

**PS352C: Mood Disorders & Creativity:
Unraveling the Mad-Genius Debate
Spring 2020, Prof. Erin Sheets
Department of Psychology, Colby College**

Meeting Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00-12:15

Location: Davis 307

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Course Description

Are creative people more likely to experience mood disorders? Can extreme mood experiences inform and even enhance creativity? The concept of the “mad genius” has been debated for centuries and remains controversial within modern psychological science. This course will explore the nature of creativity and its intersection with mood and mental illness. The course aims to link psychological science with disciplines of creative expression. In the first section of the course, we will examine the psychology of creativity. Next, we will reflect on personal accounts of depression and bipolar disorder. In the final section of the course, we will explore conflicting accounts of the creativity-mental illness connection and the mad-genius myth.

Learning Objectives

- Exploring the psychology of creativity
- Constructing a definition of creativity
- Expanding empathy for the lived experiences of individuals coping with mood disorders
- Discussing and critically examining conflicting claims about the effects of mood episodes on creative productivity
- Improving skills in leading classroom-based discussions
- Reflecting upon your own experiences with creativity
- Investigating a novel research question regarding mood disorders and creativity

Evaluation

Course grades will be weighted as follows.

Course component	Weight
Class participation and discussion questions	20%
Student-led discussion	5%
Creative activities journal	10%
Defining creativity paper (approx. 4 pages)	10%
Documentary reflection papers (3 pages each)	15%
Research paper draft (approx. 10 pages)	10%
Research presentation	10%
Final research paper (approx. 10 pages)	20%

Active Participation and Discussion Questions: Class participation, which includes attendance, questions asked, and participation in the seminar discussions, will count toward the final grade. Before each class meeting, you are expected to: (1) have read the course materials for that meeting and (2) have submitted 2 discussion questions on Moodle’s discussion board. Students must post their discussion questions by **10:00PM the day before class**. Late posts will not count toward your grade. These assignments will be graded on a scale of excellent (100%), good (85%), fair (70%), poor (50%), or no credit (0%). Your one lowest discussion question grade will be dropped when computing your final course grade. Class participation and discussion questions will count **20%** toward the final grade.

Student-led Discussion: You will be required to choose one class meeting and lead class discussion that day. You will need to 1) read the assigned articles carefully, 2) consult other literature that might enhance our discussion, and 3) organize discussion questions and possibly prepare activities. You must turn in your outline for the class at the end of class. . You may choose to lead the class on your own, or you may pair up with a peer and lead the class together. Leading discussions will count **5%** toward the final grade.

Creative Activities Journal: Because this course examines the psychology of creativity and its associations with mood, we will engage in creative activities throughout the semester. You are to engage in some creative practice at least twice per week for 12 weeks (the week of Feb. 10 – the week of May 4), and to log or journal this experience. Each time you should note what activity you participated in and its association with your emotional state. Along with establishing a regular practice, we will experiment with breadth of creative experience; you must try at least 3 different types of creative activities, each at least 3 times, over the course of the semester. What constitutes a “creative activity” is intentionally broad and left to you to define. Possible activities include, but certainly are not limited to, drawing, dancing,

playing an instrument, creative writing, use of adult coloring books, writing code for an original project, knitting... You will not be required to share any of the products of your creative activities, but there will be opportunities to do so if you wish. The creative activities journal and reflection paper will count **10%** toward the final grade. Importantly, you will not be graded on the quality of the creative output but on whether you engaged in these activities with reflection. We will have a mid-semester check-in regarding the creative activities journal on **March 18**. The final journal and a 1-2 page reflection paper is due by **10:00PM on Friday, May 15**.

Documentary Reflection Papers: You will view three documentary films outside of class hours: *From Nothing, Something* (a documentary about creative thinkers across several disciplines), *Depression: Out of the Shadows* (a documentary about major depression in America) and *Stephen Fry: The Secret Life of the Manic Depressive* (a documentary hosted by the actor Stephen Fry about bipolar disorder). All of the films provide personal accounts of the creative process and/or living with a mood disorder. After viewing each film, you will write a brief (approximately 3 page) reflection paper on your reactions to the material presented. Within each reflection paper, you should address 1) What did you learn? 2) What surprised you in the film?, and 3) How has your view of creativity/depression/bipolar disorder changed (or not) as a result of this documentary? Each reflection paper will count **5%** toward the final grade. The reflection paper on creativity is due **February 12**. The reflection paper on major depressive disorder is due **March 16**. The reflection paper on bipolar disorder is due **March 30**.

Defining Creativity Paper: Researchers have yet to agree on a general definition of creativity, as you will see across our readings. Additionally, the construct of creativity spans many fields, leading to multiple concepts of how creativity is fostered and expressed. We will build a shared definition of creativity by surveying experts across campus. First, we will construct an interview regarding creativity, and you will interview an expert at Colby. On **March 4**, you will give a brief (5-minute) presentation summarizing your interview and conclusions. You then will write a paper, approximately 4 pages in length, which summarizes your interview, synthesizes what you learned from other presentations, and provides your definition of creativity. The definition of creativity paper is due **March 9** and will count **10%** toward the final grade.

Research Paper and Presentation: For the primary paper, you will identify and examine a novel research question regarding creativity and mood. You have two options for this paper. You may either 1) write a literature review paper that critically evaluates existing research on the topic, summarizes limitations, and highlights future directions for research, or 2) propose a novel research study by summarizing existing research, detailing your study's specific methods, and stating the expected results. Either option should be

approximately 10-12 pages in length, *not* counting the abstract and references. A complete draft of the paper is due on **April 20**. We will have an in-class peer feedback workshop on **April 27**. For this, you will randomly be paired with a peer, will read their paper before class, and will provide written and oral feedback that day. The final paper is due by **10:00PM, Friday, May 15**. During the final week of classes, each student will give a 10-minute presentation summarizing their research paper. The research paper draft will count **10%**, the presentation will count **10%**, and the final paper will count **20%** toward the final grade.

Course Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Reading</i>
Feb. 5	Introduction	
Feb. 10	Mood episodes and creativity: Introduction to the debate	Andreasen (2014) – Secrets of the creative brain Bartlett (2014) – Madness & the muse
SECTION 1: Psychology of Creativity		
Feb. 12	Models of creativity Documentary Reflection Paper #1 Due	Kozbelt et al. (2010) - Theories of creativity, in Cambridge Handbook of Creativity Moran (2010) – Role of creativity in society, in Cambridge Handbook of Creativity
Feb. 17	Cognition	Ward & Kolomyts (2010) – Cognition and creativity, in Cambridge Handbook of Creativity
Feb. 19	Affect	Conner & Silvia (2015) – Creative days Benedek et al. (2017) – Creating art
Feb. 24	Mindfulness and flow	Baas et al. (2014) – Mindfulness skills and creative performance Csikszentmihalyi (1996) – The flow of creativity, in Creativity
Feb. 26	NO CLASS – Professor Traveling for Invited Talk	
March 2	Personality	King et al. (1996) – Creativity and the five-factor model Feist (2010) – The function of personality in creativity, in

		Cambridge Handbook of Creativity
March 4	Defining Creativity Presentations	
March 9	Assessing Creativity Defining Creativity Paper Due	Gray et al. (2019) – Forward flow
March 11	Gender differences/gender bias	Baer & Kaufman (2008) – Gender differences in creativity Proudfoot et al. (2015) - A gender bias in the attribution of creativity
SECTION 2: Mood & Creativity		
March 16	Major Depressive Disorder defined Documentary Reflection Paper #2 Due	Gorenstein & Comer (2015) – Major depressive disorder, in Case Studies
March 18	Personal reflections on depression Creative Activities Journal Check-in	W. Styron (1990) – Selections from Darkness Visible, reprinted in Unholy Ghost R. Styron (2002) – Strands, from Unholy Ghost Lewis (2008) – Dark Gifts, from Poets on Prozac
March 23	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK	
March 25	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK	
March 30	Bipolar Disorder defined Documentary Reflection Paper #3 Due	Gorenstein & Comer (2015) – Bipolar disorder, in Case Studies
April 1	The “artistic temperament”	Jamison (1993) – Could it be madness - this?, from Touched with Fire Jamison (1993) - Their life a storm whereon they ride, from Touched with Fire
April 6	Do creative individuals experience more mood disorders?	Andreasen (1987) – Creativity and mental illness Papworth & James (2003) – Creativity and mood Laughing Matters (2019), documentary, short
April 8	Do individuals with mood disorders experience more creativity?	Kyaga et al. (2011) – Creativity and mental disorder Santosa et al. (2007) – Enhanced creativity

April 13	Are creativity and mood disorder symptoms correlated?	Silvia & Kimbrel (2010) – Dimensional analysis of creativity and mental illness Le et al. (2015) – Relationship between mental health, creative thought, and optimism
April 15	A cautionary chapter	Schlesinger (2014) – Building connections on sand, in <i>Creativity and Mental Illness</i>
April 20	Cognitive perspectives Research Paper Draft Due	Papworth (2014) – Integrative cognitive perspective, in <i>Creativity and Mental Illness</i> Verhaeghen et al. (2005) – Why we sing the blues
April 22	Possible commonalities	Carson (2014) – Shared vulnerability, in <i>Creativity and Mental Illness</i> Kinney & Richards (2014) - Creativity as compensatory advantage, in <i>Creativity and Mental Illness</i>
April 27	Meta-analysis of the mad genius Peer Feedback on Research Paper	Baas et al. (2016) – Mad genius revisited
April 29	Debate or Synthesis?	Simonton (2014) – The mad-genius paradox Kaufmann & Kaufmann (2014) – When good is bad and bad is good, in <i>Creativity and Mental Illness</i>
May 4	Presentations	
May 6	Presentations	
May 15, 10:00PM	Final Paper Due Creative Activities Journal Due	

Course Readings

All readings and links to the documentaries will be available on Moodle. All of the required reading should be completed well before class, so you have time to consider the ideas and prepare intelligent comments and questions.

Selected Readings from

Berlin, R. M. (Ed.) (2008). *Poets on Prozac: Mental illness, treatment, and the creative process*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

- Casey, N. (Ed.). (2002). *Unholy ghost: Writers on depression*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York, NY: Harper/Collins.
- Gorenstein, E. E., & Comer, R. J. (2015). *Case studies in abnormal psychology (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- Jamison, K. R. (1993). *Touched with fire: Manic-depressive illness and the artistic temperament*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Kaufman, J. C. (Ed.). (2014). *Creativity and mental illness*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufman, J. C., & Sternberg, R. J. (Eds.). (2010). *Cambridge handbook of creativity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Journal Articles

- Andreasen, N. C. (1987). Creativity and mental illness: Prevalence rates in writers and their first-degree relatives. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *144*, 1288-1292.
- Andreasen, N. C. (2014, July/August). Secrets of the creative brain. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/07/secrets-of-the-creative-brain/372299/>
- Baas, M., Nevicka, B., & Ten Velden, F. S. (2014). Specific mindfulness skills differentially predict creative performance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *40*, 1092-1106. doi: [10.1177/0146167214535813](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214535813)
- Baas, M., Nijstad, B. A., Boot, N. C., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2016). Mad genius revisited: Vulnerability to psychopathology, biobehavioral approach-avoidance, and creativity. *Psychological Bulletin*, *142*, 668-692. doi: [10.1037/bul0000049](https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000049)
- Baer, J., & Kaufman, J.C. (2008). Gender differences in creativity. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, *42*, 75-105. doi: [10.1002/j.2162-6057.2008.tb01289.x](https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.2008.tb01289.x)
- Bartlett, T. (2014, September 19). Madness and the muse. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://garwww.chronicle.com/article/Madnessthe-Muse/148845>
- Benedek, M., Jauk, E., Kerschenbauer, K., Anderwald, R., & Grond, L. (2017). Creating art: An experience sampling study in the domain of moving image art. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *11*, 325-334. doi: [10.1037/aca0000102](https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000102)
- Conner, T. S., & Silvia, P. J. (2015). Creative days: A daily diary study of emotion, personality, and everyday creativity. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *9*, 463-470. doi: [10.1037/aca0000022](https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000022)
- Gray, K., Anderson, S., Chen, E. E., Kelly, J. M., Christian, M. S., Patrick, J., ... Lewis, K. (2019). "Forward flow": A new measure to quantify free thought and predict creativity. *American Psychologist*, *74*, 539-554. doi: [10.1037/amp0000391](https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000391)

- King, L.A., Walker, L.M., & Broyles, S.J. (1996). Creativity and the Five-Factor Model. *Journal of Research in Personality, 30*, 189-203. doi: [10.1006/jrpe.1996.0013](https://doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.1996.0013)
- Kyaga, S., Lichtenstein, P., Boman, M., Hultman, C., Långström, N., & Landén, M. (2011). Creativity and mental disorder: Family study of 300,000 people with severe mental disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 199*, 373-379. doi: [10.1192/bjp.bp.110.085316](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.110.085316)
- Le, D. H., Cropley, D. H., & Gleaves, D. H. (2015). Examining the relationship between mental health, creative thought, and optimism. *International Journal of Creativity & Problem Solving, 25*, 5-20.
- Papworth, M. A., & James, I. A. (2003). Creativity and mood: Towards a model of cognitive mediation. *Journal of Creative Behavior, 37*, 1-16. doi: [10.1002/j.2162-6057.2003.tb00823.x](https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.2003.tb00823.x)
- Proudfoot, D., Kay, A. C., & Koval, C. Z. (2015). A gender bias in the attribution of creativity: Archival and experimental evidence for the perceived association between masculinity and creative thinking. *Psychological Science, 26*(11), 1751-1761. doi: [10.1177/0956797615598739](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615598739)
- Santosa, C. M., Strong, C. M., Nowakowska, C., Wang, P. W., Rennie, C. M., & Ketter, T. A. (2007). Enhanced creativity in bipolar disorder patients: A controlled study. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 100*, 31-39. doi: [10.1016/j.jad.2006.10.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2006.10.013)
- Silvia, P. J., & Kimbrel, N. A. (2010). A dimensional analysis of creativity and mental illness: Do anxiety and depression symptoms predict creative cognition, creative accomplishments, and creative self-concepts? *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 4*, 2-10. doi: [10.1037/a0016494](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016494)
- Simonton, D. K. (2014). The mad-genius paradox: Can creative people be more mentally healthy but highly creative people more mentally ill? *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 9*(5), 470-480. doi: [10.1177/1745691614543973](https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614543973)
- Verhaeghen, P., Joormann, J., & Khan, R. (2005). Why we sing the blues: The relation between self-reflective rumination, mood, and creativity. *Emotion, 5*, 226-232. doi: [10.1037/1528-3542.5.2.226](https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.5.2.226)

Documentaries

- Bernstein, M. (Director). (2019). *Laughing matters*. [Documentary, short]. United States: SoulPancake Productions.
- Cawley, T. (Director). (2012). *From nothing, something*. [Documentary]. United States: Collective Eye Films.
- McPhee, L. (Director). (2008). *Depression: Out of the shadows*. [Documentary]. United States: TPT/WGBH.
- Wilson, R. (Director). (2006). *Stephen Fry: The secret life of the manic depressive*. [Documentary]. United Kingdom: IWC Media.

Course Policies

Professionalism in the Classroom

College offers continuous opportunities to develop and practice appropriate, professional behavior before you launch your career.

- Students are expected to attend all class meetings and are responsible for any work missed.
- It is expected that you will arrive on time for all class meetings. Arriving on time demonstrates respect for your professors and your peers.
- It is expected that you will have cell phones turned off and that you will not text or read texts during class.
- I strongly discourage you from bringing a computer to class. It is distracting for those around you and is often *extremely* distracting for you.
- Before emailing me, please check if your question can be answered by the syllabus or the course Moodle page.
- It is expected that you will interact with fellow students and with me in an open-minded, respectful, and supportive manner.

Please be sensitive to the fact that we know, based on prevalence rates, that students in this class may themselves have experienced depression or bipolar disorder or may have a close friend or relative with one of these disorders. Although your personal experiences with mood disorders may seem relevant to the class discussion, ***I ask that you refrain from personal disclosure.*** Personal disclosure often disrupts discussion when it occurs in groups outside the treatment setting, such as a class.

Academic Accommodations

If you have a disability or learning difference for which an academic accommodation is recommended, please provide your supporting letter from the Office of Student Access and Disability Services as soon as possible. I would prefer to have a conversation with you about the accommodations, so I encourage you to bring the letter to office hours. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive and cannot be granted at the last minute.

Department and College Policies

Delayed Papers/Presentations

This course follows the psychology department's policy on delayed exams and deadline extensions: Students should treat deadlines as firm. Only valid medical excuses, documented personal catastrophes (such as a death in the family), and religious observances will be accepted as reasons not turn in an assignment as scheduled. If you are,

for legitimate reasons, unable to turn in an assignment when it is scheduled, you should notify me *in advance* of the due date. Having a lot of work to do, several exams/papers in a few days, being generally unprepared, or having conflicting travel arrangements are not acceptable excuses to miss an assignment due date.

Course Late Assignment/Paper Policy

In order to be fair to every student, late assignments will lose 10% credit for each day that they are late. *Papers that are more than one week late will receive no credit.* In order to receive full credit for a late paper, documentation of the serious and verifiable reason that you were not able to complete the assignment on time must be provided.

Religious Observances

Colby College supports the religious practices of students, faculty, and staff. Students should contact their professors at least 14 days *in advance* to make arrangements for academic events that conflict with a religious observance.

Incomplete Grades

The mark of incomplete (I), indicating that a course was not completed, will be assigned only in the case of documented emergencies. The assignment of a mark of I is contingent on students making prior arrangements with their professor regarding completion of the course work by a certain date in accordance with policy specified in the *Colby College Catalogue*. Professors may consult with the department chair and/or the dean of students office (e.g., advising deans) prior to assigning an incomplete.

Academic Honesty & Consequences for Academic Dishonesty

Honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility are cornerstones of a Colby education and provide the foundation for scholarly inquiry, intellectual discourse, and an open and welcoming campus community. These values are articulated in the Colby Affirmation and are central to this course. You are expected to demonstrate academic honesty in all aspects of this course. If you are clear about course expectations, give credit to those whose work you rely on, and submit your best work, you are highly unlikely to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: violating clearly stated rules for taking an exam or completing an assignment; plagiarism (including material from sources without a citation and quotation marks around any borrowed words); claiming another's work or a modification of another's work as one's own; buying or attempting to buy papers or projects for a course; fabricating information or citations; knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty; misrepresentations to faculty within the context of a course, on an academic assignment, or an academic record; and submitting the same work,

including an essay that you wrote, in more than one course without the permission of the instructors for those courses.

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense against the college. Sanctions for academic dishonesty are assigned by an academic review board and may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, or suspension or expulsion from the College for multiple academic dishonesty findings.

For more on recognizing and avoiding plagiarism, see the library guide: libguides.colby.edu/avoidingplagiarism

Sexual Misconduct Policy

Colby College prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct (including, but not limited to, sexual assault and sexual harassment). Students should be aware that faculty members are considered responsible employees; as such, if you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a faculty member, he or she has an obligation to report it to Colby's Title IX Coordinator. "Disclosure" may include communication in-person, via email/phone/text, or through class assignments. To learn more about sexual misconduct or report an incident, visit www.colby.edu/sexualviolence/