



**Dr. B. Duncan McKinlay**  
Psychologist

London, ON, Canada  
url. [www.lifesatwitch.com](http://www.lifesatwitch.com)

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Tourette Syndrome • OCD • ADHD  
Sensory • ODD • IED/'Rage'

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A How-To Guide for Young People*

## **Disinhibited Thoughts #9**

Growing up, I wasn't by any stretch of the imagination what anyone would have considered a "catch" romantically speaking. Or maybe I simply decided I wasn't, and this belief in itself made that true.....

Granted, despite my for-the-most-part successful efforts to suppress tics, as a teen I was still emotionally volatile, unstable, pretty obtuse socially and, for many years, rather fat. I'm betting that none of these qualities rank particularly high on Chatelaine's "Recipe For A Hunk" list.

Yet losing over 70 pounds and working out regularly seemed to make little difference. Gradually becoming more socially aware through explicit skills training seemed to make little difference. Doing post-graduate work with a good career ahead seemed to make little difference. And, perhaps most confusing and frustrating of all for me, treating romantic interests like royalty seemed only to encourage them to run faster. It all seemed so backwards: I showed every consideration possible. I drowned them in affection. I doted on every word, and worshiped the ground they walked on. And nothing. Was I that repugnant? Was TS such a hideous quality that, even when hidden, it negated any positives I could possibly ever muster?

I certainly believed so. Such a fate angered me. I looked for stones I had not yet unturned to beat it. I sunk into depressions over it. Eventually there was nothing left to do but accept it. This is who I was, it was not what this world desired, and that was ok. I'd get by. So I stopped trying so hard with women, and refocused my energies into my own pursuits.

Bingo. Imagine my disbelief as my dating fortunes then began to grow, and continue to do so. The final irony was of course that I hardly suppressed anymore: certainly when I do suppress now it is with dubious success (those muscles have atrophied from disuse) and is borne out of respect for a situation rather than embarrassment. Hence my ticking has become unapologetic and outright bizarre. Huh? Were all those Cro-Magnon men right that asserted the less YOU cared, the more the WOMEN did??

Of course not. Obviously you have to care about the person you date. But you have to show that you care about *yourself* too. That had been the missing and most crucial piece up until then. I recently approached a fellow graduate student to ask her how I've changed over the four years she's known me (a time period which has seen me go from a forced dating abstinence to multiple opportunities) – without hesitation she replied I was now much more self-assured and, as a result, more laid-back and positive about myself. So maybe the TS DID play a role in my dating difficulties, but that role was to alter my self-view, and the attitude I exuded. It was never about the tics!

Attitude oozes from our every pore and gives people information on how to treat us. It is in your gaze, which may or may not falter when you tic. It is in your shoulders and stride, which may or may not be proud. It is in your priorities, which may or may not send the message "you are important to me but I will not always put you first because I am important too". It is in your dating reactions that may or may not say, "I think you are great and hope you like being with me, but it is not something on which I hinge my belief in my own worth". I have learned that believing I deserve ridicule causes me to be hyper vigilant of reactions, and even, in retrospect, to disbelieve individuals that claimed to have an interest in me. I have also learned that believing any cruel reactions say more about the reactor than about myself causes my awareness of many reactions to disappear. It has also led to a number of people approaching me with a whole new flavour of reaction – demonstrating admiration for my choice to be myself, and curious questioning.

Belief in yourself is the ultimate aphrodisiac. Pit it against TS – even tics as severe as mine – and it will trump the disorder without even breathing hard.

Until next time, my friends!

Duncan

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