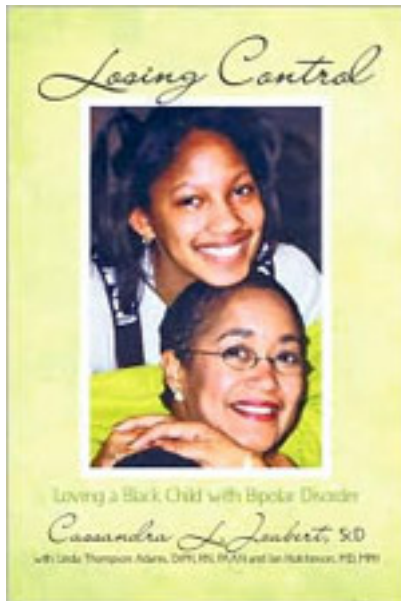


## Book review: Losing Control: Loving a Black Child with Bipolar Disorder

Written by Kam Williams

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“Pediatric bipolar disorder manifests itself similarly in the African-American population to the way it does in the Caucasian population. The disease has no cultural boundaries. However... if an African-American child manifested the same symptoms as a Caucasian child, he or she would receive a different diagnosis and a different treatment. This is the clear danger of ignoring cross-cultural commonalities.

The Black child who evidences the symptoms of pediatric bipolar disorder is seen as being oppositional, with perhaps a conduct disorder or worse. But these diagnoses result in misdiagnosis and mistreatment of these children Dr. Joubert has alerted us to the fact that we need to be very careful in our assessment of the African-American child who is evidencing symptoms suggestive of a mood disorder, and courageously shares her journey with her own child with us.”

- Excerpted from the Foreword by Dr. Ira Glovinsky (pages 11-12)

It wasn't long after the birth of her daughter that Dr. Cassandra Joubert noticed that something was wrong. After all, this was her second child, so she naturally compared Maya to her relatively easy-to-raise, 4 year-old son, Josh. The girl proved problematic even in infancy, from her refusal to breastfeed to her resistance to being rocked and cradled. And the symptoms only got worse as she grew into a toddler, between temper tantrums and disobedience acts which couldn't be corrected by either positive reinforcement or spankings.

Because Dr. Joubert was a health professional herself, she wisely consulted a psychologist when the acting out continued after Maya entered the 1st grade. Regrettably, the school's shrink misdiagnosed the child's hyperactivity as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and started her on a regular regimen of Ritalin. Thus began for Maya what would turn into years of experimentation with drugs, with doctors prescribing everything from Zoloft to Adderall to Buspar to Concerta to Depakote, as her acting out escalated into both self-destructive and anti-social behaviors.

By the time she was in the 6th grade, Maya was already compulsively sexually-active, and even

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confessed to having slept with two boys at once. Therefore, her frazzled mother had no choice but to add birth control pills to her daughter's daily Rx cocktail, to make sure the situation wasn't compounded by an unwanted pregnancy. But she still had a host of other issues to deal with, including promiscuity, suicidal tendencies, juvenile delinquency, body piercings, sleep walking, profanity, assaulting classmates and teachers, cigarette smoking, alcoholism, and addictions to Marijuana and internet pornography.

The big tragedy, here, is that everything snowballed because of Maya's initial misdiagnosis.

Consequently, not only did the unfortunate girl's life evolve into a total mess, but her parents' marriage fell apart when she was very young. This burden, in turn, exacted a heavy physical and emotional toll on Dr. Joubert, who did her best to raise her two kids on her own.

That courageous effort is the subject of *Losing Control*, a heartbreaking memoir of a mother's desperate quest for fair treatment for a child allowed to slip through the cracks by a mental health system too quick to pigeonhole Black youngsters as troublemakers rather than face up to the fact that a more complex assessment might be in order. A cautionary tale issuing a clarion call for early diagnosis and treatment of African-Americans with bi-polar disorders.

### **Losing Control: Loving a Black Child with Bipolar Disorder**

by Dr. Cassandra L. Joubert

with Dr. Linda Thompson Adams and Dr. Jan Hutchinson

Advantage Media Group

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To order a copy of *Losing Control*, visit:

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