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## Psychiatry in music

### Psychiatry and 'pop' culture: millennials for mental health

Joel Philip  and Vinu Cherian

Pop is generally considered to be the more 'vanilla' of musical genres – light-hearted, superficial and created for mass consumption. However, a new generation of millennial pop artistes is now using the platform accorded to them to open up honest conversations about mental health among young people, by writing songs that chronicle their own mental health struggles. Julia Michaels is one such talented singer, who burst onto the global pop music scene in 2017. Her extended plays (EPs), aptly named *Nervous System* and *Inner Monologues*, as well as hit singles such as 'Issues', are creative works based on her own experiences with anxiety. In her songs, Julia is vocal and brutally honest about her struggles with panic attacks, anxiety and depression. In several interviews, she has spoken about how she spent her initial years in the industry writing chart-topping hits for other artistes, held back by fears of performing on stage and insecurities about how her songs would be received. Today, she gives hope to millions of her fans who suffer the same symptoms of anxiety, by being raw and unapologetic in her lyrical work and encouraging them to seek help and support.

Julia recently collaborated with Selena Gomez to release a single titled 'Anxiety'. Selena is another young entertainer who has spoken out about the anxiety and depressive episodes that she suffers, partly due to her diagnosis of systemic lupus erythematosus. She has been a long-standing advocate of mental health, speaking openly about her time as an in-patient in a mental health facility, where she voluntarily checked in to seek help for her mental health problems, and how medication and dialectical behaviour therapy have helped her cope with her symptoms. On their collaboration, Julia details how anxiety and depression affect on her social life and relationships:

'My friends, they wanna take me to the movies,  
But I'm holding hands with my depression,  
And right when I think I've overcome it,  
Anxiety starts kicking in.'

In the bridge, Selena joins in as they put into words how millions of people who struggle with anxiety feel every day:

'I get all these thoughts, running through my mind,  
All the damn time, and I can't seem to shut it off.'

These words hit home for fans who suffer their mental health problems in silence and help to dispel the stigma surrounding a psychiatric diagnosis. The role played by pop artistes and celebrities in de-stigmatising mental illness is worthy of recognition by the psychiatric fraternity. The singer Kehlani, who was admitted to hospital following a suicide attempt and now encourages young people to speak up and seek help for their mental health problems, summed up the sentiment nicely in her lyrics:

'It's okay to not be okay,  
And it's alright to not be alright.'

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