

Clinician Christine Ann Lawson, Ph.D. developed four distinct types of people with borderline personality disorder (BPD) in her book *Understanding the Borderline Mother: Helping Her Children Transcend the Intense, Unpredictable, and Volatile Relationship* (2000).

Dr. Lawson's book categorizes borderline mothers into four groups: Witches, Queens, Hermits, and Waifs. "Queens and Witches" are higher-functioning, acting-out "invisible" BPs, while "Hermits" and "Waifs" are lower-functioning, acting-in "conventional" types. Most people with BPD probably display secondary elements of other categories. The "Queen" has both BPD and narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

## **The Witch**

### Typical Thoughts

Unconsciously, Witches hate themselves because they grew up in an environment that "required complete submission to a hostile or sadistic caregiver" (2000). They continue the cycle by acting cruelly to others, especially those who are too weak, young, or powerless to help themselves.

### Typical Emotions

They feel no remorse for nightmarish acts, showing more interest in their own well-being than concern over the way they've hurt others. The Witch's triggers include jealousy, criticism, betrayal, abandonment, feeling left out, and being ignored.

### Typical Actions and Central Dilemma

Most BP parents do not physically abuse their children. Those who do probably fall into this category. However, the abuse usually occurs when other competent adults are not present. Thus, family members can live in fear while all seems well to the outside world.

Witches want power and control over others so that others do not abandon them. When someone or something triggers the Witches' abandonment fear, these BPs can become brutal and full of rage, even punishing or hurting family members who stand in their way (2000). These types of BPs are most resistant to treatment: they will not allow others to help and the source of self-loathing is very deep.

### Typical Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions of Family Members

"I will comply with what she wants. Resistance is futile. I will be assimilated."

Fear in victims.

Denial on the part of those who could protect the victims.

Tries not to trigger the witch. But her behavior is not really about the non-BP, so this strategy doesn't work.

### The Effect of the Witch's Behavior in Children

Children live in terror of Witches' capricious moods; they are the "collateral damage" of a secret war they did not start, do not understand, and cannot control.

Attacks are random, intense, and cruel.

Children automatically think they're at fault and can become shamed, depressed, insecure, dissociative, and hypervigilant.

As adults they may have multiple difficulties with self, relationships, physical illness, and even post traumatic stress disorder.

## The Queen

### Typical Thoughts

"I want more attention. I deserve more attention. And, by the way, what have you done for me lately?" Also, "My children should fulfill my needs, not the other way around. They don't love or respect me if they disagree with me, go against my wishes, or have needs of their own."

### Typical Feelings

These include entitlement, deprivation, emptiness, anger, frustration, or loneliness from the deprivation they felt as children. Queens are impatient and have a low tolerance for frustration. They also push others' boundaries without regret or recognition.

### Typical Actions and Central Dilemma

Driven by feelings of emptiness and unable to soothe themselves, Queens do what it takes to get what they feel they so richly deserve--including vindictive acts like blackmail. Initially they may impress others with their social graces. But when "friends" can no longer deliver, the Queen cuts them off without a thought. Queens are capable of real manipulation (vs. more primitive BP defenses) to get what they desire.

### Typical Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions of Family Members

"I can't meet this person's needs; my best isn't enough."

"Don't I ever get to have any needs? (Better not say that or the Queen will leave me.)"

"Why is everything always about her?"

"If people only knew what an act the Queen puts on, they'd sure be shocked."

Family members who the Queen shames, ignores, or gives superficial attention learn that their worth depends on external things (cars, important titles).

Non-BPs' self-esteem also suffers--especially among those who become isolated or who had a Queen parent.

Over time, non-BPs feel used, manipulated and angry--anger at the BP and at themselves for capitulating so much they no longer recognize themselves.

Non-BPs give in to her wishes because it's easier than maintaining personal limits.

Less assertive non-BPs are vulnerable to distortion campaigns, unwilling or unable to protect themselves or their children.

### Consequences to Children with a Queen Parent

To the Queen, children are a built-in audience expected to give love, attention and support when the Queen needs it. Children feel confused and betrayed when their normal behavior is sometimes punished (according to the Queen's needs of the moment). Since Queens don't allow or help children become individuals (autonomy is discouraged--even punished) kids mimic the behavior they do see: the Queens'. Thus, a new generation of BPs is born.

As kids grow, conflict with the Queen increases. Underneath, these kids long for approval, recognition, consistency, and to be loved unconditionally for whom they are, not what they achieve.

## The Waif

### Typical Thoughts

"I am a worthless victim. I do so want to be loved and protected, but I am not worthy of it."  
Philosophy: The glass is not only half-empty, but is about to spill all over the floor I just washed.

### Typical Feelings

Helpless, hopeless, and despair. Rage can be masked by sadness and depression, but released by rejection or abandonment. Waifs distort their own errors or disappointments, leading to more shame. They feel vulnerable, defective, anxious, moody, and irrationally fearful.

### Typical Actions and Central Dilemma

They look to others to "save them," but ultimately refuse assistance because helplessness makes them feel safe. Ironically, if they mistrust everyone and let no one get close, they stay in control and no one can abandon or disappoint them. Waifs may hurt themselves to express shame, but they are capable of raging if they feel rejected or abandoned. They don't ask for what they need, then appear Martyr-like because others can't read their minds and give it to them. Waifs may have crying spells and be unable to give nurturing to others.

### Typical Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions of Family Members

"The greater the sacrifice, the more I show I love her."  
"She desperately needs help, so I must save her, no matter what."  
"My needs are not as important as hers."  
"If I learn enough about BPD, I can heal her."  
"I like being needed, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the BP's neediness."  
"I get confused and frustrated when she rejects my help."  
"Her behavior isn't all that abnormal. I can manage it and so can the kids."

"I feel abused, and my self-esteem wasn't all that high to begin with."

"I try to help, but she turns it down again and again."

"If a method for coping with this doesn't work, I plan to keep trying. It will eventually succeed."

"I am unable to protect my children or myself from this behavior."

### The Effects of the Waif's Behavior on Children

They feel angry, afraid and alone.

Children may feel like failures for not making the BP happy, or they may keep trying and trying until the mother's death. This enmeshment (inability to separate) may hinder grown child's relationships, which may be fraught with dependency.

The child may become cynical, angry, and feel manipulated or turn into over responsible nursemaids seeking elusive approval.

The message to children is that life is something to be endured until you die.

The BP shelters children to such an extent they find autonomy disconcerting.

## The Hermit

### Typical Thoughts

"It's a dog eat dog world out there and I'm a cat. Everyone out there is for him or herself and no place is safe. Since people will always end up betraying me, I must be alert for hints or hidden meanings in things others would consider innocuous."

### Typical Feelings

Terrified of not having control, fear of engulfment keeps them from obtaining comfort. No wonder they see potential disaster everywhere. Hermits take criticism as a global condemnation of themselves and depend upon work and hobbies for self-esteem. Their inner shame is expressed through continual criticism of others.

### Typical Actions and Central Dilemma

The hard shell makes these BPs appear confident, determined, independent, and even socially graceful. But it's a veneer. Like many BPs, hermits show one face to the world and another to everyone else. Close family members experience, "distrust, perfectionism, insecurity, anxiety, rage and paranoia" (2000). They hold everyone to same ideal of perfection, punishing others by raging or shutting them out. Hermits fear losing themselves, which translates into possessiveness about their belongings.

### Typical Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions of Family Members

"Like the BP says, the world is unsafe and I should not risk trusting people."

"I need to protect the BP from the terror of the outside world."

"I am a faithful, loyal person and would never leave the BP to fend for herself."

"I feel trapped and isolated by the Hermit's fear."

"I have trouble trusting and making mistakes because I know the BP will say, 'I told you so.'"

"I'm giving up my social life because it's too hard to maintain one and be a helpful person to the BP, who doesn't want to go out or make friends."

"I will make excuses for the BP so no one will suspect the real problems."

### The Effects of the Hermit's Behavior on Children

During adulthood, they suffer from many maladies stemming from trapped feelings such as panic attacks or phobias.

Children not encouraged to explore and learn can become anxious when faced with new situations. They may not learn appropriate coping skills, give up control too easily, have a hard time trusting, and be less capable of naturally moving away from the parent.