

TikTok Self-Diagnosis & The Horoscope Effect

The Digital Age has made it far easier for those who might never have found a community of like-minded peers otherwise to attain a sense of belonging. Social media platforms such as Reddit and Tumblr, and now primarily TikTok, were solely designed for this kind of community building. A benefit of this is the increased mental health awareness due to these digital spaces. While it may be hard to find people near you who experience the same struggles as you, online it's far easier to discuss these problems with others who have a similar diagnosis. Gen Z, as a generation, is extremely in-tune with acknowledging and learning about mental health needs. However, there has also been an increasing number of youths that are engaging in self-diagnosing behaviors.

Self-diagnosing has been a growing concern for many years. In the past, people would casually mention how "OCD" they were for a number of reasons, or blame ADHD for getting a bit off topic in a conversation. However, in recent years, the number of youths who are self-diagnosing has increased dramatically, and for a number of conditions. On TikTok, conditions such as ADHD, Autism-Spectrum Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, and the extremely rare Dissociative Identity Disorder (formerly referred to as Multiple Personality Disorder), have found huge platforms.

For many reasons, some youths will identify with some of the symptoms of these disorders, and believe that they are experiencing them too. One reason may be the exploration of their own identity. Teenage years are a time of personal exploration and growth, and many of them may see the community around that condition and want to be further involved, leading to a kind of horoscope effect. This would entail someone seeing the videos on, and the symptoms of, these conditions and feeling so moved or involved in it that they feel they have it as well. Another possibility is that they are misinterpreting symptoms of another, more common, disorder, such as anxiety or depression. Finally, and most obviously, it may be that they actually do have this condition.

Regardless of the reason, if your child or student is self-diagnosing with a disorder, it's important to push them toward getting a proper diagnosis. If they're right, or if it was a different condition, that means that they've taken the first step in properly managing their condition. If not, then learning from a professional can help them manage the symptoms they were experiencing. For some, the symptoms they experience from their self-diagnosis can be as real as the usual disorder. For instance, a recent surge in self-diagnoses of Tourette's Syndrome led to a huge uptick in patients showing symptoms of a movement disorder. Their doctors found that rather than any type of Tourette's, it was actually due to stress, and in some cases, depression or anxiety. After a few weeks on an individualized treatment plan, and away from the Tourette's focused TikToks, these patients' tics disappeared.

In light of this, it's important to:

- **Consider mental health services.** While everyone's needs are different, therapy is not only for those with mental health concerns. For many, it's simply a way of handling the stress in their life. Additionally, if you or a loved one is worried about

a possible condition, a therapist would be a great and reliable source for further information.

- **Discuss mental health with your child and listen for their concerns.** If they're worrying about their mental health, they may not immediately express those concerns without a conversation to start the ball rolling.
- **Pay attention to what kind of content they're watching.** It's important to keep in mind that many people online will provide mental health advice as if they were a licensed professional, regardless of their credentials. If something is truly worrying you, check with your primary care physician or a therapist to get a professional's opinion.
- **Take social media breaks.** While it can be hard to step away from one's phone, getting out of the echo chambers that TikTok can create is important. Research has shown that excessive social media use is tied to negative mental health outcomes, and that taking "vacations" from it can improve one's attitude.

References

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