



Bipolar Expeditions: Mania and Depression in American Culture

Emily Martin

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Manic behavior holds an undeniable fascination in American culture today. It fuels the plots of best-selling novels and the imagery of MTV videos, is acknowledged as the driving force for successful entrepreneurs like Ted Turner, and is celebrated as the source of the creativity of artists like Vincent Van Gogh and movie stars like Robin Williams. *Bipolar Expeditions* seeks to understand mania's appeal and how it weighs on the lives of Americans diagnosed with manic depression.

Anthropologist Emily Martin guides us into the fascinating and sometimes disturbing worlds of mental-health support groups, mood charts, psychiatric rounds, the pharmaceutical industry, and psychotropic drugs. Charting how these worlds intersect with the wider popular culture, she reveals how people living under the description of bipolar disorder are often denied the status of being fully human, even while contemporary America exhibits a powerful affinity for manic behavior. Mania, Martin shows, has come to be regarded as a distant frontier that invites exploration because it seems to offer fame and profits to pioneers, while depression is imagined as something that should be eliminated altogether with the help of drugs.

Bipolar Expeditions argues that mania and depression have a cultural life outside the confines of diagnosis, that the experiences of people living with bipolar disorder belong fully to the human condition, and that even the most so-called rational everyday practices are intertwined with irrational ones. Martin's own experience with bipolar disorder informs her analysis and lends a personal perspective to this complex story.

Bipolar Expeditions: Mania and Depression in American Culture Details

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From Reader Review Bipolar Expeditions: Mania and Depression in American Culture for online ebook

Cassie says

I read this for an Culture and Personality course at Purdue University. I enjoyed the book. It gave a different perspective on bipolar disorder in the United States than other books I have read. It appeared to be coming from the point of view of the patient at some points instead of just from the point of views of doctors and researchers. I would recommend it to any one interested in mental illness as it is presented in the United States.

Regina says

I especially recommend this book for anybody who has bipolar disorder or knows somebody close to them struggling with this disorder. Emily Martin has really chosen a personal topic this time. She reveals her own struggles with bipolar disorder and her search for medication. She spent years interviewing people with this disorder, visiting support groups and even interviewing pharmaceutical advertising execs. However what is really interesting about this book is Martin's ability to track mania as a cultural object throughout history. She shows how mania has been associated with femininity and masculinity in Western culture. She also asks why mania is often cast as a desirable form of creative productivity in the contemporary business world. Finally, she starts to show through interviews with real people how these cultural ideals can actually be troublesome for those who suffer from this disease.

Crista Colvin says

Too epidemiological and anthropological for me.

Dawn says

Examines mania's ties to creativity and, breaking new ground, suggests how modern culture purposely incites and harnesses mania in "movers and shakers" and Type A personalities to fuel capitalism.

Ted Gideonse says

An excellent, and clearly written, ethnography of people with bipolar disorder in the United States. The analysis is top-notch, of course (since it's Emily Martin), but it's also moving and occasionally funny.

Elizabeth says

i had to give it back because it was an interlibrary loan, but it is great!! ethnography of bipolar disorder in contemp. society. PLUS, as an added bonus for yours truly and other econ-minded folks, chapters on the links btwn bipolar disorder and contemporary, market-driven society. i plan to buy, read and teach it for sure.

Sarah says

i'm just in the first chapter after a long intro...good info on researcher as insider/outsider though for all you geeky methodologists :)

Carol says

The description leads one to believe the book is all about celebrities with mental illness. Thankfully, there wasn't much of that. I appreciated the personal accounts from support groups and grand rounds.

Athena Macmillan says

This book was basically my life for a whole semester.

Emily Martin's *Bipolar Expeditions* takes a focused look at United States culture and society, particularly in regards to how it views people with bipolar disorder and to an extent other mental illness as well. Her work in this book suggests that in a country that is so geared towards viewing success in economic and political terms, different aspects of bipolar are both revered and feared. To a critical outside observer, the slowing down and more introverted aspects of depression associated with bipolar can be viewed as succumbing to the pressures of what is deemed 'normal' life, while the more hectic side of bipolar, mania, is almost viewed as a type of creative energy that keeps pushing against all odds to achieve this nebulous idea of success.

Martin draws on her own experiences with being diagnosed with manic depression and subsequent psychosis in the US mental healthcare system as both inspiration for, and hindrance to her research. She found conflicting societal views that could shape a person's experience with this kind of mental illness ranging from praise for the creative potential of a manic high, to the barely concealed disparagement of the ability of someone with mental illness to function in an academic environment in institutions such as Princeton.

While it seems this work by Martin does face some shortcomings in discussing the day to day reality of those living with manic depression, it also presents very valid concerns about how society markets some aspects of bipolar disorder while demonising others. However because of this, there does seem to be a tendency through the piece to lump the manic appearing nature of individuals driven to financial success in the same category as those suffering with mania as a mental illness, which may serve to marginalise their experiences as individuals. What is clear however, is that bipolar disorder, as well as other forms of mental illness, do not exist in isolation from a broader cultural context. Mental illness both influences and is influenced by cultural norms and politics. In this light, Martin appears to maintain, mental illness can be viewed as both being produced through culture and being productive of culture, with socially acceptable forms of engagement

inevitably being as fluid as the highs and lows of manic depression itself.

Juliana Philippa says

Martin's examination of rationality and irrationality brings up many interesting questions. She looks at things through the lens of an "American culture" that prizes mania in some people under certain circumstances, yet reviles it and is repulsed by it in others in various contexts. (Her generalization of an entrepreneurial American culture is not fully explained nor supported). Martin explores the boundaries of normality and how decisions are made about who is sane and who is insane. Her argument that rationality and irrationality are not bounded categories, but rather overlapping and intertwining, being possible and observable in all people, is extremely compelling.

[Would give the book 3.5 stars]
