

## Does Britney Spears Have Bipolar Disorder?

By Julie A. Fast

At lot of you have written and asked if I think that Britney Spears has bipolar disorder. I don't normally try to figure out the behavior of superstars. The pressures of their careers can often cause behavior that mimics bipolar – as does the drug and alcohol use that accompanies the lifestyle. But the Britney Spears situation is different. Something is wrong here. Usually when I hear an incident on the TV or read something in a magazine I can tell if bipolar is involved. Britney Spears is more difficult to figure out.

Here is a recap of her life in the media:

She was a child star on the Mickey Mouse Club show- along with Justin Timberlake, Christina Aguilera and the actor Ryan Gosling. She had a mega hit with the song Hit Me Baby One More Time and was known much more for her sexy dancing and costumes than her singing ability. And yet, it was obvious that she was very talented. She was in the news quite often during her relationship with Justin Timberlake, but there was very little scandal or over the top behavior. I think for many people, she was sexy, but not considered too talented. I've always disagreed! Anyone who can maintain a career in the music industry and make millions of dollars from her singing and concerts is talented. I think it has always just been fun to bash Britney Spears. I also think that many people would agree that she worked very hard for her success and always had. There is no comparison to her and someone like Paris Hilton. Britney put in the time.

A few years ago she met and married a dancer named Kevin Federline. He had quite a reputation for being a party boy and she started to follow his lead. Now, here is where things get difficult. If Britney does have bipolar, and I'm not saying that she does, it's common to meet someone who seems to influence you in a bad way and yet you may be the one leading the situation with your manic behavior.

In other words, if Britney did have signs of bipolar mania it would be pretty easy to find someone to take along for the ride. I've done it so many times I can't count them all.

She got pregnant very quickly and then got pregnant again as soon as her first son was born. This further complicates things as post partum depression can cause so many symptoms that mimic bipolar disorder. She was interviewed last year and said she didn't have post partum depression. She also posted a lot of odd messages on her blog. I was watching all of this with interest- simply because she's so famous and I've always liked her as an artist, but then things just kept getting worse. She was caught driving with her child in her lap. She was accused of being a negligent mother. She did a reality show with Kevin Federline that was supposedly quite... interesting.

Eventually, she started to party and neglect her kids in a very obvious way. There were a lot of pictures of her drinking and the drug rumors got stronger- there had been drug rumors for quite a while, but these seemed pretty substantial.

Eventually she and Federline broke up and agreed on joint custody- but Britney couldn't seem to handle that. There were more pics of her drinking and taking off her top in a swimming pool

while surrounded by strangers. (Does this sound familiar to any of you who have experienced mania!) but once again- this can all be drug centered behavior as well.

She then started going in and out of rehab. Finally, her behavior got out of hand- she shaved her head in public, went after her own car with an umbrella and checked in and out of rehab again.

This is when it became pretty obvious that bipolar is a possibility. So many of her behaviors are familiar to those of us affected by the illness- depression, manic behavior, impulsive acts, sexual mistakes, drugs and alcohol- a complete change in behavior from the past- I know I went through all of this...

She eventually lost custody of her sons and her very sad drugged out performance on the MTV Music awards a few months ago pretty much sealed her fate in the media- she was destroying herself and her career all at once. It truly has been a train wreck – and they haven't let anyone forget it.

I don't think that anyone who has watched Britney Spears over the years from her very controlled, professional and amazing dance performances on MTV with snakes and Madonna just to name a few, would have ever thought any of this was possible. She honestly didn't fit the pattern of many self destructive Hollywood stars.

A few weeks ago it came out that her 16 year old sister, Jamie Lynn Spears is pregnant. That would be a trigger for any sister, whether she has a mental illness or not. And then finally, this weekend, Britney locked herself in a bathroom with her young son and refused to come out. She was taken away in restraints. She supposedly tested negative for drugs and alcohol.

All of this is making me sick. The poor girl. I happened to see a few minutes of an 'entertainment' show on TV last night and it showed how she was not even able to talk to her car without dozens of cameras in her face. I would lock myself in a bathroom as well.

Rumors are that Britney was on a psych drug and went off which caused the erratic behavior- others say that she is a pill addict, etc. etc.

Who knows? We don't know her and never will. I try to keep myself separate from gossip in my life and certainly don't want to make celebrity gossip a part of my daily conversation, but here in the states it's quite the norm. Everyone is talking about Britney.

Back to the bipolar- the illness is quite easy to diagnose is a person finds the right doctor who knows how to ask the right questions. This means taking a very deep family history in terms of mental illness and alcohol/drug use. The next step for a bipolar diagnosis is to establish if there is true mania. This can be difficult if a person is constantly in the limelight or is using drugs and alcohol. As you probably know, mania is the deciding factor for bipolar- without mania- there is not bipolar disorder. Mania is an elevated mood that can either be euphoric or dysphoric (agitated.) Britney has ALL of the signs of mania.

Post partum depression also has to be examined- a person can become depressed, psychotic or manic from post partum- so this assessment is very important. Whomever examines Britney needs to talk with close family and friends as well- not the people she's been hanging around with since the behavior started a few years ago. Then, the doctor needs to go over all of the questions in the DSM IV (a diagnostic manual used to diagnose mental illness)- as I said, this is not a difficult illness to diagnose once a full history is taken- the problem is that people can be very avoidant of getting the diagnosis. No matter what- there are so many indications of bipolar disorder right now that the illness must at least be ruled out.

Another scenario is that she has been diagnosed and is not complying with the treatment.

Here is my take on the situation: First of all, those of us on the outside only get what the media tells us. It's all negative all of the time and it's disgusting. I know that I would not be able to survive it. The vicious media around her is just like the type that surrounded Princess Diana- and we see what happened there. Can someone put a restraining order on the media if they are endangering someone's life? So, in that respect- I don't think the media is necessarily a good source of information- but considering that she has literally had her life catalogued in pictures for the past few years, there are a lot of indications that suggest bipolar disorder.

There are also a lot of indications that the problems could be pressure and drug use. It's actually too complicated to figure out. I recently saw Bill Clinton speak- he briefly mentioned the cut throat world of the media and said, "And that poor girl Britney Spears! Just leave her alone. She's a kid." Everyone nodded and cheered. They agreed, leave her alone.

But she will never be left alone and that's sad. Does this have to be a part of fame? Before I was diagnosed, I lived a life much like what Britney is going through- no fame of course, but a lot of world travel and huge mistakes- if it had been detailed in pictures I would not be here now I'm sure. I would have killed myself in shame and from all of the stress. A harsh truth isn't it.

I think that there is a good chance that Britney has bipolar disorder and the only way to know is to get her away from the media frenzy and into a place that is calm and far away from Hollywood and all of her entourage- where she can talk to someone and find out what's really going on. I'm not talking about therapy- that is not what is needed right now and it won't work anyway. Therapy is for treatment, not diagnosis. She needs to know what is going on in terms of her behavior... she needs to have some peace to stop the runaway merry go round- which is how I used to describe my mind when I was really sick.

This time away from the Hollywood life is essential for a diagnosis. I don't even think my books are something a person uses before they are diagnosed- I write treatment plans- I help people once they are diagnosed and there are millions and millions of us. We need help before we kill ourselves or lose our kids or wreck our careers. Then we need the books- I always recommend that family members do read my books if they suspect someone they love is bipolar, but the person with the illness often needs stronger treatment at first.

I hope that Britney's family can listen to what her behavior is saying- it's not saying, *I'm a typical Hollywood screw up*- we can leave that to Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie. Britney Spears is different. She is in pain and danger. She's obviously in a situation she can't control. No one wants to act the way she's acting- her behaviors suggest a brain problem- not a personality problem. She has become a part of the American way of life whether we like it or not, and we have an obligation as people affected by bipolar disorder to make sure she gets the help she needs- whether it's bipolar or not. Not one of us needs to go through what she's going through and I think that you are probably someone who understands- bipolar ruins lives- I hope she doesn't have it... that is for sure. But if she does, it's a good thing to have a diagnosis. Then the craziness can end and she can rebuild her life. I've done it- you've probably done it or know someone who has. She can do it too.

Julie A. Fast

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Julie A. Fast, best selling author of *Take Charge of Bipolar Disorder*, *Loving Someone with Bipolar Disorder* and *Get It Done When You're Depressed* is a critically acclaimed six-time author, award winning bipolar disorder advice columnist, national speaker, and sought after expert in the fields of bipolar disorder and depression. Julie's work specializes in helping people manage all aspects of their daily lives -despite the complications that bipolar disorder creates. To learn how to personalize a plan to help yourself or a loved one find and create stability that ensures the quality of life that we all deserve, visit: <http://www.bipolarhappens.com>