

## **Review of *Mad Girl: A Happy Life with a Mixed-Up Mind* - By Bryony Gordon**

Bryony Gordon hit the headlines this week, although you may not have noticed. A certain prince was the one getting all the media attention. Yes, we all heard about Prince Harry opening up about his own mental health issues – the difficulties he had in dealing with his mother’s death, and the total chaos that ensued for two years of his life. Well done Prince Harry, by the way. For being brave and opening up like that. But he is not the focus of today’s review, it is Bryony Gordon. And it was Bryony Gordon who was responsible for that conversation even happening. Because Bryony Gordon is mad. Mad enough to get in contact with a member of royalty and ask them to be a guest on her new Mad World podcast. Mad enough to write a book, revealing the intricate details of her mental health, warts and all (literally). And mad enough to publicly tell people she, at times, thinks she is a paedophile.

The last point brings me nicely back to when I first encountered Bryony. Going through a particularly bad time with my own OCD, having convinced myself I really was a paedophile, and a week away from my next therapy session, I was desperate. I kept searching for articles about OCD on the internet, but nothing was helping, and, as we all know, googling can often make things a lot worse. And then I remembered, a year ago, a CBT therapist had sent me a link to a YouTube video she thought might help me. And there Bryony was, on video, at a Triumph Against Phobia event, telling everyone her OCD had made her think she was a paedophile, tricking her into thinking she’d molested her own daughter. I wept and wept at the screen as she spoke. Bryony has no idea, but she helped me so much that day – to pick myself up and keep going through the mental fog, to not let OCD beat me.

It’s unsurprising then that I went straight onto Amazon and bought her book, *Mad Girl: A Happy Life with a Mixed-Up Mind*. The book looks, chapter by chapter, at significant events in her life that have related to her mental health. Some of these are her episodes of OCD – thinking she was dying from AIDS aged 12, thinking she might have killed someone aged 17, and thinking she was a paedophile after having her first child. Other chapters focus on her battle with bulimia, being the victim of an abusive relationship, and turning to drugs. Clearly, this is a woman who has been through a lot. But, as is often the case with mental health, one problem links so easily to another – there is rarely just one issue. The book touches, too, on the inadequacies of some health professionals, as well as the more obscure treatment methods available for OCD. Yet another reminder that things need to change, both within the NHS and privately.

It’s all sounding pretty bleak, isn’t it? It’s not, I promise. What I have failed to mention so far is that, intertwined amongst Bryony’s OCD, alopecia, eating disorder and everything else life has thrown at her, there are a whole load of good things too. She has a successful writing career and is clearly hugely valued at The Telegraph. She falls in love ultimately with a really decent guy, gets married and has a baby with him. She starts Mental Health Mates, a running/walking group for anyone touched by mental health. And she wrote this book, each page of which is full of a wonderful combination of humour, honesty and the reality of living with OCD.

Yet, I did find, at times, *Mad Girl* was so honest, I almost felt myself not wanting to read on. I suppose it was like looking in a mirror. And I am guilty of wanting a happy ending. Even though she warns at the start that her book holds no miracle cure for mental illness, I still read it wanting to know how she had cured her OCD. So, when I got to the end, and Bryony states that writing the book actually made her ill again, I was slightly dissatisfied. But, looking back on this now, I wanted a quick fix, the knowledge that OCD could be got rid of. *Mad Girl* isn’t about cushioning. It’s about

being real, seeing things as they are, understanding that mental health has ups and downs – but that you can pick yourself up again every time you fall.

And, actually, I lie. The ending is happy. The book finishes on Bryony, at a point in her life where she knows exactly what to do when she feels the OCD creeping in. It ends on her being open and brave and talking. So yes, Bryony Gordon is mad, but only in the sense that she is doing what so many wouldn't ever dream of doing. And, firstly, she is being rewarded for this by getting to meet Prince Harry. But, secondly, and more importantly, she is leading the way for others to talk too.

Bryony, you are my new hero.

**By Natalie**