



Rha Goddess is Good for Mental Health

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Psychotherapists like myself often speak of our work in three ways: as a science, as a craft, and as an art. The science of psychotherapy has to do with the rigorous studies we conduct comparing the effects of therapy to no therapy, or comparing one type of therapy to another, or testing the effectiveness of particular techniques with particular types of problems. The craft of psychotherapy refers to honing our skills in creating a safe place for people to talk about their most intimate concerns, assessing the nature of their difficulties and disorders, and deploying techniques to effectively engage them to consider alternative ways to think and feel about themselves, their families, their pasts, and their futures. The science and craft of psychotherapy are fairly straightforward - they can be taught, and they can be learned, by many fledgling researchers and practitioners. The art of psychotherapy, however, is more ineffable - it has to do with how we intuit a person's whole way of looking at the world, the aesthetic they live within, their deepest concerns and longings, how they experience their own version of madness and sanity. And it has to do with how we phrase what we say to them in a way that rings a bell of truth within them, how we capture their imagination, how we give them the kindling to relight the fire of hope and possibility where before there was only dampened-down lightlessness and discouragement.

Psychotherapists like myself often turn to the arts to gather metaphors, images, and the spirit of creativity we need to do the art of our work. Rha Goddess is an artist whose work makes her a natural resource for psychotherapists and all who seek to understand better the human condition and the nature of insanity. Her latest work, *Low's Journey*, powerfully and poignantly reveals the crazy-making nature of our hyped-up, socially-fragmented, depersonalized world. With a mixture of outlandish humor, open-throated rage, deepest sorrow, experiments in resignation, followed by resurging courage, she shows us how little acts - an annoying customer service representative giving us yet another run around about our phone bill, a bag of cheese doodles noisily crunched at just the wrong moment of an already hellish day, a boyfriend who can't be found one more time - can become the tipping point into madness. And when madness meets the mental health care system - a system dominated increasingly by psychiatrists pressed by managed care to deliver medication in 10 minute appointments rather than hours of compassion - folks can find themselves spiraling into an endless cycle of "management" of their individual pain rather than connecting with others to make a change in this oppressive, insane world. Threaded throughout the piece is the specter of social illness of racism, creeping 'round the edges of her characters' experiences, red-hot coals ready to burst into flame with the slightest fanning, making those on the receiving end of it seem like the crazy ones when they explode after exceeding their levels of tolerance.

I'm honored to be partnering with Rha in a unique collaboration of science and art. Using the tools of psychological research, we will examine her work as a therapeutic intervention and evaluate its impact on audience members' views of mental health and illness. We will also provide opportunities for audience members to tell their stories about their own struggles to maintain mental health and social connections in a world gone mad. Rha Goddess is an artistic and social visionary and I'm delighted to be working with her to bring her vision into the sights of the world of mental health.