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Publishing:

*Nix Your Tics! Eliminate Unwanted Tic Symptoms:
A How-To Guide for Young People*

T(r)IC(k)S #2: **Teasers**

So many times in my past I have felt that people were laughing at me. Not laughing *with* me, to my face, by loved ones making light fun of my foibles. Laughing *at* me in a cold, humiliating, ostracizing ridicule. A laugh meant to exclude me, to make me feel like I am some freak on a stage performing for shallow amusement. A laugh that assumed I didn't notice (after all, I must be retarded), and told me that I wasn't as good as *him*, or *him*, or *her*, or *them*. And if I had thought I was, I was wrong.

I never had the guts to say anything to any of them. I would sit there and stew, replaying the slight again and again. I would rehearse obsessively what I WISHED I could say, but never would. I would be unable to concentrate in class, plagued by whether those chuckles were aimed at me or not. After each tick I would strain to listen for a reaction because, I told myself, if they were obviously making fun of me I WOULD say something. I really WOULD.....

As I got older and learned to surround myself with people that supported, loved, and understood me, those days of persecution faded. Because I found the vast majority of people from young adulthood on are kind, I began to convince myself that the cruelty of kids HAD been all in my head. While I didn't doubt that some kids had been and could be mean, I became more and more certain that the reason I had thought that so many more people hated me than actually did was really because I hated myself.

This term, however, I sat in on a first year undergraduate psychology course; I was a teaching assistant for the class, and attending the lectures each week was one of the requirements of the job. Sitting there, submerged in teenagers, was like reliving an old nightmare -- suddenly the whispers, the giggles, the empty seats beside me, all reappeared. What struck me in particular was how quickly I reverted to the "me" of six years ago -- the power of those laughs is such that, although I am now a successful, happy adult surrounded by friends and people that love me, I was *scared* to say anything to those girls. I was paralyzed by the situation, the embarrassment, and the thought that maybe they *aren't* laughing at me, and saying something would make me look stupid. On another, newer, level I got mad. I had been helpless those years before, but no more. I was now armed with self-esteem, self-confidence, and years of counseling TS kids similarly shattered by this kind of treatment.

After class I did corral the group of girls. I called them on their immaturity and their bigotry, and questioned their ability to be in psychology if this is how they intend on reacting to a disorder. I walked away leaving them stunned. Yet a nagging insecurity, a tiny voice still wondered if those girls were standing there in shock because they had no idea what this lunatic was talking about. Maybe I would be hauled into the professor's office tomorrow for my behaviour.

The next morning I arrived at school to find an email waiting for me. It was from those girls. They had been up until 2:30 a.m. thinking about their actions. They wrote honestly -- they admitted their rudeness, and pleaded for my forgiveness. I almost cried: after so many years, VALIDATION! I HAD been right! I hadn't made all of it up. I could finally be sure. I realized that day I have done both others with TS and myself a disservice for years. Yes, attitude is vital. Yes it makes all the difference in how one responds to a situation. BUT WE DID NOT, AND DO NOT, 'INVENT' THE SITUATION. I was not weak, or somehow wrong, to think that others were cruel, and to feel angry and depressed about that. Others WERE cruel, and to feel angry and depressed is the natural reaction that anyone would have. It is so important to recognize that.



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Teasers Continued...

So how do you cope? How do you live happily, knowing that a portion of the world (perhaps a big portion when you're young) *is* cruel?

☐ a lot of people, like the girls I talked to, just don't think. They aren't bad people, they just didn't know what is going on, and don't know how to react. Realizing that you would probably laugh too if you had never heard of TS helps remove a lot of your own anger and resentment.

☐ since some people don't understand what is happening, tell them. Write an article for the school paper. Do a class presentation. Give people the TSFC Q&A. At least that way you can find out who is actually cruel, and who just needed an explanation. I found that the second type is much more common than I had thought it would be.

☐ you can't explain TS to everyone all of the time. So carry cards that talk about TS. Wear a TS button. When people see you do something strange, they look for a reason why. These things can help give a fast explanation.

☐ one of my biggest problems is that I always used to set myself up. I would go into a new situation convincing myself that people wouldn't see my TS, and that they wouldn't laugh. They always did. A big step is accepting these things – knowing that “Yes, people are going to react”. It's amazing how much that helps. I now always go into a new situation saying to myself, “Ok, these people don't know me. They will react a few times before they realize I can't help it, and then they will try and stop”. When I *expect* these things, they are easier to ignore.

☐ self-acceptance is a biggie. People look to you to see how to react. If you avoid eye contact, keep your head down, and generally look like you agree that you are a loser, then people will follow suit, and treat you like a loser. One day I decided that I would “fake it” – I would pretend that the TS wasn't bothering me, and that I liked myself. I was astounded at how differently new people treated me then. I was also astounded that, after awhile, I began to believe the things that I was “faking”...

☐ start seeing the insults that people throw at you as saying more about THEM than about YOU. Realize that the biggest bullies are usually the kids that have the lowest self-esteem – they don't feel good about themselves, so they need to pick on some guy with a disorder to try and make themselves feel better. If you really believe that you are ok, some guy who says that you aren't ok is just plain *wrong*. If he knows that you have TS and teases you anyway, be disgusted by him, and feel sorry for him because he has a small mind.

☐ focus on the people that do like you. If 99 people in a room liked me, I used to ignore them all and try to hang around the 1 that didn't! Now, after a lot of practice, I can go into a roomful of people who are reacting and laughing at me, and not notice THEM because I am focused on the one person I am with.

cheers!
Duncan
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