



Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression

Meri Nana-Ama Danquah

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This moving memoir of an African-American woman's lifelong fight to identify and overcome depression offers an inspirational story of healing and emergence. Wrapped within Danquah's engaging account of this universal affliction is rare and insightful testimony about what it means to be black, female, and battling depression in a society that often idealizes black women as strong, nurturing caregivers. A startlingly honest, elegantly rendered depiction of depression, *Willow Weep for Me* calls out to all women who suffer in silence with a life-affirming message of recovery. Meri Danquah rises from the pages, a true survivor, departing a world of darkness and reclaiming her life.

Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression Details

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Darkowaa says

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Favorite quotes:

White women who suffer from mental illness are depicted as idle, spoiled, or just plain hysterical. Black men are demonized and pathologized. Black women with psychological problems are certainly not seen as geniuses; we are generally not labeled 'hysterical' or 'eccentric' or even 'pathological'. When a black woman suffers from a mental disorder, the overwhelming opinion is that she is weak. And weakness in black women is intolerable. (pg. 20)

I've frequently been told things like: "Girl, you've been hanging out with too many white folk" ; "What do you have to be depressed about? If our people could make it through slavery, we can make it through anything" ; "Take your troubles to Jesus, not no damn psychiatrist." (pg. 21)

From the beginning, our relationship was formula for disaster. Depressed people often attract unhealthy relationships and inadvertently subject themselves and their already battered self-image, to additional abuse... You feel as if you are worthless so you attach yourself to someone who you think will give your life some meaning, be a safe harbor for your souls. But only you can protect what's inside. (pg. 41)

I despise the way blackness in the English language, symbolizes death and negativity. Because I believe that the absorption of these connotations contributes to self-hate, I avoid them at all cost (pg 182).

We sat in an awkward silence for some time. I wondered why, after all he had been through with his mother, Eugene welcomed another depressive into his life. Wasn't he afraid of the consequences? How did he escape the contagious effects of mental illness? (pg. 217)

"Why do you give people so much power over you? That M.D. behind his name just means that he's trained to facilitate your healing. You're the one who's actually got to make it happen. Therapy doesn't work unless you know what you want out of it. You're the one who has the power to change things." (pg. 220)

Racism is definitely in the eye of the beholder. White people have at hand the privilege of choosing whether to see or not see the racism that takes place around them. If Dr. Fitzgerald could not 'fathom' my reality as a black person, how would he be able to assess or address the rage, the fear and the host of other complex emotions that go hand-in-hand with being black in a racist society? For whatever reasons, seeing a black therapist had never crossed my mind, until then. (pg. 224)

The illusion of strength has been and continues to be of major significance to me as a black woman. The one myth that I have had to endure my entire life is that of my supposed birthright to strength. Black women are supposed to be strong – caretakers, nurturers, healers of other people – any of the twelve dozen variations of Mammy. Emotional hardship is supposed to be built into the structure of our lives. It went along with the territory of being both black and female in a society that completely undervalues the lives of black people and regards all women as second-class citizens. It seemed that suffering, for a black woman, was part of the package.

Or so I thought. (pg. 19)

Rhonda says

This book really made me think about the lives of others who live with depression on a daily basis. Though I could relate on some level with this author, there were many things I cannot come to terms with due to the fact that she is so different from me. I read this book with an open mind and feel that I have finished leaning a little more about depression and what others may be going through.

It is well written, but is a "heavy" book to read. I could only read a couple chapters at a time and then would need to put it aside for a few days and think about it before picking it up again.

It is not something I would recommend to everyone to read. But if you want to see how hard it can be to live with this problem, then it is a wonderful book to delve into.

Centauri says

I don't think I have ever read a memoir in its entirety ...

This tale was revealing in many ways: details about the illness of depression, how it affects those who are close to me, and even who I am in regards to it. It is an eye opener. Though some parts are difficult (due to the aforementioned above), it is promising and worth the struggle through those sections

Izetta Autumn says

Part of my continued reading of memoirs written by Black women. The second half of this book was particularly well done. The first part of the book, while evocative, didn't explain or lay out why Danquah was writing her memoir as well as the last few chapters of her book do. In the last few chapters Danquah is clear that she's writing the book for women of color, specifically Black women, to address the stigma of depression and provide resources and her own story.

There is a certain shielding in the book: for instance, how is Danquah's relationship with her daughter impacted by her depression. Also, I wonder what Danquah might add to her memoir more than 10 years after she wrote it - have her views changed?

All in all a strong memoir. Glad I read it.

Kurnain Lofton, Kurnain says

This book was extremely enlightening, educating its reader on the depths of clinical depression. Also the fact that this is a lifelong struggle, there's no one cure, or one time. It's a challenge that must be dealt with on a regular basis.

Monica Coleman says

So few books by black women on what it's like to live with a depressive condition. Danquah well names the stigma that still exists in black communities - and the problem of the ideal of the "strong black woman." I like how she includes her childhood and mothering in her story. A nice read.

Leslie says

I applaud Meri Nana-Ama Danquah. When I read this, it was pretty much the ONLY available memoir written by a black woman about mental depression.

K says

I read this book for class in undergrad, and it truly changed my life. It was my first time reading a book about a person that looked like me, who suffered from depression. It's a relatively sad story, but it really sums up the bleakness and hopelessness that comes with mental illness. It's a favorite, because it made me feel so much less alone.

Ondine says

This book was beautifully written. People who struggle with depression may see some of themselves in this memoir. I appreciated how vulnerable she allowed herself to be, and it was refreshing to read a memoir that from the perspective of a woman of color. The intersections of being a black woman and an immigrant made this story so critically important for me to read.

Kayla Brooks says

This memoir candidly addresses the issues of mental health in the Black community. The author shares how she discovered her depression and exposes the reader to how she has grown to manage and live with the disease. This book demonstrates the importance of talking about mental health and its impact on women, people of color, and women of color.

Andrea Luquetta says

Its rare to read a first hand account of depression that includes analysis of race. I love best the insight that Danquah gives us that depression, the illness, co-exists and interacts with the social and personal events, circumstances and history that inform who we are and how we behave. Viewing depression this way allows

us to look for and respond to both the symptoms of depression (physical and emotional) and narratives we interpret, internalize and use to measure who we should be and explain how we've become who we are. As such, we must interrogate social norms about race, gender, class, sexuality, mental illness and others that we conform to, disrupt or struggle against. Doing that seems to be the only way to really, consciously and with deliberate consideration, choose what we believe, who we want to be, and how to measure ourselves such that we finally achieve integrity and cohesion of mind, spirit and action.

Erin Montgomery says

While disorganized at times, Danquah's memoir was moving and authentic. She offers a unique perspective on what it means to have depression as a black, single mother in America.

Emma says

<https://emryal.wordpress.com/2017/07/...>

Thomas says

I cannot emphasize the importance of this book enough. While mental health affects everyone, it affects everyone in different ways: we need more people of color represented in books about mental health. In her courageous memoir *Willow Weep for Me*, Meri Nana-Ama Danquah details her experience with clinical depression and how it affected her role as a family member, a writer, and a human.

Danquah describes the intersectionality of mental illness and race by analyzing her own journey as well as society's expectations of black people. In a tone both fierce and non-pitying, she advocates for blacks to seek treatment and to discuss mental health with more openness. Her compassion for her friends and family members living with depression pulses through the pages of *Willow Weep for Me*. This quote serves as one of many that exemplifies Danquah's insight:

"Depressive disorders do not discriminate along color lines, people do. People determine what is publicly acceptable and what is not, who may behave in what way at which time and under which circumstances; and these social mores spill over into our private lives, into the images we create. White people take prescription drugs with gentle, melodic names; they go to therapy once or twice a week in nice, paneled offices. Black people take illicit drugs with names as harsh as the streets on which they are bought. We build churches and sing songs that tell us to 'Go Tell It on the Mountain.' Either that or we march... for justice and for peace. We are the walking wounded. And we suffer alone because we don't know that there are others like us."

Danquah's ability to articulate the anguish of depression while instilling hope in *Willow Weeps for Me* inspires me. At a few points, I had to put the book down because of the intensity of her suffering - as well as to honor the eloquence of her writing. She describes depression in a thorough and holistic way, incorporating stigma from society, biology, rumination, and much more into her memoir.

Overall, recommended to anyone interested in mental illness, memoir, or romance. I have no idea why this book has not garnered much attention since its publication over ten years ago. It deserves much more. A final

quote from the end of *Willow Weep for Me*, to end this review on a positive note:

"Before, I used to wonder what my life would have been like had I not gone through my depressions; now, I don't know if I would trade those experiences. I love who I am. And without those past depressions, I wouldn't be the same person. Through the depressions, through therapy, I have learned to speak out, to claim the life I want, and to cherish the people with whom I choose to share it. Having lived with the pain, having felt/heard/seen and tasted it, I know now that when you pass through it, there is beauty on the other side."

Leeann says

I wish I'd known about this book years ago. Not only do I battle depression in my late 20s, but I've dealt with teenage depression as well as childhood depression. I never really had anyone who could tell me that I wasn't alone or crazy. Black people deal with depression too. This is what representation is. This is an example of why so many people need to stop wondering why "everything is always about race". Mentioning race is a necessity for those who feel alone at every turn.

This is not what I'd call a "fast read". I took about a month to complete it. With my state of mind, I'd cry for hours after a few paragraphs. Some days, I wouldn't even want to look at the cover. Everything that the author had to say hit home some how.

I'll be placing an order for a personal copy and reading this book again, and I hope to discover more books about mental illness by black authors very soon.
