

Different views on Bipolarity

A recent research project conducted by Debbie Woods involved analysis of lengthy interviews and questionnaires with people who have been diagnosed as bipolar and mental health service staff who work with people who have received the diagnosis. Whilst every individual sees bipolar in a different way, her research revealed three main views about bipolarity:

A. 'Biochemical Bipolar'

People holding this view saw bipolarity as a disorder that is the result of a chemical imbalance and is controllable with professional help through the identification and management of symptoms.

Such people strongly agreed with statements such as 'Having a family history of Bipolar Disorder increases the likelihood of developing it' and 'Bipolar results from faulty wiring in the brain'.

B. 'Environmental Bipolar'

People holding this view saw bipolarity as a set of difficulties that everyone experiences in varying degrees. Rather than being caused by biochemical imbalances, people's difficulties were seen as being socially and environmentally caused. Bipolarity was not believed to be something inherent to the person, but rather the result of developmental experiences and trauma, with the difficulties being helped by social support.

Such people strongly agreed with statements such as 'Being bullied at school causes Bipolar Disorder' and 'Everyone has some Bipolar Disorder symptoms'.

C. 'Being Bipolar'

People holding this view saw bipolarity as being inextricably linked to them as a person. Some situations were believed to trigger symptoms/problems, however on a frequent basis moods were seen as changing without warning in an unpredictable way.

Such people strongly agreed with statements such as 'Bipolar Disorder is just who you are' and 'Sensitive people are predisposed to Bipolar Disorder'.

Which fits your views the best? Or if none of the above significantly overlaps with your view, how would you summarise your view of bipolar.

In Debbie's study all the people who saw bipolarity as A (*Biochemical Bipolar*) were mental health service staff. All the people who saw bipolarity as C (*Being Bipolar*) were service users. People who saw bipolarity as B (*Environmental Bipolar*) were a mix of staff and service users.