



CASE STUDY #16: ANONYMOUS GIRL (Tourette's Syndrome)

My first encounter with this condition occurred before I knew anything about it. This

normal enough appearing young lady had just arrived in the group and within 10 minutes she is screaming a rant of profanity that would make a longshoreman blush. I am more familiar with the profane gift than most people having been blessed with, I'm told, a rare ability to turn any conversation blue at a moment's notice. I employ this gift sparingly and in the group setting only with considerable forethought.

An example: A kid might call another kid a horrible name...like "s--t head" the normal "teacher response" might be "Now Jim, you have a better vocabulary than that; let's hear a more socially acceptable version of derision". My tendency would be to isolate the perpetrator and take away his "shock value" by quoting my grandma saying: "Don't say anything you wouldn't want to put in your mouth."

I digress: Naturally, since we just met, the Unknown girl got a more traditional rebuke centering around the inappropriate nature of her outburst. Without hesitation she (with the same confidence that a minister might address their congregation) launched an attack on the legitimacy of my birth, my sexual orientation, an evaluation of my intellect, and ended by wishing me a quick yet painful death resulting in a notoriously hot permanent residence reserved for the most egregious of all sinners. With my jaw now resting uncomfortably on the table between us I watched her disappearance from the room never to be seen again.

When I shared this experience with a psychologist friend she suggested the possibility that I had dealt with a victim of Tourette's Syndrome. For those who were unacquainted with T.S. here is some useful information:

Tourette syndrome is a neurological condition that manifests in sufferers through frequent verbal and motor tics of varying severity that are largely involuntary (there is some measure of control patients can assert, though it may only forestall stronger symptoms to come). The symptoms can disappear and reappear, and onset of the disorder occurs by the age of 18. The cause of the disorder is not yet known, there is no cure and a person with Tourette has a 50 percent chance of passing it on the gene

to his or her offspring. It's often accompanied by milder obsessive compulsive behaviors. The condition does not debilitate the life of the sufferer, and a number of drugs (such as haloperidol) can help control its symptoms [source: Tourette Syndrome Association].

A number of famous people have Tourette syndrome, including actors Howie Mandel, Dan Aykroyd and the "Big Brother" reality-show guy Pete Bennett. Samuel Johnson, the dictionary author, had it too, famous soccer star David Beckham has TS as does goalie Tim Howard of the Manchester United Football Club and also the star goalie for the USA team in the 2014 World Cup. He set a World Cup record of 16 saves in the loss to Belgium. Other athletes with Tourette's include former Major League Baseball player Jim Eisenreich and former NBA star Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf.

It makes sense that Tourette athletes are so successful in sports requiring exceptionally fast reflexes. The muscle twitch turned into a positive!

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart may have had Tourettes, some speculate. But there is no definitive proof he did.

Some people with Tourettes are able to see the humor in their situation thereby giving the rest of us permission to see them as real people and not as helpless victims.

I'm reminded of a story told by Linda Ellerbee (one of my favorite writers on the planet) about a cartoon she saw that she found to be insensitive and offensive. It depicted a wheelchair-bound man in a negative light.

She researched the cartoonist and decided to pay him a visit to scold him for being a jerk. Her knock on his door was met with a prolonged wait and finally "Just a minute, I'll be right there." Imagine her shock when the person opening the door was in a wheelchair! They had a long conversation during which he discussed a feeling of "invisibility" shared by many who spend their waking days in a "chair". "They never make eye contact with me." He started to notice that people become "real" when they can laugh and be laughed at. It's perhaps ironic that the lack of eye contact, while may be an attempt to respect someone's privacy, can also be degrading and offensive.

As a result of reading her article I always make it a point to acknowledge people in chairs and kneel on one knee when conversing with them. They needn't "look up to me". I probably don't deserve it.

Tourette Association of America

42-40 Bell Boulevard

Bayside, NY 11361

718-224-2999

888-486-8738

support@tourette.org

https://www.tourette.org/