

Editorial

Mental illness still bears scarlet letter

Crazy, lunatic, psycho, nuts, wacko, looney. All of these words are used to describe someone who has a mental illness. This week was declared National Mental Illness Awareness week by Congress, and perhaps when it's over fewer people will use these words to describe the more than 20 million Americans who are afflicted with a mental disorder.

The words listed above reflect the stigma attached to being afflicted with a mental illness. Besides being derogatory, they convey a sense of responsibility. The words suggest that the afflicted people act differently on purpose; as if they could change if they really wanted.

Words to describe people who are sick with other disorders rightfully fail to acknowledge any responsibility on the part of the affected person. The person is euphemistically "under the weather." They "come down" with the mumps; and "pick up" or try to "shake" a cold. The person is "ill" or "ailing." These words connote that the person does not want to be sick.

In addition, when someone is sick with something other than a mental illness, it is usually worded in a possessive form to reflect that the person is separate from the disease; for example: he has cancer, she has a cold, he has hepatitis. When a person has a mental illness, however, the person is often equated with the disease, as if the disease is an inseparable part of the person; for instance: she is insane, he is mentally ill. Rarely would we hear: she is cancerous.

Also, few people have qualms about telling neighbors or friends that a family member is sick or in the hospital. But if a relative is affected by a mental illness, particularly if the person is institutionalized, their condition is shrouded in secrecy. Family members may say that the person is on vacation or has moved. It is sad that it is difficult to imagine someone simply reporting that the person has a mental illness and is being treated for the disorder.

Because of the distinctions between those who are afflicted with mental illness and those afflicted with other disorders, those with a mental illness are the subjects of discrimination. Even a fully recovered individual or an individual who can treat their illness with medication may find that, similar to ex-convicts, they have been permanently branded with a scarlet letter. They are discriminated against on the job market; and they are discriminated against socially.

Scientists and physicians aren't sure what causes mental illness, but many believe that the condition is a physical disfunction of the brain. Few would attribute mental illness to a deep-rooted character flaw or personality defect.

Therefore, once it strikes, mental illness may be just as physically oriented as any other disorder. But whether it is entirely physical or not, a victim of a mental disorder may be just as helpless against it as someone afflicted with another disease. Because of this, people who have a mental illness should be treated like anyone else who is sick.

Debbie McDaniel of the local affiliate of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill says that support from family and friends is "absolutely critical." She suggests that family members educate themselves about the disease so that they can know what to expect. Too often, those suffering from a mental disorder are shunned by those close to them.

But things are changing. The AMI has 500 affiliates throughout the country and helps and educates more than 30,000 families who are affected by mental illness. In addition, in June of this year, the Supreme Court upheld a Massachusetts law that requires all state group insurance plans to include mental health benefits.

We support efforts to educate people about mental illness, and efforts to alleviate discrimination against those who have been afflicted with a brain disease. With these efforts, we hope that the stigma attached to having a mental illness erodes away.



Letters

No justification

Apologists for Israel are really having to strain their brains to justify the Tunisian bombing. Israeli Defense Forces killed 60 people at the Palestine Liberation Organization headquarters, in response to a gangland style execution of three Israeli citizens. Unless one believes that Jews are 20 times more valuable than Arabs, one can hardly call what happened just retribution.

Israel justifies this new horror by referring to the PLO as a terrorist organization. Ironically, the PLO was indirectly involved through the Jordanians in negotiations over the West Bank issue. A successful resolution of the West Bank issue would do more to reduce support for violent attacks against Israel than all the IDF military assaults on Palestinian camps put together in the last 20 years.

It appears that Israel prefers state-supported terrorism over negotiations. One can now ask the question as to whether Israel has any interest in settling disputes in ways other than violence or intimidation. The bombing of Tunis really makes this an open question.

Andrew Beckwith
Graduate student, Physics

Animal torture

Remember how you had to write those, "what I did last

summer papers?" I washed windows for the U of O.

One of the buildings was in the Science Complex. In order to find out which rooms had outside windows, we had to open the doors of each room to check.

There was one that we knew had no outside window. Its edges were covered with black plastic tarp so that no light could enter. From within came a clicking, rhythmic whir. No other sound could be heard.

It was the room they used for their cat-eye torture. I thought about the animals inside and had to leave the area. Another time, upon opening a door, we were greeted by the pleas of at least 30 cats. There were several to a cage, and one could see in their eyes, a plea to be freed.

One small kitten had an eye sewn shut. I said, "hi," and left wishing I didn't need the job. In another room, I washed blood from a window. I doubt it was human blood.

I know that these people are not "animal people," but I would like to ask them the question, "Do we really need your clicking eye machine?"

I know I will never forget its sound, and I am sure the cats won't either. Students should go check it out for themselves.

Dan Suire
Senior, Gerontology

Verification

As a concerned student, I feel that the current drop/add deadlines need to be reevaluated. In looking at the fall class schedule, I noticed that the last day to drop a class without receiving a "W" on one's transcript is Oct. 11.

I can live with this new deadline, but what doesn't make sense to me is the purpose of a registration verification. If no one can drop a class without receiving a "W" after Oct. 11 then what is the purpose of registration verification?

For instance, if someone has unknowingly registered for the wrong class at registration then they are screwed. They have 3 grim options: receive a "W," not worry about it and receive an "F," or face the glorious red tape of academic petitions, and try to drop it without receiving a "W."

It seems to me that the whole purpose for registration verification is to be able to double check that you're registered for the classes you thought you were and if not, to correct the situation. Now, these corrections become a hassle, and registration verification is useless.

It would be nice if students could be sure of the classes they are registered for before it is too late to change their schedule without a smudge on their transcript.

Doug Ramsthal
Eugene

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