

One flew over the
cuckoo's nest, the
source of mental
illness essay sample



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In the novel, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, by Ken Kesey, many of the patients in the ward have lack of self-respect and dignity. The lack of dignity and self-respect causes many people to become depressed, and even mentally ill. The three patients that lack the most self-respect and dignity are Billy Bibbit, Chief, and Harding. These three characters have had tragic past experience that causes them to lose their dignity, or "man hood". Billy Bibbit lost his dignity by "flubbing" the proposal to the woman he loves, Chief lost his self-respect by being ignored in the past, and Harding lost his man-hood because he can not satisfy his wife. All of these patients suffer from their lost pride and dignity, and all of them became mentally ill from the lack of self-respect. The novel shows how lack of dignity and self-respect of one self is the source of mental illness.

Billy Bibbit is born with a speech impediment. He stutters almost every word he tries to say. His mother treated him poorly in the past, and he was never taught better. His life starts be being made fun of. He flunks out of college because when he has to answer, he stutters. "You were suppose to say, 'Here sir,' and I never c-c-could get it out" (119). Because of Billy Bibbit's stutter, it has made him mentally ill by causing him to lose his self-respect. Not only does Billy's stutter weaken his dignity, but he also loses his pride and self-respect by the reaction of the woman he loves. "I said 'Huh-honey, will you muh-muh-muh-muh-muh...' till the girl broke out l-laughing"(121). Billy's past experience will stay with him forever. His speech impediment and destruction of his dignity from the woman he loves causes his mental illness.

Chief, another patient in the ward, loses his self-respect and dignity, which causes him to be mentally ill. He can remember things about his past, and

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he describes when three people come to his village and ignore him. He is ignored even though he is trying to tell them something important. They continue to talk, and Chief responds, “ Not a one of the three acts like they heard a thing I said; in fact they’re all looking off from me like they’d as soon I wasn’t there at all”(181). Because of people ignoring him the past, Chief gives up and “ acts” deaf. That way no one will bother him, and he does not need to waste his breath.. He uses his “ act” to hide from people, but most people think he is ill just because he does not speak. He uses his experience with being ignored as a lesson; he learns that no one will ever listen to him from his past experience. Chief does not see the point in talking to someone who does not listen, but what he does not realize is that now people will listen to what he has to say. Chief’s lack of self-respect by being ignored in his past is the source of his mental illness by causing him to “ act” deaf because he thinks that no one will listen.

Harding has a lack of dignity and lost of “ man hood”, which is the source of his mental illness. Harding’s description is fairly normal, but he is uncomfortable about one thing. He is uncomfortable by his hands. “...it bothers him that he’s got pretty hands”(23). His lack of self-respect is shown by his actions when his hands flail around, and he quickly shoves them in between his knees. Not only does Harding lack self-respect because of his appearance, but also he loses his “ man hood” when it comes to the subject of his wife he has a big bosom and that everyone stares. He is not only mad about her appearance, but he also obviously can not pleasure her enough. One can tell that he does not give her what she needs by the flirtation between her and McMurphy. She does not like being called Mrs. Harding, and

she prefers to be called by just her first name. Harding loves his wife, but his "man hood" is destroyed when he can not give her the satisfaction that she desires. He hates himself for not being able to satisfy his wife, and he becomes distraught when men talk about her. Because of his past with his wife, the loss of his "man hood" from her flirtatious behavior and non-satisfactions, it causes his mental illness.

The characters in the novel suggest that the cause of mental illness is the lack of self-respect and loss of dignity. All of the characters experience a bad past, and the cause of their mental illness is by the way all of them choose to live. Chief chose to be deaf because no one listened to him in the past, Billy Bibbit never forgets his past experiences with his stutter, and Harding will never forgive her wife, even though he is the reason she is flirtatious.

These characters lack self-respect and dignity from their past, and they think that they can not change anything about it. Their mental illness is caused from their behavior and actions towards their bad experiences. To the conclusion, Chief is the only one from these three men that actually faces fear. He speaks again, and people listen. Harding never forgives his wife, or realizes that she does not love him, and Billy Bibbit will never forget his college and love destroyed by his stutter. The causes of mental illness can come from many experiences, but how one will deal with the experience is a way to gain back respect and dignity.