PS352C: Mood Disorders & Creativity:
Unraveling the Mad-Genius Debate

Spring 2018
Prof. Erin Sheets
Department of Psychology, Colby College

Meeting Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-3:45
Location: Davis 307

Email: essheets@colby.edu
Office: Davis 336

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. In the second section, we will review mood disorders research and reflect on personal accounts of depression and bipolar disorder. In the remaining half 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.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Course component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation and discussion questions</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading response papers (2 pages each)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-led discussion</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative activities journal</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defining creativity paper (3-4 pages)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documentary reflection papers (2-3 pages each)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research paper draft (approx. 10 pages)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final research paper (approx. 10 pages)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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*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 **15%** toward the final grade.

*Reading Response Papers:* You will write four response papers over the course of the semester, each approximately 2 pages. These papers will encourage close attention and reflection on a selected topic within the course readings. The primary expectation is that the paper demonstrates deep understanding and thoughtful evaluation of the day’s set of readings. Each paper will count **2.5%** toward the final grade. You may select the topics to which you respond. Each response paper must be submitted by email by the beginning of that topic’s class. You must complete four response papers by the last class with readings, **May 2**.

*Student-led Discussion:* You will be required to choose one class meeting and co-lead class discussion during the meeting. You will need to 1) read the assigned articles carefully, 2) consult other literature that might enhance our discussion, 3) organize discussion questions and possibly prepare activities, and 4) lead the class discussion on that day. You must turn in
your outline for the class at the end of class. 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. 12 – the week of May 7), 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 4 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 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 21. The final journal is due by 10:00PM on Friday, May 18.

*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 7, you will give a brief (5-minute) presentation summarizing your interview and conclusions. You then will write a paper, 3-4 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 12 and will count 10% toward the final grade.

*Documentary Reflection Papers:* You will view two documentary films outside of class hours: Depression: Out of the Shadows (a PBS documentary about major depression in America) and The Secret Life of the Manic Depressive (a documentary hosted by the actor Stephen Fry about bipolar disorder). Both films provide personal accounts of living with these mood disorders. After viewing each film, you will write a brief (2-3 page) reflection paper on your reactions to the material presented. Specifically, you should address the following: 1) What did you learn? 2) What surprised you in the film?, and 3) How has your view of 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 major
depressive disorder is due **March 19**. The reflection paper on bipolar disorder is due **April 2**.

*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 23**. We will have an in-class peer feedback workshop on **April 30**. For this, you will randomly be paired with a peer, will read his/her paper before class, and will provide written and oral feedback that day. The final paper is due by **10:00PM, Friday, May 18**. During the final week of classes, each student will give a 10-minute presentation summarizing his/her 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 7</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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| Feb. 12| 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. 14| Models of creativity                            | Kozbelt et al. (2010) - Theories of creativity, in Cambridge Handbook of Creativity  
Moran (2010) – Role of creativity in society, in Cambridge Handbook of Creativity |
<p>| Feb. 19| Influence of environment                        | Csikszentmihalyi (1996) – Creative surroundings, in Creativity          |
| Feb. 21| Cognition                                      | Ward &amp; Kolomyts (2010) – Cognition and creativity, in Cambridge Handbook of Creativity |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 26</td>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>Csikszentmihalyi (1996) – The flow of creativity, in Creativity</td>
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<td>Feb. 28</td>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>Conner &amp; Silvia (2015) – Creative days</td>
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<td>Benedek et al. (2017) – Creating art</td>
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<td>March 5</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Baas et al. (2014) – Mindfulness skills and creative performance</td>
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<td>Lebuda et al. (2016) – The mindfulness-creativity link</td>
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<td>March 7</td>
<td><strong>Defining Creativity Presentations</strong></td>
<td>King et al. (1996) – Creativity and the five-factor model</td>
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<td>Feist (2010) – The function of personality in creativity, in Cambridge Handbook of Creativity</td>
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<td>March 12</td>
<td>Neuroscience of Creativity</td>
<td>Beaty et al. (2018) – Prediction of creative ability</td>
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<td>March 14</td>
<td>Gender differences/gender bias</td>
<td>Baer &amp; Kaufman (2008) – Gender differences in creativity</td>
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<td>Proudfoot et al. (2015) - A gender bias in the attribution of creativity</td>
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<td>March 19</td>
<td>Major Depressive Disorder defined</td>
<td>Gorenstein &amp; Comer (2015) – Major depressive disorder, in Case Studies</td>
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<td>March 21</td>
<td>Personal reflections on depression</td>
<td>Oltmanns et al. (2015) – Major depressive disorder, in Case Studies</td>
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<td>Creative Activities Journal Check-in</td>
<td>Styron (1990) – Selections from Darkness Visible, reprinted in Unholy Ghost</td>
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<td>Styron (2002) – Strands, from Unholy Ghost</td>
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<td>Lewis (2008) – Dark Gifts, from Poets on Prozac</td>
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<td>March 26</td>
<td>NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK</td>
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<td>March 28</td>
<td>NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK</td>
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<td>April 2</td>
<td>Bipolar Disorder defined</td>
<td>Gorenstein &amp; Comer (2015) – Bipolar disorder, in Case Studies</td>
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<td>Documentary Reflection Paper #2 Due</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<td>April 4</td>
<td>The “artistic temperament”</td>
<td>Oltmanns et al. (2015) – Bipolar disorder, in Case Studies</td>
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| April 9    | Do creative individuals experience more mood disorders?              | Jamison (1993) – Could it be madness - this?, from Touched with Fire  
Jamison (1993) - Their life a storm whereon they ride, from Touched with Fire  
Ludwig (1994) – Mental illness and creative activity in female writers  
Papworth & James (2003) – Creativity and mood |
| April 11   | Do individuals with mood disorders experience more creativity?       | Kyaga et al. (2011) – Creativity and mental disorder  
Santosa et al. (2007) – Enhanced creativity                                                                                          |
| April 16   | 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 18   | Touched by fire or burning with questions?                           | Schlesinger (2014) – Building connections on sand, in Creativity and Mental Illness  
Johnson et al. (2012) – Creativity and bipolar disorder                                                                             |
| April 23   | Cognitive perspectives  
**Research Paper Draft Due**                                                                 | Papworth et al. (2014) – Integrative cognitive perspective, in Creativity and Mental Illness  
Verhaeghen et al. (2005) – Why we sing the blues                                                                                   |
| April 25   | Possible commonalities                                              | Carson (2014) – Shared vulnerability, in Creativity and Mental Illness  
Kinney & Richards (2014) - Creativity as compensatory advantage, in Creativity and Mental Illness                                      |
| April 30   | Meta-analysis of the mad genius  
**Peer Feedback on Research Paper**                                      | Baas et al. (2016) – Mad genius revisited                                                                                              |
| May 2      | Debate or Synthesis?                                                | Simonton (2014) – The mad-genius paradox  
Kaufmann & Kaufmann (2014) – When good is bad and bad is                                                                                 |
Course Readings

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

Selected Readings from


Journal Articles


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**Course Policies**

**Academic Honesty**

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. Students are expected to demonstrate academic honesty in all aspects of this course.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: plagiarism (including quoting sources without quotation marks around the borrowed words and a citation); presenting 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; violating clearly stated rules for taking an exam or completing homework; misrepresentations to faculty within the context of a course; and submitting the same work, including an essay that you wrote, in more than one course without the permission of instructors.

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 more on recognizing and avoiding plagiarism, see the library guide: [libguides.colby.edu/avoidingplagiarism](http://libguides.colby.edu/avoidingplagiarism)
**Attendance**
Students are expected to attend all class meetings. You should review the syllabus carefully at the beginning of the semester to determine whether you will have any scheduling conflicts, and discuss them with me *in advance*.

**Classroom Behavior**
- It is expected that you will arrive on time for all class meetings.
- 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 laptop to class. It is distracting for those around you, for me, and is often *extremely* distracting for you.
- It is expected that you will interact with fellow students and the professor in an open-minded, respectful manner.

Please be sensitive to the fact that we know, based on prevalence rates, that students in this class may themselves have experienced major depressive disorder or bipolar disorder, and/or may have a close friend or relative with one of these disorders. On the other hand, 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 makes others uncomfortable when it occurs in groups outside the treatment setting, such as a class.

**Email**
Before emailing me, please check if your question can be answered by the syllabus or the course website. If it cannot, I will do my best to answer your email within 24 hours of when it was received.

**Psychology Department Late Assignment/Paper Policy**
Students should treat deadlines as firm. Only documented medical excuses, documented personal catastrophes (such as a death in the family), and religious observances will be accepted as reasons not to 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 the professor *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 prevented you from completing the assignment on time *must* be provided – no exceptions.

**Religious Observances**
Practitioners of a religious tradition requiring time apart from the demands of the normal work schedule on a particular day (or days) may contact me *in advance* to make arrangements for academic events that conflict with a religious observance.
**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/](http://www.colby.edu/sexualviolence/)

**Support for Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences**
If you have a disability or learning difference for which an academic accommodation is needed, please contact me to discuss this as soon as possible.