ABSTRACT

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Title: LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
                    ANALYSIS OF THREE MENTAL-HEALTH RELATED TEXTS FROM
                    THE UNITED STATES FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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As of 2017, 1 in every 5 adults in the United States will experience symptoms of any mental illness in a given year, constituting approximately 46.6 million people. This population of American adults is at a heightened risk for comorbid diagnosis with substance abuse disorders or chronic physical conditions, as well as at risk for premature mortality. In this study, the most significant threads and themes surrounding mental health in the United States are identified and explored in depth, as well as looking at how these themes interact between the documents. The thesis used critical discourse analysis on three texts published by the United States federal government centering around mental health: a step-by-step Wellness Guide from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the 2017 Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee's report to Congress, and the 21st Century Cures Act of 2016. Through a critical exploration of these texts, this thesis has determined that our government's current approach to mental health erroneously assigns responsibility onto the individual with a mental health condition, pays mere lip service to social determinants, and inadvertently (or overtly) contributes to its ongoing stigmatization. This approach denies the responsibility of the United States federal government towards protecting the vulnerable population of citizens with mental illness, causing real, detrimental effects on the lives of individuals and their families. Future research may benefit from studying the evolution of federal publications related to mental health, as well as studying the intertextual relationship between these upstream, federal messages and information available more proximally (i.e., in local clinics, online self-help resources).