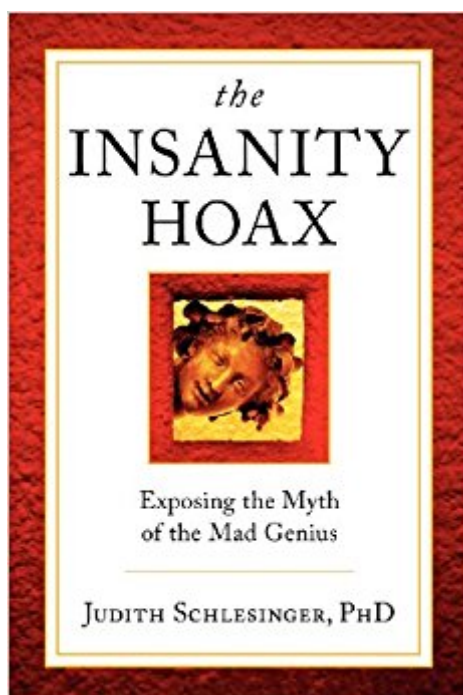


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# The Insanity Hoax: Exposing The Myth Of The Mad Genius



## Synopsis

This groundbreaking book sheds new light on an old and destructive stereotype: the idea that the highly talented must suffer a lifetime of psychological torment in payment for their exceptional gifts. Despite exaggerated professional claims, widespread popular assumptions, and the dramatic parade of "mad geniuses" in the media, no one has ever proved that creative people are more prone to psychopathology than any other group. The Insanity Hoax tracks this fantasy's history from its birth in ancient Greece to today, showing how Plato's benevolent "divine madness" slowly darkened into a symptom of bipolar disorder -- and why the myth is too deeply embedded in society to ever disappear. Psychologist, educator, and jazz writer Dr. Judith Schlesinger uses her three decades of research and creative and clinical experience to make a convincing case, while providing a witty and entertaining read.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In this original and passionate work, Judith takes on one of the great Western myths and serves up her painstaking research with equal portions of wit, wisdom and criticism. An emancipatory book."  
- David Cohen, PhD, Professor of Social Work, and Distinguished Tocqueville-Fulbright Chair, Florida International University  
"Fascinating, insightful, and surprisingly funny." - Chris Brubeck, "fairly sane and highly functional" jazz musician and classical composer.  
"In her skillful and entertaining dissection of the myth, Schlesinger deconstructs the pseudoscience used to support it, while illuminating the deep cultural functions that this myth can serve for society and the geniuses

themselves." - Stuart A. Kirk, DSW, coauthor of *The Selling of DSM, Making Us Crazy*, and the forthcoming *Mad Science*.

Judith Schlesinger, PhD has spent her entire life marveling at creativity and surrounding herself with others who cherish it.Â Psychologist, psychotherapist, author, educator, musician, jazz critic, and producer, she believes that genius should be celebrated, not diagnosed.

An extremely well-researched analysis of the controversial subject of the long-standing theory of madness as a pre-condition of artistic genius. Written in a friendly, good-humoured style, the author goes to considerable effort to de-bunk the theory and the prejudice surrounding the work of many psychologists. Some may find the criticism of psychiatrists somewhat excessive, but overall the book is a thought provoking study, and the extensive research as indicated in the many references is proof of the author's sincerity in shedding light on a situation which has existed literally for centuries.

This book is a must for those who really want to understand this controversial and surprisingly complex topic. The author's enthusiasm makes this book an enjoyable read and her conversational writing style makes it accessible to casual readers (as opposed to just psychologists and psychiatrists).

Schlesinger's book is a sane overview of the insanity of social-network style "science" which too often dictates popular thinking rather than a thinking populace.

I have seldom read a book that is so well written. It was worth reading just for how well it is written. The author is clever, eclectic, witty, knowledgeable and convincing. It was a pleasure to read.

Dr Schlesinger's *THE INSANITY HOAX* is a brilliant book about a serious topic; but the kicker is that it's also hugely entertaining. The good doctor is not only a psychologist, she's a well known, respected jazz critic. The combination of these disciplines enabled her to write a book which demonstrates a professionally honed research logic and a witty, improvisational writing style. It's the perfect combination and I found myself throughout the book alternating between gasps of surprise at her beautifully constructed arguments and laughing out loud at her funny, creative jazz riffs. There are a lot of bigwig psychologists and psychiatrists who have built their reputations (and are making a

bundle of bucks) off a false belief--i.e., the myth of the mad genius. The author exposes their weak and often non-existent research and dismantles the illogical assumptions which they claim support their position. Here's one short example from the book of such a false assumption: "A common misconception among mad genius researchers is that the notion of creativity is a continuous state, so that any variations in productivity must be caused by some interfering pathology...this is the rationale for all those productivity timelines, where the quiet stretches of great artists become 'evidence' of their depression and the spikes in activity are equated with mania. But other explanations are certainly possible. Here's one: when Aaron Copland was asked why he hadn't written anything lately he replied that he hadn't gotten any interesting musical ideas. This is perfectly reasonable. And given the natural cycle of activity and rest, every field needs time to lie fallow after a bountiful harvest--in the same way, creative people must recharge after their own." If you're hankering to read an important book that has both substance and an entertaining writing style, I highly recommend Dr. Schlesinger's book. It's a keeper and one that you'll be recommending to friends.

Whether or not you agree with the premise of this book -- that it's wrong to collectively brand most creative geniuses as pathologically unstable -- you will enjoy the music of Dr. Schlesinger's wise words and inventive wit. For this reader, "The Insanity Hoax" was an informative case of preaching to the choir, but it was still a page-turner nonetheless. The writing here is much like listening to a sophisticated jazz solo full of "the sounds of surprise" (to paraphrase Whitney Balliett). And just browsing the Table of Contents should give you an idea of how enlightening (and entertaining) this solo is going to be: "The Pale, Stammering Genius," "Yelling 'Crazy' in a Crowded Concert Hall," "Shrinks Are People Too"... There are also insightful gems like: "In mad genius research, it seems like everyone is busy reinventing the wheel, which prevents combining their disparate studies into a strong case for anything..." and "...the mad genius will never be legitimized by research motivation, no matter how passionate; or a theoretical hunch, no matter how compelling; or even an intuitive list of great talents who get their bipolar badges long after death..." And then there's: "Given a world of twittering multitaskers who get pelted with stimuli from all sides -- where everything is important, therefore nothing is -- you get just a few seconds to make your point and rise above the hive." An apt observation that could apply to many facets of cyber-life in the 21st century. Again, if you are already in Dr. Schlesinger's corner on this longstanding issue (read: stereotype), her compelling case will only fortify your beliefs. But there is also the joy of the journey right up to the last page. Just because we already know what Miles Davis is going to play on "My Funny Valentine" doesn't

make the experience any less inspiring. And if you enjoy first-rate writing that deconstructs -- and debunks -- a widely-held myth, this is a very inspiring book.

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