



## LOW PROFILE

An unlikely mouthpiece for the anxiety-ridden, comedian APARNA NANCHERLA's monologues provide a humourist's prescription to surviving the doldrums, says AARTI VIRANI

“Any pizza can be a personal one if you cry while you eat it,” blurts comedian Aparna Nancherla. It’s a remark better suited for an emoji-laden text message than a standup routine. But her signature lilt, somewhere between dreamy and deliberate, gives it instant punchline status. That’s just the sort of kooky, self-deprecating quip—an excerpt from her debut album, *Just Putting It Out There*, (Bentzen Ball Records, 2016)—that has made this Indian American a sensation on the international stage. Nancherla is refreshingly uninhibited about her quotidian struggles with depression, comparing it to everything from an existential red carpet (“Dominated at the SAD Awards tonight. Who are you wearing? Gown by Snuggie, hair and make-up by Nutella”) to an ex-boyfriend (“Wherever my depression is now, I hope it’s happy”). She unfurls her overcast but hilarious thoughts on her nearly 2,00,000 Twitter followers and lends them cameos in all her comedy sets, infusing dead-end dating, prescription drugs and extreme introversion with low-key levity. Here’s a bit of cheer-up wisdom from the 36-year-old:

**I like to call therapy baggage claim.**  
2:01 pm - 2 Aug 2012  
24 Retweets 53 Likes

My parents were both doctors and first-generation immigrants, so there was always a lot of emphasis on being productive and constructive with your time and less on expressing your feelings. When I got to college, like a lot of people, after the first year I didn't really feel like I figured anything out and was like, "Well, I put all my eggs in that basket and now I feel stuck." That translated into an eating disorder because it was a way to control everything. But when I was officially diagnosed with depression, the eating disorder stopped. A lot of people think everybody should be in therapy but I think even going in for one session to talk about what's on your mind with someone who is trained can give you a better idea of what is normal and what you're experiencing. There's power in being able to name stuff, like depression and anxiety.

**My self-esteem fluctuates between "report as spam" and "block this user"**  
7:44 am - 14 Oct 2014  
33 Retweets 114 Likes

The most fundamental definition of self-care for me is just being kinder to myself, though my schedule is my enemy right now. When I judge myself, I end up being harder on other people without meaning to be, so ultimately if I give myself grace it affects everyone around me. In more concrete terms: take time for yourself and do things—exercise, meditate, bring your friends to be openers for your comedy shows—that give you a sense of place in the world.

**Whether they know it or not, I find a lot of artists I like are sponsored by my depression**  
4:51 pm - 25 Nov 2015  
50 Retweets 221 Likes

A lot of my social circle now is made up of other comedians; there's a lot of solace to be found in those struggling with the same demons. I wouldn't say there's a direct cause-and-effect relationship but neurotic people tend to be stand-up comedians because we're hyper-analytical and questioning everything. Take 'Sad Girl Twitter' (a contingent of the Twittersphere that's fluent in this emerging brand of depression comedy), for instance. I think it came about as a way to make the Manic Pixie Dream Girl three-dimensional instead of being this male pop-culture, 'let me fix you' fantasy and weird fetish.