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# Welcome To The Jungle: Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Bipolar But Were Too Freaked Out To Ask



## Synopsis

Going bravely where no other bipolar book has gone before, here Hilary Smith offers devastatingly on-target, honest--and riotously funny--insights into living with bipolar and answers some of the hardest questions facing her fellow bipolaristas: "Can anything ever be the same again?" "Am I still me" if I take mind-altering meds? Can other people tell I have bipolar? "Can I get this thing removed?" Bipolar is one of the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric conditions among teens and twenty-somethings--yet there are very few books out there written specifically for teens and twenty-somethings experiencing mental illness for the first time. *Welcome to the Jungle* (Conari Press, May 2010) fills that gap with its upfront, empowering approach to the challenges of being diagnosed with bipolar. Both humorous and immensely honest, it offers a true "in the trenches" perspective readers will trust. With chapters ranging from *What Just Happened?: Life Beyond The Diagnosis* to *Here Be Downers: Drugs, Booze, and Suicide* to *Hippy Shit That Actually Works: Herbs, Wilderness Time, and Other Ways to Help Keep Your Shit Together* to *Hell is Finding Good Insurance: How to Get Your Ass Covered in Troubled Times*, Smith brings bipolar self help to the street level.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*\*\*\*\*I have read many books on bipolar illness, and I just love this book! Its intended audience is young people, but it is suitable for everyone--from teenagers to middle-aged folk like myself. It's raw, funny, and very honest, answering questions that other books just don't get near, perhaps because they're very personal. But people with bipolar illness need to know about these things, and

so do their families and friends! In fact, this is the perfect book to give to others to help them to understand just what the illness is and how to deal with it. Interesting topics include: when and how to tell your friends and romantic partners you have bipolar illness; how it really feels to be bipolar; recreational drug use, alcohol, and bipolar; cohabitation issues with bipolar; telling family; how to decide what type of professional to see; all the options and considerations in health insurance (the section on health insurance is really good for young people); managing your bipolar with food-sleep-exercise; being in college with bipolar; working with bipolar; and much more. The book gets really specific, for example, how to deal with a social life or a significant other when you have to go to bed at the same time every night, and you have to take your drowsiness-causing meds early. One of my family members has to do this, and it's hard for people to understand about "bedtimes" and such as an adult. This book gives ideas (including humorous ideas) about what to say. I think that it normalizes and reassures people with bipolar, and is invaluable for this. The book does contain profanity, but it fits in with the tone and writing style that appeals to many in modern youth culture, so that the book will be perceived by them as hip and cool.

This is a quick & enjoyable read (I whizzed through it this morning over breakfast), lighthearted & intended to allay fears that someone living with bipolar can never lead a "normal" life. Ms. Smith is a personable & talented writer & her approach is much less sterile than traditional books on bipolar disorder (e.g. no long lists of vague statistics, etc.), which certainly makes it tangible reading material for a wide array of people. However, for a book meant to (thankfully!) touch upon a few more of the so-called taboo topics that we're "too freaked out to ask," (ahem, e.g. "Hippie [Stuff] that Actually Works" chapter) I was admittedly disappointed in her chapter dealing with friends & family ("Voices Not in Your Head"). Although her "keep everyone informed & happy" approach, touted throughout the chapter, undeniably has its merit, she fails to make any mention of dealing with friends & family who completely DENY or DOWNPLAY a person's bipolar diagnosis or those who BLAME the afflicted. Instead, I got the advice to "Invite them over for dinner so they can see how happy you are, how well you're doing, and how bad a cook you are" (& if you're a bipolar sufferer, you may NOT actually be doing too well, so playing up your happiness for the benefit of loved ones can be detrimental & counterproductive to receiving needed help, anyway). The stigma associated with bipolar disorder is very strong & very real (& celebrities with bipolar don't help public perception or social stigma much, either). Those afflicted are facing an upstream swim against those stigmas at home, work, school & in social affairs. The true gravity of that was seriously glossed.

I came face to face with the disease after my ex had her first episode. She had all the hallmark traits of bipolar disorder: a marked decrease in the need for sleep, a hyperactive mind, mystical experiences, irritability, and a surge in apparent creativity. The most painful and frustrating aspect of the disease is that you lose the person who is in the throes of a bipolar episode. There is no reasoning with that person. There is no heart-to-heart let's-work-this-out talk with that person. He or she becomes obdurate, unyielding and, most crushing of all, unfeeling. I picked up this book to learn about the bipolar disease from the perspective of a bipolar sufferer rather than from the perspective of a clinical psychologist. I hoped to at least get a glimpse into the psyche of a bipolar sufferer to understand why my ex had behaved the way she did and thereby help bring some closure to our breakup. After reading the book, I'm admittedly a little dismayed that it had brought me no closer to an intimate understanding of the disease. To be fair, however, this book is intended primarily as a roadmap for bipolar sufferers, and to that end, I think the author has done a spectacular job. She offers advice on the management of symptoms (mania, depression, insomnia, etc.), meds, shrinks (e.g. psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, support groups), dealing with the disease in college, and other aspects of the disease. I'm especially touched by her entreaty to bipolar sufferers to be mindful of the distress they can wreak on loved ones and her advice for mitigating the distress. There is much levity in her prose.

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