



CASE STUDY #18: IRIS

(The Straight 'A' Student That Blew My Mind)

Imagine a room filled with 50 plus 17 and 18 year-old failing students. What kind of kid would be an outlier in this setting? We're talking about the equivalent of a four foot basketball player or a 300 pound jockey. Almost as shocking would be a polite, charming, attentive young lady seeking "help" for the issues in her life. The usual age-group girl problems are boyfriend issues, parental discord, gossiping girl "friends", the green-eyed monster; jealousy (either victim or occasionally punished perp.) More problematic concerns are pregnancy, drug and alcohol involvement, juvenile justice involvement.

You get the idea. Her problem was earning honor roll grades throughout her entire high school career! You could probably imagine my reaction to this revelation... "Are you jerking me around?" Or "Are you just here to watch the "freak show"? She quickly convinced me of her sincerity by disclosing that she "was concerned that she was only earning these grades to make her parents happy.

Furthermore; displaying a kind of introspection normally demonstrated by much older people who had spent a fortune on therapy or maybe even attending some kind of support group like ours (only much more effective) she remains one of the most fascinating young people in my career.

My concern for her would be having a "people-pleaser" personality. She also presented an anxiety behavior...in her case twisting and chewing her hair. This condition falls under the category of BFRBs or Body Focused Repetitive Behaviors. Common wisdom suggests that acting on this disorder can result in relaxation, relief from negative feelings such as:

- boredom
- frustration
- loneliness
- many others

Research on this disorder (Trichotillomania) including WebMD and Mayo Clinic provide little information on treatment. Habit reversal training is mentioned as well as support groups. Not being a licensed therapist I hesitate to even use this term, however my reading indicates that hair twirling and chewing is evident among the 2% of young women aged 14 to 20.

Ali M. Mattu writing in Mental Health suggests that this affliction is misnamed as an anxiety disorder but is more correctly labeled as OCD or another disorder group.

At this junction I would like to suggest, by way of this study, that volunteering time and energy helping others can reduce the symptoms. Iris started helping other class members with their home work after group meetings demonstrating an astonishing variety of skills...everything from math, science, history, social studies even electives.

I never noticed her messing with her hair while tutoring others!

As of this point in time I have lost contact with Iris. In a perfect world she would be teaching at the high school, college or best of all; junior high or middle school level. You do remember “the range of the strange” right.

Iris would be a God Send there!

