

Talking Points for Therese Borchard
author of *Beyond Blue:*
Surviving Depression and Anxiety and Making the Most of Bad Genes

FIGHTING THE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS

The first step is to educate. Depression, mood disorders and other forms of mental illness are caused by bad brain chemistry and disruption in the structure and function of neural circuits and should be counted as legitimate diseases.

For those who haven't been able to benefit from all the research into mental illness as I have, I dedicate my life to making mental illness less scary for those who live it and to educating as many people as I can about mood disorders so that we can permanently remove the unfair stigma associated with depression and bipolar disorder.

INSURANCE COMPANY POLICIES ON MENTAL ILLNESS

How can we ask people to ditch the stigma of mental illness if insurance companies are telling us otherwise? One conversation with a health-care insurance representative will have you believing that mental illnesses are much like imaginary friends—*not real*. As one doctor's receptionist told me when I asked if they took insurance: "It depends on the diagnosis. If it's a physical condition, most insurances will cover it. If it's mental, they won't."

POST-PARTUM DEPRESSION

Nothing disrupts a women's biochemistry like conceiving, carrying, and giving birth to a baby. For me, the walk from the maternity ward to the psych ward was a short one. What was most difficult for me those first years of motherhood was the brutal combination of sleep deprivation and isolation.

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

I consider myself to be very holistic—I engage body, mind, and soul in my recovery from depression and addiction, incorporating diet, exercise, prayer, mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral strategies, vitamins and so forth. But I know from experience that many of these centers espouse Tom Cruise-ish philosophies regarding medication, especially antidepressants. Many of these homeopathic guys believe that mental health is but one yoga class, acupuncture session or hour of Tibetan mediation away. These attitudes not only perpetrate the stigma of mental illness, they worsen the depression of millions of people around the globe.

HUMOR

I'm keeping the jokes and the acerbic tone because Abraham Lincoln and Art Buchwald said wit was essential to sanity, that comedy can keep a person out of the psych ward. And this is definitely true: if you're laughing, you're not crying, even though they look similar. And that works for me.

FAITH

Growing up Catholic, for me, was both a blessing and a curse. My faith became a refuge for me, where my disordered thinking could latch onto practices and traditions that made me feel normal and secure. I've always maintained that Catholicism is the most suitable religion for the mentally ill. But my religiosity was also a curse in that it disguised a serious mood disorder as piety.

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