

# Analyzing Bipolar Disorder: Beyond the Stigma and Towards Compassionate Care

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## DESCRIPTION

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition characterized by extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression). These mood fluctuations can disrupt daily life, affecting personal relationships, work performance, and overall quality of life. Despite its prevalence, with approximately 2.8% of the USA adult population experiencing bipolar disorder, there remains a significant stigma surrounding the condition that prevents open discussion and understanding. This article aims to explore the complexities of bipolar disorder, the misconceptions that contribute to stigma, and the importance of compassionate care and support for those affected.

### Complexity of bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder is not just about experiencing mood swings; it is a complex condition that can vary significantly in its presentation. There are several types of bipolar disorder, including:

**Bipolar I disorder:** Characterized by overexcited episodes that last at least seven days or by overexcited symptoms that are so severe that immediate hospital care is needed. Depressive episodes often occur as well, lasting at least two weeks.

**Bipolar II disorder:** Defined by a pattern of depressive episodes and hypomanic episodes, but not the full-blown overexcited episodes typical of Bipolar I Disorder.

**Cyclothymic disorder:** A milder form of bipolar disorder involving numerous periods of hypomanic symptoms and periods of depressive symptoms lasting for at least two years (one year in children and adolescents).

### Misconceptions and stigma

One of the most significant barriers to understanding bipolar disorder is the stigma attached to mental health conditions. Many people view individuals with bipolar disorder through a

lens of misunderstanding, often attributing their symptoms to personal weakness or character flaws.

Many people underestimate the severity of bipolar disorder by reducing it to simple mood swings. While mood fluctuations are indeed a assurance of the disorder, they are often intense and weakening. During overexcited episodes, individuals may engage in impulsive behaviors, such as excessive spending or reckless driving, which can have serious consequences. During depressive episodes, they may struggle to perform everyday tasks, leading to feelings of hopelessness and despair.

This phrase often dismisses the real and perceptible experiences of those living with bipolar disorder. While mental health conditions are indeed rooted in the brain, they can also manifest physically and emotionally. The neurotransmitter imbalances and structural changes in the brain associated with bipolar disorder cannot be easily dismissed.

Some people believe that bipolar disorder is uncommon or only affects a specific demographic. However, it can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Furthermore, early signs can manifest in adolescence or early adulthood, but many individuals do not receive a proper diagnosis until later in life, leading to a misperception about its prevalence.

### Impact of stigma

The stigma surrounding bipolar disorder can have dire consequences for those affected. Many individuals may avoid seeking help due to fear of being judged or misunderstood. This delay in diagnosis and treatment can lead to worsening symptoms, increased episodes of obsession or depression, and even a higher risk of suicide. Moreover, individuals with bipolar disorder often face discrimination in various areas of life, including employment and relationships. They may be seen as unreliable or unstable, leading to social isolation. This isolation can impair feelings of loneliness and despair, creating a vicious cycle that further establishes the stigma.

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## Treatment and prevention

While bipolar disorder is a lifelong condition, effective treatment can help individuals manage their symptoms and lead fulfilling lives. Treatment typically includes a combination of medication, therapy, and lifestyle changes.

**Medications:** Mood stabilizers, antipsychotics, and antidepressants can help manage the symptoms of bipolar disorder. Finding the right medication and dosage often takes time and collaboration between the individual and their healthcare provider.

**Therapy:** Psychotherapy, particularly Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), can help individuals develop coping strategies, identify triggers, and manage symptoms more effectively. Support groups and peer-led programs can also provide valuable emotional support and shared experiences.

**Lifestyle modifications:** Incorporating healthy habits into daily life can significantly impact symptom management. Regular

exercise, a balanced diet, good sleep hygiene, and stress-reduction techniques (such as mindfulness or yoga) can help stabilize mood and improve overall well-being.

## CONCLUSION

Bipolar disorder is a complex and often misunderstood condition that affects millions of individuals and their families. To create a more compassionate and understanding society, it is essential to challenge the stigma that surrounds this disorder and promote open dialogue and education. By developing a culture of empathy, supporting accessible mental health care, and encouraging effective treatment options, we can help those living with bipolar disorder navigate their journey with dignity and hope. Together, we can work towards a future where individuals with bipolar disorder are met with understanding, support, and the resources they need to increase. It is time to listen, learn, and hold those affected by bipolar disorder, recognizing their strength and rigidity in the face of adversity.