

Special Challenges When Working with Problematic Clients: How to Identify Them and What To Do

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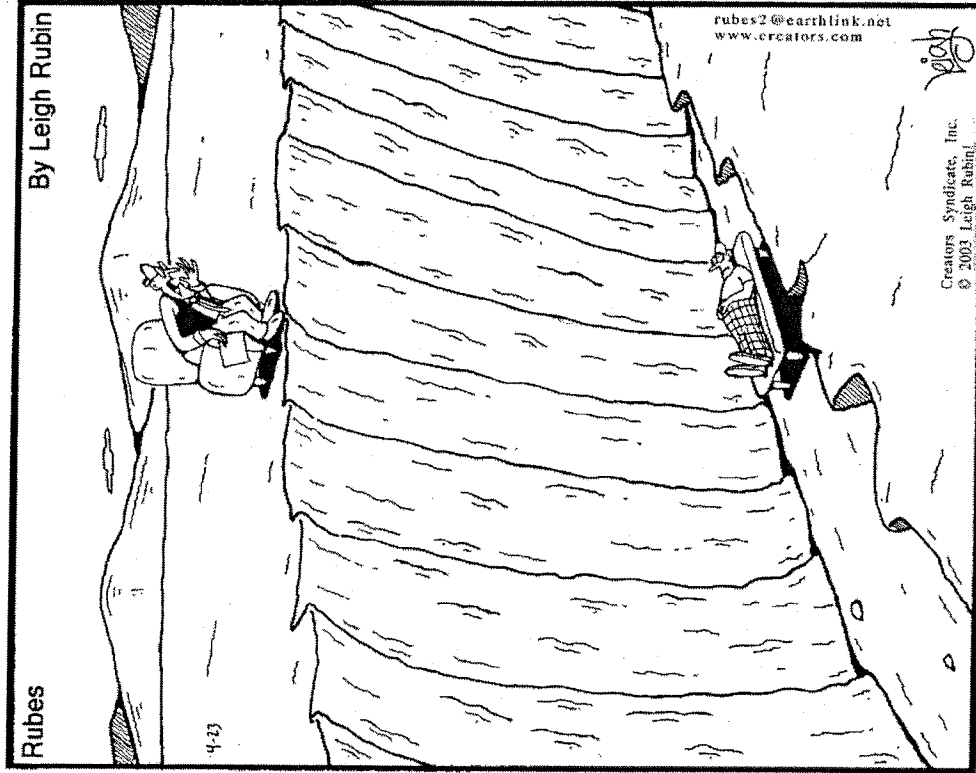
Difficult Clients

- How to identify client mental health concerns
- How to respond to client mental health concerns
- What factors make responding difficult due to client relationship

Overview

- Signs and symptoms of mental illness
(Axis I)
- Characteristics of personality disorders
(Axis II)
- Particular traps in client relationships
- Questions

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness in Clients



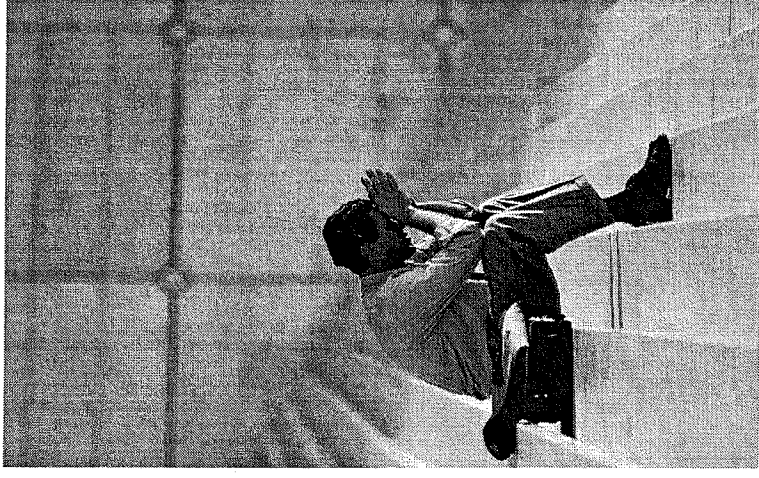
"I said, 'IT'S QUITE OBVIOUS TO ME, MR. SINGERMAN, THAT YOU APPEAR TO BE IN A DEEP DEPRESSION!'"

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness in Clients

- Problems with thinking
 - Confused thinking
 - Poor concentration
 - Can't remember things
 - Slow information processing
 - Can't think abstractly
 - Disconnected or nonsensical thoughts or writings
 - Odd perceptions or strange beliefs: perceptual distortions, hears voices, believes things that are highly implausible or impossible

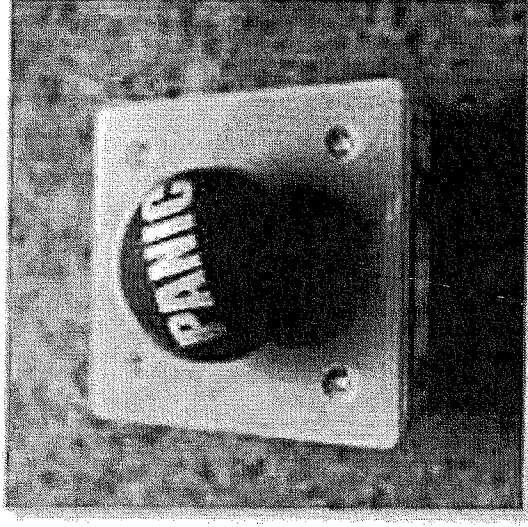
Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness in Clients (con't.)

- Problems with mood and feelings
 - Depression symptoms
 - Loss of interest/pleasure in most things
 - Unable to make decisions
 - Physical slowing
 - Thoughts or expressions of suicide
 - Worthlessness and hopelessness
 - Fatigue



Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness in Clients (con't.)

- Problems with mood and feelings
 - Anxiety Symptoms
 - Hyperalert and on guard
 - Notably anxious and afraid
 - Avoids normal life activities
 - Ritualistic or repetitive behaviors
 - Flashbacks or intrusive thoughts or memories



Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness in Clients (con't.)

- Problems with mood and feelings
- Bipolar symptoms
 - » Overly confident and grandiose about abilities, talents, etc.
 - » Excessive energy, little need for sleep
 - » Abnormally elevated or irritable mood
 - » Extreme mood swings
 - » Speaks very fast, difficult to interrupt
 - » Excited, euphoric, disruptive
 - » Thoughts seem loosely connected
 - » Highly distractible
 - » Excessive pleasurable activity with no care for consequences (spending, sex)

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness in Clients (con't.)

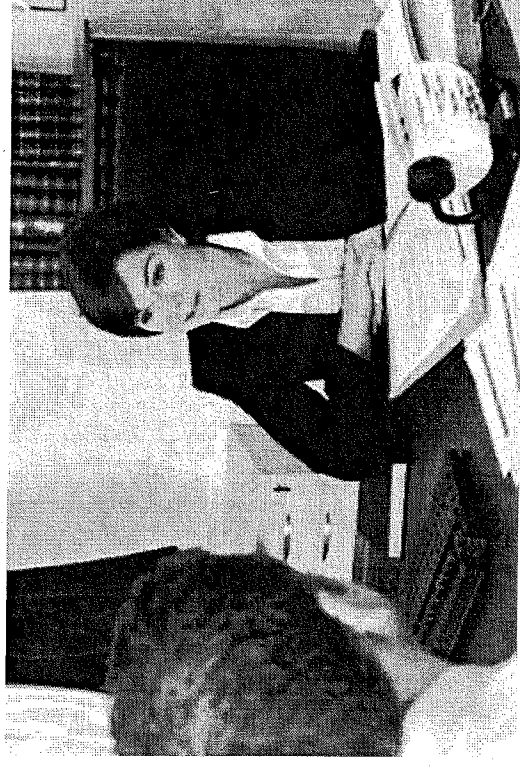
- Difficulties with socializing
 - Has few close friends; withdraws socially
 - Has stormy relationships with swings in attitude
 - Has difficulty getting along with people; distrusts people
- Difficulties with functioning at work, school or home
 - Gets fired or quits jobs
 - Is easily angered by normal expectations
 - Can't concentrate or work effectively

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness in Clients (con't.)

- Poor Self-care
 - Doesn't take care of appearance or cleanliness
 - Doesn't take care of home or yard
 - Pays no attention to physical health
 - Dresses inappropriately for the weather or season
- Miscellaneous
 - Self-destructive activities
 - Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
 - Denial of obvious problems
 - Inability to cope with daily activities
 - Exaggerated or blunted responses
 - Inappropriate or uncharacteristic mood of particular circumstances

When a Client is Distraught or Struggling with Mental Illness

- Identify resources in advance and have them available
- Refer to appropriate resources
- Consult with colleagues
- Understand the limits to being a good advisor



Axis II

- Personality disorders
- Prominent maladaptive behaviors, defenses
- Mental retardation

Sustained and long term conditions

DSM Criteria for a Personality Disorder

- Patterns of inner experience and behavior
- Deviates from expectations/culture
 - Cognition: self, others, events, worldview
 - Affect: range, intensity, lability
 - Interpersonal functioning
 - Impulse control
- Inflexible and pervasive across many situations
- Lifelong and stable over time

DSM Character Types

Paranoid – Distrustful, suspicious

Schizoid – Detached, a-social

Schizotypal – Distance, eccentric

Borderline – Moody, relational disruptions, impulsive

Narcissistic – Grandiose, unempathic

Antisocial – Disregard for others, exploitative

Histrionic – Attention-seeking and highly emotional

Dependent – Care-seeking, fears separation

Avoidant – Withdrawn, inadequate, lonely

Obsessive/Comp – Orderly, over-controlled, restricted affect

A= Odd, eccentric, B= Dramatic, emotional, C= Anxious, cautious
(DSM IV)

Narcissist Personality Disorder

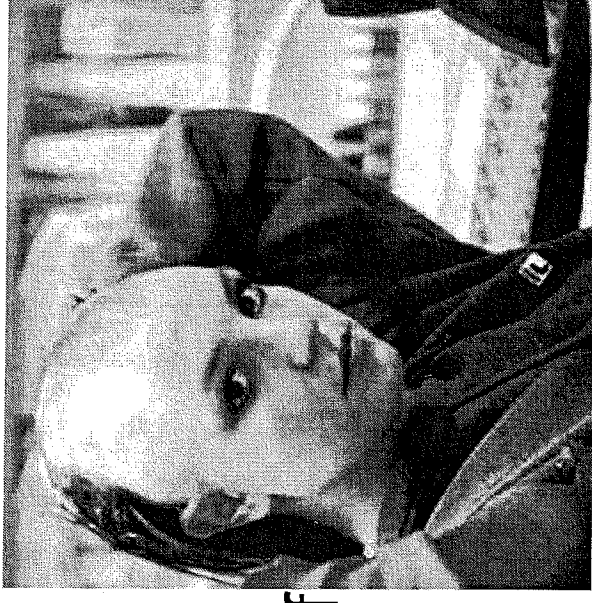
- Grandiose sense of self importance
- Aspires to power, success, intelligence, ideal love
- Entitled/exploitative
- Lacks empathy
- Pulls for admiration from others
- May feel rules don't apply to them
- Runs from mistakes and hides from those who might find them out



(DSM IV)

Borderline Personality Disorder

- Perpetual state of crisis
- Unstable, dependent-hostile relationships (idealizing and devaluing)
- Intolerant of being alone
- Impulsive, risky behaviors
- Suicidal behavior, gestures, self harm
- Shifting moods, irritability
- Intense anger (DSM IV)



Antisocial Personality Disorder

- Lack of conscience
- Deceitful
- Impulsive
- Irritable and aggressive
- Reckless disregard for the safety of others
- Preoccupation with “putting something over on others”



(DSM IV)

The psychopathic personality (PCL-R)

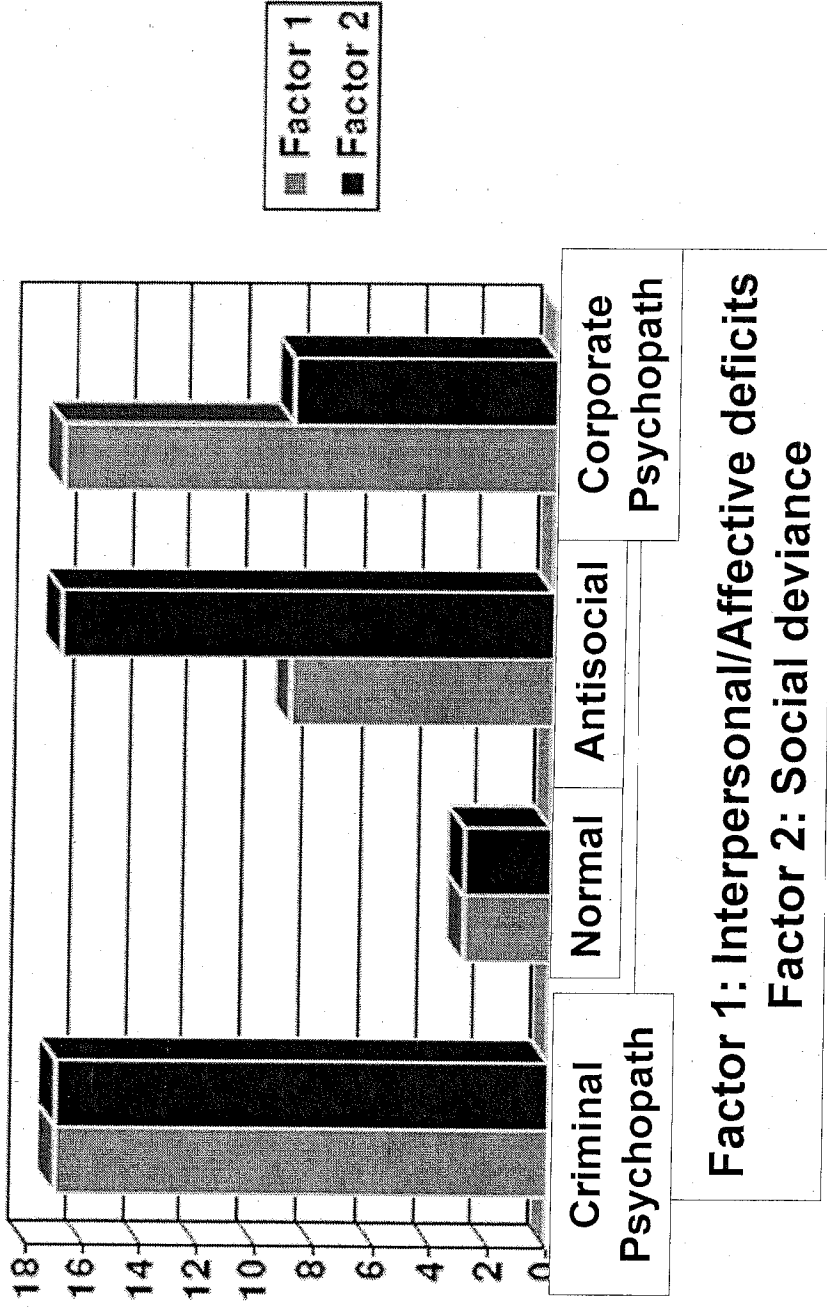
1. Glibness/superficial charm (1)
2. Grandiose sense of self-worth (1)
3. Pathological lying (1)
4. Cunning/manipulative (1)
5. Lack of remorse or guilt (1)
6. Shallow affect (1)
7. Callous/lack of empathy (1)
8. Failure to accept responsibility for own actions (1)
9. Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom (2)
10. Parasitic lifestyle (2)
11. Poor behavioral controls (2)
12. Early behavior problems (2)
13. Lack of realistic, long-term plans (2)
14. Impulsivity (2)
15. Irresponsibility (2)
16. Juvenile delinquency (2)
17. Revocation of conditional release (2)
18. Promiscuous sexual behavior (T)
19. Many short-term relationships (T)
20. Criminal versatility (Hare, 1986) (T)

Factor 1: Callous emotional and interpersonal detachment; affective impairment

Most corporate psychopaths score more on Factor 1 than 2

?
Factor 2: Chronic and socially deviant antisocial behaviors & lifestyle

PCL-R Profiles



Unlike the criminal or antisocial psychopath, the white-collar psychopath usually does not engage in violence or direct criminal behavior. Instead, they operate through glibness, manipulation, deceit, and with a lack of remorse or guilt

Dependent Personality Disorder

- Difficulty making everyday decisions without excessive reassurance from others
- Difficulty expressing disagreement with others because of fear of loss of support
- Goes to excessive lengths to get nurturance and support from others
- Helpless when alone because of fears of being unable to care for self

Particular Issues in Challenging Client Relationships

- Interpersonal dynamics with difficult clients
- Perfectionism; want to do a good job for the client and demonstrate competence
- Often expected to adapt our personalities to those around us

What to do?

- Be aware of the dynamic
- Anticipate your own emotional reactions
- Set firm boundaries and stick to them
- Take breaks, where possible
- Spend time with others
- Consult with colleagues
- Remember who you are and what your role is

Questions?

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