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<p style="text-align:center">Erasing the Stigma around Mental Health</p>

Frontiers are what keeps our society growing and advancing. There are many frontiers today including neuroscience, space exploration, and sustainability of the environment. Although these are all making major breakthroughs, none of them talk about the individual. Mental illness affects one in five people (National Alliance on Mental Health), but unfortunately, there is a stigma placed on it. However, society is evolving, and the stigma is slowly fading. More people are talking about mental illness every day and learning that having a mental illness is not something that is different or weird. In the reading *Death Comes For the Archbishop* by Willa Cather, the idea of mental illness is not directly addressed but after examining characters it is clear that it was something that affected the characters. However, if those characters were placed in society currently only a few of them would be successful during the frontier of trying to eliminate the stigma on mental health.

Mental illness is a "disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines" (Mental Health America). Some of these include mood and personality disorders, such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anorexia. Many factors can cause this that can include environmental stresses, genetic factors, biochemical imbalances, or a combination (Mental Health America). Living with a mental illness greatly affects your everyday life. For example, if you suffer from some type of anxiety disorder you could have sudden panic

or anxiety attacks which can bring anything one is doing to a sudden halt. If a person suffers from phobias, then one could be so focused on avoiding those things that they become manic. Dealing with mental illness does not only change that one-person's life, but it also affects those closest to you. Many people do not know how to deal or act around those whom they know have a mental illness. All they want is to be treated normal and find help. There are many options for treatments including anti-depressants, therapy, etc. Finding the best treatment is sometimes a long process because not everything works the same for each person.

Mental illness for a long time was not being talked about; however, as time has progressed many people are stepping up and spreading the word to try to end the stigma. Today there are many organizations that work to offer support and knowledge on mental health. These include the non-profit "Hope for the Day" and "To Write Love on Her Arms". These organizations provide outreach to those in need as well as sell merchandise that sends their profits to help support suicide prevention and more. In addition, there are events such as mental health awareness month which occurs in October, and the world mental health day is observed on October tenth. The goals of this are to help spread knowledge of how it is okay to not be okay, and that mental health is not a downfall but a positive. Moreover, there is a national convention held in June typically sponsored by the National Alliance on Mental Illness. This conventions goal is to "Join the nation's largest gathering of mental health advocates as we share, learn and network around important mental health issues" (National Alliance on Mental Health). Furthermore, policies such as the Affordable Care Act of 2013 and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 made it possible for coverage on mental health conditions to be the same way coverage as physical health conditions (Friedman). Also, people are simply becoming more open-minded and accepting of others and not judging before perceiving. All these examples main

goal is to give outreach and understanding to the public on mental illness, and to hopefully erase the stigma surrounding the idea of mental illness being something somebody is ashamed of.

However, not everyone believes or understands mental illness and unfortunately, this is only worsening the stigma. For instance, there are so many stereotypes surrounding mental health, and starting at a young age, children learn that people who suffer from these illnesses are crazy or weird. These terms follow through adulthood which only makes for a negative perception of these disorders (Friedman). Also, the use of social media does not always paint a positive image of mental illness. These all lead to something called social distancing; meaning, "when people feel that an individual with mental illness is dangerous, that results in fear and increased social distance" (Friedman). This then results in people with mental illness feeling lonely, and potentially worsening their illness and well-being. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of mental illness creates a form of a divide between society and people suffering. For example, when asked during a study 44 percent of people reported knowing little to nothing on mental illness (Soapboxie). In addition, there are still people who believe that mental illness is just "in your head" and is not real. They believe these people are doing it for attention and for prescribed medication to either sell or abuse in another way. Many religions as well do not believe in mental illness completely; many Christians think mental illness is spiritual and has no genetic or biological connection. Also, some Christians have a difficulty in deciding whether mental illness is related to a person's sin (Stetzer). Most of the reasons for the lack of support for normalizing mental illness comes from the idea that mental illness simply is not what this frontier is pushing for, and that is it is not "normal".

The idea behind the frontier of supporting mental health has come a long way. However, if you look back in history or even in certain books not everyone would be as successful in the

frontier of mental health. For instance, in the book *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, by Willa Cather there are many unique characters, and even though mental illness is not directly addressed in the book it played a part. For example, at the beginning of the book while Father Latour and Father Vaillant are traveling they come across a house when they were looking for shelter to rest. After, entering the home and meeting the American man who lived there they soon met a Mexican woman that lived there too. She was quiet and seemed horrified by the way she moved and looked. Soon after, both the Fathers decided it was best if they left the home because they had an awful feeling about the man. The Fathers later learned the woman's name was Magdalena and then heard her story about how her husband had killed multiple people including their three children. Magdalena even tried to escape, but he threatened her and was forced to return home (Cather). Magdalena was never said to have a mental illness, but after analyzing her situation it is very much so possible that she could have PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) from the loss of her three children, and then having to watch her husband continue to kill. In addition, she could suffer from anxiety which could explain her hands shaking and her quiet nature (Cather). The two fathers were understanding of her story and only wanted to protect her. This example shows that Father Latour and Vaillant would survive in the frontier today because they both had open minds and were willing to listen to Magdalena. They did not turn her away, or say she was crazy or lying which is crucial when it comes to approaching and getting to know someone with a mental illness.

One form of a mental disorder is called depression which is a mood disorder. During *Death comes for the Archbishop*, Father Latour expresses some symptoms of depression. For instance, Cather wrote, "Latour had been going through one of those periods of coldness and doubt" (Cather210). This quote was describing how Father Latour was after being separated

from Father Vaillant for a long period. His symptoms only worsened and "his prayers were empty words brought him refreshment. His soul had become a barren field" (Cather 211). However, with this all going on Father Latour decided to look into himself and go to the church and pray. Once, at the church, he met a woman named Sada and listened to her story and even offered his cloak (Cather). Father Latour's actions only show that he would be successful in the frontier today. He decided to get help for his feelings of loneliness and emptiness which for him was going to church. One big push in the mental health movement is the promotion of seeking help which is exactly what Father Latour did. In addition, Father Latour was accepting towards Sada which could have been difficult for others, but his giving and trusting nature allowed him to be successful in her opening up to him. These examples are key reasons why Father Latour would most likely be successful in the frontier today.

However, in the movie *The Last of the Mohicans* not all characters would have lasted in today's frontier. For instance, when the younger, blonde sister decided to commit suicide the group of Indians did not even think twice, but instead, they kept walking. Today, people are devastated when someone commits suicide. In society today, an investigation is done and sometimes groups come together to mourn over the death. This just shows that society has grown; however, the group of Indians from the movie lacked remorse which is something you need in order to be successful during the frontier.

The mental health frontier going on today is thanks to many people wanting change; however, if the characters from the book *Death Comes for the Archbishop* were in society today then many things could happen. For instance, Father Latour is a genuinely caring person, and today those are the people needed most. He could possibly start a non-profit or work one-on-one

with individuals in need of support. His efforts to help those in need of any kind is exactly what inspires and motivates people to act differently and learn to accept others differences.

The mental health stigma is a frontier that has taken over society. This frontier requires patience and understanding which *Death Comes for the Archbishop* characters showed, but as well showed that some characters would not be as successful as others. With the push for more acceptance of illnesses and less judgment, the world is one step closer to normalizing and celebrating mental illness.

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