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Thirtysomething, bisexual, single and satisfied: Your breeder friends can’t bear it

If you're in you 30s and the biological imperative is still un compelling even the strongest friendships suffer

MAEGAN CARBERRY

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View of female runner back with tatoos "just breathe" on her neck (Credit: Jasmina81 via iStock/Salon)

About a year ago a dear friend and I went to a bar in Hollywood where everyone was swiping left or right on their cell phones without looking up. A familiar apathy overcame me. My desire to participate in dating rituals was depleted. I'd long since grown comfortable with the invisibility of being a short, thick woman with crows feet in a city that salivates over the lithe teenage daughters of 80s supermodels. Despite the fact that I was with my coolest partnered-up pal who never behaves like what Bridget Jones dubbed a "Smug Married," I swallowed a slug of Sauvignon Blanc and suppressed the nagging feeling of failure. We left quickly, walking back to her place because we'd decided to binge the show "Thirtysomething" on Netflix. We remembered our parents watching it when we were kids, and suddenly it felt important to understand our own lives in their context.

We made it through the pilot and another half episode before she clicked the stop button and dropped the remote. Our eyes met under furrowed brows as we telepathically communicated: I just can't." In my borrowed PJs, I drove home and crawled into bed with the 12-year-old tabby cat I rescued when I was 23.

The show hit too close to home for both of us — for different reasons. Two bisexual girls sick of grappling with the heteronormative, have-it-all lives society expected of women our age. My friend married a man who wanted to have babies while she wanted to keep pursuing her career. She did not recognize herself anymore. I avoided relationships entirely, unable to fully recover from being raped a few years prior. I preferred to watch from the sidelines as everyone I knew built thriving personal lives. The feminist philosophies my friend and I championed were tested daily, and even at the twilight of the Obama Administration before the promise of a female presidency imploded it didn't feel like we were winning.

Part of me always knew I would be different from most of my peers. I remember being sent to the principal's office for kissing a girl in elementary school. I listened to Ani DiFranco in high school like it was a religious experience. Not once have I fantasized about being pregnant — not then, not now. Still, the story of ideal womanhood and adult maturation was one I internalized. I wanted to be the best at everything, to be half of a picture-perfect power couple, and to be respected by my community. It was easier to date men, so I did. There was the cable news anchor who left me flummoxed in our heated debates, the young billionaire who taught me to play beer pong at the Wynn in Las Vegas, the auto critic who zoomed around in fast cars, and one really sweet Starbucks barista. Women happened in the wee hours of the morning, when we were still contact high from hanging with Snoop Dogg backstage at the House of Blues. I passed for straight and dated dozens of exciting people who were great on paper, never too happy and always knowing something wasn't adding up. I couldn't quite name it, though; the heteros and the homos often prefer that those of us in between languish in purgatory, which is better than where the Evangelicals say we're going.

As the years passed attending weddings and receiving birth announcements in the mail, I felt numb. Still, I squeezed myself into a bridesmaid dress and plastered on a smile whenever I was called upon to support someone I love.

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It's impolite to speak of the pain a friend's joy triggers in one's own inner world. These things are never personal, but straight friends whose chosen family structures are supported and encouraged rarely recognize how frustrating it is for someone different to experience them as part of an aggregate power structure. I do my best to avoid taking it out on anyone; it's simply a bad math equation for me. If I'm not intentional about how I apportion time and on whom I focus, I wind up spending a majority of my life immersed in a sanctioned heterosexual culture that at best I can't relate to whatsoever and at worst I find patriarchal and oppressive. This is true whether I'm dealing with hipster Park Slope parents or James Dobson devotees.

Maegan Carberry is a writer and artist. She is the author of the novel "Do I Have To Vote For Hillary Clinton?" about the 2016 election and is hand-making 100 dresses to raise awareness about sexual assault through her project, birdbrain.

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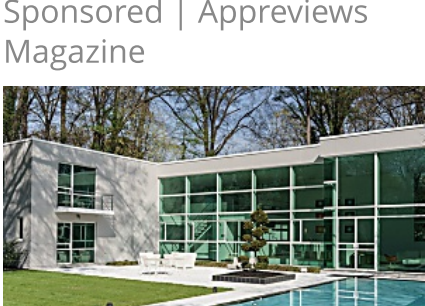
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