



# **Infectious Madness: The Surprising Science of How We "Catch" Mental Illness**

*Harriet A. Washington*

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**Infectious Madness: The Surprising Science of How We "Catch" Mental Illness** Harriet A. Washington  
**A groundbreaking look at the connection between germs and mental illness, and how we can protect ourselves.**

Is it possible to catch autism or OCD the same way we catch the flu? Can a child's contact with cat litter lead to schizophrenia? In her eye-opening new book, National Book Critics Circle Award-winning author Harriet Washington reveals that we can in fact "catch" mental illness. In INFECTIOUS MADNESS, Washington presents the new germ theory, which posits not only that many instances of Alzheimer's, OCD, and schizophrenia are caused by viruses, prions, and bacteria, but also that with antibiotics, vaccinations, and other strategies, these cases can be easily prevented or treated. Packed with cutting-edge research and tantalizing mysteries, INFECTIOUS MADNESS is rich in science, characters, and practical advice on how to protect yourself and your children from exposure to infectious threats that could sabotage your mental and physical health.

## **Infectious Madness: The Surprising Science of How We "Catch" Mental Illness Details**

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## From Reader Review Infectious Madness: The Surprising Science of How We "Catch" Mental Illness for online ebook

### Book Riot Community says

I have a longstanding interest in the biological underpinnings of mental illness and so couldn't resist checking out Harriet Washington's *Infectious Madness: The Surprising Science of How We "Catch" Mental Illness* from the library when I first learned of it earlier this month. As the title implies, the book delves into a large body of research pointing to an infectious cause behind many cases of so-called mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and OCD. With cool rationality, Washington challenges the predominant psychiatric paradigm of talking cures and antipsychotics while providing readers with an entertaining and informative introduction to the microbes that like to mess with our heads.

-Kate Scott

from The Best Books We Read in June 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/06/29/riot-r...>

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### Maria Ryan says

#### Disjointed Agenda

It would have been nice if Washington could have managed to stick to ethical investigative journalism and perhaps kept to the topic at hand, the theory of how various pathogens cause mental illness. It would have been a lofty goal at that because the topic itself is so vast. But Washington did a poor job of even trying. My one burning question is who is the true author of this book?

Deviating from the subject many times over, Washington goes off on multiple axes to grind such as her outrage over the pharmaceutical industry's corporate power plays and their penchant for putting profits before health, denying many citizens of underprivileged countries to suffer some of the worst fates imaginable due to their better-than-average chances of contracting the most horrific diseases imaginable. She barely utters a word about the myriad of environmental issues that potentially cause these diseases while once again touting the imagined efficacy of non-existent vaccines that might not be made available to these populations even if they did exist. There are also plenty of US citizens who are also denied potential life-saving medications due to economic position or lack thereof and some of them are even white. None of what she expounds is news and her outcries had little to no place in this book, a book supposedly about pathogens that cause a neuro-psychiatric presentation, not about the groups of people denied healthcare and not about one size fits all vaccination to save the world from every medical bogeyman imaginable.

In regard to her vaccination as a cure-all for measles and polio eradication to the tics that are a hallmark of Tourette's or even autism itself, one of the issues that absolutely needed to be included in her conversation of how certain pathogens can cause a neuropsychiatric presentation in some individuals but not others gives leverage to vaccines as a cause, not a cure of these illnesses. If an immune system can be negatively compromised by a vaccine, then it could be assumed that a failure of one's immune system to resolve a viral or bacterial episode might result in the body continuing to make antibodies to an infection no longer present, resulting in an auto-immune attack that could take the form of many of the diseases she lists. If vaccines can

harm a developing fetus and we should dispense with vaccinating all pregnant women yet protect those unborn children by vaccinating every single living human regardless of their circumstances, why is it that those same vaccines would not harm a newborn, toddler, or adult? This backwards logic has to stop once and for all. Her own misconceptions and fears surrounding vaccines and how they truly work along with her complete lack of regard over the fact that one size does not fit all makes this book a poor choice for this topic.

Wait a minute, what was this book supposed to be about again? I forgot. The title is catchy but I cannot recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn how it may be possible to catch mental illness much like we catch a cold. There are far better sources available providing accurate information that hasn't been skewed by unseen conflicts of interest.

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### **Andile Mahlangeni-Byndon says**

I loved this book. Washington does a great job using history, research, and other various cases to link infections with certain psychological illnesses. One thing I like about her style of writing is you can tell she does a lot of homework and research on the subjects she is talking about. She doesn't just bring new ideas to the table, but ideas that have existed that maybe haven't been fully explained in strong detail by a majority of people in the scientific community. The scientific community sometimes tends to be stuck in old models on how certain ailments are caused, and she does a great job broadening the subject at hand. Mental disorders have been linked with environment, genetics, trauma, or abuse, but rarely have we heard of the causation being that of an infection. This book was refreshing and was an overall great book. One that I'm sure I will be using as a reference point throughout my studies of health and medicine. -AMB/THOTN

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### **Joshua Jones says**

#### **Outstanding**

I learned so much and have so many more questions. Well researched and written, but it seems tip of the iceberg?

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### **Peter McLoughlin says**

couldn't get into this one. I skimmed it. No rating.

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### **Jen Milia says**

Combining a thorough review of medical and psychiatric research results with engaging case studies, Harriet Washington presents a compelling case for the biological basis of prevalent mental health disorders. Cases of autism, schizophrenia, Tourette's, and other mental health disorders have been found to be caused, at least partially, by biological means (bacteria and viruses). Washington illustrates how these biological agents, in

combination with genetics, environmental factors, and general health, contribute to the complex presentation of mental health disorders. Readers will find *Infectious Madness* a thought-provoking look at our perceptions of the divide between physical and mental health. I was delighted to be able to read this advanced copy as part of a Goodreads Giveaway.

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### **Jeanette says**

Picking up this book for a precise reason, which was to learn more about PANDAS. It's a condition that presents (rarely but increasing) within children. One day the 8 or 10 year old is completely normal, the next week showing progressive symptoms of hallucinatory or wildly emotive swings of fear, OCD, paranoia—generally insane scale conditions. Brain functions and perceptions definitively involved.

I've become a fan of the TV show on the Animal Planet channel called "Monsters Within US". And after viewing at least 4 cases of PANDAS or other related adult parasitic conditions, I was intrigued to learn more. This book actually covered several related fields too which I have viewed in other aspects on that show. Not retrovirus, but other agents of cell sabotage or brain function alteration through plaque building or some other physical result.

In the first half of the book I would have given it a 4 star or maybe even a 3.5 because this book is an extremely difficult read. And in the defining chapters (base beginning of this read) I would think the continuity would be lost by most casual readers. But VERY slowly I began to conceptualize the retrovirus groups. And also the autoimmune types of reactions possible to them. Be it a virus, a bacteria settling, a chemical induced alteration to function or close contact with other vectors of passing? Regardless, other causes to brain perceptions and process not genetically inherent. And mental illnesses not progressive either until other factors of infection interplay over time or at specific periods (as in the womb).

Science and especially medical survey has repeatedly been a field where the "correct" illness, pathology definition has been exact, and its treatment also imperative. For a certain period of time. And then not at all. Just as stomach ulcers ALWAYS required cream drinks, not spicy or other certain types of foods etc. THEN, and it wasn't all that long ago either. And now, those cures are laughable because the cause has been bacteria of a certain type all along and antibiotic the treatment. And let us not forget the psychological theories of over a century when every or most observed condition was the "Mother's" emotive relationship fault, or some parsing of Father neglect was the root of the illness. And its cure the remembering or the reciting of "forgotten" ire. Simplistic and also simply incorrect. Science deems "correct" within waves of vast change to description and to treatment. Sometimes treatments becoming the opposite of what was done just 30 years previously. The period where body organs were taken or imploded or altered by surgery to cure mental illness, not the less of those past journeys to improved "result".

Some arenas of mental illness are similar to diseases that attack or claim other organs in the body. SO much is unknown to why there are waves of anorexia, OCD, tic movement syndromes in certain places and over certain geographic locations. This book explains why that may be. In part, at least. It also surveys identical twin outcomes within certain vectors of contacts and placements. What is the percentage of both twins becoming anorexic or filled with OCD anxiety? This is detailed too.

What I did learn by this, is that so much is unknown to causal entities and time frames for reactions. More than is known.

And I did think of all the critters in my rural location. And the dung they leave. Raccoons everywhere.

If you are a cat person too. Because there is certainly strong evidence in study of numbers for children who have a cat in their home. Or for those who have had long term cat contact for certain specific mental conditions.

The study of retrovirus world is fascinating and one of those fields (like space) that needs far, far more analysis. There are more of them than there are insects on Earth or all suns/stars in the universe.

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### **Kaite says**

I won a free copy from the Goodreads First Reads Giveaway Program and think that it is interesting. I would recommend it to everyone.

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### **Sara M. Abudahab says**

A well researched and thought provoking book.

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### **Kat (Lost in Neverland) says**

This may sound outrageous at first. The suggestion that mental illness, currently an epidemic in modern society, can be caused by bacteria and pathogens like a common cold is nearly unheard of.

Getting schizophrenia from a cat? Developing anorexia after getting strep throat, or even depression from bacteria in your stomach?

While it seems strange, there are some truths to be found. For example, before the discovery of penicillin curing syphilis, a large quantity of people in mental institutions were admitted for 'delusions, hallucinations, and hearing voices'. This was called psychosis and many people died from it. However, when penicillin was found to cure syphilis, the amount of these patients dropped dramatically. The conclusion? That specific form of psychosis was a late stage of syphilis, and thus, when syphilis was cured, the psychosis was as well.

In another example, cats are known carriers of zoonotic pathogens. Most people simply aren't affected by it. In 1871, England had its first cat show, and that same year, the number of people who owned house cats skyrocketed. Cats were no longer just outside animals meant to catch rats and other vermin, they became our pets. At the same time, rates of schizophrenia also skyrocketed.

Cats carry a type of bacteria that is present in many four-legged mammals, but only reproduces in felines. Most people are not affected by it, but according to some studies, it has been thought to cause sickness and, yes, even schizophrenia.

Moving ahead, untreated cases of strep throat in some children have shown sudden onslaughts of OCD and anorexia. Healthy children who, only days after their sore throats have healed, suddenly become obsessed

with washing their hands or exercising. In 1998, a pediatrician named Susan Swedo laid out the theoretical paper of PANDAS, or, pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections. PANDAS encompasses any sort of OCD, Tourettes, anorexia, anxiety, etc., that has appeared in children after they have sore throats/strep throat.

Most of the cases that Harriet A. Washington give us are usually highly isolated cases, and, in my opinion, very theoretical. I still have a hard time believing cats can cause schizophrenia or that gut bacteria can cause depression. It's an interesting theory, and one that should be researched more in the following years. It's rather new; Washington started gathering research in the late 1990's, and only a few other scientists and doctors have furthered the research.

There's something to be said about it, for sure. One example was the case of the flu; severe cases of the flu can cause delusions and hallucinations in the late stages. She brought up the comparison in that, if we took the knowledge of the flu away, delusions and hallucinations of that sort are most certainly a 'mental illness'. But with the flu, we see it as fairly normal and a common occurrence.

So, when do we draw the line? Between bacterial infections and infections of the mind? Or, at least in some cases, are they one and the same?

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### **Robin Riedstra says**

I found this book fascinating. I particularly enjoyed the section on pre-Freudian ideas and treatment of mental illness.

My only criticism would be an over use on reporting on the reporting of studies, rather than reporting on the studies directly. At times it can be two levels of bias on a study rather than one. But still thoroughly engaging and I would recommend this book to others.

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### **Monica Snyder says**

Seriously. Read this book. My life has been rescued because a few brave doctors have begun to understand how a virus or infection can truly attack your brain in such a way you seem completely mad.

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### **Tea says**

This book was entirely captivating to me! I love research, biology, brain health, and history. All of which are sewn throughout this novel! You can tell Mrs. Washington is a highly intelligent person!

If science, history, and research don't strike you as fascinating, this may be difficult for you to read. Washington exposes the true causes to many illnesses by thoroughly citing scientists' research, evoking significant and perhaps overlooked historical evidence, and doing a complete 360 on many conventional

shared beliefs about today's perceptions of what is considered factual. This opens doors for many awaited breakthroughs.

This book is only difficult to read (referring to other reviews) because each page is voluminous and the entire book is thoroughly packed with a ton of information. However, in the same sense, I found every bit of it highly intriguing. I never desired to put the book down, but would only do so out of tiredness lol.

The book's purpose is to make the case that pathogens are responsible for mental illness like they are in physical illness. Washington's unorthodox research have not to this time been accepted by the practice of majority of doctors and scientists. This groundbreaking knowledge proves there isn't a division between "mental" illnesses of the mind and "physical" illnesses of the body! She proposes they are all physical because mental illnesses are caused by an infection. This is very good news because it means illnesses plaguing the brain have an identifiable source and can be eradicated and prevented!

In the big picture, I definitely believe this book will be regarded highly and be a pivotal point referenced in medical history!

I would also love to note how much I adore how this incredibly brilliant author/scientist/doctor etc. is a black woman! ? I hope to meet her!

Initially, my personal familial ties to "Mental" Illness lured me to this book.

My immediate family of 5 is plagued with Autism Spectrum Disorder, OCD, Tourette's Syndrome, Bell's Palsy, Depression, Anxiety (Severe Panic Attacks), Paranoia, Suicidal tendencies, Epilepsy, Multiple Personality Disorder, Bi-Polar Disorder, a temporary/ random onset of Schizophrenia in an intelligent/popular and seemingly healthy child, Insomnia, and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. That's all between the 5 of us.

I also battle "physical" autoimmune illnesses that I've had my entire young life: Crohn's Disease, Sarcoidosis, Stage 3 Endometriosis, Uveitis, Rheumatoid Arthritis: Ankylosing Spondylitis, Interstitial Cystitis, and many other symptoms. (Despite all of this we are a high-functioning family who appear perfectly normal).

Surprisingly, these illnesses were all mentioned in the book! Having such personal experience with this, it all made so much sense and I am hopeful for future generations of people! ?

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### **Theresa says**

This is a great book on how some disorders may arise from infections. For example, strep throat in young children can result in OCD or anorexia. But her conclusions are not limited to medical disorders. She also has a chapter on cultural disorders. ( Hitler + Jews = Trump + Muslims? <- my parallel) I recommend reading "Brain on fire" by Susannah Calahan, a personal memoir related to this topic.

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### **Lauren says**

3.5 stars

Over the last few months, I have been researching this and related topics. This is a good introductory synthesis about the human microbiome and how it plays into physical and mental health. A good place to

start to learn more.

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