



## **Strictly Bipolar**

*Darian Leader*

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## **Strictly Bipolar** Darian Leader

Strictly Bipolar is Darian Leader's treatise on the psychological disorder of our times.

If the post-war period was called the 'Age of Anxiety' and the 1980s and '90s the 'Antidepressant Era', we now live in Bipolar times. Mood-stabilising medication is routinely prescribed to adults and children alike, with child prescriptions this decade increasing by 400% and overall diagnoses by 4000%.

What could explain this explosion of bipolarity? Is it a legitimate diagnosis or the result of Big Pharma marketing? Exploring these questions, Darian Leader challenges the rise of 'bipolar' as a catch-all solution to complex problems, and argues that we need to rethink the highs and lows of mania and depression.

What, he asks, do these experiences have to do with love, guilt and rage? Why the spending sprees and the intense feeling of connection with the world? Why the confidence, the self-esteem and the sense of a bright future that can so swiftly turn into despair and dejection?

Only by looking at these questions in a new way will we be able to understand and help the person caught between feelings that can be so terrifying and so exhilarating, so life-affirming yet also so lethal.

Strictly Bipolar is essential reading for anyone interested in contemporary views of the self, bipolarity and a deeper understanding of manic-depression.

Praise for *What is Madness?*:

'Lucid, excellent' Adam Phillips, *London Review of Books*

'Leader is as much a philosopher as a psychoanalyst and his ideas are engrossing and enlightening' *Metro*

'Fascinating . . . [Leader has] a formidable grasp of psychiatric history and a storyteller's flair for detail . . . a humane and timely book' *New Statesman*

'The mad . . . have been segregated and often confined; for fear, perhaps, that they will contaminate the rest of us. But as Darian Leader brilliantly shows, things are never so simple' Hanif Kureishi, *Independent*

Darian Leader is a psychoanalyst practising in London and a member of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research and of the College of Psychoanalysts - UK. He is the author of *What is Madness?*, *The New Black*, *Why do women write more letters than they post?*, *Promises lovers make when it gets late*, *Freud's Footnotes* and *Stealing the Mona Lisa*, and co-author, with David Corfield, of *Why Do People Get Ill?* He is Honorary Visiting Professor in the School of Human and Life Sciences, Roehampton University.

## **Strictly Bipolar Details**

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## From Reader Review Strictly Bipolar for online ebook

### David Bate says

Helped me understand a lot about my bipolar.

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### Purbali says

Strictly bipolar is one of the most advanced books ever written on psychotherapy. Though not a conventional book yet it adds to the debate of differentiating the mental disorders namely bipolar disorder and manic depressive disease.

The author here outline that manic depressive disorder though very closely resembles bipolar disorder, yet they are not the same. Using very simple examples he has outlined the differences.

Even in psychiatry taught in med schools they are designated as same.

however it is important to understand their differences so as to make changes in the approach towards them.

Manic depressive states can be easily handled through counselling and doesn't necessitate the use of drugs acting on the brain chemical functions.

Throughout the book the author has enforced the differentiating factors through vivid repetition of various personal experiences, and has raised a valid question that is apt for the present world.

The question is not "ARE YOU BIPOLAR" ?

its "HOW BIPOLAR ARE YOU"?

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### Mind the Book says

Hilary Mantel-blurbad (!) McFreud, d.v.s. en snabbläst faktapocket i ämnet psykologi. Ingår i serien 'A Penguin Special', vad det nu innebär. Baksidestexten utlovade analys av Vår Bipolära Era, den som efterträtt den Antidepressiva Eran.

Insåg för sent att författaren - tydligen verksam vid Roehampton University, ett stenkast härifrån - är djupt troende freudian och representerar det psykodynamiska perspektivet. Drabbas av vredesutbrott vid passager som "It has been argued that manic highs repeat the experience of feeding at the satisfying breast". Tankarna går till en viss fredagkväll på Freudmuséet <http://lasdagboken.blogdns.com/2011/i...>

Klokt nog citerar Leader andra fallbeskrivningar från Stephen Frys dokumentär och Andy Behrmans 'Electroboy' och jag påminns om att jag även borde läsa 'An Unquiet Mind' av Kay Redfield Jamison ur jobbokhyllan.

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### Nancy says

Excellent little book and a must for serious coaches. It is a joy to read an idea explored in such an intelligent and concise way.

Read alongside madness explained and what's wrong with you, your body never lies and simplicity parenting and you'll get a very healthy world view.

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## sevdah says

One in four Americans is estimated to have some form of bipolar disorder. How did we come to this?

Darian Leader makes a very compelling case against the way we tend to see manic-depression as a question of biology, a thing to be resolved by pharmaceuticals. It's considered to be a whole spectrum now, and he explains why a correct diagnosis is crucial - often times, symptoms are part of other disorders, and we don't really ask enough questions to distinguish one from the other. We aren't treating the disorder, we fine-tune medication - instead of asking what caused the onset of mania or depression, doctors simply ask how the pills have been lately. If something's not a-okay, we simply give you another medication to add to your breakfast.

Understandingly, recovery rates were better in the pre-drug era, when traditional psychotherapy was employed. Manic-depression was seen as the one type of psychosis that would resolve as time goes by, whereas now the diagnosis is immediately followed by a heavy chemical cocktail in the form of pills and more pills, and pills to cure the side effects of those first pills.

After distinguishing the "original" bipolar disorder (and calling it manic-depression), Darian Leader takes on investigating the symptoms and analysing the specific symbols in mania or depression. The constant need of talking, the way language changes its meaning, the need of splitting/contrast, the shopping sprees, the revenge fantasies, the obsessive rituals, the need to blame others, the sense of connectedness to the world, are each analysed with examples from Leader's own practice or memoirs by people with manic-depression.

We need to explore the details and investigate the past in each individual case, if we want to do anything about that disorder at all. It's a great book about something that we'll hear more and more about, I got it on a whim but would definitely recommend it. It's not difficult to read and relatively tiny, which might be a bonus as well.

(Just to be clear, I'm not condoning the use of pills, they could save your life - it's a serious disorder and like any other, it calls for medication. Let's just not forget about how important analysing is, is what I'm saying.)

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## Salome says

"We live in an age which pays lip service to history, yet which continually undermines the ties we have to the past."

An interesting read that sheds some light on how it feels to suffer from bipolar disorder. Excerpts from Stephen Fry's "Moab is my Washpot" and the "Fry Chronicles" and other authors' work illustrate personal experiences. Darian Leader then puts those experiences into perspective. Leader - a psychoanalyst in the tradition of Freud - manages to analyze the reasons behind the disorder. Some of his ideas seem too speculative, but overall the book offers a comprehensive overview. It's also well-written and easy to read.

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## Roberto says

Very interesting book with very clear and precise meanings understanding of the manic disorders. This book helps you to understand all these bipolar people that is around us.

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### **Perna says**

The book was a little dense for a non-psychoanalysis background reader, but nonetheless, a great book with some great insights. I actually wish it was longer and he went more in depth with some of the things he talks about.

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### **Sastha Prakash says**

The best analysis of manic-depression so far. It gives an account of how the pharmaceutical companies branding this as a biological condition and making it totally drug dependent. This condition has to be studied individually clinically and not brand one with set parameters of the bipolar spectrum. Nowadays this condition is treated with multiple drugs and trying to find the right cocktail, this is totally driven by the drug industry. Now, time is the factor and thereby old clinical approach is forgotten.

Bring in back the good old family practice and do away with the spectrum parameters.

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### **Katarzyna says**

This book has a life changing power. Necessary.

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### **Olivier says**

"Strictly Bipolar" by Darian Leader discusses primarily the rebranding of "manic depression " into "bipolar disorder" at the end of the 90ies, but through this rebranding, Leader actually also analyses our overmedicated society. Leader reviews how this change in name, but also how marketing, have transformed the earlier approach into a drug-heavy approach focusing only on drugs and the fine-tuning of these drugs.

To take his words "there is an elephant in the room: the whole conversation is about what the drugs are making them feel rather than what their original feelings had been before taking the drugs".

Leader advocates for a return to the previous approach, but if what he says at the end of the book is true "recovery rates were better in the pre-drug area", who wouldn't?

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The book makes/references many interesting points; here are a few groundbreaking eye-openers for me:

Leader makes a very extremely interesting point on the connection between manic-depression and language: "In manic states, the person was at the mercy of acoustic and formal connections between words but in the depressive state, it was meaning or signification that governed them". "How strange that the two axes of

language - words and meanings - would each emerge in manic-depression in alternate strengths.

He makes also an interesting point related to sociology: "the constellation in manic-depression often involves an aspiration to a better social position".

He makes a very extremely interesting point on manic-depression and cinema: "That's why if you observe the audience during a comedy film, they keep looking not just at the screen but at each other, whereas if it's a tragedy the gaze remains fixed on the screen".

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Favourite quotes:

Leader quotes many famous writers. He quotes for instance Stephen Fry for the "highs" phases: "society is too slow for our racing minds, everything is connected in a web of glorious colour, creativity and meaning" (I can't help seeing here Bradley Cooper in "Silver Linings Playbook") "Talking becomes easy, words flow with a newfound fluency"...

"Manic-depression is like an alternating hypertrophy and atrophy of unconscious conscience" (quote of Edward Glover)

"Internet questionnaires allowed self-diagnosis in a few minutes, and, for many people, it seems as if their difficulties finally had a name"...

"Bipolarity is less a pendulum of moods than an effort to keep two poles apart. Cheney tells us that mania is more than a disease: it is a way of thinking"...

Strictly Bipolar

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### **Damian Konopka says**

The most real and factual book I have read about bipolar disorder. I learned more than I knew about bipolar, and more about myself. The last 5 pages I read many times over. So much of what Leader writes about will help me handle my illness better moving forward.

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### **Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says**

I've recently been tentatively diagnosed as bipolar, so this remarkably readable and informative book came along at a most opportune time for me. Darian Leader is able to convey complex concepts in lucid, engaging prose and I intend to read more by him.

As for this book, it explores the trend towards diagnoses of bipolarism, the pharmaceutical approach to management and the inner experience and drives of the condition. Bipolarism is more complex than a simple pendulum state, and the manic end of the behavioural curve could be seen as an extreme form of depression. The kind of depression suffered in bipolar disorders is also different from the self-loathing melancholia of a pure depressive. Leader identifies themes like the inability to see shades of grey, the need to perform to gain approval, the experience of being connected with the universe and the converse sense of numb frustration.

Ultimately, this book calls for a more nuanced, case-to-case understanding of bipolarism and stresses a humanistic approach that focuses on the unique biographical factors that have shaped each case over a proliferation of medication, although these have a place too. It helped me understand why I may be bipolar and what may be driving my condition, although a more definite diagnosis will only emerge from further work with my therapist.

If you're interested in what seems to be a defining mental condition of our times, if you have been diagnosed as bipolar or have a loved one who has been diagnosed as such, or if you just want to catch up on current thought on this condition, this short, extremely readable book seems like more or less the thing you could pick up, although I'll definitely seek out and read Stephen Fry's memoirs as soon as I can.

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### **Aurélien Thomas says**

Manic-depressive illness, although serious, used to be rare (roughly 1% of the population). Yet during the past three decades more and more people have not only been diagnosed but, put on a cocktail of medication to address their 'bipolarity'. Now, are such diagnosis genuine? Or is this increase a symptom of something deeper that is, something gone wrong with our mental healthcare systems?

Darian Leader, *'a psychoanalyst (...) and a member of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research and of the College of Psychoanalysis'* surely throws here a needed debate.

He may have a point in accusing the pharmaceutical companies of marketing an illness so as to sell more drugs to more people:

*'Historians of psychiatry have all made the same observation here. It was precisely when the patents began to run out on the biggest-selling mainstream antidepressants in the mid-90s that bipolar suddenly became the recipient of the vast marketing budgets of the pharmaceutical industry.'*

I don't know about that and, quite frankly, I feel wary of such argument tantamount (or so I felt) of accusing big pharmas of conspiracy to make profits. I personally don't want to go there.

Where I fully agree with him is, when he denounces modern psychiatry that has redefined manic-depression with ill consequences. First, it has stripped such illness of its specificity (*'the flight of ideas, the special sense of connectedness to the world, the oscillation of a fault, and the effort to create a categorical separation of good and bad'*) to now include a new spectrum of very different mood swings each with their own features. Out with 'manic-depression'! In with the quite new 'bipolar' catch-all label (BP1, BP2, BP3, BP4, BP5, BP6 and their satellites...) which, being too simplistic, doesn't help the understanding of a complex illness. Then because, not only content to have thus airbrushed the very specifics of manic-depression, it has reduced itself to the prescription of pills, as if cocktails of medication were the best if not only way to address mental issues. As he clearly states: it isn't. Understanding patients' histories is also crucial, a human touch that modern psychiatry sadly seems to have dangerously lost touch with.

*'Strictly Bipolar'* is a short read, challenging at times, but nevertheless a powerful argument for a new approach to treating what remains a very serious illness. Bipolar cannot be dealt with casually thrusting pills, all the while neglecting the human factor. That such a condemnation is needed shows how cold and dehumanised (economically interested?) our healthcare systems, consciously or not, came to be. A must read for anyone interested in the topic.

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## **Spirohir says**

Started strongly with an attack on Big Pharma and questioning the categorisation of manic-depression. But it started rambling somewhere around the halfway mark and lost a lot of focus. Still, a good read for a psychoanalyst's view of what manic depression is, and arguing for a more holistic, less statistical and biological treatment for patients.

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