

## How do you tell your date you are bipolar?

By Flor Nieuwenhuys

In the TV series [Modern Love](#), Anne Hathaway plays the role of a woman reflecting on how her bipolar disorder has interfered with her love life. In the episode *Take Me as I Am, Whoever I Am*, she randomly meets Jeff, a nice guy at the supermarket, when she feels “crazily energized” during an euphoric state. By the time they go out on a date, she falls into a depressive state, and the change in her personality is so drastic that Jeff ironically asks if she doesn't “have a twin by any chance?”

Bipolar disorder is marked by [“dramatic shifts in mood, energy, and activity levels that affect a person's ability to carry out day-to-day tasks.”](#) Imagine riding a rollercoaster where the peak makes you feel euphoric, known as a hypomanic or manic episodes, and the sudden drop to the bottom plunges you into depression. No wonder why Jeff could barely recognise his date when they went out.

“Sharing your experience and your mental health is not the most easy thing when you're dating,” explains Ann-Marie Kallberg. The 31-year-old special educational needs teacher, diagnosed with bipolar disorder 9 years ago, created a mental health awareness Instagram account, [@babewithbipolar](#), in which she opens up about her experience having bipolar.

“I was dating this guy and didn't tell him [about bipolar disorder]. I wanted him to see me for who I am and see that I'm stable and healthy and live a normal life.” But as they continued dating, she realized that she didn't know neither when nor how to bring up this fact about her. [1 in 8 people in the world live with a mental disorder](#), and yet, let's face it, how do you tell someone about your mental illness? And why are so many people afraid to do so?

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### The Stigma Around Mental Illness

Ann-Marie says that the difference between sharing [about your mental illness](#) and other physical disorders lies in misconceptions. “If you have a knee injury, you tell everyone.

Commented [JV2]: about 'your' mental illness? not sure

You tell Facebook, you tell your doctor, you tell your dog, and you go to the doctor, and you get it fixed.” However, when it comes to mental anomalies, the conversation often turns into hesitation, shame, and taboo. “It’s because it messes with our behavior. And so, especially with bipolar, it’s a really sad cycle because people are scared to get help and talk about it.” Anne-Marie continues to say that when “you don’t know someone”, you’re not as likely to tell them about your condition right off the bat. “They may not know what that is,” she adds.

In the article, [The Stigma of Mental Illness](#), Dr. Overton, who has worked in a community mental center for 15 years, and her co-author Sondra L. Medina, discuss that mentally ill people have difficulty building “empathetic” and “supportive” relationships. This happens because the “negative connotation and false assumptions connected with mental illness may be as harmful as the disease itself.”

[Statistics](#) by the Mental Health Foundation show that nine out of ten people with mental health problems say stigma and discrimination negatively impact their lives. They are often viewed as dangerous to strangers, when, in fact, they are more likely to be attacked or hurt themselves than others. This prejudice is connected to the misconception that they refuse treatment.

Mainstream entertainment often portrays mental illness as “criminal, evil, or very disabled and unable to live normal, fulfilled lives,” [an analysis](#) on bipolar [disorder](#) stereotypes in television programs has shown. Take the Joker, for example. The character of the Joker, played by actor Joaquin Phoenix, is about a case of severe mental illness associated with extreme violence. In a Guardian [opinion piece](#) released shortly after the film, two doctors defend that: “Portrayals of mental illness in film can perpetuate unfounded stereotypes and spread misinformation.”

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### More Unashamed Conversation

Since Ann-Marie became public about her bipolar condition three years ago, she believes it connects her “more with people.” Opening up about it on Instagram has made her life easier when it comes to dating: “I don’t have to tell people anymore because when they follow me on Instagram, which usually happens before you date these days, they know, and it’s like a topic of conversation.”

There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all psychological illness, but the “best thing” is to research and inform your partner about your condition. “When you are having that conversation, tell them it's not that scary,” Ann-Marie advises. Clarifying triggers and how moods fluctuate in bipolar disorder are helpful ways to deal with the topic. Glenn Close, an Oscar-nominated actress who took on a new mental health advocate role, said: "What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, more unashamed conversation."

