

What is stigma?

“A process by which individuals with devalued physical, behavioral, or medical attributes experience prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and exclusion.”
(Dovidio et al, 2000)

“Prejudice, negative attitudes, abuse and maltreatment directed at people living with HIV and AIDS.”
(Avert.org)

HIV infection

progression toward AIDS

death

HIV/AIDS-related stigma is thought to be **socially rooted** in “fear of **physical contagion**” as well as “fear from ‘**symbolic contagion**’ ...”
(Campbell et al, 2005)

promiscuity

poverty

drug abuse and addiction

“... This process of stigmatization or “othering” is thought to serve an “identity-protective” function by producing feelings of comfort and security and a sense of personal invulnerability to threats and dangers that might otherwise appear overwhelming.

“Stigmatization is also argued to serve a “system-justifying” function. The content of the psychological processes associated with “othering” may often reflect wider social interests. A study of representations of AIDS in Zambia highlighted how the stigmatization of women as vectors of AIDS, with men depicted as the “innocent parties,” is part and parcel of a more general devaluing of women. In another context, people with AIDS have been described as the symbolic markers of all that threatens to undermine American society and economic success. In a country where economic success is built on traditional values of self-discipline, self-control, and prosperity, HIV/AIDS (stereotypically associated with promiscuous sex, drug abuse, and poverty) can be seen as standing for everything that threatens the middle American way of life. HIV/AIDS is an “epidemic of signification” at the same time as it is a biomedical epidemic, and stigmatization of people with AIDS has been an important vehicle for affirming the status quo.”

(Campbell et al, 2005)