnesses that are potentially debilitating.
- When a person's emotional and psychological state is impaired to the point that they struggle to function or experience significant distress . . . Regardless of their “diagnosis” it could be said that that person is suffering from a Mental Illness.

WHY TONIGHT'S TALK?

- About 20% of all persons will personally experience at least an episode of mental illness
 - The onset of some of the most debilitating mental illnesses is between the ages of 16 – 30 . . . Prime age for university students
 - The major transitions and stressors on young adults today MAY be significant triggers for the onset of mental illness
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A COUPLE OF THINGS I THINK I KNOW

- There is a complex relationship between how genetic predisposition and environmental stressors work together to produce mental health problems.
 - Increasingly we understand that social factors have a direct and profound affect on our mental health and our attempts to treat mental illness. Radical shifts in economy, community, diversity (racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, etc.) are creating new stressors that we are needing new or better tools to manage.
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GENETICS & STRESS



This is stress . . . Daily happenings, social context, expectations, deadlines and demands

This is genetics . . . Biologically determined limits to our capacity to handle/process stress

This is the life that we're able to build by "channelling" the stress into achievements

GENETICS & STRESS



What happens if the funnel is too narrow?

What happens if we pour too quickly?

What happens if more liquid is spilling out of the funnel than is neatly being collected in the vessel?

FUTURE SHOCK AND MENTAL HEALTH/ILLNESS

- Alvin Toffler – Future Shock
 - Thomas Homer-Dixon – Ingenuity Gap
 - Robert Kegan – In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life
 - Mary Pipher – The Shelter of Each Other

 - Each of these authors describe problems related to rapid social/technological change and our inability to keep up. The water is being poured too quickly for our funnels!!!
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WHAT KIND OF THINGS ARE WE FACING TODAY?

- African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal students are dealing with stressors of sophisticated racism in social locations (the academy and professional settings) for which their grandmothers' wisdom did not prepare them.
 - Gender and sexual fluidity in the context of a still sexually repressed society, extreme substance use, novel social pressures, new and dramatic financial challenges, and community erosion and dislocation are all extreme pressures encountered by university students today.
 - Even straight, white, male students from privileged backgrounds face an economic uncertainty that erodes the confidence and makes the future hazy at best (welcome to the club!)
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SO WHAT DO WE DO?

- Acknowledge the reality that you may be experiencing problems with your mental health.
 - Talk openly about mental health problems to decrease isolation and seek appropriate help.
 - Don't be a victim . . . Actively contribute to those activities that highlight and resist the forces that are undermining our collective wellness.
 - Consider medical intervention, medication and therapy as options to assist you.
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Q & A

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