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Depression: A Public Feeling



Synopsis

In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich combines memoir and critical essay in search of ways of writing about depression as a cultural and political phenomenon that offer alternatives to medical models. She describes her own experience of the professional pressures, creative anxiety, and political hopelessness that led to intellectual blockage while she was finishing her dissertation and writing her first book. Building on the insights of the memoir, in the critical essay she considers the idea that feeling bad constitutes the lived experience of neoliberal capitalism. Cvetkovich draws on an unusual archive, including accounts of early Christian acedia and spiritual despair, texts connecting the histories of slavery and colonialism with their violent present-day legacies, and utopian spaces created from lesbian feminist practices of crafting. She herself seeks to craft a queer cultural analysis that accounts for depression as a historical category, a felt experience, and a point of entry into discussions about theory, contemporary culture, and everyday life. *Depression: A Public Feeling* suggests that utopian visions can reside in daily habits and practices, such as writing and yoga, and it highlights the centrality of somatic and felt experience to political activism and social transformation.

Book Information

Paperback: 296 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books (November 5, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822352389

ISBN-13: 978-0822352389

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #339,599 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #130 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Gay & Lesbian Studies](#) #418 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Depression](#) #578 in [Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > LGBT Studies](#)

Customer Reviews

"A provocative addition to Ann Cvetkovich's eloquent writings on the archives of public feelings, this book takes depression out of the space of the private into the complex politics of our time. Weaving together memoir, cultural and medical history, and literary and theoretical discussion, Cvetkovich experiments with and reflects on unconventional ways of writing about embodiment, cognition, and

affect. Along the way, she offers myriad prescriptions, small and large, on how to cope with the daily effects of depression and how to heal the world." — Marianne Hirsch, author of *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*

Combining cultural critique with nuanced readings of queer aesthetic practices, and mixing theoretical reflections on experience with experiments in memoir, *Depression: A Public Feeling* delivers not only critical insights but also wisdom. The book offers a model for something like collective or collaborative authorship; framed as a project conceived in concert with a far-flung community of academics, activists, and artists, *Depression* is a departure from academic business as usual. This is a profoundly inspiring book." — Heather Love, author of *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*

"Aesthetics, anecdotes and evidence against the medical model." — Tyler Cowen *New York Times Magazine*

"*Depression: A Public Feeling* sets out to challenge contemporary medical notions of depression that simultaneously relieve one of responsibility (it's just genes or chemicals) and provide agency (you can fix it by taking a pill). . . . In anatomising her lived experience of writer's block, Cvetkovich invites the reader to ask whether, despite the trade-specific terminology, this is still a symptom exclusive to writers. . . . [H]er perceptions are agile." — Talitha Stevenson *New Statesman*

"*Depression* succeeds at opening up a public discussion on certain kinds of depression that are often dismissed as trivial, like the stress of academic labour. . . . [C]lear and helpful with a vision for overcoming melancholy through a transformation of everyday life." — William Burton *Lambda Literary Review*

"[Cvetkovich] has taken some huge risks with *Depression*. Rather than building a traditional academic argument with research and theory, the book combines stylistically distinct and potentially disparate parts that add up to a highly readable, relatable, radical treatise that provides many points of entry and fresh thinking on one of the most overexamined subjects of the past few decades." — Cindy Widner *Austin Chronicle*

"At one end, *Depression* is a call to expand how we frame and engage with depression, and at the other it's an internal appeal to academia to accept personal experience as a valid source material for scholarship. By melding the personal and the academic, Cvetkovich is creating an important new forum for how we discuss depression. . . . The material is totally fascinating. . . ." — Nina Lary *Bitch*

"Cvetkovich offers us an introduction to thinking critically about depression's causes and its manifestations as well as, perhaps, the localised tactics that are necessary to enable recovery. At the end, she turns rather sweetly to crafting as one reparative habit, partly because of the aesthetic of connectivity that it can stimulate. *Knitting yourself out of depression: it's kind of folksy, but I liked it.*" — Sally

Munt Times Higher Education)“The book’s merit is in jolting us out of our habit of thinking about depression as a personal, medical issue, reminding us of the ways in which the rules and roles of society influence our psyches and feelings about ourselves. By taking depression out of the exclusive domain of the therapeutic culture, [Cvetkovich] challenges us to make new connections between the individual’s experience of depression and life within a depressive culture. (Irene Javors Gay and Lesbian Review/Worldwide) “[A]n experiment in connecting personal feelings with social conditions and critical analysis. . . . Cvetkovich finds a variety of ways to utilize the tools of academe to build a shelter from the traumas of academe. It’s both funny and oddly endearing to see an academic response to depression that turns it into a field, organizes conferences and protests with special and entertaining dress requirements, recommends cures for writing blocks, and appropriates American anxiety in the interest of getting academic work published. (Elaine Showalter Chronicle Review) “Although she is not the first to consider that institutionalized racism causes depression, Cvetkovich’s take on academia’s ills is unique. . . . Still, Depression is not a pity party. Cvetkovich offers hope to all who fight depression by suggesting that as she has emerged from despair, so can others. (Rachel Pepper Curve) “Cvetkovich draws us into her own encounters with various obstacles and leaves us with the sense that all the insights she has gained have been unexpected gifts earned through lots of hard work, but still contingent, provisional, uncertain. If you have ever been a struggling academic, you will relate, and you will feel grateful. (Aaron Sachs American Quarterly) “It is important that Cvetkovich is able to balance the personal desire for feeling better alongside a questioning of the investment that exists in both medical and critical social models of depression. Importantly, while this approach never undermines the experience of depression by positioning it only as a construction, it still draws attention to commonplace assumptions about feeling sad, being political and getting better. Cvetkovich weaves her own journal through the critical reading that makes her work so compelling simultaneously taking seriously, and asking us to question, the more familiar narrative she has just shared.” (Jacqueline Gibbs Feminist Review 2015-11-01)

Ann Cvetkovich is Ellen C. Garwood Centennial Professor of English and Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Texas, Austin. She is the author of *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, also published by Duke University Press, and *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism*; a coeditor of *Political Emotions*; and a former editor of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*.

Daring because Cvetkovich displays her journey in depression through memoir. In the first half of the book, she dares to expose herself as well as challenge the types of works and experiences considered "academic." Theoretical because in the second half, the author explores concepts such as political depression and the utopia of daily living that can be tools to understand and navigate the world. And practical because Cvetkovich speaks directly to the very students (the most likely audience) reading her book. It is a unique and affirming experience to read scholarly work that could come right from your own journal. In addition to personally identifying with the work, since the author is writing in the future tense, readers can also benefit from Cvetkovich's ways of understanding and dealing with what can be debilitating sadness.

A very smart exploration of depression and psychic pain for queers, academics, and others who have found previous models lacking. It's theoretically sound yet easily accessible. It's grounded in theory and material reality. It is one I'll revisit often.

This book is a stunning example of the potential of affect theory for cultural studies and academia in general. It's beautifully written and lovely to read, refreshingly sensitive in its analysis of Medieval thought, and an utter tour de force in its new perspective on depression and contemporary life.

I really liked this book, even though it was a difficult read at times. I liked the perspective that depression is partly a consequence of the environment, specifically social/political oppression. This book validated my own struggles as a woman and my discovery that depression and self-harm are epidemic in today's youth.

I've been very moved by reading this book. So much to learn about depression, affect studies, and creativity from a really original scholar with a superb writing style. Highly recommended---literally, in that I just told one of my students to read it and said the same thing to my partner last night. It's one of those books that generates word-of-mouth enthusiasm, perhaps because it's so illuminating and thoughtful in its merging of memoir and traditional scholarship.

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