The Influence of Patriarchal Norms and Social Inequalities on Gender Discrepancies in BPD Diagnoses

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Abstract

While literature surrounding Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) has attributed the substantial gender disparity prevalent in patient-populations as reflective of a difference in biology, this paper presentation examines the role that social structural inequalities may play instead. The overrepresentation of women in the patient population is discussed through three principal themes in this presentation; the first explores the gender disparity that exists within risk factors for BPD, emphasizing that women are at a higher risk of experiencing the principal risk factors associated with the development of BPD. A second perspective highlights the role of adaptational responses to maltreatment and neglect, and how these responses have been pathologized in the mental healthcare field. Finally, the third examines a number of diagnostic biases that have roots in gender biases within the mental healthcare system itself. While a number of theories exist to try and explain why the diagnosis of BPD is dominated by women, these three highlight the inequalities women face which may either contribute to their high diagnosis rates, or function as a reflection of the diagnostic criteria itself. Approaching the diagnostic category of BPD critically and with a focus on social inequalities, as opposed to solely a biomedical method of analysis, may illuminate the unique experiences women face that may contribute to their diagnosis. This presentation will also examine the utility of the diagnostic category itself and bring into question the many ways biases impact the diagnostic process and how they can lead to pervasive gender disparities, such as the disparities that are reflected in BPD diagnoses.

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