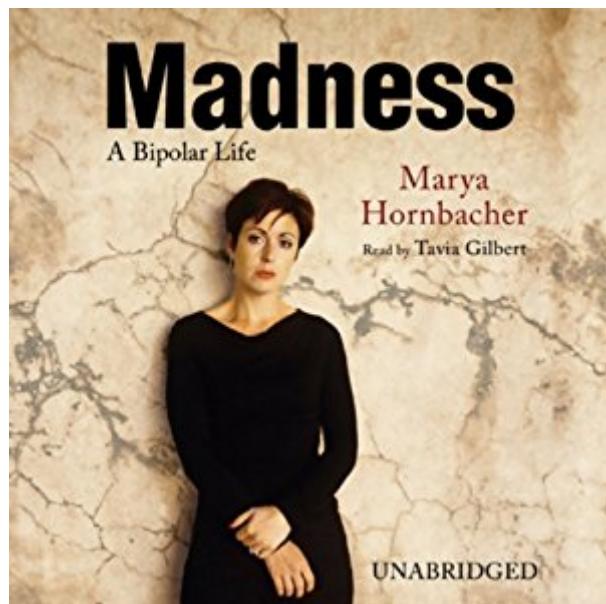


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# Madness: A Bipolar Life



## **Synopsis**

When Marya Hornbacher published her acclaimed first book, *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*, she did not yet have a piece of shattering knowledge: the underlying reason for her distress. At age 24, Hornbacher was diagnosed with Type I rapid-cycle bipolar, the most severe form of bipolar disease there is. In her trademark wry and utterly self-revealing voice, Hornbacher tells her new story in *Madness*. Through scenes of astonishing visceral and emotional power, she takes us inside her own desperate attempts to counteract violently careening mood swings by self-starvation, substance abuse, numbing sex, and self-mutilation. Her brave and heart-stopping memoir details her fight up from madness and describes what it is like to live in a difficult, sometimes beautiful life and marriage where the bipolar tendency always beckons. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Madness is one of the few personal accounts of bipolar disorder I've read that covers the escalating unfolding of the disorder from such an early age (4 years old) to the present. The book covers just about every aspect of the struggle with bipolar disorder - early failures to diagnose it, misdiagnosis, clueless and competent psychiatrists and therapists, stressors, triggers, the tendency to self-medicate, hospitalizations, hyper-sexuality, the terrible side effects of many of the medications used to treat depression and mania, bipolar and career, alcoholism, self-mutilation, relationship dynamics, lack of insight (not realizing when a manic episode is settling in), and the highly

productive and invigorating hypomanias that often convince those with bipolar disorder that nothing's wrong. Her narrative functions almost like a textbook case study of bipolar disorder. The book has a solid chronological structure that leads the reader through the escalating and exhausting mood cycles Hornbacher experienced. She is a highly skilled writer who keeps the narrative progressing at a quick pace while revealing dazzling insights about the disorder, about people, and about life in general along the way. What I found particularly helpful about the book is Hornbacher's descriptions of how her mood episodes began so seemingly innocent enough. One day, life seems to be just fine and then over the course of several days, weeks, or months becomes wonderful - everything is clicking and Hornbacher's energy and joy seduces all those around her - and then, just as suddenly, her world crashes in on her. People who haven't experienced this, don't know what it's like. They wonder why people with bipolar disorder can't tell when their moods are cycling or why a loved one didn't step in sooner.

Marya is an amazing writer and her literary gift puts you right in the middle of her psychotic episodes. So on sheer literary value, this book would get 5 stars for me. It was gripping, emotionally intense, and very well-written. That being said, this book is being hailed as an end-all, be-all for Bipolar disorder and as a female with exactly the same diagnosis as Marya (Ultra Rapid Cycling Bipolar I) but without an eighth of the crazy that she has, it's important to remember that Bipolar is a SPECTRUM disorder and she is at the FAR crazy end of it, a near worst case possibility that is not typical in the least. This is yet another book that makes the general population terrified of people with Bipolar disorder. I haven't seen many books at ALL that will gently remind you that Bipolar is a spectrum disorder and there ARE people out there with these tragic diagnoses (like myself) who still get up every day, go to work, and function as productive members of our society. Just because she needs a visit to the funny farm a few times a year and about 18 different chemicals in her bloodstream at any given moment doesn't mean that all or even MOST people who live with Manic Depression are the same. On that basis, I deduct a point from the book because it focuses on her experience, her diagnosis, her reckless abandon, and her low functionality in a world that expects she at least get out of her pj's every day, without acknowledging that she is indeed, out of her mind. She never takes more than a sentence to remind the world that she's on the far end of a SPECTRUM disorder. She just writes down her experiences with the disorder, a bunch of jumbled facts, and closes the book out.

I eagerly purchased "Madness" after its release; "Wasted" was one of the most compelling memoirs

I've ever read and Hornbacher is a fascinating and incredibly talented writer. After reading about a third of the book, I found myself struck by the disparity between Marya Hornbacher the writer and Marya Hornbacher the person. Marya the writer is thoughtful and shockingly insightful; she is hyper self-aware, almost to the point of being self-obsessed, able to write chapter after chapter of intricate prose about her own history, thoughts, and actions. Marya the person seems to lack any self-awareness. She acts on impulse alone, jumping from one whim to the next, rarely stopping to pause and think about what she's doing. She is sucked into her own emotions and compulsions easily; she easily slips back into patterns drug & alcohol habits, compulsive spending, self-mutilation, sex-addicted behavior. Both Maryas are interesting, and make for a hardy memoir, but there's something missing in the writing. "Madness" is extremely detached, written as if "Marya" is a fictional character being written about by an impartial observer. It's often hard to believe that Marya the writer actually did the things Marya the person did. There's plenty of pretty prose, plenty of insight, but there's no connectivity. Hornbacher is a great writer, but she is a clinical and analytical one. Sometimes that works in a memoirist's favor (see, "Darkness Visible," "Girl Interrupted") but it's just sort of strange to read someone writing about themselves in a cold, mathematical, detached sort of what when they are trying to relate periods of extreme passion & mental illness.

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