

Case of Sophia

By Janine Michelle Sy, Rpm

Twenty-two-year-old Sophia describes herself as very passionate and excitable. She said that it does not take much for her to feel and express emotions, regardless of the consequences. Sophia shared that among her family, she is the only one who exhibits an intense temperament. Her mother, who she described as someone who "hates and doesn't like showing emotions," would become infuriated when Sophia showed her feelings. This gave her the impression that being demonstrative of one's sentiments is wrong. Despite being punished for her overt emotional displays, she had difficulty controlling the overwhelming internal excitement that she constantly felt.

Sophia shared that she often experienced violent outbursts, characterized by uncontrollable and rapid mood shifts. She described that her moods "control her more than she controls it" and that even the smallest issue can trigger a disproportionately severe emotional response. She said that she has a low threshold for anger and that she feels it the most. These volatile displays of emotions affected her willingness to socialize. She said that she prefers not being around people in order to minimize the possibility of making a scene in public.

Sophia's Relationships

Sophia's intense internal and external emotional experiences pervaded her close relationships. From her account, it can be seen that her relationships are marked with heightened emotions and conflict.

As a daughter and sister...

Sophia's parents are not married. She and her siblings were born out of wedlock. Growing up, Sophia never met her father. She then recounted that she never had significant memories of her dad when she was young. At twelve years old, she discovered that her father was married and has his own family, with whom he still lives with. Upon learning that they are the second family of her father, she felt a multitude of emotions, such as anger and shame towards her mom. She also felt guilt towards her father's legal wife and family. These emotions stemmed from the idea that Sophia's mother and father continued to maintain their illicit relationship despite its unlawful nature. She believed that if she weren't born, her mom and dad might have stopped seeing each other.

Sophia first encountered her father when she was fourteen. She asked permission from her mother if she could watch a concert. Sophia's mother allowed her, only if her father accompanied her. Sophia said that her mom's condition made her feel like she was being blackmailed emotionally. Upon seeing her dad, Sophia initially felt nervous. However, her emotion shifted to being upset when she witnessed her mom and dad flirting openly. It was then that she felt hatred for her dad. On later occasions, she only met him when her mother brought him along family outings, without informing Sophia and her siblings beforehand. These instances made her feel upset because she was not forewarned about her father's presence.

During her childhood, Sophia's mother was always busy. For this reason, Sophia grew up under the care of her grandmother. They have a close relationship, such that whenever Sophia needed comfort, she would stay beside her grandmother and cry. Sophia felt most comfortable expressing her thoughts and feelings to her grandmother.

Sophia said that she and her mother "weren't close at all" and "would always fight." Their arguments are usually triggered when Sophia shares a story about her personal life to her mother. In the middle of sharing her story, Sophia's mother tends to scold her and point out her flaws. Her mother's interjections offend Sophia and trigger her anger. Their conflicts also stem from situations when her mother would give provisions and privileges to her younger sister, but not to her. Their confrontations would sometimes turn into violent disputes when both of them are in a bad mood. In one instance, Sophia's mother got upset and threw a chair at her. She then chased Sophia to her room, beat her, and locked her in. Sophia was not allowed to leave her room, so her grandmother brought her food.

Sophia believes that her sister is the favorite among all siblings. She shared that she feels jealous of her sister because she enjoys all the attention, while Sophia remains in the background. She admitted being insecure of her sister and never really talking or being around her.

As a girlfriend...

Sophia was involved in a "toxic" romantic relationship that lasted for one year and four months. Three months into the relationship, her boyfriend openly flirted with other girls. Later on, this escalated to instances of cheating and objectifying women. To express her hurt and feelings of betrayal, she initially gave her boyfriend the silent treatment. As the tension and conflicts progressively escalated, Sophia began to show her frustration by crying and yelling at her boyfriend in public. It reached a point where a professor called her out for a violent outburst in school. Sophia and her boyfriend also engaged in physical disputes, where both ended up having bruises from biting and scratching each other. During these instances, Sophia said that her mind would shut off, and all she could think of was wanting to hurt her boyfriend. These violent conflicts occurred every week and lasted for a few days. When they fight, she felt conflicting emotions that quickly shifted from "I hate you" to "Don't leave me." This inner conflict made her stay in the relationship even at the cost of both their physical and emotional well-being. She also shared that the relationship did not help them to grow. Instead, they kept bringing each other down.

As a friend...

Sophia had few friends during grade school. She mostly kept to herself and described that her life then revolved around school and home. She performed excellently in school and attributed this to her love for learning.

In high school, Sophia belonged to her own peer group. She described herself as very possessive when it comes to close friends. When her best friend started being close to another classmate, Sophia felt upset. She felt that her friend spent less time with her and paid less attention to her. Sophia was able to resolve the issue by conversing with her best friend about how she felt.

In her senior year, Sophia got bullied for reasons that never became clear to her. Because of this, she started to resent school. It heightened her feeling that she had no one to turn to, not even her family. She cried privately to avoid being tagged as an attention-seeker.

When Sophia entered the university, she discovered vices—alcohol and cigarettes. She drank alcohol every day and sometimes went to class inebriated. Sophia said that she was not able to establish a deep relationship with her college friends. She only hung out with them to drink, but their interactions remained superficial. Her only confidante was her best friend, with whom she shared everything. Despite engaging in vices during college, Sophia managed to earn a place in the Dean's List.

The Trigger

At eighteen years old, Sophia had a severe and violent breakdown. Their helper tried to pacify her, but Sophia retaliated and chased the helper with a knife. At that moment, Sophia felt that she was not herself anymore. This episode prompted Sophia to seek psychological help.

Sophia first sought the help of a mental health professional in 2014. Sophia was initially diagnosed with depression. Later on, the diagnosis was changed to bipolar disorder. Eventually, she felt uncomfortable towards her psychologist and decided to discontinue with her therapy. After that, Sophia tried many times to look for a psychologist that would suit her, but always ended up being discontented. She candidly shared that she cannot remember all the psychologists whom she consulted because she had been through many already. The usual scenario that led to a falling out would begin with the psychologist being frank with her, which would trigger Sophia's anger. Unable to contain herself, this would lead to an outburst in the clinic. She would then feel embarrassed and discouraged to go back to the therapist. She also admitted that she never took therapy seriously and only went there to make her mom happy.

Unable to seek constant help, Sophia's unstable temper and outbursts continued, both in school and at home. At this point, she was in danger of being suspended from the university due to her behavior. Sophia also shared that her family, especially her grandmother, grew more concerned about her whenever they see her having these emotional difficulties. It was around February 2015 that her mother decided to confine Sophia in a psychiatric facility.

On the day of Sophia's confinement, her mother told her that she will undergo therapy. When they entered the premise, a mental health professional called Sophia in. Four security personnel escorted her through a long and narrow hallway. A nurse then explained that she had to stay in the facility for a while. Upon hearing this, Sophia "went ballistic," as feelings of fear and anger arose. When she protested violently, the nurses tied her to a bed and released her only when she regained her composure.

Based on Sophia's psychological assessment, she was diagnosed with _____. Sophia initially felt disbelief, "For me, depression was fine. But what's this _____ so there's something wrong with your _____. Once the diagnosis sank in, she called her mom and apologized for her actions.

In the mental health facility, Sophia said that she felt comfortable with her psychologist's approach of not being intrusive and imposing. She found it helpful when her therapist asked questions that allowed her to reflect. Aside from her individual therapy, her mother and siblings also underwent family therapy regularly. This served as the springboard to mending Sophia's relationship with her family. During her confinement, she said that seeing her family during visits brought her so much joy. She considered the entire ordeal as a way to heal herself and her relationship with her family.

Of Relapse and Recovery

The real battle for recovery was tested after she was discharged from the psychiatric facility. Sophia got involved in another romantic relationship. Her boyfriend belittled her as she earned money, while she cheated on him and became promiscuous. She said that at that time, she only engaged in the relationship not because she liked the guy, but because she did not want to be alone. After some time, they decided to end the relationship.

Sophia also revealed that after confinement, there was a time when she felt "so fed up, didn't want to go to therapy, didn't want to drink meds." Going through this stage, she stopped seeking treatment for months. She also contemplated on taking her own life. To carry out her intent, she collected her medicine, instead of ingesting it. When she had thirty tablets, she crushed it, mixed it in milk, and drank the mixture. She thought, "I was so ready like can I just go now? I don't want anymore." A few minutes later, Sophia's vision blurred. She began to panic and called her mother. She was then rushed to the hospital, where she remained for three days.

After the incident, Sophia went to her therapy sessions regularly. She found comfort in her therapist's warm disposition and genuine concern for her. Her relationship with her therapist has significantly facilitated her recovery. After meeting regularly for over a year, their sessions have been reduced as she continued to show improvement.

Current Functioning

Sophia's psychiatrist has declared that she is now able to manage the symptoms associated with _____. She shared that her recent experiences have been healthier, compared to her previous patterns of behaving, interacting, and dealing with her emotions.

Sophia is presently in a committed relationship, which she described as meaningful and allows both of them to grow. On a deeper level, she also feels that her relationship with God has influenced her life in a more pervasive way, such that she feels a deep desire to change her previous ways. With a refreshed perspective in life, Sophia graduated *cum laude* from college and is currently employed in an events management business.