



Izzy's Book Nook Review

September 2013

Coming of Age on Zoloft: How Antidepressants Cheered Us Up, Let Us Down and Changed Who We are

by Katherine Sharpe

Coming of Age on Zoloft takes us on Katherine Sharpe's personal journey into depression, from diagnosis to medication, while reviewing cultural notions about mental health. The book focuses on the young adult's perspective and therefore offers a "bird's eye view" for parents wanting to gain insight on their children's experiences with depression.

Katherine's story begins when, at a social event, she discloses that she is currently taking medication for depression. To her surprise, she comes to the realization that many of her friends are also taking medication for some sort of mood disorder. This leads her on an exploration of depression in young adults in the American society. In her book, she reviews the history of treatment of depression from psychoanalytic talk therapy to the rise of the biomedical model and to the current psychopharmacology model which deals mostly with medication management.

As Katherine Sharpe's book is descriptive of American Society, some of the historical, medical and cultural references do not apply to Canada but, in my opinion, the book's main benefit to parents is the narrative of personal experiences from the teenager and young adult's perspective. Many interviewees described feeling different from a very young age. Some experienced a "crisis event" and for some, the crisis was the severity of their symptoms, despite not having any triggering events. Everyone interviewed described feeling isolated in some way. Depending on the age of diagnosis, some youth just went with their parent's decision to use medication (especially those in grade school) while teenagers often resented their lack of control over the choice to use medication or not. The individuals interviewed discuss their ambivalence over being diagnosed and taking medication. For some, the diagnosis of depression was a source of relief and for some, a stifling label. Most interviewees describe medication as being effective to some degree. Katherine explores not only the stigma of mental health but also, the stigma of being on medication. Despite *Zoloft* being the title drug, she presents a history of medical research on different medications used to treat depression.

Katherine explores the topic of your "real self" when taking medication. Do taking anti-depressants change you as a person? Who is the authentic self, the person on medication or off? This is especially relevant for teenagers on medication who are exploring their self-identities.

The book presented an interesting angle whereas teenagers on medication may experience a very low or absent sex drive (a common side-effect). How does this affect their sexual identity? Parents might not consider this, in regards to their son or daughter, but it is an important consideration for healthy sexual development.

Katherine reviews her experiences with therapy and seeing varied professionals (medical doctor, psychologist and psychiatrist). She gives a brief overview of the history of psychotherapy in treating depression. One interviewee thought that talk therapy was more helpful when dealing with difficult things happening in life (crisis, difficult or traumatic event) whereas medication helped more with depression caused by chemical imbalance. A lot of the beneficial experiences were facilitated by a positive relationship with the therapist. Finally, Katherine explores the decision to stop taking prescribed medication. She emphasizes that the choice should be based on what's right for you, and not the stigma of "being on medication". She describes alternative and supportive activities to good health such as exercise, sleep, diet and socializing.

After reading this book, I felt that I had an exhaustive overview of young adults' personal thoughts about depression. Katherine gives a powerful description of the anxiety faced when choosing to use medication or not. This can be doubly stressful for parents who may have their own ideas and have to make the choice for their son's or daughter's welfare. As well, many of our parents with children who are legal adults struggle with a difference of opinion over diagnosis, medication and lifestyle in general. For those interested in learning more about depression, from the perspective of young adults, this book presents a multitude of opinions and perspectives.

Review written by Isabelle MacNider; Family Navigator at PLEO

The book is available at the Ottawa Public Library or at Chapters.

Sharpe, Katherine (2012). *Coming of Age on Zoloft: How Antidepressants Cheered Us Up, Let Us Down and Changed Who We Are*. Harper Perennial.

Coming of Age on Zoloft: How Antidepressants Cheered Us Up, Let Us Down, and Changed Who We Are by Katherine Sharpe Malcolm Folley, "Senna Versus Prost: The Story of the Most Deadly Rivalry in Formula One" Tony McCarroll, "Oasis the Truth: My Life as Oasis's Drummer" Solo: A Memoir of Hope by Hope Solo Steel Danielle - Brilla una stella. Coming of Age on Zoloft: How Antidepressants Cheered Us Up, Let Us Down, and Changed Who We Are by Katherine Sharpe. English | ISBN: 0062059734 | 2012 | EPUB | 336 pages | 0,6 MB. When Katherine Sharpe arrived at her college health cen In Coming of Age on Zoloft: How Antidepressants Cheered Us Up, Let Us Down, and Changed Who We Are (public library), Katherine Sharpe explores the heart of this ambivalence through an intersection of her own experience, conversation with medical and psychiatric experts, and in-depth interviews with forty young adults who grew up on psychopharmaceuticals. Having spent a fair portion of my own life on antidepressants, and having recently resumed treatment, I was instantly fascinated, both as an observer of culture and a living sample size of one. It is strange, as a young person, to realize that you have lived through something that can be considered a real historical change, but that's exactly what we had done.

