Mothers of Adult Children with Bi-Polar Disease

My research:
Mothering of Adult Children

- Child development researcher
- Gerontologist
- Feminist

- Interested in women's issues as they age

- How are parents/mothers affected by their adult children's problems?

    - Women > 60.

When does parenting end?

- Most parenting books are for mothers of young children
  - Parents of Infants and Toddlers *****
  - Parents of Adolescents
- Parents/Mothers of Adult Children???
- Mothers of Adult Children with Serious Mental Illness?

Who cares for persons with Bi-Polar disease?

- Family (parents, partners) or friends = “Caregivers”

- These “caregivers” take on the responsibility of helping the person with BD cope with:
  - unpredictable, symptoms of depression
  - mania
  - high suicide risk

Caregivers’ physical health and mental health suffer

“Caregivers” → Mothers
Switching focus away from the “patient”

AWAY FROM THE CHILD

A FOCUS ON THE MOTHER’S EXPERIENCE

Why not fathers?

Small sample only interviewed mothers

But is caregiving really gender neutral?

Most “caregivers” are female

Once a mother – always a mother?

- What do you remember mothering was like with SUSIE when she was ---

- First born

- School age
- Early Adolescence
- Adolescence

- Young Adulthood

- Launching -- work, marriage, children

I feel like I am a mule being held back by a harness.

Jillian 76

- The harness was her commitment to providing shelter and safety to her daughter, Celia, who had her first psychiatric break at twenty-two. The next twenty years in Jillian's life were framed by finding and re-finding new apartments for her daughter.
- Friends thought that Jillian's doing the same thing over and over again was pointless.
- Others said she was only being a good mother. Jillian explained
- Celia "needed to eat … she needed a place to live."

Family obligations

- Family obligations—shared understandings about responsibilities, informal rules that determine how family members should help each other—vary from family to family and within cultures.
- The majority of families provide important, but typically intermittent, support when there are changes in their children's lives.
- When a mother is faced with her adult child's long-term need for support, she then faces a different kind of conflict – weighing her own needs over her adult child's.

Hope and Samantha

- “There was always something. It was the suicide attempt. It was the stealing with the credit card. It was not going to classes when she was enrolled in MassBay Community College. Those were like the big events and then there was the sex with the boy in the attic… a lot of events that I felt personally hurt by.”

Hurt from seeing her in a new light

- The hurt that Hope felt resulted from having to see her daughter in a new light each time something unpleasant happened. She was not just the smart, social young girl her mother appreciated and enjoyed. She was also troubled and dishonest.

Unhelpful therapist

- Hope found a therapist for her daughter after the suicide attempt, which had actually been a call for help and not a serious attempt. But after six months, the therapist called Hope to let her know that Samantha was not speaking in any of the sessions. She just spent the hour looking at her phone.

- Hope learned about her daughter's drug problem by discovering that valuable items were missing from a locked cabinet in the apartment—her father's gold coins and her mother's silver. Upon realizing that it was Samantha who had been the thief, Hope felt a tremendous sense of betrayal. Confronted, Samantha admitted that she had stolen the items, sold them, and used the money to buy crack. Hope was shocked and concerned.

- Samantha would not go to the treatment center Hope had located for her. Nothing Hope could do to get her to go.

- What Hope could do—and did, to her own amazement—was insist that Samantha move out.

- Homeless shelter, her own apartment with boyfriend

Worries even during the good times

- Yet, even during this relatively stable period in Samantha's life, Hope suffered. Worried whether or not her daughter would ever earn enough money to be fully self-supporting, she knew that she would not have the money to look after her once she retired.

- What was hardest was realizing that she was holding onto unrealistic expectations for their relationship. Hope had begun attending Al-Anon meetings where she struggled to follow the take-away lesson

- "If you don't expect anything, you won't be disappointed."

- While this generally referred to not expecting that the addict will recover, Hope was applying it to her hopes for a more reciprocal relationship between herself and her daughter.

My daughter doesn't know how to think about me – a missed date

- At the appointed new pick-up time, she waited in a deserted car park. The station was poorly lit, and groups of street people were mingling about. Hope felt vulnerable and conspicuous being this "white-haired lady" hanging out in her car.

- When the train arrived, Samantha did not get off with the others. Worried, Hope called the boyfriend and then Samantha, and learned that she had taken the wrong train and would be arriving at a different station.

- Hope was livid, but instead of telling Sam to turn around and go back home, she told her that she would get to her as quickly as she could. Driving there—"like a maniac"— she imagined her daughter alone in a deserted station. Hope was relieved to see Samantha in one piece, but she was also in a rage. She handed her the $75 that she now realized was the real reason for the visit. Hope told Samantha to not call again. They didn't speak until several weeks later when Hope called Samantha for her birthday.
- "My daughter doesn't know what it's like to have to make it work," Hope lamented. "To not get on the wrong train. To call when you're not able to leave on time. To me, those are just normal things. And to her, I don't know what. I still don't know why she wouldn't call beforehand and say, 'listen, it's really late. Let's make another plan or something.' It would have definitely taken the edge off for me."

I feel trapped in this relationship that I'm not willing to give up. And unlike a divorce, where you really can give the person up, I just really don't feel able to give her up."

On the one hand, Hope recognized that her daughter had serious problems that lead to her being late etc.

At the same time, Hope believed that she, herself was really the problem. She wanted to stop herself from so quickly responding to her daughter's requests or offers to visit, as they almost always ended up being disappointing and frustrating.

Difficult adult child

- Despite the unique circumstances of the women's lives, I discovered many commonalities in their stories. Nearly all had re-opened their homes to their adult child when they had nowhere else to go. Many of the adult children had mental health problems or substance abuse disorder—or both.

- That's what led me to search for a name to describe what I was seeing and to ultimately settle on the term Difficult Adult Child. I chose this name to acknowledge not just the challenges faced by the grown children, but the hardships passed along to the mothers who cared for them.

Difficult adult child

- If “difficult” seems a harsh label—one that blames, not just identifies—consider how the dictionary defines the word:
- 1. when something is hard to do or carry out;
- 2. hard to deal with, manage or overcome, and
- 3. hard to understand.

- Mothering adult children is *hard to do.*
- Tolerating the tensions in a relationship with a struggling adult child is extremely *hard to manage.*
- And *understanding* the problems that might have caused your child’s situation are *hard*,and knowing how to intervene can feel impossible.

“I have a difficult adult child”

- Giving a name to a family problem is the first step in being able to take action.

- It was only when domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse were named that attention to these problems occurred in health care, the law, and government social policies.
- Child abuse was first named in the 1960’s;
- domestic violence was first named in the 1970’s; and elder abuse in 1975.

- On a personal basis, for a woman whose boyfriend or husband was hitting her, having the concept of “domestic violence” gave her a tool to link her experience with that of others, and the first step toward seeking help.

Try using this new name

“Difficult adult child”

My daughter is an addict

My daughter is bi-polar

My son is a drunk

My son is a schizophrenic

“I’m at a crossroads”

- After two years of living with her daughter and grandson, Faith had come to the agency to find out how to evict them.
- “I’m still trying to help. But at the same time, I can’t keep on leaving myself out. I have to help myself. And I’m at a crossroads here.
- I have to stand up to them.
- At the same time, I have to understand that they have real problems.
- And I have to understand that, no matter what, I want to help them. I don’t want to give up on them. If I step back, something could happen to them and I’ll be sorry that I didn’t continue to try to keep working with them.”

Parenting at 80?

- Faith described herself as still “working with” her adult daughter to secure her capacity to live safely on her own.

- Ebony is forty-two years old; Faith is eighty. Her daughter and grandson both have bi-polar diagnoses

- According to most textbooks on typical adult development, Faith should be in the post-parental stage or the “empty nest” stage, which is assumed to occur when one’s children are all out of the parental home.

Linked Lives --- Difficult Mothering

- When adult children get into a situation where they can no longer support themselves and/or have no place to live, “difficult mothering” begins.

STAGE 1 “Something’s wrong: I have to help.”

- Celia 22, Jillian 42

STAGE 2 “This will be a new start.”

- Jillian 42 - 64
- Moved her daughter 21 times in 20 years
- *“It was horrible. It was horrible because I thought, oh, another place; either she has to leave or she’s—like the time we bought her a condo, she kept complaining and complaining to the management company. And she’d complain about neighbors and things like that. I was just getting call after call, and it was just awful. Each time I’d think, ‘Well, I have to find her another place to live.”*

- STAGE 3 “Crossing a line”

- Celia crossed a line by breaking into the family cabin on Lake Michigan, where she was forbidden to go, and she trashed their belongings and the cabin itself. Even though Celia had already broken into their suburban home several times, her breaking and entry into the family cottage pushed Jillian into a new level of fury and shock. She entertained (then rejected) the idea of cutting off Celia’s money or calling the police. “It’s like lead in your stomach.”

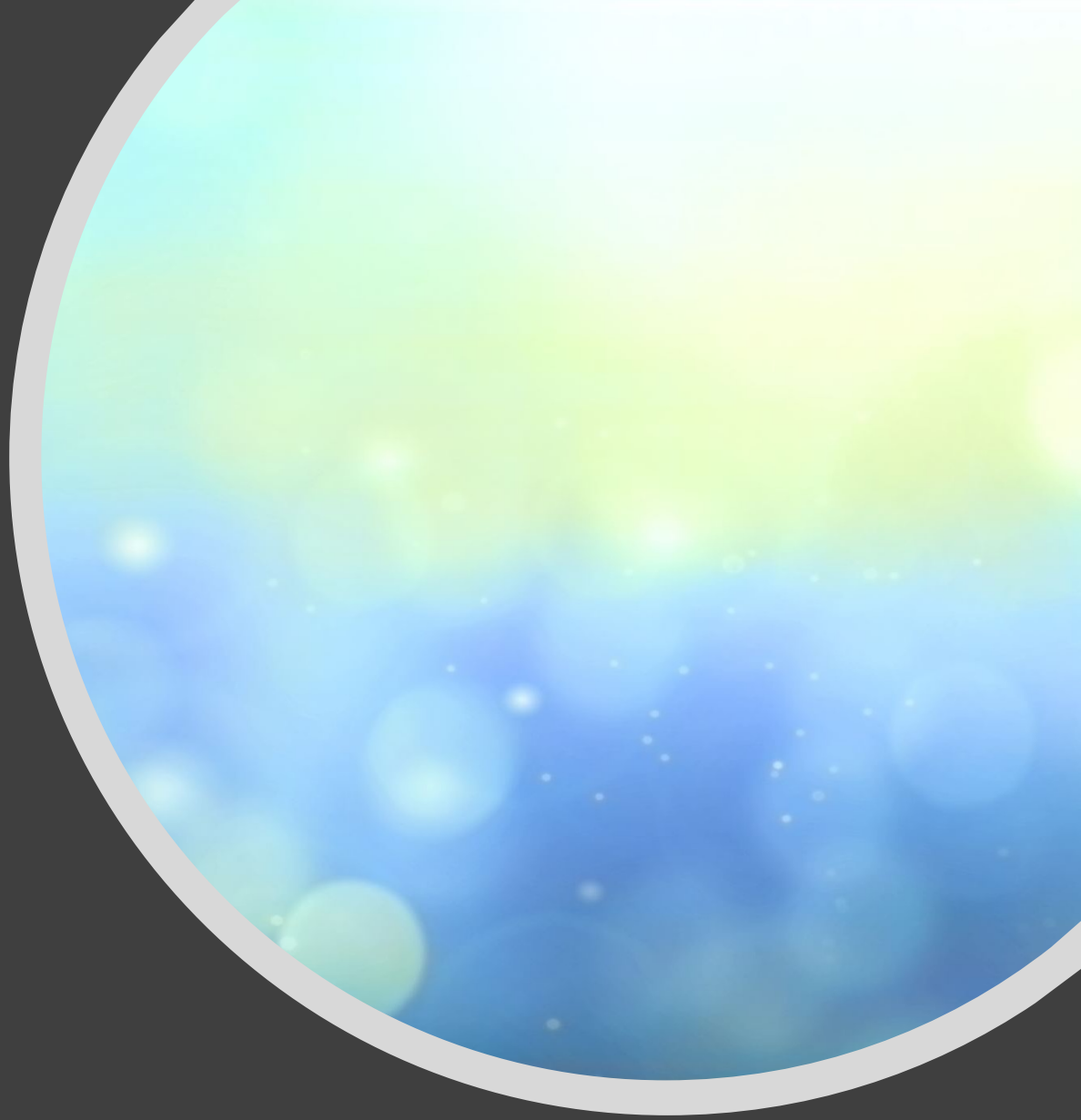
- Stopped finding and furnishing new apartments. Paid for monthly motel bills.

- STAGE 4 “Running out of gas”

- STAGE 5 “After I’m gone”

Where are you in this journey?

- How much are the problems in your adult child's life effecting you?
- Are you able to take care of your own health?
- Are you able to take care of your own mental health?
- Who do you turn to for support?



Thinking about Change

What can change?

- You can not cure your adult child's mental illness or stop their substance use disorder

- YOU CAN take Small Steps
  - How hard it is for mothers to focus on their own needs – even in later life
  - Take time to evaluate how uncomfortable you are
  - Stage of Change – Prochaska & DiClem

Change

Depression screening --

Bring to your physician

Get social support

Engage in Self-Care

Stay safe in your home

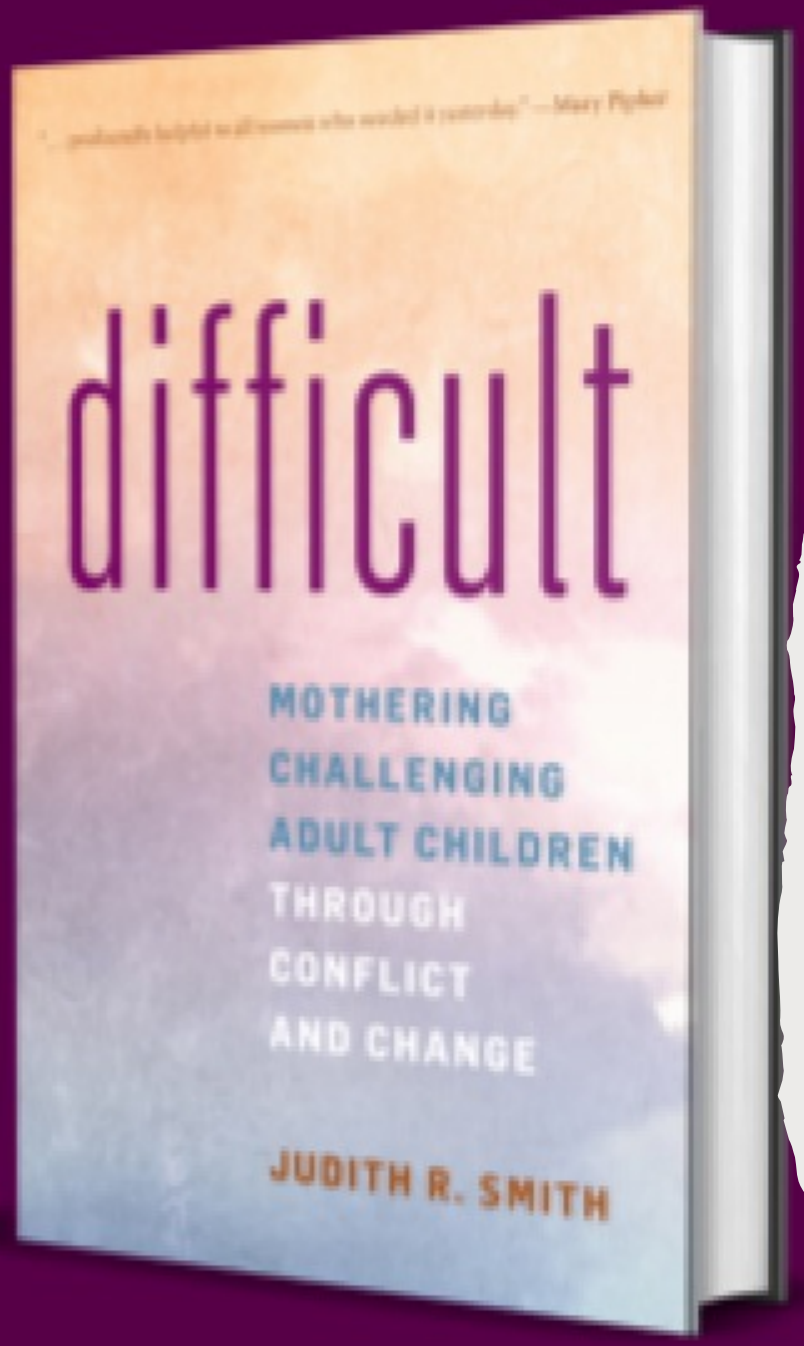
Have resources available when your adult child asks for them

Resources for help – for you and for your adult child

- National Suicide Prevention Help line. 800-273-8255
- SAMSHA NATIONAL HELPLINE 800-662-4357
- Area Agencies for Aging (AAA) https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx

- Mental health services
- Housing for adult children
- Government benefits for adult children

- Advocacy groups



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