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**Title:** Miss Kansas

### **The Mind Matters**

Imagine lying beside a friend, holding her while she cries and can barely breathe. Not one time, but over and over again as she struggles with depression and anxiety that are so crippling she can barely function. Imagine her parents calling you, a college student, to check on their daughter, to ask your help in supporting and protecting their child. This is my experience with one of my best friends in college, and it's why I am so passionate about my platform, "The Mind Matters."

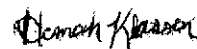
Depression is the leading cause of disability in the United States among people ages 15-44, according to the World Health Organization. Over 80 percent of the world will experience an episode of mental illness at least once in their lifetime, and a staggering 1 in 5 people will be personally affected by a mental health condition. These statistics alone show that mental health awareness and easily accessible mental health resources are needed now more than ever. Mental illness is not new; however, as the number of people with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, etc. continues to rise, so do suicide rates and the discussion surrounding how to resolve this problem.

Demi Lovato, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Mariah Carey, and Kristen Bell are a few of the many stars who have mental illnesses and have spoken candidly about their experiences. The openness of certain public figures and the suicides of others have created even more talk throughout America, raising awareness of mental diseases. Why is this so relevant now? 450 million people worldwide are impacted by mental illness and America's youngest are facing a mental health crisis. Each time I speak about this crisis, another person comes forward to tell me about their own experience with mental illness or how a loved one struggles, and each one causes more conviction in my campaign for public awareness.

My grandmother was recently diagnosed with bipolar disorder after experiencing delusions, panic attacks, depression, and manic behavior. She had led a full, successful, independent life until her breakdown, which made it especially hard to see my Grammy change. Attending her subsequent counseling sessions at Prairie View was intriguing, and showed me what a difference mental health professionals can make in a person's life when they have access to that care. Once Grammy moved into an assisted living center and received both the physical and psychiatric care she needed, she started healing. Grammy is now improving daily and the light has come back into her eyes, thanks to counseling, medication, and familial support. She does not talk about wanting to die anymore and has hope for her future. This experience has provided me an inside look at how a mental illness can greatly affect an entire family.

My work has included reaching out to and/or partnering with the National Council for Behavioral Health, the Lee Thompson Young Foundation, Sumner County and Prairie View Mental Health Centers, and Via Christi's Behavioral Health Center. I have also presented to multiple elementary school classes on what a mental illness is and where to find help; I post a weekly "Monday Mind Matters" on my Facebook page discussing self-care and sharing encouraging blogs; and I participated in Mental Health America's #4mind4body series during Mental Health Awareness month. "The Mind Matters" also aligns with Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, since physical and mental health are so intimately interwoven. A wholly healthy person includes both a healthy mind and body.

As stated previously, the age range between 15-44 is very much affected by mental illness. These are the years of acquiring higher education, starting families, and establishing careers. It is often a time of quick, intense life changes. When afflictions such as depression or other mental illnesses are present, daily life tasks and changes become so much more grueling. I remember how feelings of guilt and shame accompanied my friend's depression because she believed she had failed at healing and being happy on her own. With my appointed title, I now have the chance to be a powerful voice for my friend, my Grammy, a family friend who attempted suicide last year, and thousands of others who battle daily with their mental health and wellness. "The Mind Matters" is relevant, relatable, and pushes for change to be made in a world that desperately needs joy and hope restored. As Miss America, I would continue the conversation on how to maintain mental health and find resources to get help. I would also continue advocating for those who struggle every day, specifically with depression, and call for action to be taken by parents, legislatures, and schools to resolve this national crisis, erasing the label of "crazy" that is put upon so many people with mental disorders.

 7/19/2018

Signature/Date