

Routt County Mental Health Improving, Study Credits Newspaper Commenters for Uplift

Written by Betty Youfeelnow
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According to the Steamboat Center for Mental Health (SCMH), its annual survey indicated that the overall mental health of Routt County residents has improved by 37 percent since last year. Those analyzing the study believe the dramatic uptick is the result of respondents feeling better about themselves after reading the online comments at the Pirate & Yesterday Web site.



"We found that a large percentage of Routt county residents who felt they were depressed or possibly a little 'crazy,' although we prefer not to use that word, realized they weren't mentally unhinged at all after reading the truly crazy nutjobs who leave hundreds of posts on the newspaper Web site," said Sigmund Fraud, chief scientist for SCM. "It's not a cure-all for the truly insane, but it appears to create a lot of relief for those who may have otherwise classified themselves as mildly depressed or just a little down about themselves."

Scientists at SCM tested their hypothesis by sampling several members of the community who had still considered themselves mentally unwell in vague ways. This sample set then was

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exposed to dozens of Web postings on The Pirate & Yesterday comments section and asked to re-evaluate themselves. Almost 95 percent of those subsampled reported that they no longer felt they were crazy at all when confronted with the truly insane blatherings of conspiracy theories, personal and cruel attacks waged against strangers, and general "tin-foil-hat whackiness" found in abundance.

"I quickly realized that my mental problems were inconsequential and downright petty compared to many others out there online," stated Pat Erntest (not her real name). "In fact, those posting were so mentally unhinged that I actually felt really great about myself and threw away the Prozac my doctor had subscribed to me. I've never felt so good about myself in my entire life. Thank you, crazy news-article posters!"

Fraud did note that in a small sample, exposure to the online rantings increased chemical levels of crazatonin, which have been found to increase anger and "the world is ending" fantasies. These patients were immediately placed on 24-hour "Web surveillance" and barred from using any computers connected to the Internet.

"There is definitely a downside to our findings," admitted Fraud. "In rare cases, some patients became worse and exhibited tendencies to engage in the online forum, at which point we terminated any further testing.

"We also were able to convince a few of the regular commenters to come in for testing, and their crazatonin levels were through the roof, so there's room for more study there," added Fraud. "But overall, we at SCMh believe the newspaper Web commenters are a great resource for controlling and reversing mild levels of perceived mental instability."