

Autobiographies about depression offer key information about the illness

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Credit: Wikipedia/CC

Autobiographies about depression can play an important role in disseminating knowledge about the disease. That is the conclusion of research conducted by Anne-Fleur van der Meer (VU Amsterdam). Van der Meer reveals that autobiographic books are more than gripping stories about illness. They also provide pointers for how we can articulate and understand depression. Van der Meer will defend her doctoral thesis on 27 September 2018. Her research was funded by the

NWO programme PhDs in the Humanities.

Much is currently being done to increase the knowledge of [depression](#) and to remove the stigma surrounding it. There are depression galas, health apps, and government campaigns on radio and television. Patients share their experiences with the general public and write autobiographical [books](#).

Anne-Fleur van der Meer analysed narrative techniques in several recent and well-sold autobiographical books about depression and determined what these texts can mean for society. For example, she studied the books *Pil* [*Pill*] from pianist and former comedian Mike Boddé, *Kikker gaat fietsen* [*Frog Goes Cycling*] from emeritus professor of French literature Maarten van Buuren, and *Shoot the Damn Dog* from the deceased British author Sally Brampton.

Van der Meer examined how the writers incorporated the information and ideas of others in their texts. She used various techniques, including intertextuality research, to compare the autobiographies with the original sources.

Van der Meer discovered that depressed writers often creatively use insights from psychiatrists, quotations from manuals and sentences from scientific articles. Furthermore, the authors read works from Sartre and Dante, watched films and consulted self-help literature and then gave their own twist to this. In their books, they make valiant efforts to regain control over their own health, adapt the sources and give comments.

Van der Meer demonstrates that autobiographies offer their readers a guide about how, and with which sources, you can understand depression and make sense of it. Accordingly the autobiographies contribute to knowledge about depression and how to deal with it in our society.

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