

# States of Blue: American writing on depression

Daisy Christodoulou, English & Comparative Literature Student, Warwick University  
Supervisor: Dr Stephen Shapiro

## Introduction

This overall aim of this project was to examine the links between affluent market societies and increasing instances of melancholy and depression. My role was to compile an interdisciplinary literature review on mental illness and writings on mental illness over the last decade and a half. Whilst the main focus of the overall project was on American writing, I was to look at British and American sources and at the prevalence of depression globally.

## Methodology

As this was an interdisciplinary project, I used a wide variety of sources. I carried out searches on paper and internet archives and databases. I started by investigating British and American online newspaper and magazine archives for articles on depression, mental illness and use of antidepressants. I then used the general newspaper databases Lexis Nexis and Factiva for more accurate and specific searches and access to full text articles. I used a lot of the information I found in these sources to start investigating popular writing on depression on Amazon.com. Finally, I moved on to searching for scholarly articles on the subject of depression, looking at sociological, literary and historical scholarly journals. I filed all the information I found into Endnote bibliographies, and saved many of the articles as PDF files.



## Findings

My research showed me that over the past 20 years there has been an increase in the prevalence of, study of, writing about and treatment of depression. I was particularly surprised to discover that depression, often characterised as a Western, privileged disease, has been increasing worldwide, not just in the West. However, both scholarly articles and popular, anecdotal writing seem to suggest that depression is exported with Western lifestyles.

## Evaluation

I had never been involved in a project like this, and it was very satisfying to be able to thoroughly research a topic beyond the level required at undergraduate level. Practically, the project helped me improve my research and IT skills, which is hugely beneficial for any further academic study I may do, but also in everyday life. It was also very exciting to be engaged with such a topical issue. The week before I started the project, UNESCO published a report saying that British and American teenagers are the unhappiest in the Western world. This project offers some suggestions as to why that might be. Taking part in this URSS project has also been useful for me at a personal level. I am currently working as a teacher in a secondary school in London, where these issues are very relevant. I have also gained a practical idea of what is required for academic research, which will benefit me if I ever decide to do further academic study.