

# Schizophrenia and stigma

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Since time immemorial the “MAD PERSON” intrigues, amuses, but most of the time worries and scares. Because of his madness the individual will be labeled and considered out of the ordinary, put away from society.

Depending on the age and place, “Madness” could give rise to different types of representations and associated behaviors. Some positive representations may be found as wisdom or holiness, which may have elicited reactions of empathy or benevolence. But most of these representations, since the Old Testament period, strongly inspired by a pagan vision, have introduced a new notion in the world of madness, that of sin and madness considered as fault and punishment. Madness thus knows a connotation ethico-religious almost always negative and pejorative. From this labeling, from this differentiation between the “we” and the “them” described by Link & Phelan (2001), will result the process of stigmatization.

From its ancient Greek origin, *Stitzein*, which meant tattooing, branding to tell the rest of society the lower status or lower value of some members of society, stigma has become synonymous with brand. While this distinction may have taken a glorifying time, especially in the religious field with the stigmata of Christ that could appear in some people indicating their spiritual exemplarity, this brand has quickly and most often had a pejorative aspect leading to the eviction of the society. It was in the Middle Ages that the word took on the meaning of a defamation, a disgrace, a mark of infamy or shame. Thus, over time, stigmatization has affected different groups of people, for their skin color, their ethnic origins, their religious beliefs or their sexual orientation, leading to discrimination and behavior of sidelining, rejection, even mass exactions justified by their difference. This notion of

stigma has gradually spread in the field of health by first referring to the indelible “degrading” marks left on the skin by a disease (Smallpox, Leprosy. . . ), then by extension, other diseases have been strongly stigmatized: Tuberculosis, AIDS, mental illnesses and among these, Schizophrenia.