



Passing for Normal

Amy Wilensky

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I am crazy. But maybe I am not. For most of her life, these thoughts plagued Amy Wilensky as her mind lurched and veered in ways she didn't understand and her body did things she couldn't control. While she excelled in school and led an otherwise "normal" life, she worried that beneath the surface she was a freak, that there was something irrevocably wrong with her. *Passing for Normal* is Wilensky's emotionally charged account of her lifelong struggle with the often misunderstood disorders Tourette's syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder. A powerful witness to her own dysfunction, Wilensky describes the strain it bore on her relationships with the people she thought she knew best: her family, her friends, and herself. Confronting the labels we apply to ourselves and others--compulsive, crazy, out of control--Amy describes her symptoms, diagnosis, and her treatment with courage and a healthy dose of humor, gradually coming to terms with the absurdities of a life beset by irrational behavior. This compelling narrative, by turns

tragic and comic, broadly extends our understanding of the wondrously complex human mind, and, with subtlety and grace, challenges our notion of what it is to be "normal."

Passing for Normal Details

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From Reader Review Passing for Normal for online ebook

Barbara says

I loved this book...what a courageous story of a woman learning to live life with disabilities that would sideline most people

Chana says

A bright young girl grows up with OCD and Tourettes before these diagnoses were well known. Her pediatrician diagnoses her with nervous energy and this stands until she is in her early twenties and pursues a diagnoses as an adult.

Emily says

This was an amazing non-fiction piece by someone who lives with Tourette's Syndrome and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. The reason I chose to read it was because I wanted to read about a female's experience living with OCD. It turns out that the parallels are amazing between the writer and myself. It was encouraging to read that I'm not the only one I know who obsesses over the silliest things or has to do one thing over and over until I am satisfied with it. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has Tourette's by itself or OCD by itself.

Charlotte says

I chose this book because I am in the same boat. I also have TS and OCD (and some other fun stuff thrown in the mix). So I'm glad somebody wrote this book. Sometimes I related to her; sometimes I didn't. That's life. I love it that she put herself out there. It's something that's not easy to describe.

Bank says

This book was a gift from my favorite neuroscience major and is the autobiography of Amy Wilensky . She first had symptoms of Tourette' s syndrome and then OCD at age 11 and was not diagnosed until in her early 20's . Apropos to the title , her story is about this genetic disease and her efforts to pass for normal but having no idea what was causing her tics and OCD . And rather than being supported by her family , her symptoms became the source of a schism with her dad, targets for her peers as a teenager , and of course she thought she was crazy . Her search for answers is sporadic , partly from fear of what the answer might be . At points my heart breaks for her , while I also greatly admire her ability to both discover and then accept her affliction .
Anybody interested in Tourette's or OCD , which are genetically linked , should read this .

Kirsten says

This is an interesting but flawed memoir of one woman's experiences with OCD and Tourette's Syndrome. The stuff directly relating to her experiences with these poorly-understood disorders is excellent and well-written. The memoir suffers overall, though, from a lack of organization in speaking about her personal relationships, particularly with her husband, Ben. I was extremely confused about their relationship; she would go from mentioning their honeymoon in one paragraph, to talking about him breaking up with her several pages later, and never explains just how they came to a truce in their relations. Her tics and the stress of living with someone else are mentioned as a major problem when she and Ben are living together post-college, but she never explains how the two of them worked this out. It's as though she felt including some of her relations with Ben was important to the memoir, but she was reticent about revealing too much. This is understandable, but the overall effect leaves the reader wondering just how the two of them make their lives together work, if indeed they do.

Maurice Frank says

It came out when Tourette's had been linked to ADD but before they had all been linked to the autistic spectrum. As befits all those conditions, it exposes a traumatic impossibility of concentrating on homework, and a textural sensitivity of skin to the touch and pressure of fabrics that proves all dress codes a human rights violation. It's the book that represents Tourette's and OCD as experiences on their own, while fully bearing out their place in the spectrum: other books are more focused on autism than on these conditions, which of course merit their own hearing about.

Vrinda Pendred says

This was a very good book, though hard to read at moments. I related so strongly to so much of it, I fought hard not to cry a lot of the time. I would give it 5 stars except I couldn't understand why she didn't divorce her husband and ditch her 'best friend', because they were disgusting about her conditions.

Darlene says

This memoir, *Passing for Normal*, written by Amy Wilensky is a very thorough description of what life is like for a person living with Tourettes Syndrome and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Ms. Wilensky begins her memoir with helpful definitions of both Tourettes Syndrome and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). She defines Tourettes as a "neurobiological based medical condition characterized by involuntary movements and involuntary sounds." She defines OCD as a "lifelong condition identified by two groups of symptoms: obsessions and compulsions..... irrepressible need for symmetry and order; hoarding and saving; repetitive rituals; nonsensical doubts.....".

After providing a good working definition of these disorders, she begins to talk about her personal story and how the disorders have affected her ability to function as a 'normal' person. Ms. Wilensky describes first

noticing that there was something different about her in a ballet class when she was 8 years old. She noticed that she was repeatedly contracting a muscle in her neck which caused her head to jerk to the right or to the left.... sometimes this 'tic' would occur multiple times in a row. At first, nobody seemed to notice but Amy but eventually another student in the class pointed it out (and not in the kindest manner!)... causing Ms. Wilensky to become very self-conscious and embarrassed and with this discomfort and stress she experienced, the 'tic' became even more pronounced and noticeable.

Ms. Wilensky relates experiences dating back from her early childhood through adolescence and into her early adulthood.... the development of new 'tics' and compulsions, including rotating her shoulder blades as if she were trying to allow them to meet in the middle of her back; biting her cuticles until they bled; snapping her jaw until it cracked and she even began hoarding food in her dorm room in her first year as a college freshman at Vassar College until mice began taking up residence in her dorm room closet.

Ms. Wilensky's story was not just about her ever growing number of 'tics' and compulsions. She also talked about just how difficult it was for her to function from a very early age. She realized that by observing the reactions of people around her ... including her father and sister.. that she was behaving in a way which caused people to stare and in the cases of her father and sister, to openly taunt her with expressions of disgust on their faces. Her mother took her to the family pediatrician who concluded that she had developed a nervous 'twitch' and his advice to her was to try to find ways to ease the stresses in her life.. which would lessen the frequency and severity of the 'twitches'.

Ultimately, Ms. Wilensky began attending group therapy with a friend, Bryant, who was also dealing with similar problems. She relates that she had not actually become aware of her mental illness until she was 24 years old. She had heard about Tourettes Syndrome and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder but had never made the connection between those illnesses and what she had been dealing with in her life. Until she was a young adult, she could only conclude that her 'tics' were mistakes she was making and that they were evidence of a weakness or a lack of control on her part.

Although Ms. Wilensky was from a more privileged background and perhaps that background sheltered her from some of the more horrendous experiences that others from less well-to-do backgrounds suffered, it was obvious to me that she had perhaps unnecessarily spent her life expending huge amounts of energy trying to 'pass' for normal. What seemed astonishing to me was that, despite her family's great resources, they could not seem to find the wherewithal to really discover what was wrong with her. It astounded me, made me angry and it aroused great sympathy for her and her struggles. It was also obvious by reading about her family background that her father seemed to be struggling with some obsessive compulsive behaviors of his own; perhaps it was his denial of his own problems which kept him in denial about his daughter's problems. Ms. Wilensky's mother was a bit more sympathetic to me .. but she also seemed to spend a great deal of her daughter's life denying there was a problem.

By the time Ms. Wilensky started attending group therapy, she was taking medication... Prozac and Haldol. She was functioning better... not quite so self-conscious and with a greater understanding of her illness and no longer fearing her reaction to be touched by other human beings. I wish she had spent a little more time in her story talking more about the important relationships in her life and how she worked things out to the point that these relationships were not quite so impossible. I think that would have been inspiring and beneficial to others in similar circumstances. Of course, I certainly understand that revealing information THAT personal may not have been possible or comfortable for her. All in all, this memoir was a very realistic portrayal of a person coping with a mental disorder (or in Ms. Wilensky's case.. TWO disorders). Her story was hopeful and I believe it will inspire hope in others dealing with their own struggles with mental illness.

Jess says

As a recollection of realizing her experience with Tourette's and OCD, this book was accurate.

As a "memoir" it was weak. She didn't experience even half of the judgement, criticism or harassment a few of the other characters did. She lived a privileged life, hardly the makings of a life that others can relate to. Lastly, her accounts of interpersonal relationships was very lacking. No emotional struggles, no heartbreak, no loss. Friends whenever she wanted/needed them.

Amy says

If you're at all interested in OCD or Tourette's (the real thing not what tv shows it to be for ratings), please read this book. It was a very good read for myself since my husband has Tourette's and a less mild form of OCD than the author. It was interesting for me to see the similarities in how long it took to get a diagnosis, how long to consider treatment, what options were, etc. Very interesting and moving read. For me, it was probably much more of a clinical rather than emotional read, though I could see that if you've never seen these first hand, it could be pretty moving.

Emily says

Amy did an excellent job of describing the symptoms and difficulties of Tourette's and OCD from an insider's perspective. It was odd because sometimes, I really felt connected with Amy as a person, and other times, I felt like she was lecturing me on technical things. I guess...it just didn't really seem to flow. It's not a book I will buy, or ever read again, but I am glad I read it.

One more thing, I read another book by Amy Wilensky, another memoir. It's called "The Weight of It" and it's about Amy's sister's struggle with obesity. Reading the other book, I had no hint or clue that Amy herself lived with Tourette's and OCD. Also, I noticed, reading this book I had no hint about Amy's sister's struggles with her weight. I sort of expect books involving the same 'characters' (even though these are real people, especially because these are real people) to have some sort ofwell, similarities at least. Reading the two books, it almost seems like the Amy in the book about Alison's weight is an entirely different person than the Amy in the book about Amy. It's less important to me that Alison seem like the same person, because Alison is not often mentioned in Amy's book about herself, but it is impossible for Amy to write about Alison without talking about herself. I don't know. I guess it bothered me because I had an idea of who Amy was both as a person and a writer from "The Weight of It" and then she seemed completely different in "Passing for Normal." I understand that the two books had very different themes, and it's good to focus on just one subject or theme, but I just don't get how she could write another book that is also mostly about herself and her family and have it seem like it's about two different families.

Joette says

Tells what it's like to live with Tourettes. Funny and thoughtful.

Kholee G. says

Sebelumnya, saya ucapkan terima kasih kepada Perpus KALAM FT yang telah menyediakan bacaan yang amat berkualitas ini. Kemudian, saya juga meminta maaf kepada buku-buku yang lagi-lagi ditinggal mengantri demi membaca buku ini.

Baiklah, kita mulai sekarang.

Buku ini menceritakan bagaimana seorang Amy Wilensky hidup bersama-sama dengan sindrom Tourette dan OCD. Ngomong-ngomong, sindrom Tourette adalah salah satu jenis gangguan saraf, sementara OCD adalah salah satu jenis gangguan psikologi (bukan diet ala pesulap!). Nah, kedua penyakit tersebut serta dampaknya terhadap sejarah kehidupan Amy digambarkan secara rinci dalam buku ini.

Buku ini merupakan salah satu buku yang mampu menceritakan apa yang terjadi dalam kehidupan seorang penderita Tourette dan OCD. Mungkin, selama ini kita hanya mengenal kedua penyakit tersebut melalui gejala-gejalanya yang membuat kita mengecap para penderitanya sebagai orang gila. Namun, Amy berhasil membuat orang-orang paham bahwa mereka bukannya gila. Mereka juga ingin mempunyai hidup normal, bebas dari gangguan-gangguan tersebut.

Amy juga berhasil menceritakan bagaimana penyakit tersebut mempengaruhi perasaan dan hubungan yang dijalin oleh para penderitanya. Cemoohan, kecemasan, ketakutan, semua terasa begitu berat dan memukau para pembacanya. Amy berhasil membuat hati kita beresonansi dengan kegelisahannya yang dimilikinya selama ini.

Sayangnya, terjemahan buku ini agak sedikit kurang lezat di mata Kholee. Banyak istilah-istilah yang nampaknya bisa dicari padanannya yang lebih baik. Kemudian, masih banyak juga kesalahan ketik yang terjadi di buku ini.

Akhirnya, buku ini Kholee persembahkan untuk kamu yang ingin mengenal lebih jauh mengenai kedua penyakit ini. Atau, bahkan mungkin saja untuk kamu yang menderita penyakit ini, agar kamu tidak merasa sendiri lagi.

NB. Bukunya kayaknya udah lama menghilang di pasaran. Jadi, kalau mau cari, harus agak bersabar, sangat bersabar.

Claire says

This is the first book I've read where I felt an extremely strong sense of déjà vu, like I was reading a memoir about my own life. It is honestly the best book I've encountered that explains what it is like to have Tourette's Syndrome, with the added bonus that it is from the point of view of a woman (take a look at the gender distribution of authors who have written about TS, and you'll see what I mean). The descriptions are

nuanced and debunk standard stereotypes (for example only about 10% of people with TS have coprolalia, or tics that involve saying taboo words). Wilensky does not limit herself to describing tics, but also sketches out some lesser-known symptoms — repetitive thinking in loops, the loss of certain kinds of impulse control (for example, impulses to spontaneously brush against “do not touch” signs), not to mention comorbid disorders like OCD. There are many peculiarities about TS that in my opinion make it a fascinating disorder: For example, my tics go away completely when I play music. I have also heard the disorder can be connected to sensory sensitivity, which is borne out in my own experience. Obviously the exact way TS manifests is very personal, but I was extremely moved to see Wilensky describe certain symptoms I have experienced that I have literally not seen described in any other book.

I would love to see more books about TS, especially ones written by diverse authors with less privilege along other axes. In the meantime, the memoir by Wilensky is a great place to start to learn about this quirky disorder.
