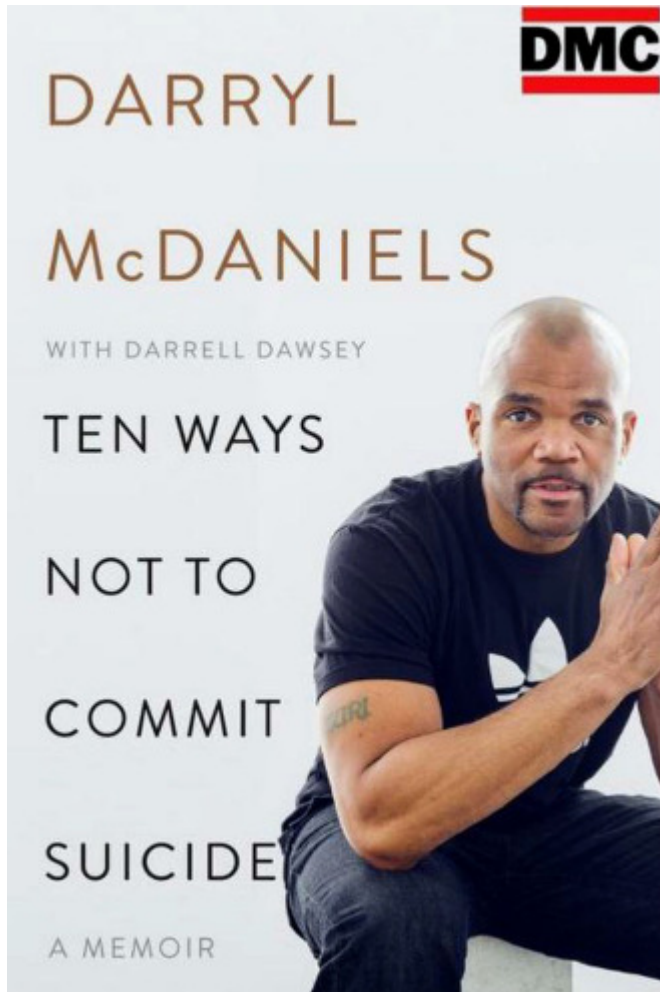


'Ten Ways' focuses on artist's search for fulfillment

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"Ten Ways Not to Commit Suicide: A Memoir" by Darryl McDaniels. New York: HarperCollins, 2016, 225 pages, \$26.99.



“From about 1995 through the early 2000s, I wrestled with deep depression, thoughts of suicide and a relapse into the alcohol abuse I thought I’d left behind years earlier,” Darryl McDaniels explains near the beginning of "Ten Ways Not to Commit Suicide," his memoir about life before, during and after being in one of the world's biggest bands. “During that time, my being awake meant struggling to be me for one more day. It meant grappling with the pain and uncertainty that I felt had come to define my life.”

“My depression came in the form of being disappointed by ‘friends’ I felt did not care about me,” he continues. “My voice was giving out on me. I felt empty inside. And as bad as all this was, it didn’t compare with the most traumatizing blow in my life – a revelation that rocked me to the very core of my identity: in 2000, I found out I was adopted.”

In 1981, along with Joseph “Rev. Run” Simmons and Jason “Jam Master Jay” Mizell, McDaniels formed Run-DMC, one of the most influential hip-hop groups ever. Originating from Queens, N.Y., they were the first hip-hop

group to earn a gold record (Run-DMC, 1984), the first to earn a platinum record (King of Rock, 1985), and the first to earn a multiplatinum certification (Raising Hell, 1986). They were also the first group in the genre to receive a Grammy nomination, the first group to have videos in heavy rotation on MTV and the only hip-hop act to perform at Live Aid in 1985. Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2009, they were ranked 48th of the “100 Greatest Artists of All Time” by Rolling Stone magazine in 2014. To date, they have sold more than 30 million records worldwide. Sadly, in a homicide that has yet to be resolved, Mizell was shot and killed at his recording studio in 2002; McDaniels and Simmons still perform occasionally as Run-DMC.

"Ten Ways" consists of 10 relatively succinct chapters written in a powerfully honest and profoundly intimate voice. Even though McDaniels’ success with Run-DMC was arguably the high point of his career, he grew to resent being defined by his involvement with the group. It is important to understand this volume is not a book about Run-DMC; it is a much more personal narrative about the author’s private demons – how they came to control his life and brought him to

the brink of suicide on several occasions. Most of us look at those who have achieved the level of success McDaniels has experienced and wonder how they could not be happy with their lives. "Ten Ways" illuminates that paradox.

I met McDaniels at a conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, back in October 2012. I had been a fan of Run-DMC ever since their collaboration with Aerosmith on "Walk This Way" in 1986. He gave a very moving talk about his involvement with the music industry and how Run-DMC was relegated to "old school" status by many members of the hip-hop community when newer, edgier groups such as NWA and Public Enemy began to dominate the musical form in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

After his presentation, I had the opportunity to speak with him for quite a while; he was extraordinarily insightful and eloquent on a wide range of issues, including economics and political theory. Much of what he had to say, however, really did not resonate with me until I read "Ten Ways." Like many artists who achieve extraordinary recognition and wealth, he was never fully satisfied by the accolades he received – there was always that feeling of emptiness on the inside that no amount of external validation could fill. Reflect on how he characterizes himself and most of those in his close circle of friends in "Career Decisions: Owning My Truth, Forging My Path," the third chapter and one that I found particularly enlightening:

"Lots of people know of me. Far fewer know who I am. It's largely because, until fairly recently, I had no idea who I was. For a long time, I tried hard not to ever know. I went out of my way, in fact, to stay out of arm's reach of my own true self. I was a liar. I was a man out of touch with himself, someone who was able to lose himself behind the safety of his hooded sweatshirts amid the thundering beats of studio tracks and the screams of arenas full of fans."

As is typically the case, his parents were less than enthusiastic about his passion for the music industry. He was a stellar student from kindergarten through high school, so it was naturally expected that he would attend college – and he did go for a short time. But he was never happy on campus; whereas the public school curriculum was "designed for interaction, socialization," he was miserable in an environment that seemed "competitive, grounded in individualism." But just about the time he had resigned himself to sticking it out, "Rev. Run" called and told him that their first record, "It's Like That," was being played on the radio. The rest, as they say, is history.

Ultimately what I liked about McDaniels' story, even though several passages were admittedly heartbreaking to read, was the earnest description of his search for fulfillment and the eventual redemption he found through a combination of unlikely sources. After all he has been through, it is admirable and more than a little amazing that he has been able to maintain a mature and realistic perspective regarding his sense of responsibility to those closest to him.

"No matter how damaged I felt, I had an obligation to myself and my family to address the internal flaws that threatened my life," he writes in "Remixed: Bringing Out the Best in Me," the concluding chapter. "I'm still trying to repair myself. I always will be, in a lot of respects. Therapy has taught me that anger and resentment are like acid. Holding on to them just corrodes me from the inside."

I am sure my counseling colleagues could not agree more. In case you haven't surmised, I really liked "Ten Ways" and I have the sense that many readers would be able to relate to McDaniels' quest to find meaning in life more than they might think. Pick up a copy!

Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.