

A promotional image for the play 'next to normal'. It features a group of six cast members standing in front of a dark, textured background. A woman in a red shirt is prominently featured in the foreground, looking directly at the camera. Behind her are four other cast members, and a sixth person is partially visible on the right. The title 'next to normal' is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# next to normal

NOVEMBER 19-24, 2013  
FULKS THEATRE

Contains mature language and situations;  
recommended for ages 16 and older

## Study Guide

by Matthew Silar

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## Synopsis

*Next to Normal* is a Pulitzer Prize winning musical about one woman's struggle with mental illness as well as the toll it takes on her family. This rock musical follows Diana Goodman, a bipolar Depressive, 16 years after a tragic accident left her manic and depressed. Her daughter, Natalie, is 16 years old and on the verge of losing control of herself. Adding to her stress is her ever-present and loving, stoner boyfriend, Henry. As Diana continues to spiral downward, she is aided by her loving husband, Dan, and her newest psychiatrist, Doctor Madden. Together, they try several treatments in an effort to save Diana from her manic depression. After medications and therapy refuse to provide improvement, they resort to electroconvulsive therapy. When Diana loses her memory from the procedure, the family may finally have a chance to start over and build the family they'd always dreamed of. But, there's one looming presence that threatens all of their progress. Diana's 18-year-old son, Gabe, is proving to be a larger hindrance than the family thought possible.

### But, why?

The truth will shock you to your very core.





**Diana Goodman**

**Mother. Sexy. Sharp. Delusional bipolar depressive**



**Dan Goodman**

**Father. Handsome. Genuine. Constant. Tired.**



**Gabriel "Gabe" Goodman**

**Son. Dashing. Gentle. Bright. Playful. Everything a mother could want...**





### **Natalie Goodman**

**Daughter. She's trying to be perfect. It's not going well.**



### **Henry**

**Musician, romantic, stoner, slacker, philosopher king.**



### **Doctor Madden**

**On the young side of ageless. Assured.  
A rock star.**

## Production History

*Next to Normal* got started in 1998, over ten years prior to its opening on Broadway. The piece started out as a ten-minute musical about a woman undergoing electroshock therapy. Subsequently, it adopted the name *Feeling Electric*. The writers were prompted to write the piece after reading about a statistic that stated a large percentage of female patients were being prescribed electroshock therapy by a large percentage of male doctors. Brian Yorkey and Tom Kitt were at the heart of the piece from the beginning and after the success of their ten-minute musical, which served as a final for a college class, both writers felt compelled to continue working on the piece. In 2002, multiple workshop versions of *Feeling Electric* [*Next to Normal*'s original title] were presented in various venues in New York City. As both Yorkey and Kitt learned from the exposure, their big break came in 2005 at the New York Musical Theatre Festival, a presentation that would greatly alter the path of the show and ultimately, the fate of its creators.

*Feeling Electric* was presented at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in 2005. The production was an accumulation of changes gathered from three years of workshops and ran over four hours in length. Interestingly enough, of those four hours, only three







songs remain untouched in the final draft; many of the songs in the final draft are based off of songs found in the NYMF version, but are altered or reworked in some capacity. Thankfully, these four hours had enough promise to catch the attention of a producer, David Stone. Stone, who was already two years into his incredibly successful run of *Wicked*, thought the show and its writers had promise. He agreed to serve as the executive producer for the show. Stone hired on Michael Grief as the director of the piece and together, the four men produced two more large scale workshops of *Feeling Electric* in 2006 and 2007. They were constantly making changes to the piece. The largest and most effective change was the decision to shift the focus of the show from the medical treatment of electroshock therapy to the emotional experience of a family struggling with the reality of a mother who is a bipolar depressive.

*Next to Normal* opened Off-Broadway at Second Stage Theatre in January of 2008. The show received mixed responses claiming the balance between “comedy” and “pathos” was weak. The show was rewritten again and premiered in a regional theatre at the Arena Stage in Virginia. Reviews were overwhelmingly positive and gave the production team the momentum necessary to make the move to Broadway.

*Next to Normal* opened on April 15, 2009. The show played over 730 performances and was nominated for eleven Tony Awards, winning three including Best Original Score and Best Performance By a Leading Actress in a Musical which went to Alice Ripley for her stunning performance as Diana Goodman.



# Bipolar Disorder

**Bipolar Disorder** is a chronic illness that features consistently recurring episodes of mania and/or depression. A patient with diagnosed bipolar disorder often shifts dramatically from states of peace and positivity to states of mania and depression. These mood shifts often follow irregular patterns and can last anywhere from hours to weeks or months at a time. While the cause and cure are unknown, there does seem to be a hereditary link among patients. In fact, 2/3 of patients have a relative in their immediate family that suffers from Bipolar Disorder as well.

## Mania

When a bipolar patient is in a manic state, their emotions are extremely heightened. There is a common misconception that mania is always negative. However, manic states can range from feelings of extreme irritability to extreme euphoria. A bipolar person may become incredibly productive in their manic state, sleeping little and accomplishing much. Often, these manic states lead to a lack of judgment like impulsive large purchases and major life decisions such as quitting a job.

## Depression

Depression, on the other hand, is always negative. Fits of depression include feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and defeat. While in a depressed state, many people experience impulses towards self harm and suicidal thoughts.

**"I disinfected the entire house, rewired the computer, and did some decoupage.**

**Hmm... Next. I think I'll retile the roof!"**

**- Diana**

## Did you know?

*Costco*, a song originally written for the show, was cut after the show was retooled following the Off-Broadway run.

The song featured Diana having a manic episode inside a Costco Warehouse Store.





# Two Types of Bipolar Disorder

## Bipolar Disorder Type 1

Bipolar 1 is often referred to as **Manic Depression**. Patients with Bipolar Disorder Type 1 suffer from both manic and depressive states. Severe states of mania can lead to psychosis, or detachment from reality. The most common forms being **hallucinations** and **delusions**.

### \*hallucination:

something (such as an image, a sound, or a smell) that seems real but does not really exist and that is usually caused by mental illness or the effect of a drug

### \*delusion:

a belief that is not true; a false idea; a false idea or belief that is caused by mental illness

**\*\*Merriam-Webster.com.**

## Bipolar Disorder Type 2

Bipolar Disorder Type 2 patients suffer from both manic and depressive states, however, these manic states never exceed a state of hypomania. It is not uncommon for depression to be incorrectly diagnosed as Bipolar Disorder Type 2. This is due to the states of depression being noticeably different from states of passivity or positivity. It is sometimes difficult to diagnose whether these states fully reach hypomania.

### **lithium:**

Lithium affects the flow of sodium through nerve and muscle cells in the body. Sodium affects excitation or mania.

**\*\*Drug Information Online  
Drugs.com**

### **anticonvulsant:**

Anticonvulsants are drugs that prevent or reduce the severity and frequency of seizures in various types of epilepsy. The different types of anticonvulsants may act on different receptors in the brain and have different modes of action..

**\*\*Drug Information Online  
Drugs.com**

## **Treatment Options**

It is usually difficult to decipher what is and isn't going to be successful in terms of treating a bipolar patient. In most cases, a combination of talk therapy and medications provide the best results. Medication is frequently a combination of drugs including **lithium** and several **anticonvulsants**. [A list of medications can be found later in this study guide.]

Since bipolar depression is, in fact a chronic illness, it is recurring and often takes a lifetime of medication to stop flare ups and maintain a normal lifestyle. Still, most patients benefit from combining medication with therapy, life style changes and support from their family and immediate social circles. In some cases, a more extreme form of treatment may be suggested. [See Electroconvulsive Therapy]

## **Types of Talk Therapy**

**Cognitive:** The patient and doctor examine thoughts and negative thinking patterns. When habits or patterns are discovered, the patient and doctor then investigate the negative affects these habits have on the patient's emotional and physical behaviors.

**Interpersonal:** The patient and doctor examine habits and issues amongst the patient's relationships. There is a focus on building and strengthening the positive relationships in the patient's life.

**Family-Focused:** The patient and doctor examine family dynamic and often include immediate family members on the sessions in an effort educate them on efficient ways to create a healthy living environment.



# Electroconvulsive Therapy

Neuropsychiatrists first implemented Electroconvulsive Therapy in Italy in 1930. ECT is a process in which small volts of electrical current are applied to the head to induce small seizures. This process is thought to alter the way in which the brain responds to chemicals. (Remember a majority of medications are prescribed to treat chemical imbalances in a patient's brain.) Despite having been around for almost a century, there is not a lot of data to support ECT or why it works on some patients. The results are scattered and follow virtually no pattern and there is little correlation between the frequent short term effects and the anticipated long term effects. Still, it is quick and often provides instant results.

## Side Effects:

- memory loss
- disorientation
- headaches
- stiffness
- confusion

**ECT is fatal in about 1 in every 1,000 patients**



## Medications\*

(As listed in the song *Who's Crazy/ My Psychopharmacologist and I*)

**Ambien (zolpidem)** is a sedative, also called a hypnotic. It affects chemicals in the brain that may become unbalanced and cause sleep problems (insomnia).

**Ativan (lorazepam)** is in a class of medications called benzodiazepines. It is used to relieve anxiety. It works by slowing activity in the brain to allow for relaxation.

**Buspar (buspirone)** is an anxiolytic psychoactive drug of the azapirone chemical class that is used to treat anxiety disorders, helping to alleviate fear, tension, irritability, dizziness, pounding heartbeat, and other physical symptoms.

**Depakote (divalproex)** is a anti-convulsant. It is usually prescribed for persons who are Bipolar (Manic Depressive), or a similar illness. It is sometimes prescribed for people who experience chronic migraine headaches.

**Klonopin (clonazepam)** is in a group of drugs called benzodiazepines (ben-zoe-dye-AZE-eh-peens\_/ Clonazepam) affects chemicals in the brain that may become unbalanced and cause anxiety.

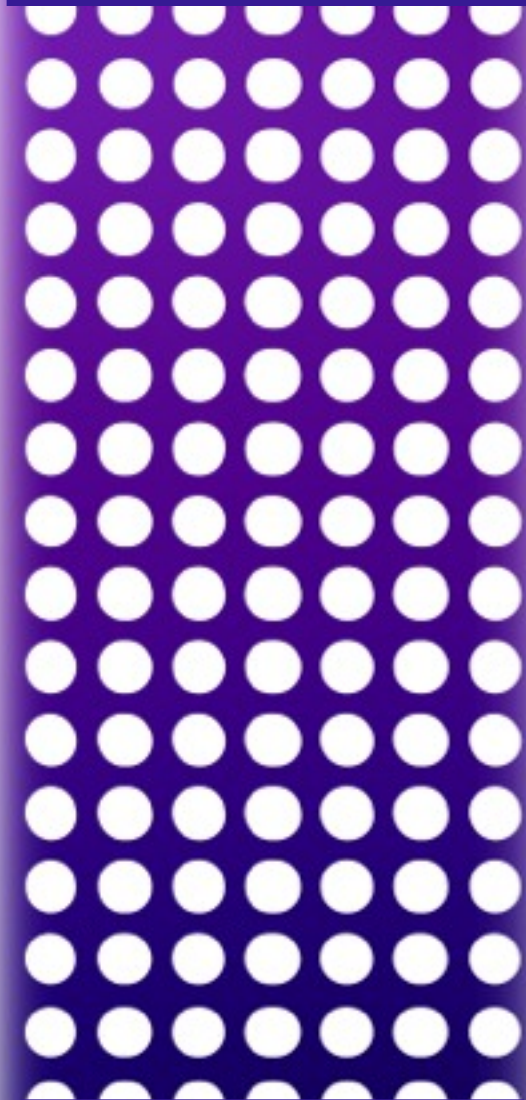
**Paxil (paroxetine)** is an antidepressant in a group of drugs called selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Paxil affects chemicals in the brain that may become unbalanced.

**Prozac (fluoxetine)** is a selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRI) antidepressant. Prozac affects chemicals in the brain that may become unbalanced and cause depression, panic, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive symptoms.

**Xanax (alprazolam)** belongs to a group of drugs called benzodiazepines. It works by slowing down the movement of chemicals in the brain that may become unbalanced. This results in a reduction in nervous tension (anxiety)

**Zoloft (sertraline)** is an antidepressant in a group of drugs called selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Zoloft affects chemicals in the brain that may become unbalanced and cause depression, panic, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive symptoms

\*Compiled by Odjani Simmons & Leonardo White- Tri Cities High School





# Theatre Etiquette

The ACU Theatre Department is thrilled that you're coming to see our production. We produce an average of 8 shows a year, and they're all open to students. As you prepare to attend *Next to Normal*, remember that there is certain etiquette appropriate for live theatre performances.

A live play is different than a movie. It is inappropriate to talk, text, or use any mobile device during the show. It is inappropriate to bring food or drink into the theatre or make loud noises (chomping on gum, crumpling paper, etc.). Not only is that kind of behavior distracting to your fellow audience members, but it is also distracting to the actors. They do "feel" your energy, so, it's appropriate to laugh when something is funny or clap at the end of a scene or when the entire play is done. Your focused attention actually makes the performance better for everyone.

**On behalf of ACU Theatre, we would like to thank you for providing both the actors and audience with a pleasant atmosphere and experience.**

**Thank you!**



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**\*\*All *Next to Normal* images are from the Original Broadway Production- Booth Theatre, NYC, NY.**