

Bioethics Book Club



More or Less Maddy

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Summary¹

Maddy Banks has just finished her first year at university. She's had a difficult year, and been depressed, but during the summer Maddy's mood changes significantly. She can't sleep at night, and she acts in ways that are unusual for her. At first, Maddy's mood changes go unnoticed by others, but during a family dinner Maddy behaves in a way that put herself and others in danger. She is admitted to the hospital, where she is diagnosed with and treated for bi-polar disorder.

Maddy struggles with the diagnosis and how it impacts her life and her relationship with family and friends. and the challenges it poses to her pursue of a career as a stand-up comedian. Gradually, however, she starts to find her 'new' normal.

Ethical Issues

Mental health/illness

Stigma

Chronic Disease Management

Trust

Capacity for decision-making /impaired judgement

Discussion questions:

- What part of Maddy's journey towards finding her 'new normal' stood out to you the most and why?
- Why do you think it is so difficult for Maddy to come to terms with her diagnosis?
- One of the issues that causes tension between Maddy and her mother is her mother's lack of confidence in Maddy's ability to manage her bi-polar disorder. Do you think this tension could have been avoided?
 - Why/why not?
- Maddy's mother and sister perceive Maddy's decision to pursue a career as a stand-up comedian as a product of her bi-polar disorder. Discuss how this perception impacts their relationship with Maddy.

¹ This summary is written on basis of the audible version of the book. Read by Tessa Albertson. Available on Audible.com

- How does stigma (social stigma, self-stigma, and family stigma) impact Maddy's ability to accept her diagnosis, willingness to seek treatment, and her family's ability to help her along on her journey toward learning how to manage her bi-polar disorder?

Discuss the following passages from the book:

P. 124: "This isn't like a sinus infection, you take a course of antibiotics, the infection goes away, and you stop taking the medication. This is more like diabetes. It's a chronic illness, something she'll have to deal with for the rest of her life. But for now, let's just think about these first six to twelve months. The goal is to decrease the severity, duration, and number of episodes she'll experience."

For the rest of her life. She's not able to absorb everything Dr. Weaver and her mother are saying, but that phrase gets in, taking center stage in her mind, echoing its fateful cry off the inner walls of her skull."

P. 157: "Second semester begins today, but Maddy's still in Connecticut. Because inpatient hospitalization at Garrison qualifies as a mental health crisis, she's required to take the next semester off. She fails to see how this blanket policy is helpful to anyone by NYU. They're just covering their legal asses and protecting their reputation, Maddy's reputation be damned. So that's it. There's no nuance, no conversation, no exception to the rule. She's banished. Like a leper."

P. 236: "Maybe what happened wasn't due to a chronic, lifelong illness. Maybe it was just a one-time thing – call it a blip if people need to put a label on it – or something she outgrew, like an allergy or bangs.

And so maybe she'd been taking all these horrible daily medications, suffering through every hideous side effect, for no reason. She decided she owed it to herself to find out."