The Stigma of Borderline Personality Disorder

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I had to fight for years to get a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, and everyone I met along the way kept asking me *why* I wanted to be diagnosed with "such a thing." Doctors, nurses, friends and strangers alike all asked me if I was aware of the huge stigma BPD carried, of the judgments and prejudices from society and mainstream media. In my quest to be diagnosed, I learned a lot about BPD through the eyes of others, and every single word uttered was horrifying to me, but most shocking of all was the conclusion that people with BPD are "manipulative."

I spent months reading books and blogs, watching YouTube videos and talking to people in the hopes of educating myself about the disorder. I saw myself in almost every symptom, making me a "classic, quiet borderline." Some books and websites were compassionate, reassuring and validating, but the majority made me feel like I was some super villain and that I ought to be avoided or even exiled for my… personality.

When I finally got my diagnosis, after a tidal wave of emotions was witnessed firsthand by a crisis team, and after my second suicide attempt in a matter of weeks, I was fully ready to hand back the diagnosis with a not-so-polite "f**k you!"

For months on end, nurses came into my house and upon looking at my history, made their mind up about me in an instant. All of a sudden, I wasn't Samantha, a 31-year-old with a mental health issue. I was… Samantha, a 31-year-old woman who acts like a child to get what she wants. Samantha, a burden to everyone around her. Samantha, manipulative and deceitful. Samantha, who might not actually be suicidal at all but uses it because she knows it'll get her the help she thinks she needs.

I heard firsthand how my behaviors were manipulative or attention-seeking, and I stopped reading books on BPD because almost all of them told me I should be avoided. My self-esteem and self-worth plummeted to an even lower level than I thought possible, so much so that I even bought books for my partner on "how to live with a borderline." Naturally, he was disgusted by this book and threw it straight in the trash. Naturally, he saw how offensive and harmful these books were to anybody with BPD.

One night at a friend's house, I came across a website for men who were "in recovery" from their relationships with "a borderline." We all laughed and joked at how ridiculous such a site was. Then we found an article called "How to Train Your Borderline," and once again, we laughed and joked at the absurdity of such a piece. But months later, I still look back at that article and I can't help but think – *is this how the world really views us?*

I didn't want to be diagnosed with BPD for any other reason than I wanted targeted treatment. After years and years of my doctor sending me away because he didn't know how to deal with a person in crisis, I wanted to finally be understood by medical staff. Instead what I got was a "one size fits all label" that branded me as untrustworthy, aggressive and manipulative. I couldn't help but notice that since my diagnosis, nurses would no longer be sent to my home by themselves but instead in sets of two. I know I have a particularly paranoid mind, but that spoke volumes to me about how I couldn't be trusted. Since my diagnosis, any self-harm or suicidal thoughts have been brushed off as cries for help or mere symptoms of my disorder.

I spent years asking doctors what was wrong with me, why I was so emotional, why my mind instantly turned to suicide if something even slightly scary happened in my life. When I was tired of searching for answers about myself, I turned to other people who I believed could "save me." I was in a string of unstable, abusive relationships because I needed to feel loved, despite the violence or the abuse I received. I turned to alcohol and gambling. Little did I realize that everything I turned to was actually a symptom of my BPD. I fought for years to get this diagnosis so I could access correct treatment and targeted medication, and while my medication has changed to suit my disorder, the treatment I have received by medical professionals has left me feeling more broken and more abandoned than ever.

I recognize that BPD is one of the most difficult disorders to treat for a number of reasons. We tend to engage in fast and fleeting relationships, be it romantic, therapeutic, or friendship. We may experience "black or white" thinking, meaning we "spilt" on people very easily, putting them in a mental box labelled either "good" or "bad." At our worst, we may "test" people to see if they will abandon us. Without even recognizing it until afterwards, I test people on a daily basis because I am so scared of them leaving me. My previous therapist cut our sessions short because I told her I was suicidal, to which she replied: "I will not waste my time treating someone who doesn't want to be here."

I *do* understand why my diagnosis makes me a harder case to treat, but don't I deserve the same treatment, the same level of compassion and understanding as any other person with a mental illness? There are many therapists out there who flat-out refuse to treat people with BPD because we are considered to be manipulative and mentally draining. None of my actions are manipulative by choice, and everything I've ever said or done is out of an uncontrollable fear of abandonment or desperation. I also do not intend to be so intense or mentally draining, even though I can clearly see that's how I am being perceived. And believe me, as much as you might loathe me, I can assure you I hate myself than you can even imagine. I already feel like society's castaway and the most unworthy and unbearable of people. So when you dedicate yourself to the profession of psychology, try to be aware that not all of your patients will be a "quick fix." You chose this field because you want to help people. That should mean *all* of us. If we are in therapy with you, it's because we *want* to be helped, so please allow us that chance.