

# MESA REPUBLIC

**OPINIONS EDITOR**

Michael Tulumello, 602-444-7772

**SEND A LETTER:** e-mail your thoughts to [se.letters@arizonarepublic.com](mailto:se.letters@arizonarepublic.com).

Include your name and city of residence with your response.

## Exploding some of the common myths about mental illness

**M**isconceptions about mental illness are pervasive, and the lack of understanding can have serious consequences for millions of people.



**My Turn**

DAVID COVINGTON

In fact, one in four Americans suffers from a diagnosable mental illness in a given year.

They are our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, children and friends.

They are us. Yet, evidence indicates that only one-third of those in need of treatment seek care, mostly because of stigma.

Four of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide are mental disorders. And, among developed nations, including the United States, major depression is the leading cause of disability. The

direct cost of mental-health services — which includes spending for treatment and rehabilitation — is about \$69 billion in the United States, according to the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression

So what are some of the myths about mental illness that create stigma? NAR-SAD surveyed mental-health professionals nationwide to determine the most common myths, and here are some they identified:

**Myth:** Psychiatric disorders are not true medical illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes. People who have a mental illness are just “crazy.”

**Fact:** Brain disorders, similar to heart disease and diabetes, are legitimate medical illnesses.

Research shows there are genetic and biological causes for psychiatric disorders, and they can be treated effectively.

**Myth:** People with a severe mental

illness, such as schizophrenia, are dangerous and violent.

**Fact:** Setting aside Hollywood portrayals, the statistics show that the incidence of violence in people who have a brain disorder is indistinguishable from the general population.

Those suffering from a psychosis such as schizophrenia are more often frightened, confused and despairing rather than violent.

**Myth:** Depression results from a personality weakness or character flaw, and people who are depressed could just snap out of it if they tried hard enough.

**Fact:** Depression has nothing to do with being lazy or weak. It results from changes in brain chemistry or brain function, and medication and/or psychotherapy often help people recover.

**Myth:** Schizophrenia means split personality, and there is no way to control it.

**Fact:** Schizophrenia is often confused with multiple-personality disorder. Actually, schizophrenia is a brain disorder that includes symptoms ranging from social withdrawal to hallucinations.

Many of the estimated 2.5 million Americans with schizophrenia lead fulfilling, productive lives with jobs, friends and family.

**Myth:** If you have a mental illness, you can will it away. Being treated for a psychiatric disorder means an individual has in some way “failed” or is weak.

**Fact:** A serious mental illness cannot be willed away. Ignoring the problem does not make it go away, either. It takes courage to seek professional help, and treatment works.

*David Covington is the vice president of clinical programs and outcomes for Magellan of Arizona.*

**SATURDAY SOUND OFF**

## Do you agree with the Boy Scouts allowing gay Scouts but not leaders?

**A**s a former Scout leader of 12 years and the father of two Eagle Scouts, I wholeheartedly agree with the decision. I believe



that it is in keeping with the philosophy, goals and guidelines of the BSA. As for the matter of adult leaders, I believe that the BSA ought to completely revamp its policy of

accepting adults. Gay or straight, male or female, the matter in which adults are chosen to supervise children ought to require stringent background checks and a thorough vetting of qualifications. Whether they are recommended by churches, schools, etc., the policy of accepting adults into the program carte blanche should cease.

— **Bill Hall,**  
Mesa retiree

**T**he Boy Scouts of America made an organizational compromise that was probably the only thing they could do to



prevent a great loss of funding, support and membership. Many non-profits have stopped supporting the BSA because of their discriminatory policy against gay Scouts. But many of

the troop-sponsoring organizations and leaders hail from conservative Christian churches, which continue to have moral objections about gay participants in Scouting. So, the BSA embraced gay Scouts but continues to block gay and lesbian adult leaders. It's a sad commentary on the Religious Right, but a logical compromise for the BSA.

— **Dave Wells,**  
Eagle Scout, Tempe

**J**ust like the Boy Scouts of America, I'm going to equivocate by saying yes and no. A big yes on allowing gays to join the Scouts, a



large no on barring gay Scoutmasters. Like many in America, the governing board of the BSA seems to have trouble differentiating between gay men and pedophiles. They

aren't synonymous, and until gay men can lead troops, this decision will stay half-baked in a solar oven and remain a knotty problem.

— **Rob Walker,**  
longtime Southeast Valley resident

“On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country ... and to help other people.” The Boy Scout motto says



it all of what this successful organization is about. I'm puzzled when a group will forcefully sue to change a nearly 100-year-old organization instead of starting their own. It is very

unfortunate this honorable organization was sued by anyone when there's nothing wrong with their values and saying no to another group's agenda. Leave the Boy Scouts of America alone.

— **Nora Ellen,**  
Realtor, Chandler City Council member

**T**he Scouts first floated an unambiguous ban on bigotry. The half-measure they settled on may have been necessary



to hang on to “sponsorships.” In effect, they chose convenience over coherence. As it stands, their gay adult leaders will have to remain closeted.

For some, reform is a dirty word. But to get from A to C, it seems reasonable to me to go through B.

In the end, I trust the Boy Scouts will embrace full acceptance.

— **Haryaksha Gregor Knauer,**  
drone-free Arizona