

Of Strategies, Paradox and Wisdom

Mania *n.* mental derangement marked by great excitement and (freq.) violence; craze, passion (*for*)

Becoming manic, learning that one has been manic, is not something that happens quickly. Kay Redfield Jamison explains:

“I did not wake up one day to find myself mad. Life should be so simple. Rather I gradually became aware that my life and mind were going at an ever faster and faster clip until finally...they both had spun wildly and absolutely out of control. But the acceleration from quick thought to chaos was a slow and beautifully seductive one. In the beginning everything seemed perfectly normal...The more I tried to slow down my thinking the more I became aware that I couldn't. My enthusiasms were going into overdrive as well, although there often was some underlying thread of logic in what I was doing. One day, for example, I got into a frenzy of photocopying.” (Jamison 1995, pp.68,72)

It didn't start with the photocopying, but looking back that was one of the indicators. She was planning a party for her son's 18th birthday and decided it would be very creative to display large photographs of him in a continuous border at eye height around the room. She chose the photos she wanted and took them to work. Every day after her colleagues had left the office she enlarged, copied and laminated 200 photos in what she recognised later (after reading Jamison's book) as a 'frenzy of photocopying'.

Warn *v.t.* give timely notice of impending danger or misfortune, put in guard, caution against; give cautionary notice or advice with regard to actions, conduct, belief, etc.

Warning signs of mania

Early warning signs of mania include difficulty falling asleep, racing thoughts, increased activity, increased productivity, energy and rate of speech, talking over the top of people, spending sprees, heightened libido and irritability.

She waited until the children went to bed. Then she did the folding and the ironing, put a few loads of washing into the machine, hung a few on the line (in the dark), tidied the house and mopped the floor. At ten o'clock she went to bed, but she couldn't sleep so she got up again. She went to the computer and logged on. When she looked up it was midnight, then two-thirty, then three am. She forced herself to go to back to bed, not because she was tired, but because she had to get up at six to get the kids off to school and go to work. It was strange, after weeks of this she should be exhausted, but quite the opposite, she had lots of energy.

As mania gathers momentum early warning signs intensify and additional signs emerge, such as obsessiveness, sexual indiscretion, unusual and inappropriate behaviour, risk taking and psychotic thinking.

Insight *n.* mental penetration.

Insight is lost.

Her birthday was approaching and her husband asked what she wanted for a present. She said she wanted a lime green Holden Monaro and if she couldn't have that then she wanted a tattoo. A big one with beautiful flames of red, orange and yellow, flaring up her right arm from her elbow to her shoulder. Her husband assumed she was joking but she wasn't. He said no to the Monaro and NO to the tattoo. It didn't matter She would talk him around, if not about the car then about the tattoo. She had made up her mind, It didn't matter what he said, if she couldn't talk him around, she was going to get a tattoo anyway.

<http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/media/writingcomp/index.cfm>

Recognising the warning signs means there can be earlier and more effective treatment, harm minimisation, self-management, awareness, understanding, communication, reassurance and relapse prevention. An action plan can also be developed.

Mood *n.* state of mind or feeling.

Personality and behaviour when mood is stable

When mood is stable people usually have regular appetites, sleep patterns and energy levels. They have reasonable decision making skills, and planning and organisational abilities. Their actions and reactions are appropriate. They feel comfortable with themselves, in their own company and with others. They don't have obsessive thoughts and, in fact, they are usually not even aware of the state of their mood.

“We don't usually notice how little control we have over the mind, because habits channel psychic energy so well that thoughts seem to follow each other by themselves without a hitch.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p.119)

Personality and behaviour when mood is manic

When someone is manic they usually don't sleep for more than a few hours a night. They are irritable, hyperactive and restless. They can be angry and aggressive. Their behaviour is disinhibited and impulsive. They spend money on things that are expensive or things they don't need. They argue persuasively and passionately rationalise every decision and every action.

When she is manic she says... “Of course I'm not manic I am fine. In fact I'm better than fine. I feel fantastic.”

When she is manic she thinks... “There's absolutely nothing wrong with me. I'm not ill. This medication is going in the bin.”

When she is manic she can't... stop moving, sit still, slow down, relax, watch TV or read a magazine or a book.

When she is manic she appears... articulate and coherent, logical and organised, persuasive, and determined.

When one is riding the high of bipolar disorder, there comes a point of no return. The mania destroys everything in its path, and when its fury is spent, it is inevitably followed by depression. If there is an up side to mania, (and there is) there is absolutely no up side to depression. None. Depression is very often fatal and it causes untold suffering. For that reason alone everything possible should be done to prevent mania.

Strategy *n.* art of war; art of planning and directing larger movements and operations of campaign or war.

Strategies for when mood is normal

When her mood stabilised she found a doctor she had total confidence in. He was the fourth one she went to. She established a good relationship with him, and made and kept regular scheduled appointments. She took her medication religiously. Together they documented a detailed and specific management plan so that her preferences could be respected if she was ever in a situation where she could not advocate for herself. She established a support network of people who could help her when her mood was becoming elevated.

Now she maintains regular daily rhythms and routines and is strict with herself about sleep, diet and exercise. Well, she is strict about sleep and diet most of the time and she exercises on the odd occasion.

Strategies for when mood is becoming elevated

When her mood is becoming elevated she contacts her doctor straight away and checks her medication. She makes sure she gets enough sleep. She decreases her activities and reduces sensory stimulation. She stays away from shopping centres and other busy, noisy places that have lots of people and fluorescent lighting. She quarantines her credit cards. She sees her counsellor and she uses the cognitive behaviour skills she learned in group therapy.

Paradox *n.* seemingly absurd or self-contradictory though possibly true statement.

Kay Redfield Jamison believes that there is strong scientific, biological and historical data to support the thesis that the mania of bipolar disorder is intrinsically linked to artistic and creative expression. She cautions, however, that this issue is fraught with clinical, ethical and philosophical considerations. While mania can be an “exhilarating and powerfully creative force” it is more often “a destructive one”. (Jamison, 1996, p.240)

“...the best treatment for [the] “wound in human consciousness” lies in music, painting, literature and, at its finest, philosophy. Art, unlike “the swooning egocentricity of closed-off uncaring hedonism...from which we awake to bitter solitude”, opens us to reality. This...encourages us to find, awaken and employ our latent creative powers.” (Farrelly, 2006)

She used to write short stories and enter them in competitions. She spent hours at the computer, sometimes not doing anything else for days and nights on end, hardly eating or sleeping. She approached publishers and agents and attended courses. She was desperate to be published, to have recognition, to be famous. Afterwards, she wrote nothing for a very long time. Her biggest challenge was to read a book rather than to write one. Then, one day, out of the blue, she sat down at her computer and wrote a short story. Not to be published or for recognition. This time she wrote for the sake of it, because she felt like it, for the love of the words and the beauty of creative expression.

Wisdom *n.* being wise; soundness of judgement in matters relating to life and conduct; knowledge, learning.

“There is great value in specific kinds of adversity. None of us would choose to learn this way...We go forward with courage and with too much wisdom but determined to find what is beautiful.” (Solomon, 2001, p.437)

References

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