The Relationship Between Bipolar Disorder and Narcissism

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Bipolar and Narcissism: Are They Connected?

Bipolar disorder and narcissistic personality disorder are two disorders that can occur separately or may even overlap with each other. When they occur in conjunction with one another, it can have results that are very difficult to deal with for both yourself and those around you.

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder where someone can experience euphoric highs (manic episodes) or extreme lows (major depressive episodes). These episodes often last months, however, some people may experience periods of rapid cycling where moods can go from one extreme to another. Some may also experience mixed episodes where symptoms of both manic and depressive episodes are experienced at the same time.

During manic episodes, people with bipolar disorder feel euphoric, confident, and hyperactive. They may also have racing thoughts, trouble with sleeping, paranoia, and poor decision making. During depressive episodes, individuals may feel lethargic, a loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, oversleeping, and even thoughts of suicide.

What Is Narcissistic Personality Disorder?

Narcissistic personality disorder is a life-long personality disorder. Experts believe that this is usually linked to traumatic events that the individual may have experienced as a child. Narcissists have an exaggerated sense of self-worth and often need constant admiration. They often may have an inaccurate grandiose idealization of themselves.

They believe themselves to be superior and tend to only associate themselves with people they believe to be as superior as they are. This results in them often looking down on other people who they consider to be average or tasks/jobs they consider to be below their grandiose standard.

They also tend to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge others' feelings. They often will use others and take advantage of them for their own benefits as well. This can result in complex and negative social interactions with those around them. This is why they often struggle with maintaining close relationships and intimate ones.

Shared Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder

There are some overlapping symptoms between bipolar disorder and narcissism. The unrealistic expectations that one may have during manic or hypomanic states is something that those with a narcissistic personality disorder may experience regularly. Most experts believe the illnesses occur separately; however, some with bipolar disorder may exhibit narcissistic personality traits during certain moods (hypomania or mania specifically).

Treating Bipolar Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder

These are two separate disorders, however, when they occur at the same time, the symptoms of one can exacerbate the other. For example, a stressor for those with a narcissistic personality disorder may be what they view as an attack on their ego. If they also have bipolar disorder, this stressor could potentially set off an episode.

During manic episodes, delusions of grandeur and superiority may be exacerbated even further. During depressive episodes, what they view as attacks on their ego may impact their depression even more significantly. This can result in an almost negative cyclical effect.

When the illnesses occur at the same time, the stabilization of moods is often prioritized. Psychotherapy is a useful treatment for both, however bipolar disorder is often treated through medication as well. The best time to focus on treatment for narcissistic personality disorder is when one's mood has stabilized, and the symptoms of bipolar disorder have subsided.

Part of the psychotherapy treatment that's important for both of these illnesses (whether they occur on their own or in conjunction with one another) is learning the reasoning behind why they feel certain emotions. This can help them better understand their own emotions and behaviors as well as assisting them to better understand the emotions of others they have relationships with.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy has been shown to help individuals with both identify certain behaviors and the reasoning behind them. On top of that, it helps teach you healthier coping mechanisms for dealing with the symptoms of these illnesses.

Psychosocial therapy can be beneficial, as well. This helps focus on the effects these illnesses have on your personal relationships. It helps provide you with the tools to take the strain of these illnesses off of your personal relationships.

Bipolar Disorder and Narcissism

Bipolar disorder and narcissistic personality disorder are things that can create a lot of chaos in your life for yourself and those around you. When they occur in conjunction with one another, the results can be even more difficult to deal with. When left untreated, they can wreak havoc on your daily life and overall mental health.

However, both can be treated with the help of a treatment plan given to you by a mental health professional. Not only can you learn how to improve behaviors that are affecting you that are associated with the illness, but you can also learn how to improve your behavior when interacting with those you have relationships with.