

My description of bipolar is when one fluctuates between two extreme destructive states. When either depressed or manic it is hard to control one's own thoughts and actions. When one is depressed they brood and obsess over negative things uncontrollably, compulsively, and constantly. When manic, one's thoughts are racing, elaborate, paranoid, and delusional. These states may seem like opposites, but both cause destruction; just in different ways. When depressed I feel apathetic, impotent and lose motivation to live life. This causes isolation, reclusiveness, removing myself from life. I burn bridges through isolation and not meeting necessities. When manic I feel invincible, reckless, impulsive, and delusional. I think I am accomplishing everything in the best way ever, but I am really being scattered and dangerous. I burn bridges through reckless actions with no care for myself or others. So bipolar is when one moves between these two states over time.

I learned that I had bipolar when I was hospitalized for substance-induced mania. I weighed 78 pounds, was doing drugs, and was acting strangely due to delusional thoughts. I have blank spaces of time where I do not remember what happened during this manic state. In the hospital I was diagnosed with bipolar (I had already fought depression before this time, but was never officially diagnosed or medicated). I was put on lithium and stayed in the hospital for a week and half (during my twentieth birthday). When I was diagnosed, I had no idea what bipolar was. I was a liberal person naturally, and so I did not judge others quickly, and I thought of myself as socially aware, but I really had not much knowledge about bipolar. This is true even though I liked psychology and took AP psychology in high school. After I was diagnosed, this became a sore point for me, because bipolar is very much left out of psychology education. After being diagnosed for some time, I took it on myself to learn more about bipolar, but most of this education was through experience and support groups due to a lack of scientific knowledge on bipolar. This was especially frustrating when I took my abnormal psychology class. Depression was allotted a huge portion of the textbook and class time, as was schizophrenia as well. But bipolar was glimpsed over. And my professor always tried to elaborate on other topics, but could not answer my questions about bipolar. Now I feel it is my job to educate others. At the time of my diagnosis, however, I had no idea what to expect besides going to an outpatient drug-program.

I have told my family my diagnosis and some of my friends. I find old friends were easier to tell. I am not still friends with all of them, but I found them to be pretty accepting. These were old friends from childhood. My college friends pretty much deserted me due to my actions while manic and did not have much understanding. Everyone I have told "Acted" open and caring, but not everyone has actually been open and caring. I try to tell less people now. For a while I felt like an ambassador for my mentally ill community, but due to mixed reactions, I have died down on that for now. I have found friends who just listen and truly are there for you the most helpful. They don't have to respond or advise, but I just know they will be there with me. I hate when people say they understand when they do not. Or when the illness is marginalized, like "Oh I totally know how you feel, I've been so depressed" or "I am totally

manic” when they truly are not. I would rather people just listen if they do not have experience. I remember I felt good when my brother asked me questions about my illness, not pretending to know about it and truly being curious about what my life is like with this illness. I find most friends I make are in settings where my mental illness is apparent already i.e. support groups. I revealed my illness to one of my classes. I do not know why; I just felt this urge to help people understand. I was met with mixed reactions, but eventually felt really good because I felt judgment and tension evaporate from the room during a later class discussing this. However, I must stop myself from sharing the fact I have this illness because I have been lucky, most people may never truly trust you ever again due to prejudice. In order to succeed, I do not think I have to remain paranoid, but I definitely cannot tell people about the illness until I have more secure footing in my career. This is an obstacle because I feel the illness is such an integral part of me.

I wish people would understand the everyday difficulties and not just the grand insane episodes. Bipolar affects every aspect of life, due to thought patterns, habits, and medications. I wish more people understood the difficulty of mundane things, like using five different dry eye medications due to side effects of the psychiatric medications, or trying to train my brain to not be too paranoid when an antidepressant flairs my hypomania, or to try to get rid of guilt which comes full steam when I need more time to finish work than my classmates and when I become distressed that I can hardly read anymore due to a short attention span and horrible memory when reading used to be one of my main passions in life. And this list can become endless, especially when leaning towards a depressed mood. I also would like the media to stop blaming violence on mental illness. The mentally ill community is no more violent than the normal population as a whole.