

On The Edge of Insanity

Emily Watson

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Brave and revealing, On The Edge of Insanity shows what life is like inside an OCD mind.

Emily Watson's struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorder begins on the cusp of her adulthood. A bright physics student in a challenging program, she suddenly finds herself distracted by the overwhelming need to wash her hands, repetitively flip light switches, and perform other meaningless rituals. As she struggles to cope with her OCD and later her bipolar disorder, she calls on the support of her family and the medical community. In *On the Edge of Insanity*, Watson explains what OCD is and how it feels from the patient's point of view.

This book would be a useful companion to a discussion about how mental health problems are experienced. While it often comes across as a recital of agonies, Watson does a fine job overall of conveying the full extent of her condition. The book does not shy away from verbatim transcriptions of the obsessive thought processes that make life with OCD so difficult. People who have never experienced mental health issues may be shocked at the level of debilitation inherent in this condition.

The representation of the author as an intelligent, sensitive person plagued by an uncontrollable mind may help dissolve continuing social stigma against the mentally ill. Ultimately, the author admits that she had originally hoped to publish this book after getting her mental health under control, but the fact that her struggle is ongoing may invite further discussion about the importance of mental health maintenance and the unrealistic nature of a quick fix.

Despite her condition, Watson maintains a fairly positive attitude, highlighting some of the more comically absurd aspects of OCD in vignettes usually titled along the lines of "Emily's Helpful Tips." These include guides to hand washing and hygienic packing. Her quirky personality gives this book an endearing quality that might have been lost if the treatment had been purely serious.

Near the beginning, the book describes OCD in clinical terms, using WebMD as a reference. However, this section could have used more context. The history of the condition, the experiences of other OCD sufferers, and a wider variety of sources would have strengthened this otherwise useful section.

Though its content is of high quality, the book also repeats some of its points, particularly the timetable of the onset of the author's OCD. Some awkward phrasing suggests that the attention of an editor could improve the book, but does not interfere with comprehension.

On the Edge of Insanity is brave and revealing. Its audience is potentially broad, including not only other mental health patients, but also the families and friends of people whose irrational behaviors may seem inexplicable to the rest of the world.

ANNA CALL (January 5, 2015)

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