

BORDERLINE AS A SUPERPOWER

I was diagnosed with BPD when I was 23, whilst studying for my honours degree, but the reality is I'd lived with my disorder for a long time, not truly understanding what it was.

As a child, I'd have intense emotional reactions that no one really understood. Crying fits that wouldn't end. Pain that would last well after arguments and desires to end the pain from the age of 17 years old.

Aside from BPD not being well-understood for many years, the information available online makes it sound like a death sentence. The diagnosis has always been viewed as an "Other" label for personality disorders, for people that don't quite fit the bipolar box. These extra fears of abandonment and rejection combined with lack of boundaries in relationships tend to form struggles with independence or having a "favourite person", who is where one's emotions are stored. These are typical traits for BPD. I had my first favourite person at 13 years old and my last relationship with one ended a year ago. These traits are also what cause it to be the most negatively viewed online, with words like "manipulative" and "toxic" labels. The label and categorisation has led this disorder to be the diagnosis for "people that don't get better" and it has become shameful for people to be associated with it.

I have been told by most of my medical professionals - if you're admitted for a suicidal attempt, whatever you do, don't tell them you're borderline. This, and the horrible misinformation out there on Google, reminds me of silent protests we'd do at university where you're unable to say anything

Throughout my years of struggle behind closed doors of seeming success to the outside world, I felt I had no voice and no one truly understood the pain I was experiencing, that often appeared out of the blue. The worst was both the misunderstanding, as well as the invalidation of the feelings and reactions, which left me feeling like an alien. Even when seeking help I often fear telling people about my borderline, including the professionals that seek to help me, for fear they will treat me differently, even losing empathy for me completely.

Borderline has been spoken of as the most emotionally painful disorder. My own episodes feel like I'm being held with a vicelike grip underwater, completely unable to breathe, whilst simultaneously being stabbed with multiple sharp objects. I've often described it as a deep hole where no one can reach me. There's

a reason it had been termed as on the borderline of psychosis. Without a support group it's also one of the loneliest disorders. The lack of knowledge and understanding from non-borderlines just feeds into fears for borderlines of rejection and black and white thinking patterns.

However, the majority of borderlines I know are some of the strongest and most resilient people on the planet. Since the entire disorder is triggered from trauma, they are both trauma and often suicide survivors. We are also the most empathetic and caring of people, and are excellent in professions with those emotions, such as teachers and health care workers. They are often also the most intelligent and creative people on the planet. Due to the emotional intensity, artistic expression is often natural to the borderline. Some of my many hobbies include drawing, playing guitar and bagpipes, calligraphy, writing poems and slam poems, French knitting, decoupage, scrapbooking, dancing and creative writing. I currently write campaigns for DnD games and act as Dungeon Master for the game.

In describing my experience of BPD, I wish to highlight the superpowers of this mental health condition, and not just focus on the negative qualities and stigmatisations of these personality traits that the media constantly highlights. Even though the name itself BPD, like most mental health conditions, is labelled "a disorder," the word becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for borderlines with low self-esteem that already feel like they do not fit into society and that there is something wrong with them.

Despite a divorce in 2022 and overall abuse in workplaces, I have studied full-time while working 5-8 jobs from the year 2017. As I finish my final year of PhD in Linguistics in 2023, I still work two jobs and have moved cities, living alone. My full-time job and after-hours teaching on the side I do to ensure my bills are paid. I've been called a machine by people, showing admiration for how I cope. The truth is, when my borderline shouted at its loudest I wasn't respecting myself and my boundaries, taking on more work to try and enter the academic world of permanent employment. The crash came after my experiments I'd self-funded for the thesis didn't do what I'd hoped they would. A few months later, I worked a job I should have been remunerated for, yet was not, and missed my own graduation.

After a massive dispute in divorce proceedings I wound up in a government emergency ward for a suicide attempt in



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a town without water. Not only was there no psychiatric help provided to me, but all patients were forced to wear diapers, due to the toilets being unable to operate in the conditions of the town itself. Yet, it is at rock-bottom that diamonds form. I was admitted on a Friday but by the following Monday I was not only back at work, with barely anyone aware of what took place, but also presenting to a group of over 200 people, as if nothing happened.

This year, I've had to work through that trauma, and it's a long process. I realised that the academic space was causing my mental health to decline, as I fought in a system to be seen as valuable, and knew I had to leave and find a workspace that would value me.

It has taken me five years to learn the skills and practical side of therapeutic information to treat my borderline, and even so, I still get episodes. But they have lessened and are easier to deal with and now Borderline is no longer the scariest thing in my life. My borderline co-occurs with PTSD, ARFID (avoidant restrictive food intake disorder) and ADD. Treating these is really important, as food intake and the executive functioning issues that come with ADD increase the instability of moods and emotional dysregulation.

The biggest lesson I've learned through the past year in particular was to respect myself more, that I deserved more and nurturing my self-esteem. My intense emotions now, even though they hurt me sometimes, are often a miracle balm that can soothe friends and colleagues that are going through terrible times. They help me put myself in other people's situations and understand others better. My emotions often have the power to change a room's dynamic, without me even trying to change the environment. I love how my emotions act like watercolours on a blank canvas, and how it leads me to be able to be artistic and creative in my hobbies. For so long, people like me have put ourselves down and felt we are not normal because of our intense emotions. But why blend in when you were born to stand out? Why be human when you could be superhuman? And by finishing my PhD soon, and finding a lack of success reports from borderlines, I hope to cross that stage and show borderlines exactly how powerful they are.

References available on request. **MHM**