



# Understanding Frequently Encountered Personality Disorders: BPD & NPD

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Personality Disorders 2010 OETA Presentation:  
**Understanding Frequently Encountered  
Personality Problems in Their Relation  
To Returning to Work**

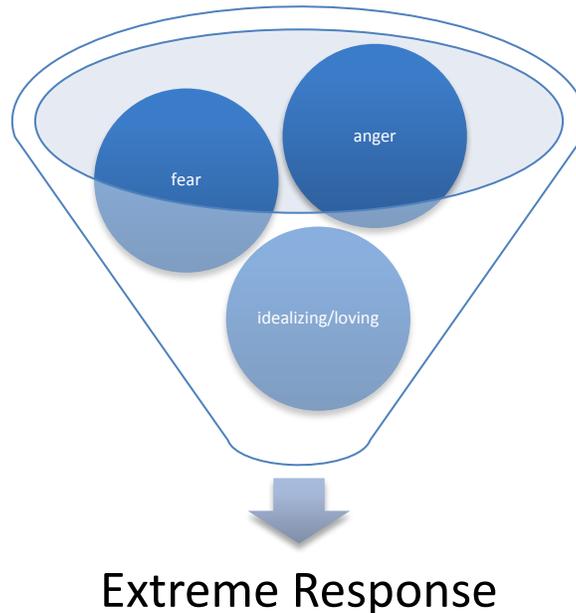
An Overview of Borderline, and Narcissistic,  
Trait Functions, Their Etiology, Presenting Symptoms, Prognosis  
For Returning to Work

How do we work with these difficult clients?

How do we best help them return to work?

# Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

## Flooded by Feeling



1. Borderline personality disorder (BPD), a disorder characterized by pervasive instability of mood, relationships and behavior, is more common (14 million) among Americans than either bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.
2. BPD clients are not deliberate attention seekers. Instead recent studies reveal that their behavior stems from an unusual sensitivity to subtle facial expressions and extreme difficulty in controlling their emotions.
3. Psychotherapy for BPD (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) is now enabling clients to overcome an illness that has long been viewed as a life sentence.

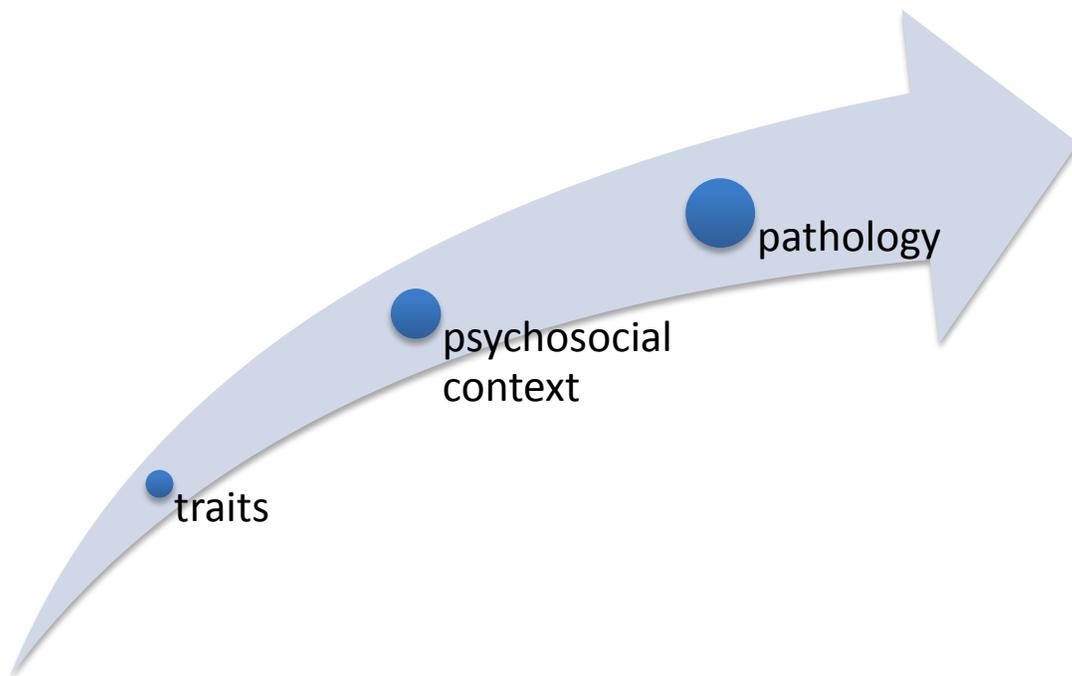
## **Identifying Borderline Behavior**

- 1.** Displaying frantic attempts to avoid real or imagined abandonment. Some clients might stalk a friend or a loved one or even hurt themselves to attract the attention of someone they care about.
- 2.** Exhibiting a pattern of highly unstable relationships. People with BPD may suddenly shift from idealizing and loving someone to feeling intensely angry with that person.
- 3.** Showing signs of an unstable self-image or sense of self, which can lead to desperate attempts to win the approval of others.
- 4.** Acting impulsively in at least two potentially self-destructive ways, such as excessive spending, risky sex, reckless driving, binge eating or substance abuse.
- 5.** Engaging in suicidal behavior or self-mutilation. About 10% take their own lives.
- 6.** Experiencing intense mood shifts that often last only a few hours but are very hard to control.

7. Report feeling empty most of the time.
8. Habitual displaying of inappropriate, intense anger or having difficulty controlling anger
9. Thinking paranoid thoughts, if only briefly particularly when exposed to severe stress.

Despite its repeated use the borderline label remains vague and is considered by many to be a wastebasket diagnosis for severe symptoms that do not fit any clear category.

## Etiology of Borderline Personality Disorder



## **Borderline Personality Disorder as a Brain Disease**

Recently biologists have been looking deeper into the psychological and neurological causes of BPD and they have sketched a radically different picture of the ailment. **BPD clients do not choose to act the way they do; they are buffeted by a combination of unconscious processes—an unusual tendency to pick up subtle facial expressions of others, coupled with a hyperactive emotional responses.**

Specifically, scientists wanted a better understanding of the three hallmarks of BPD:

1. Emotional instability.
2. Impulsive aggression.
3. Interpersonal chaos.

**Why do people with BPD have so many more emotional flare-ups than healthy people do? And when they feel upset, why do they act out impulsively?**

**In 2006 Thomas R. Lynch, then at Duke University found a clue in the reading of facial expressions. The researchers asked 20 adults with BPD and 20 mentally healthy people to watch a computer generated face change program. On average people with BPD correctly identified both unpleasant and happy faces much earlier than the healthy group marking them as hypersensitive to subtle facial expressions. An afflicted individual might see a happy expression as a sign of love and react with inappropriate passion, leading to whirlwind, stormy romances that rock the lives of people with BPD.**

**A recent brain-imaging study suggests why these patients are so socially sensitive and moody. In 2009 Psychiatrist Harold W. Koenigsberg and his colleagues at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine used functional magnetic resonance imaging to record activity in the brains of 19 BPD patients and 17 mentally healthy individuals as the subjects examined photographs of people crying, smiling, acting violently and making sexual gestures. Researchers found that the unpleasant images elicited far more activity in several regions of the brains of BPD patients compared with those of healthy volunteers. These areas involved basic visual processing and the amygdala, which governs emotional reactivity and memory. This pattern suggests that BPD clients may react not only more strongly but also more rapidly to disagreeable images and scenarios.**

From these studies and others like them BPD's credentials as a brain disease are beginning to be established. At this time it is not known if the previous study has identified possible traits that a person might be born with or if there are specific learning environments that alone can cause these brain function anomalies. The answer is most likely a combination of the two that depends on the individual.



## PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVES

### The Psychological Dialectic

*A dialectic is a process in which two opposing concepts each creates, informs, preserves, and negates the other, each standing in a dynamic relationship with the other. Hegel 1807.*

*Why is it that the ordinary healthy person has at one and the same time a feeling of the realness of the world, and of the realness of what is imaginative and personal? Winnicott 1971.*

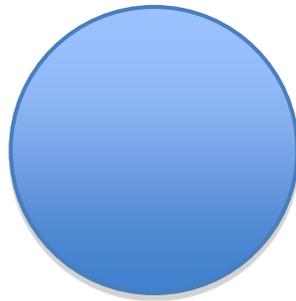
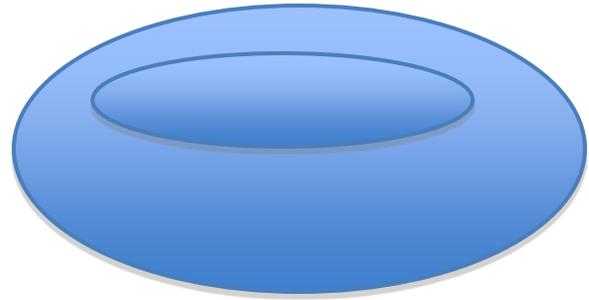
*The most elemental ordeals of the disturbed child are at the same time the ongoing challenge of human experience. Just as the differentiation of inside and outside is perpetual, the task of locating oneself in relation to one's hidden desires in order to act upon them or not, and the task of separating oneself from the demands or desires of another in order to respond to them or not, **are always the unfinished ordeal of human autonomy.** Mannoni 1999.*

Infant/Child

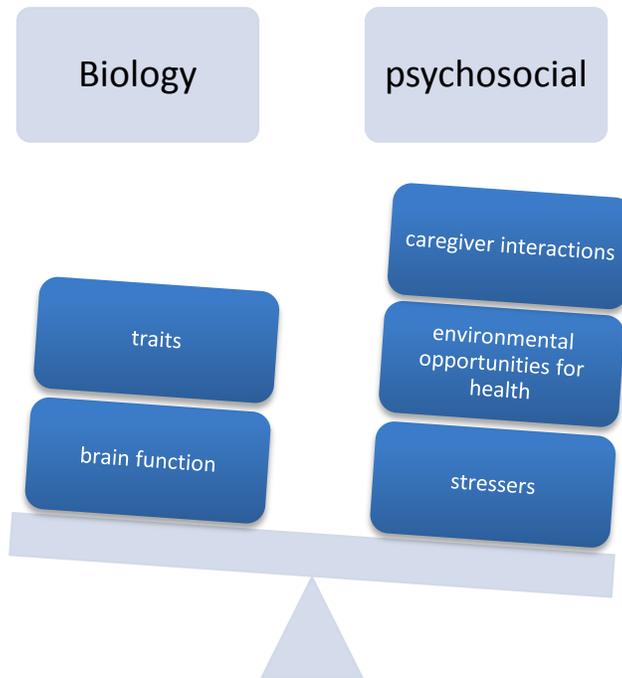
Parent/Caregiver



Psychological Dialect



**The Psychological Dialect is created between the primary caregiver and the infant/child. It is the existence and the health of the psychological dialect that influences personality. It is in the area of the psychological dialect that Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) seeks to restore health.**



## PERSONALITY ON BALANCE

People with balanced and flexible psychological dialectics are those that are able to move freely back and forth between internal and external realities. They are able to self-activate by expressing themselves in giving to and taking from the world. One of the least recognized developmental milestones for a healthy personality is the achievement of a flexible psychological dialectic.

## **Employment Counseling**

Always let your partners know that you are working with someone with this disorder.

Keep others appraised often to avoid triangulation or blaming.

It is ok to ask for help and have someone in the room with you when you are meeting with them.

Staff frequently with others your own feelings about working with the individual.

Try to keep your own reactions to things in check and keep good notes.

Take the attitude that they are survivors and will be reminded of negative past experiences very easily.

Build on their past experiences of success when identifying employment opportunities.

Job Coaching may be needed on a psychosocial level.

## **Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)**

### **Three Areas to Consider for Evidence of Severity in Narcissistic Personality Disorders**

**Entitlement: Exaggerates accomplishments and is overly sensitive to criticism. Believes in the use of power against “inferiors”. Will lash out in rage at others who challenge this self-belief.**

**No Empathy: There is a need to feed their narcissistic self-image sometimes accomplished by inflicting deep emotional pain through sarcasm, and cynicism. The need to feed will drive narcissists to hunt for what is called “Narcissistic Supply”. Sometimes a codependency will develop between a Narcissist and a person living with a Dependent Personality Disorder. This person becomes the narcissistic supply and target of the Narcissist. Children are frequent targets along with spouses and significant others for**

**emotional abuse. There is a never-ending hunt for narcissistic supply.**

**Envy: Is a large part of the Narcissist's worldview. They are envious of others accomplishments because they feel that they should have those accomplishments. They also believe that others are envious of them. To a Narcissist this is the natural order of things.**

## **Identifying Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

- 1. A grandiose sense of self-importance. Expects to be recognized as superior without exhibiting commensurate achievements.**
- 2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty or ideal love.**
- 3. Requires excessive admiration.**
- 4. Has a sense of entitlement, has unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations**
- 5. Believes that he or she is special and unique and can only be understood by or should be associated with other high-status people (or institutions).**
- 6. Is personally exploitative and willingly takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.**
- 7. Lacks empathy, is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.**
- 8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.**

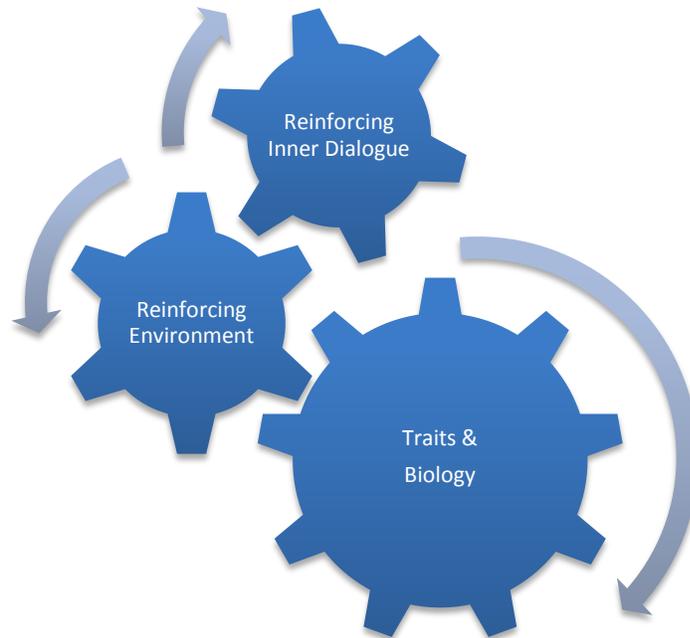
## **9. Shows arrogant haughty behaviors and attitudes.**

### **Etiology**

The absence of empathy and/or the ability to see oneself as others see one, suggests that something biological is involved. Modern neuroscience is currently researching a possible biological explanation for Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

### **Psychosocial Perspectives**

As we have discussed in Borderline Personality Disorder, there is a deficit in the psychological dialectic of individuals living with Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The difference is, whereas Borderline Spectrum disorders have a problem with an ill-formed dialectic to establish communication between the inner world and the outer world, the Narcissist has never developed a dialectic between his/her inner world and the realities of the outer world. There is no meaningful dialogue between them.



## **Narcissistic Traits as a Positive Force**

Narcissistic traits exist on a continuum with optimum health associated with moderate narcissistic traits. Moderate traits help individuals beat back depression, and anxiety, while handling higher stress loads, without upsetting social relationships. Mild narcissism seems to help people recover from accidents or other trauma.

**“If I had a little humility, I’d be perfect” ....  
Ted Turner.**

## **Employment Counseling For Narcissistic Personality Disorders**

Confronting unrealistic perceptions of themselves in anyway could be dangerous and or at the very

least, unproductive. (If challenged, feel you are incompetent and will go over your head).

Taking a realistic tone or stance will likely enforce the perception that you are incompetent and incapable of seeing who they really are.

Use motivational interviewing to identify all factors, even the unrealistic ones and then use positive language of change around positive aspects. “This could be your big break “ etc.

Acknowledge positive strengths and promote their use.

**Sales jobs of every type are usually a sure bet.**

Car salesmen, clothing salesmen, cashiering, act.

**It is when the client’s self-perceived abilities exceed real abilities that placement struggles are likely.  
(A topic for counselor. Helpful for you to identify strengths)**

**Notes:**

“I know this isn’t up to your standards, but I know you are very good and will work hard to move your way up.”

Best to not challenge grandiose ideas. Focus on strengths and promote them as much as possible.

Difficult to illicit change because locked into how they are and like it.

Find strengths and find a place for them to use them.

- Sales
- Attractive to people in the beginning, but long-term positions don’t go so well
- Short-term contact more successful (i.e., sales, cashiering, etc.)