

Life with a BPD Mate

***One man's response to reading questions on page 12 of Stop Walking on Eggshells by Paul T. Mason & Randi Kreger**

When I read the following questions, I just about cried with pain (from the anxiety and fear I experienced seeing how the Gordian knot of symptoms is so inter-twined) and with joy (from hearing from someone who finally knew the hell I was going through).

- **Do you find yourself concealing what you think or feel because you are afraid of the other person's reaction or because it doesn't seem worth the horrible fight or hurt feelings that will follow?**

– Absolutely, I hate fighting. I avoid dealing with issues that might cause a fight, because we can't seem to solve problems like normal people.

- **Do you feel anything you say or do will be twisted and used against you?**

– Right on. Little innocuous comments will be deposited in her mind to be turned into hurt feelings and guilt trips later.

- **Are you blamed or criticized for everything wrong in the relationship – even when it makes no logical sense?**

– Certainly. Sometimes the criticism comes out from nowhere in endless spewing of the blame game.

- **4) Are you the focus of intense, violent, and irrational rages, alternating with periods when the other person acts perfectly normal and loving? Does no one believe you when you explain what is going on?**

– Yes. Ginger's rage can be the most incessant and venomous I've ever experienced. If the phone rings, she can revert in a flash to be the most pleasant and pious person. Only now are a few of her family members starting to see this other side, which she tries to hide from others.

- **Do you feel manipulated, controlled, or even lied to sometimes? Do you feel like a victim of emotional blackmail?**

– Unquestionably. Manipulation and emotional blackmail are a way of life. Suicide is the ultimate form of blackmail.

- **Do you feel like the person you care about sees you as either all good or all bad, with nothing in between? Is there sometimes no rational reason for the switch?**

–One moment I am loved and cherished, then, in a flash, I'm "the worst husband who has ever lived on the face of the earth!"

- **Are you afraid to ask for things in the relationship because you are told that you are too demanding (or selfish or self-centered) or that there is something wrong with you? Are you told your needs are not important?**

– Yes, I feel like I have given everything I have to my wife, and it is never enough; I'm always inadequate; my needs are denied and I can't seem to get Ginger to understand the mutuality required to make a relationship work.

- **Is the person always denigrating or denying your point of view? Do you feel that their expectations of you are constantly changing, so you can never do anything right?**

– My view and experience don't count. When I have to make a tough decision (for example a legal issue), her opinion is always more important than someone with specialized expertise. The rules of the game always switch to make it impossible to plan or to create a win-win or to have the stability in a relationship which engenders trust.

- **Are you accused of doing things you never did or saying things you never said? Do you feel misunderstood a great deal of the time; when you try to explain, do you find that the other person doesn't believe you?**

– Definitely. There are times when I wonder if we both were present when something was said. I sometimes wonder who I'm married to, because she changes fundamentally from one moment to the next.

- **Are you constantly being put down? When you try to leave the relationship does the other person try to prevent you from leaving in a variety of ways (anything from declarations of love and promises to change or explicit threats)?**

– Sadly yes. I have never been so criticized and accused in my whole life. In our short time together, I've received ten lifetimes of criticisms and threats. It's like being brainwashed to have my sense of identity, ethics, and vision stripped from my psyche.

- **Do you have a hard time planning anything (social engagements, etc.) because of the other person's moodiness, impulsiveness, or unpredictability? Do you make excuses for their behavior or try to convince yourself that everything is okay? –**

– Yes. Planning is impossible, her unpredictability is like living with Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde, changing from one moment to the next.

- **Right now, are you thinking, "I had no idea that anyone else was going through this?"**

– Wow! Do you mean this aberrant behavior is actually a pattern with real cause and effect? Can we diagnose it and understand it? If so, maybe a miracle is possible! Obviously this relationship has taken a toll on both of us. It is stressful, anxiety ridden, draining, and filled with extremely high doses of ambiguity and uncertainty. While I have adapted and have deep faith, Ginger has deep fear. We both have had a serious erosion of trust. We need help, and I am putting my faith in you as her therapist to guide her recovery. You can count on me to do whatever I must do to help in her recovery.

Clinical Issues that Drive Tripolarity

1. Abandonment – Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment

(Ginger often expresses this fear. Every time I get ready to leave for a business trip, her fears of abandonment become obsessive and oftentimes violent. She tells me of how she was abandoned as a child. She runs away or files for divorce so she can abandon me before I abandon her. She drives me away to prove that I want to abandon her. She knows I must earn a living, but she'd rather I be with her all the time than serve my clients so I can pay the bills.)

2. Splitting – A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation

(In her view, one moment I'm a lovely intelligent, caring person, the next moment I'm an evil, stupid, self-centered slob. This point of view is most evident in her last suicide note two weeks ago, which I've attached if you hadn't seen it.)

3. Identity Disturbance – Markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of oneself.

(She constantly says I must make her #1 in my life; she is jealous of all my friends; she is angry when I receive accolades from my clients; she has tried to make me into a homosexual, a bi-sexual, a bigamist, a criminal, or a fellow sufferer of BiPolar Disorder, etc. to demean me to make her feel more superior or equal. She is one of the best real estate saleswomen, but hasn't sold a house – except one's I owned – in three years, and can't seem to hold a job in the real estate field. She has lots of reasons and excuses for this, but her identity is tenuous without her career. She's tried attaching herself to her church with some limited success. She won't let me attend the church's peace program for fear that I might overshadow her.)

4. Impulsiveness -- Impulsivity in areas that are self-damaging

(Ginger is impulsive and obsessive-compulsive, but not in the self damaging areas noted in DSM IV. However, if irrational impulsiveness, and obsessive-compulsive-possessive should be considered in Ginger's case. She will and has run away in a moment of anger/fear/vengeance, getting in her car to drive across country without packing, or without money. She is obsessive-compulsive about cleaning the kitchen, insisting that only clean dishes be put in the dishwasher, because the dishwasher is not for washing dishes but for sanitizing dishes; she will clean house until 2-3 am because the cleaning crew is coming in the morning, then accuse me of being lazy when I want to go to bed at 11:30 pm. Any priorities I have for my business are always subordinated to her obsessive-compulsive needs. These become anxiety filled times for her, thereby creating her own stress, which has other physical, social, and psychological impacts which damage her ability to live in the moment. She demands that we plan our lives, which I'd like to do, but then in a moment of anger cancels all the plans, making planning an exercise in total futility. She can be obsessive-compulsive in her possessiveness. If I spend too much time at a party talking to someone else, she will accuse me of not including her, throw a temper tantrum, and then, if the person was a woman, accuse me of wanting to have an affair with her. One time at a dinner theatre she accused me of staring at some blonde. I didn't even notice this supposed blonde, or if I did she wasn't attractive enough to hold my attention, but nevertheless the accusation degenerated into a full blown ordeal, with the implication that I did not care enough about my wife.)

5. Suicidality -- Recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, or threats, or self mutilating behavior. *(This has become almost habitual. There have been about nine of these actual suicidal or mutilating incidents in the last 2 ½ years since we've been married; plus numerous threats of suicide or mentions of its possibility. For Ginger, suicide is both an escape from the real world, and a form of punishment/guilt trip for those who caused her pain.)*

6. Mood Instability – Affective Instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g. intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety, usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days.)

[Dysphoria is a mixture of depression, anxiety, rage, and despair.] (Manic dysphoria is almost a way of life now. She is totally unpredictable, because these moods can rage in a flash, with the most innocuous triggers. I don't know at the beginning of the day what might happen just an hour from now. I can't plan anything with her because her mood will cause us to tear up any plans and start over. Her dysphoria is very maladaptive in that she never takes responsibility for her emotions – someone else is always the cause, resulting in her feeling like a victim: then the persecutor, victim, rescuer game gets played. Often I become the persecutor, and she finds a family or church member or a therapist or, worse, a police officer, to play rescuer. Of course, this just perpetuates the maladaptive dysphoric cycle, producing more and more evidence that the people in her world are screwed up, which triggers more anger, criticism, emotional intensity, disproportionality, and, worst of all, paranoia.)

7. Emptiness – Chronic feelings of emptiness

(Ginger frequently complains of being lonely, disconnected, and having failed to bond with me. Attempts to be affectionate, caring, and compassionate go totally unnoticed. Apologies are just met with her going into her history bag to find some other transgression that validates why I am inadequate. If I bring her flowers to cheer her up, half the time the flowers are smashed on the floor. She says we never have any fun; when I recount the good times, she either can't remember them or finds some minor, isolated incident that proves it wasn't a perfect occasion. When I have a good time at a social occasion meeting someone new, Ginger becomes angry because I didn't spend that time with her. Talking with another female for more than a few minutes on anything deeper than a superficial subject will incur endless spewing of wrath.)

8. Anger – Inappropriate, intense anger, or difficulty controlling anger (e.g. frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights).

(In a flash she can become uncontrollably angry, violent, out of her mind, and maniacal. I originally thought this was part of BiPolar, but now I understand it as BPD. She has raged for hours; become violent, and destructive. She's smashed plates, broken doors, overturned tables, thrown my computer and printer in the swimming pool, torn up all our wedding pictures, defaced walls, and many other things. When I've tried to restrain her, she's called the police and told them I assaulted her. She's filed charges against me and had restraining orders against me when I tried to restrain her from self inflicting wounds, destruction of our home, or physical attacks against me. She has slugged me hundreds of times, bitten me, and used the foulest language imaginable against me. Then she's said I did it to her. She had me thrown in jail when I did nothing; explaining later that I had done her harm before, therefore I deserved to be in jail. When she goes to bed in a rage, she'll wake up in the morning just as mad as when she retired. Forgiveness is totally out of the question,

as the anger fuels the fires of endless blame, negativity, and accusations.)

9. Paranoia –Transient, stress related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms. *(Paranoia is a common psychosis that often accompanies the Bi-Polar II Disorder. The triggering of full scale paranoia can be like napalm on the fires of rage, creating a furious conflagration that can burn for hours and even days. Ginger, when engulfed in paranoia, believes I am having affairs with other women, that I'm remotely spying on her by intruding on her through the internet, that I'm going through her personal effects, etc. It goes beyond me; she thinks her daughter has a key to her house, calling her mom to determine if she's left the house so her daughter can prowl; she thinks her friend and pet-sitter has stolen her crucifix necklace, etc.).*

While not included in DSM –IV Criteria, the “Eggshells” book suggests several other symptomatic patterns are typical to BPD:

10. Responsibility Avoidance – Placing responsibility and blame on others *(Ginger seldom accepts responsibility for any problem, thus becoming a perpetual victim. All her problems are caused by other people who are insensitive to her needs, which just catalyzes an onslaught of blame, anxiety, paranoia, and splitting. For example, when she got out of the hospital from her latest suicide attempt, she blamed me and her two daughters for putting her there and staunchly displayed her wish that we all learned something from the incident so we would never make her attempt suicide again.)*

11. Emotional Intensity & Irrationality – Extreme emotionality, hurt feelings, and irrationality making illogical conclusions by making facts fit emotions, and dramatic displays. *(Ginger is always stating how someone “hurt my feelings.” It is like she is a super-tuned “feelings machine.” After reading the book, I realized that she experiences emotions at about triple the intensity of normal people, and then she places the weight of fact upon the emotion. In other words, emotions are reality. This causes her to blow little things totally out of proportion, thus overly dramatizing things most of us would just brush off. For example, if I put dirty dishes in the dishwasher, she will explode at me, accusing me of not caring about her because I didn't clean the dishes before putting them in the dishwasher. She might blow into a total rage in an instant, smashing the dishes on the floor, and then tell me to clean up the mess and buy her new dishes. The over-emphasis on emotions causes her to become almost superstitious, because she will distort facts to fit her emotions, particularly her fears. If she is feeling unloved and her computer acts up, she will accuse me of sabotaging the computer, even after I tell her I never went near her computer. If the flowers are dying in the garden, she will accuse me of turning off the water, even if I show her it was slugs or grubs that were eating the plants. If I wash my car, but not hers because I ran out of time, she will accuse me of not caring about her. If I don't drop every business priority to meet a minor need of hers, I've hurt her feelings because I don't care about her, etc. After trying to commit suicide, she demanded apologies from her children and me. Her daughter wanted her to take responsibility for her own actions. Ginger dug in her heels, refusing to go to an important family wedding the next weekend unless her daughter apologized. Behind the scenes I convinced her daughter to apologize and read the Eggshells book. Ginger went to the wedding, but had she not gone, everyone would have had hell to pay because she was deprived of being included in the wedding, thus triggering her abandonment fears. These all become no-win situations that she can complain about for hours with no resolution.)*

12. Criticality – Beyond reasonable propensity for blaming, accusations, deprecations, and negativity toward others, particularly those upon whom one is closest.

(Hypercriticality, when combined with Anger, Responsibility Avoidance, Emotional Intensity, and Irrationality, produce a volatile and violent behavioral cocktail destined for nothing less than explosive results. There are times when I can do nothing right, when I she will pick on everything and anything. If she can't find something wrong, she will drag up something from the past. Any wonderful event can be remembered from minor thing that went wrong. A day after a wonderful time, she will complain that we never have any good times. I'll remind her of yesterday, and she will draw a blank, unable to recall the situation.)

13. Neediness – Manipulating and Controlling Behavior, Self-Focus. *(When Ginger goes into the needy zone, everything is about her. She manipulates every discussion with accusations and guilt trips. If I ever have a need or request, she dominates the conversation, turning the tables into what she needs, how her needs are more important than mine, how I've never met her needs, how her priorities are more important than mine. When we need money and I need to earn it, she pulls me away and tells me I am not meeting her needs, I don't take her to enough places, I spend too much time on business, etc.)*

*all names have been changed to protect the confidentiality and safety of the author.