

The concept of ignorance of discrimination in literature



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The most important thing for society to learn and understand from the pieces we have read, watched, and discussed so far in our HNR 312 class is that those who are ignorant of discrimination and accept this fact are just as bad as those who participate in discriminatory acts themselves. This concept can be seen in the Tuskegee Experiment shown in *Miss Evers' Boys*, the treatment of mentally ill individuals outlined in William Styron's *Darkness Visible*, how women, specifically, with mental disorders were treated in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and how the AIDS epidemic was dealt with in *And the Band Played On* by Randy Shilts.

Miss Evers' Boys showed a story about the horrible mistreatment of many individuals solely because of their race. There was ignorance found at all levels in the Tuskegee Experiment, as the government officials manipulated Miss Evers, Dr. Brodus, and Dr. Douglas to perform an experiment on many vulnerable African American men riddled with syphilis. Miss Evers and the two doctors directly performing the experiment were unaware of the nature of the experiment they agreed to do, and the men being experimented on had absolutely no idea as to what was occurring. After it was revealed to Miss Evers and the two doctors that the experiment would only be completed once the men were allowed to die without receiving newly available medicine, the doctors remained ignorant of the fact that this medicine would indeed help the men they cared so deeply about. If the two doctors and the nurse had seen the effects penicillin had on men with syphilis themselves instead of accepting what the government had to say on the matter, they would have realized these men's lives could have been saved. It is because

of their ignorance of the mistreatment that was occurring that the experiment was allowed to be carried out for so long.

Through William Styron's *Darkness Visible*, society's view of the mentally ill is displayed from the first-person perspective of someone going through depression. Although the mentally ill are not outright discriminated against, they are viewed and treated in an unfair manner because of the ignorance surrounding their disease. The ignorance in regards to those suffering from depression is still prevalent today in many. It is because of this that having a mental illness is viewed as having a fundamental flaw in a human instead of being viewed as the actual illness it is. Without this ignorance, the lives of those dealing with mental diseases would be much better. Treatments would be pursued more vehemently by researchers. The friends and families of mentally ill men and women would be much more mindful of what the individual they care about is dealing with, and in turn be able to help the individual more than they ever could when uninformed. The ignorance surrounding the stereotype created for the mentally ill is very harmful in moving forward with treatment and prevention of the disease.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* gave another first-person account of an individual going through a mental illness, albeit a fictional one. The short story allowed the reader to see the ineffectiveness of the Rest Cure and the blatant discrimination accompanied with it. The people who cared for the main character, her husband and sister-in-law, both cared deeply for her and felt that what they were doing for her was best. They were unable to see that they were only causing more problems for the one they cared about by following this primitive method. The Rest Cure was a <https://assignbuster.com/the-concept-of-ignorance-of-discrimination-in-literature/>

method founded on discriminatory ideas. The husband and sister-in-law were ignorant of what they were doing to the one they cared about. If they had sought to inform themselves of the potential risks of their actions, they would have been much more effective in helping the main character.

As outlined in Randy Shilts' *And the Band Played On*, the main reason AIDS was able to spread as it did was because of the lack of awareness surrounding it. This lack of awareness was a direct result of people not paying attention to the disease. The reason for no one paying attention to this new epidemic was due to homosexuals being viewed in a negative light by the media. The majority of people were ignorant of this discrimination by the media because they seemingly chose not to care. Despite reports by numerous scientists and doctors indicating the danger of AIDS, there was no backing to allow the general public to see these reports. The general public may not have been directly discriminating against the homosexuals involved, but their ignorance towards what was occurring can be viewed as detrimental to the elimination of the disease as those that directly ignored because of their disdain for homosexuals. It was not until the disease began to appear in heterosexuals that the information regarding the dangers of the disease reached the general public, and by that point, it was much too late. If the ignorant masses had strived to keep themselves informed of what was occurring in the world instead of relying solely on popular media to inform themselves, many more lives could have been saved.

Society should always actively seek to remain informed of what is going on in the medical community to avoid situations that are wrong to go

unchecked. If the ignorant were informed in all of the cases above, only <https://assignbuster.com/the-concept-of-ignorance-of-discrimination-in-literature/>

positive consequences could have occurred. The people who do not seek to challenge stereotypes and discrimination are doomed to fall into the same category as those who are committing the acts of discrimination. Society must be mindful of this fact and react accordingly or it will be doomed to allow discrimination to exist forever