

UNDERSTANDING TRI-POLAR DISORDER

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO LIVE WITH A BI-POLAR/BPD SPOUSE – THE TESTIMONY OF A NON-BPD MATE

Being in a Tri-Polar's world is like being in Vietnam. You never know if the person with whom you live and sleep is your ally or your enemy. In a flash, things can go from normal -- happy, and peaceful -- to explosive -- bullets, napalm, and bitter battle. For the non-BPD mate who survives this massacre, there is no glory, no hero's welcome, no sympathy, no thanks from either the BPD sufferer or the family (In fact, in the aftermath, there is usually blame, anger, and more grief.)

If I told anyone what its like, I'd be blamed for being the cause of it. Because the Tri-Polar sufferer experiences a highly distorted view reality when they have an episode, that's what's imprinted as a memory in their brain. (They do not remember the world as it really was, for the aphorism: "Perception is Reality" is totally true for the Tri-Polar. Therefore, there is no forgiveness, no apologies, and no sadness in the wake of a blow-out; just more anger, more blame, and more negativity, thus setting the foundation for the next incident.

Hospitalization only makes things worse, because it confirms in the Tri-Polar sufferer's mind that no one cares, everyone is

against them, and more paranoia triggers more dysphoria, more anger, more hurt, and more emptiness.

Living with a Tri-Polar means you can be instantaneously engulfed and consumed into an obsessively bizarre Lilliputian world, one of explosive self-generated storms that will be whipped up into a frenzied and bloodied battleground. The simplest mistake, and all the sudden, I'm trapped in her little world where whispers become raging typhoons, dampness becomes a torrential flood, and minor irritants become nuclear holocaust.

One probably wonders what causes the rages, the anger, the blame, and all the swirling sea of torment. The answer is not simple, but it is clear there are triggers everywhere, complex, and interrelated. If this was chemistry, the Borderline "molecule" would be compounds composed of many elements, each that can react violently to some stimulus.

Triggers can be:

- perceived abandonment
- mistrust
- dysphoria
- fear or loss
- bruised self-image
- perceived lack of support
- perceived lack of love
- anxiety
- loneliness
- hurt feelings
- ambiguity or uncertainty
- sense of lack of control
- inattention by others
- lack of sleep
- stress

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Because there are a myriad of triggers, life is like a minefield -- the Borderline's partner is constantly brushing against one of many unseen detonators. I can't have needs of my own for fear that those needs might trigger one of her detonators. I feel like I'm living on one of those movies where the villain has booby-trapped a bus or a plane and one little deviation from course or speed will blow the vehicle and all its passengers sky high. Or a real-life game of Dungeons and Dragons, where there's a devil or monster behind every pillar and post.

Every move of mine must be measured and calculated in advance. Life is like a chess game where you have to think several moves in advance for fear the other player will wipe you off the board. This makes living spontaneously very difficult. Joy, passion, or frivolity, while wondrous to most, becomes a high-risk game for the Borderline's mate.

What the outside world finds difficult to understand is that the Borderline's exaggerated emotions launch a self-propelled anger. In response to her rage, I, as her mate, can either be silent, caring, or rational -- in each case totally self-controlled and non-combative -- and her wrath will nevertheless regenerate itself like an alien creature rising from the dead in a horror movie. If seen by a television camera, it would look like a one-sided fight -- the thunderous explosion of "one hand clapping" -- something most people have never experienced. I can state unequivocally it doesn't take two to fight. She can start a fight, continue to fight, and fuel her own self-perpetuating fight without instigation from me. It's rough living with someone who wakes up angry, it's like starting the day with one foot in the grave, with two strikes against you, with a

burning stick of dynamite in your hand, with a doomsday sentence the moment the new day is born.

This is what one Non-Borderline remarked about living with a Borderline spouse:

Many of the techniques for anger-management don't work. Walking away makes her angrier. Trying to hug her makes her angrier. Being compassionate and understanding makes her angrier. Logic doesn't work. Active-Listening sometimes works.

My wife is a devout Christian, but when she enters the Borderline Zone, it's her version of the Twilight Zone; her Christianity is useless, worthless, and without impact. I can pick up the Bible and read Psalm 23 (or any other verse): "The Lord is my Shepard, I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in green pastures...." all to no avail -- for even the soothing passages of the Psalms make her angrier.

I just learned of a workshop for partners of Borderlines. The headline read:

- Are you coping with a loved one whose behavior you don't understand?
- Are you frustrated, angry, or just feeling powerless?
- Do others tell you to stop "enabling," to set boundaries or limits, to think of yourself?
- Do you follow this advice yet see things getting worse instead of improving?
- Ms. Porr will teach you a better way to help!

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Reading this headline can make a grown man cry. Her friends and family don't have a clue what the problem is and what to do about it. They blame me; they tell her I'm no good, and still the problem lingers. Because BPD is mainly a behavioral disorder, it is somewhat controllable; she can hide or repress their outbursts, concealing the disorder or masking it from the mainstream of life. Only those closest experience its wrath.

So often I feel hopeless and helpless to give her succor. This helpless-hopeless feeling is most distressful because it is so disempowering. And the constant state of ambiguity and uncertainty in which I have to live – never knowing from one moment to the next if I will be with Dr. Jekyll or Mrs. Hyde, with a lover or an enemy, with life or with death – generates its own dysphoria in me.

As a result of being in a battle ground -- at either a constant state of "high alert" or "under attack in combat,"-- I have experienced an inordinate of stress, putting me on edge, ever

vigilant, and seldom trusting of the signals I receive from my world.

Now, having completed some research and reading several books, at least I "know" what is happening to my wife and my world. Knowing makes it easier to understand, to be more sensitive, and to learn some coping mechanisms. With time, and with her receiving treatment, perhaps the situation will become livable.

But I fear that some day I will be stressed, not in control, and not compassionate. And on that ignominious day she will attack me verbally with a barrage of abuse, I will not be understanding and tolerant, and will lash back with testosterone induced counter-attack of verbal abuse, causing her to escalate, and a real case of physical abuse will occur, with the police intervening. Then, try to explain this complex malady to a police officer, whose own stressed-out life is made a lot simpler by putting hand-cuffs on someone and carting them off to jail.