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GUEST BLOGS

“The ADHD Symptom Women Might Be Overlooking”

I didn't have a Borderline Personality Disorder, after all.

BY SARAH MARIE GRAYE

The name “Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder” misses one of the symptoms that is hardest to live with — [emotional hypersensitivity](#).

When you think about ADHD hypersensitivity, you might think being sensitive to loud noises and scratchy labels in clothes. In many cases, the sensitivity also applies to our emotions. We cannot bear the pain of criticism; we are unable to brush off personal slights the way other people do.

The *emotional* side of [ADHD](#) hypersensitivity is often not present in children, especially in boys, which means it is rarely discussed in detail on the symptoms pages of ADHD websites. It doesn't show up in online searches.

So it's not surprising that some adults with undiagnosed ADHD (like me) searching the Internet for answers about feeling emotionally overwhelmed think we have [Borderline Personality Disorder](#) (BPD).

The emotional symptoms of BPD are the cornerstone of the disorder. In fact, the new name for the condition is Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder! So if you have undiagnosed ADHD and find that you suffer from persistent sadness, a mood disorder, and anxiety linked to your emotional hypersensitivity, a BPD diagnosis makes sense.

[Free Resource: [15 Ways to Disarm \(and Understand\) Explosive ADHD Emotions](#)]

Those with BPD have bouts of extreme sadness, mood disorders, and anxiety as well as unstable family and social relationships. They find it difficult to cope with changes in plans. They quit jobs. They overeat. So I found myself nodding along to many of the symptoms on the list. But one stuck out that I absolutely knew wasn't me: the “push/pull” symptom — a chronic pattern of sabotaging and re-establishing closeness in a relationship without appropriate cause or reason.

Many of those with BPD have suffered neglect or a significant rejection, or they have struggled with separation issues in childhood. This results in wildly fluctuating feelings in which a sufferer goes from idolizing to hating someone at the drop of a hat.

The reason for this is that sufferers have an unstable self-image, so if someone gets too close to them, they feel engulfed and in danger of losing themselves. But the minute the same person steps slightly out of reach, they are overwhelmed with fear of abandonment.

It is this pushing-and-pulling that earns BPD sufferers the unfair label of being “manipulative,” when they are, in fact, trying to balance their emotions.

[Download: [3 Common Diagnosis Mistakes](#)]

Instead of having these fluctuating feelings, when I'm emotionally overwhelmed, I withdraw into myself, the shutters come down. How could I have BPD and not display one of its key symptoms? I needed to ask an expert.

I saw a psychiatrist and he dismissed my self-diagnosis. Without the fluctuating emotions and the push/pull behavior, he confirmed that I didn't have BPD. I wasn't completely surprised, but I also felt that a diagnosis of mood disorders and anxiety that the psychiatrist handed out wasn't correct.

I struggled on, trying to cope and taking SSRI medications until I had a breakdown and ended up in a hospital. Another psychiatrist I saw suggested that I might have ADHD.

I thought she was mad. I had suicidal thoughts and had suffered an emotional collapse, so who cared if I found it difficult to sit still or concentrate? But then she explained how emotional hypersensitivity manifests itself in female adult sufferers of ADHD, and everything fell into place.

In ADHD, emotional hypersensitivity comes with an "off switch." Not being able to abide boring conversations, cope with personal slights, or tolerate arguments were examples of hypersensitivity that were just as valid as having to cut the label out of a new jumper.

I had an off switch. The shutters coming down had a name!

Since my ADHD diagnosis, I've started taking the ADHD medication, which reduces the noise in my head, making it easier for me to think. I feel calmer, and I am better able to cope with overwhelming emotional responses to other people's behaviors.

My hope is that my story will help other adults with undiagnosed ADHD get a better understanding of debilitating emotional symptoms. I hope that reading my story will persuade them to see a psychiatrist and perhaps get the diagnosis that alluded me for so long.

[When It's More Than ADHD]

Updated on October 20, 2020

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