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Book Review

Madness: A Bipolar Life

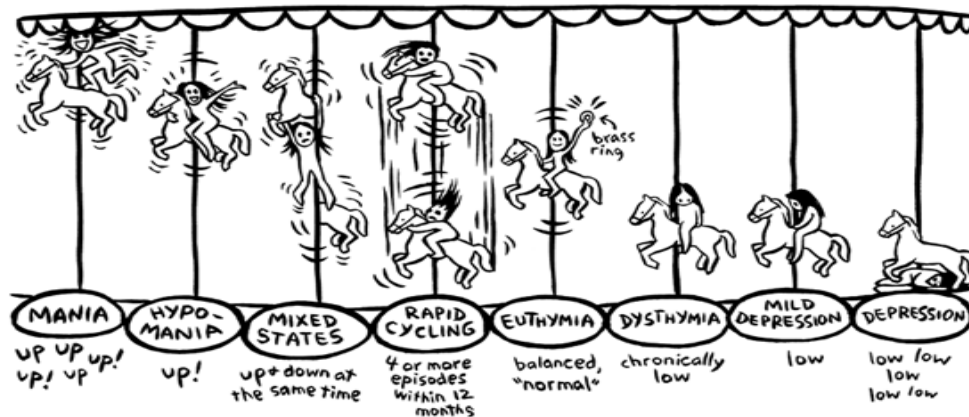
Hornbacher, Marya. *Madness: A Bipolar Life*. New York: Mariner Books, 2009. Print.

[Marya Hornbacher](#) narrates her journey with bipolar disorder in her novel *Madness: A Bipolar Life*. An intense experience of extreme behaviors intensely recounted in extreme detail, Hornbacher's novel is an immersive experience. Between the opening pages (an episode from her childhood) and the ending (pages of facts about bipolar disorder) Marya fills more than two hundred pages with the emotions and events of coming to terms with her mental illness.

As a child, she is haunted by [the goatman](#). As an adult, she is haunted by [anorexia](#), [alcoholism](#), and the unsympathetic whims of her type I rapid-cycle bipolar. By turns crushed by depression and energetically untethered by her mania, the only consistency in Hornbacher's life is that it is anything but consistent. The structure of her novel guides the reader's witness of this turbulence by her gripping storytelling. The stuttered missing years of seven hospitalizations, the hyper and chaotic passages of her mania, the dark dragging of her depression, the incoherence when she's lost- the words move the story much like the bipolar moved the woman.

Reading *Madness*, you feel the ["madness."](#)

You're anxious, keyed up, pent up, bones itching and contracting. The long sentences tumble out and crash ceaselessly like waves and drown you as your heart races as her writing rushes on, like those never-ending crashing waves. For some brief moments while reading *Madness*, Marya holds you inside her bipolar [mind](#).



Art by Ellen Forney, who experiences her bipolar much like Marya Hornbacher.