Can Hypersexuality Be Related to Bipolar Disorder?

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Hypersexuality and Bipolar Disorder: Are They Related?

When experiencing a bipolar episode, specifically a manic one, there's a large variety of symptoms one can experience. Paranoia, lack of sleep, and racing thoughts are all symptoms that can heavily impact your life. Another symptom that occurs for some that can put their health at risk is hypersexuality.

What Is Hypersexuality?

Hypersexuality, or sexual addiction, occurs when someone is frequently having impulsive, and often reckless, sexual encounters, fantasies or urges. Often times it's extremely difficult to fight these urges. Unfortunately, as of now, there is no diagnosis within the DSM-5 of hypersexuality as its own disorder.

According to Mayo Clinic, "it may be diagnosed as a subcategory of another mental health condition, such as an impulse control disorder or a behavioral addiction."

This behavior can negatively impact multiple facets of one's life including relationships, work, finances, and health. One of the main criteria for identifying an individual with hypersexuality is some of the risky sexual behaviors they take part in. As of right now, many studying hypersexuality believes that chemical imbalances can play a role in triggering hypersexual behavior.

Bipolar Disorder and Hypersexuality

For many with bipolar disorder, there is a connection between manic episodes and hypersexuality. Not only can this occur during a full-fledged episode, but it can also occur before, or at the onset of a manic episode. Manic episodes often exacerbate the symptoms of hypersexuality due to the increased impulsivity and risk-taking that often becomes more prevalent during them.

Hypersexuality on its own can result in unsafe sex practices, but when combined with the symptoms of a manic episode it can be significantly worse. Due to manic episodes impacting one's rationality, one may be more likely to practice unprotected sex with many partners over a short period of time.

Having unprotected sex can significantly increase the chances of contracting an STI. Since thinking rationally is difficult during a manic episode, you're also much less likely to get tested for STIs after sexual encounters.

The longer one goes without professional treatment for their hypersexual tendencies, the more likely they are to contract an STI. This puts not only one's own health at risk but also the health of any and all potential sexual partners.

Can Hypersexuality be Controlled?

Since hypersexuality is rooted in impulsivity and urges, it can be extremely difficult to control. In many ways, hypersexuality is an addiction and should be treated as such. This is why some type of professional intervention is needed.

It should be treated just like other types of addiction. A mental health professional will be able to not only help with the sexual addiction but also any other underlying illnesses that may be contributing to it.

Treatment for Bipolar Disorder and Hypersexuality

Similar to the symptoms of bipolar disorder, fighting the symptoms of hypersexuality without professional intervention can be extremely difficult and is *not* recommended. Depending on your location, there are various forms of treatment that are available for those experiencing a manic episode with hypersexuality.

The potential treatment options include medication, support groups, and psychotherapy. When searching for treatment options, it's important that you search for a mental health professional that can assist you with both the symptoms of hypersexuality and bipolar disorder.

Psychotherapy

According to Mayo Clinic, psychotherapy can occur on an individual basis with a mental health professional, or even amongst a group of people like a family. The three types of common psychotherapy that may be used to treat symptoms of hypersexuality. These include:

1. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which may help you identify unhealthy, negative beliefs and behaviors and replace them with more adaptive ways of coping. You may learn strategies to make these behaviors less private and interfere with being able to access sexual content so easily.
2. Acceptance and commitment therapy, which is a type of CBT that emphasizes acceptance of thoughts and urges and a commitment to strategies to choose actions that are more consistent with important values.
3. Psychodynamic psychotherapy, which is a therapy that focuses on increasing your awareness of unconscious thoughts and behaviors, developing new insights into your motivations, and resolving conflicts.

Next page: More bipolar and hypersexuality treatment options, and more.

Medications

Generally, the medications used to treat hypersexuality are used for other conditions, including medications for bipolar disorder. There are various different types of medication that a medical professional may prescribe to someone experiencing symptoms of hypersexuality during a bipolar episode.

However, the medications prescribed to someone with bipolar disorder who is experiencing symptoms of hypersexuality may be different than medications prescribed to someone only experiencing symptoms of hypersexuality, or experiencing symptoms of hypersexuality combined with a different mental illness.

While some of the medication options to treat hypersexuality include antidepressants, psychiatrists may be hesitant to prescribe them to someone experiencing manic episodes because anti-depressants can exaggerate the symptoms of a manic episode. It can also increase the risk of experiencing a manic episode in some individuals.

For those experiencing an episode, or those with a history of manic episodes, medical professionals may be more inclined to prescribe those individuals with a mood stabilizer. These types of medication can help not only treat a manic episode, but also the symptoms of hypersexuality.

Naltrexone may also be used to treat symptoms of hypersexuality. This is a medication that's often used to treat other forms of addiction like alcoholism. It inhibits the part of the brain that derives pleasure from addictive behaviors.

Anti-androgen medications are another option that medical professional may consider for men experiencing symptoms of compulsive sexual behavior. These are considered even more fervently for men whose sexual behavior has the potential or has already put other people's safety at risk.

Anti-psychotics are also another option that a medical professional may use to treat bipolar disorder. According to Everyday Health, "Antipsychotics work by blocking dopamine, a substance in the brain known as a neurotransmitter." Dopamine is used as the brain's reward receptors. People with issues of hypersexuality/sex addiction tend to become extremely depressed when they're done with sex. This makes them want more in order to feel satisfied/happy, similar to any other type of addiction.

Support Groups

For the best results, it's important to see a psychiatrist as well as joining a support group. A person with bipolar disorder experiencing symptoms of hypersexuality may benefit from a self-help group that specializes in either assisting people living with bipolar disorder, symptoms of hypersexuality, or both.

Next Steps for Seeking Treatment for Hypersexuality and Bipolar

It may be better to see a psychiatrist first in order to identify what's causing/exaggerating the symptoms of hypersexuality (whether it be due to bipolar disorder, or another illness) because this will determine what the best methods of treatment are.

The treatment options may differ depending on what illnesses may be present. This includes whether or not you may benefit more from going to a support group that specializes in treating individuals with bipolar disorder, whether or not you'd benefit more from a support group that mainly focuses on hypersexuality, or whether you may need to focus on treating the symptoms of a totally separate mental illness.

According to Mayo Clinic, many of these groups are modeled after the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. If access to a physical support group is limited due to location or other extenuating circumstances, there are support groups available online. These groups can help teach you coping skills, and help you resist temptations to fall back into hypersexual behaviors. Some of these groups also help find additional forms of treatment. Be sure to conduct some research so you know which group/s are right for you.

What Comes After Finding Treatment?

In order to continue combatting hypersexual behavior during or after a manic episode, it's important that you stick to the treatment plans set forth by your mental health professional/s. Often times a mental health professional will not only be able to provide you with a plan to fight the issues you're experiencing while they occur, but they'll also be able to provide you with the tools you need in an attempt to prevent/deter these issues from arising again.

If possible, you should also work with your mental health professional to try and identify things that trigger both your symptoms of hypersexuality and bipolar disorder. If you feel yourself being tempted to fall into hypersexual behaviors, try a healthier, less risky activity than sex that may satisfy your dopamine needs. Try a new hobby, or maybe go for a ride on your bike. It's important that you resist the temptation to put yourself back into precarious situations.

Lastly, if your symptoms do unfortunately return, don't hesitate to tell your mental health professional. Unfortunately, people with bipolar disorder often have multiple episodes throughout their life. That being said, once you're able to recognize the signs of an oncoming episode, or you feel that you're about to give into urges of hypersexuality, knowing when to seek treatment will be significantly easier.

Rising Above Bipolar Disorder and Hypersexuality

Unfortunately, hypersexuality can be a symptom for some going through a manic bipolar episode. There’s no doubt that it can be difficult to deal with, but with some professional intervention, and some perseverance it can be overcome.