

THE NEW ECONOMICS ZINE

PEOPLE. PLANET. POWER.

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IS OUR ECONOMY MAKING US SICK?

MENTAL HEALTH & THE ECONOMY

with articles by: Samara Linton,
David Powell, Ayeisha Thomas-Smith,
Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett,
Jake Mills, Annie Quick and many more



IS OUR ECONOMY MAKING US SICK?



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MENTAL HEALTH AND HOPE

In the last few years the world has become awash with TV shows, newspaper articles, testimonials and even influencers discussing mental health (hello!). It is nice to finally live in a world that has started to take the issue of mental health more seriously. It is now much more possible, as someone with a mental health problem, to feel less alone.

Through the coronavirus pandemic we've seen a rise in depression and other mental health problems – new Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures show that twice as many adults in Britain are reporting symptoms of depression now compared with this time last year. But even before the pandemic we were seeing childhood mental health problems, severe mental illness and the mental ill health of young women increasing. There was also an across the board rise in common mental health issues and a suicide rate that reached a two-decade high in 2019, according to the ONS. New research in the last few weeks has also shown anxiety trebling in young adults since 2008, affecting 30% of women aged 18-24. With mental health (or at least, certain areas of mental health) being discussed so widely, chipping away at stigma and nudging us to take it more seriously, why do so many problems still persist? And what are the next steps?

Mental health problems are the 'great leveller' so they say – "Mental health doesn't care about how much money you have in the bank, it can affect anyone!" It's true, of course, that it can affect any of us, but the money you have in your bank, among other things, does impact who is more likely to have mental ill health and who has the most resources to deal with it. The Health Survey for England has consistently found that the poorest people have the highest risk of having a mental health problem.

It may come as little surprise that the pandemic and ensuing crisis is making health inequalities ever clearer and often worse. Research from the Health Foundation showed that measures taken to control the spread of the virus are having unequal socioeconomic impacts likely to deepen health inequalities in the long term. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has said that the pandemic "will have significant

consequences for people's health outcomes in the short and longer term." Countless pieces of research, most recently from the King's Fund and not least from the tireless work of Sir Michael Marmot, show that people in deprived areas live significantly shorter lives than those in affluent ones, and that people's position in the economy has an impact on both their health and the treatment they are able to access. Poor housing conditions, poor employment conditions, unreliable wages and high levels of debt are common, and have a detrimental impact on our health, including our mental health.

Our experience of mental ill health is not equal – factors like race, economic class, gender identity and disability all affect our likelihood of struggling with mental illness. These factors also affect the way we experience and receive treatment, support, access to services and understanding from our employers. The entire structure of our society and economy is not set up to support people equally in their illness – whether that be a short-term issue or a life-long problem.

Underfunding of the NHS has made it extremely difficult to receive timely treatment for mental illness. Unless you are experiencing a severe crisis, you are likely to be on a waiting list for months. Those who can afford it can bypass this and pay for private treatment. So while treatment for mental ill health is may be free at the point of use, it is not free at the point of need. And that is as true for long-term and severe mental health problems like schizophrenia and psychosis as it is the more widespread and low-level anxiety and depression. As NEF authors Sarah Arnold and Daniel Button write in this issue, funding for prevention and treatment is key. While mental health accounts for 28% of the burden of disease in the UK, mental health services receive only 13% of NHS spending. When you need help and treatment, access to well-funded and well-provided services need to be there, regardless of your location, wealth or privilege.

In order to access comprehensive treatment from the NHS for a severe mental health crisis you often will have to have attempted suicide. While hearing from members of the Royal Family about their

experiences with mental illness is welcome and encourages conversation, it's only half the story. This is the subject of one of the pieces in this issue from Jake Mills who runs Chasing the Stigma, which he set up after struggling to access treatment for his own mental health. It's a reminder that awareness alone is not enough and that, while each of us can make a difference, we need structural not just individual action.

That said, awareness and destigmatisation remain especially important for the less widely understood mental illnesses like psychosis and schizophrenia. Organisations like Rethink Mental Illness, Mind and Mental Health UK, and campaigners like Jonny Benjamin play a hugely important role here.

This tendency to individualise issues rather than to zoom out and look at the structures we are operating within means we still aren't getting the full picture. Our scene-setting essay in this issue is from NEF Weekly Economics Podcast host and brilliant academic Ayeisha Thomas-Smith who explores what living in a neoliberal economy does to our minds. Later in the issue, junior doctor and writer Samara Linton explores how racial injustice in our economy impacts on mental health. Black, Asian, and minority ethnic people have poorer access to mental health services than their white counterparts, and when they do gain access, they have poorer outcomes. And towards the end of this issue, academics Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett pick up on the theme of their most recent book and discuss the implications of inequality on our mental health.

So we need to understand how the rules of our economy create these health disparities. Some of this is, of course, about healthcare funding and the long-fought for need for equality between mental and physical health funding. It's also about reducing risk factors for as many people as possible, with safe housing, secure jobs, a social safety net that works, and a healthy environment.

And finally, we need to change the rules of the economy – policy change, local change, service change. Mental health campaigning is important, but it's often seen as outside of politics and economics. Even the issue of funding is something big

mental health campaigns often seem afraid to touch. The economy is not something abstract, it's what we live every day and the current structure of the economy is making us sick – from the underfunding of services and the insecurities in people's immediate lives through to the destruction of the very planet we live on. As wildfires ravage parts of the globe and floods sweep across others, the fight for change becomes ever urgent. But it's not always easy – the fight itself can be tough on our mental health – NEF's former head of environment Dave Powell takes on the issue of eco-anxiety in this issue – and reminds us that humans are capable of wonderful things.

After the pandemic, we have a choice about the sort of world we want to return to. We can choose a world that ensures that people have what they need to live a good life, with mental health support and services free at the point of use and need. For that world to become a reality we need to build a different kind of economy so that it works in service of the people living within it and the planet on which we live.

We hope this issue brings insight and new perspectives to how the economy plays its part in the mental illness and wellness of us all.

Sofie Jenkinson & Margaret Welsh, Editors

A NOTE ON THIS ISSUE:

The publication of our second issue was delayed by the pandemic – all hands were required on deck at the start of this crisis to redeploy resources, adapt to working remotely and look after our mental health. And so we wanted to apologise for not getting it to you sooner. We are very proud of this issue and wanted to make sure that everything in it was still relevant and captured where the world is, as far as possible. A lot has happened and there is so much going on in the world at the moment, but mental health remains just as important as ever.

SEE PAGE 39 FOR WHERE TO ACCESS
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT & ADVICE



THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON NEOLIBERALISM

If you can't afford to buy a new car or pay your rent, it's your own fault – that's what neoliberalism tells us. No wonder we're in the midst of a mental health crisis, says
Ayeisha Thomas-Smith



In 2006, Australian television writer and producer Rhona Byrne released *The Secret*, a DVD closely followed by a 268-page book with the tagline “Feel good. Change your life.” The *Secret* is based on the ‘law of attraction’, which, she argues, all the great men of history knew governed their lives – “Plato, Leonardo, Galileo, Napoleon, Hugo, Beethoven, Lincoln, Edison, Einstein, and Carnegie, to name but a few.” According to this law, whatever befalls us in life does so because we attracted it, through positive or negative thinking. The book, which has sold over 9 million copies and been translated into 46 languages, tells us: “Everything you see and experience in this world is effect, and that includes your feelings. The cause is always your thoughts ... Food cannot cause you to put on weight, unless you think it can!” For me, as a pudgy 14-year-old growing up in a small town on the outskirts of Leeds, and often finding myself at the sharp end of inequality, gendered violence and racism, this provocation was confusing to say the least. But nevertheless, I fashioned myself a makeshift vision board, cut some inspiring looking (read: thin, white) models out of old *Look* magazines, and got to cosmic ordering.

Needless to say, 14 years later, I’m not writing this from my private yacht having never gained weight from a carb. I did, however, have to go through a painful and protracted process of liberating myself from the belief that everything that had ever happened to me I had somehow brought on myself, and that my family were not hovering on the edge of poverty because my mum had failed to purchase Byrne’s follow up hit *The Science of Getting Rich*. But what the roaring success of ‘self-help’ books like *The Secret* tells us is important. In a world of increasing inequality, systemic oppression and environmental destruction, some of the few voices able to cut through the noise are the ones telling us to turn inward, rather than looking too closely at the crumbling institutions surrounding us. “Instead of focusing on the world’s problems, give your attention and energy to trust, love, abundance, education and peace”. Worse than this, these voices encourage us to believe that not only are the problems we face not caused by structural factors, they are the direct result of choices we

have made and thoughts we have ‘manifested’. If you’re unable to buy a shiny new car, pay the heating bill or rid your body of that pesky cancer, you have no one to blame but yourself.

It’s perhaps not news to most that nowadays, we are in the midst of a mental health crisis. Recent statistics show a significant rise in mental health related issues across the board, from anxiety and depression in teenagers to the emergence of suicide as the biggest killer of men under 49 in the UK. Antidepressant prescriptions have almost doubled over the last 10 years, with a 34% increase in people being detained under the Mental Health Act. As of 2018, one in six of us is suffering with a mental health problem. But what does all of this have to do with neoliberalism?

As Ruth Cain argues in her brilliant piece ‘How Neoliberalism is Damaging Your Mental Health’, there is a growing number of medical professionals, academics and social commentators making the link between the limping spectre of neoliberal economics staggering on post-financial crash, and the army of workers cramming ourselves into overpacked tube carriages at 7.30am everyday, struggling to stay awake while we listen to podcasts on how to be ‘Happier, with Gretchen Rubin’. As Cain puts it, when faced with “the enervating whirl of relentless privatisation, spiralling inequality, withdrawal of basic state support and benefits, ever-increasing and pointless work demands, fake news, unemployment and precarious work” it’s perhaps unsurprising that so many of us are struggling. But what is vital not to overlook are the ways in which neoliberalism as a particular psychological intervention impacts the way we see ourselves and the world around us. It’s no coincidence that, in a society perched on the precipice of environmental destruction brought about as a direct result of an infinite economic growth model, we are encouraged to focus instead on what we can do to ‘maximise ourselves’ and to battle to claim our slice of the ever-diminishing pie. This diversion is a necessity, not a convenient byproduct of neoliberal governance strategies.

A whistle-stop tour of the history and development of neoliberalism can help us figure out how we got here. The two main forms of

“**...we are living in an economic system that survives and thrives when we are anxious**”

early neoliberal thought were the German ‘ordoliberals’, and the American ‘Chicago School’. Both of shared a fundamental rejection of the economic doctrine of the day and also shared a common enemy – namely, the state-controlled economy, planning and state interventionism. For the ordoliberals, the limits of state control had to be precisely established and the relationship between the people and the state clearly defined to enable the economy to sufficiently influence the political system. This process constituted a new style of government, and an internal reorganisation that, as Michel Foucault says “does not ask the state what freedom it will leave for the economy, but asks the economy how its freedom can have a state-creating function and role.”

In order to make this happen, the ordoliberals carried out a number of transformations that came to shape the distinction between classical liberal and neoliberal doctrine. Crucially, they rejected what they called ‘naïve naturalism’ – in other words, they argued that whether the classical liberals defined the market by exchange or competition, they still conceived of it as a natural given that is produced spontaneously and, as such, must be respected by the state. Competition, however, for the German ordoliberals, is absolutely not a given of nature but on the contrary, is something that will only appear and produce optimum effect when purposefully constructed through ‘active governmentality’. Neoliberalism then “should not...be identified with laissez-faire, but rather with permanent vigilance, activity and intervention”, says Foucault.

For the folks at the Chicago School, this ‘active governmentality’ principle also formed the basis of their thought, but with one important distinction. American liberalism was not just a technique of managing people, but rather a redefinition

of the relationship between the people and the state. In the US context, amidst historical conflict over independence from Britain, disputes in this relationship were not understood as problems of service, but rather as problems of freedom. What made North America such a ripe testing ground for neoliberal ideology was exactly this repositioning: in a society which holds the principle of freedom at its core, this new technique of government was able to grow into a whole new style of imagination, a new “way of being and thinking.”

Continuing its shift away from classical liberal economics, neoliberalism argued that the focus of analysis should not be the mechanisms of the market, but the way in which people within it choose to allocate their scarce means to alternative and competing ends. In line with the objectives of some of its chief promoters such as Theodor Shultz and Gary Becker, neoliberal economics repositioned its lens and settled squarely on us. And we are no longer just an actor in the market – we are entrepreneurs of ourselves. For homo-entrepreneur (that’s me and you by the way), every choice becomes a calculated investment, and as such, every outcome can and must be examined as a success or failure according to the income it generates. Every decision we make, from marriage to childcare to which university we attend, whether we choose to purchase a state-of-the-art juicer or buy a third round down the pub, every minute of every day we are making choices that push up or pull down our Recommended Retail Price. The aim of neoliberalism, then, becomes not forcing the individual to act in a certain way, but creating the conditions within which we will want to act in that way, believing that we’re exercising free choice in our own best interest. As Margaret Thatcher succinctly articulated: “Economics are the method. The object is to change the soul.”

The implications of this for our relationships, our work and our political systems are too multifarious to list here. The work of Wendy Brown, David Harvey, Christine Berry and countless others are a good place to start if you’re looking to bone up on neoliberalism and its manifestations. But one thing we can be sure of is that when it comes to our mental health, this new form of ‘cognitive capitalism’ is not doing us any favours.

It’s not just the impact of realising that,

as someone under 35 without access to the bank of Mum and Dad, you’ll likely be living precariously, spending at least 50% of your income on rent every month for the rest of your life that’s making us sick. It’s also not even the discovery that your lost loved one was one of more than 130,000 deaths in the UK since 2012 that could have been prevented if improvements in public health policy had not stalled as a direct result of austerity cuts. It’s the gnawing knowledge that we are living in an economic system that survives and thrives when we are anxious – when we look inward and ask “what’s wrong with me?” rather than taking to the streets in protest when we see our hospitals closed, our schools defunded and our friends and families detained. The parasite of neoliberalism is behind every sleep pod installed in an office so the workers don’t ever have to leave, every mindfulness coach that management brings in to help cushion the blow of mass redundancies. Perhaps most important to remember in all of this is that the system is not broken. It’s working exactly as it is supposed to. And for now, so are we.

Ayeisha Thomas-Smith is Director of Movement Building at NEON, Co-founder of KIN and presenter of NEF’s Weekly Economics Podcast.

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ALL WORK AND NO PLAY



*We need downtime to escape the stresses of work. But leisure time is becoming increasingly indistinguishable from our working lives, writes **Emily Scurrah***

It is not groundbreaking to talk about the damaging impact work has on our mental health. There's a popular awareness of the harm caused by the stress, pressure and competition which typify many experiences of the working world – research from mental health charity Mind found work to be the most stressful factor in people's lives and in 2018-19, stress, depression or anxiety were responsible for 54% of all working days lost due to health issues. But what about outside of work? Our leisure time should surely allow us to be free to enjoy breathing space from the pressures and stresses of the workplace.

Leisure time is essential for us to restore and re-energise after work, but the distinction between work and play has rarely been that clearly demarcated. Early Marxist thought argued that capitalism is produced and reproduced outside of the workplace, through activities which disproportionately fall on women (such as domestic or emotional labour) and leisure activities (which restore the worker's ability to work again after a hard day). But in today's economy, leisure time is under ever greater threat from becoming indistinguishable from work. The spatial boundaries of the workplace are blurring, and precarious work has increased. This often means that workers must be ready to take on work at any time: being either in a perpetual state of looking for work or always ready to take on whatever 'gig' is offered.

Today's shape-shifting workplace is characterised by instability, competition and declining share of wages in the national income – the latter going hand in hand with a decline in union membership – evidence suggests that a 1% drop in union density leads to a 0.019–0.379% drop in the wage share (the amount of national income used for wages). Wage share in 2014 was at a historic low of 67%, a decline from its 1975 peak of 76%. Faced with the threat of unemployment, or a cut to pay and conditions, workers are expected to perpetually improve their value in the job market. And the same logic which underpins the neoliberal world of work is gradually seeping into our leisure time and tugging on our mental health.

Far from providing a restorative breathing space, our leisure time has come under

siege. In a society saturated by yoga, baking, colouring books and the 'golden age of TV,' it might feel like there are more leisure activities available to us than ever. In actuality, we are witnessing the encroachment of neoliberal values into our leisure time.

We are under increasing pressure to professionalise or market our hobbies, with a love for pottery, or running, or gardening a missed opportunity if you are not using it to raise your profile as a go-getter with a can-do attitude. If you're struggling in between jobs or languishing on low pay, it makes sense turn one of your skills into a 'side hustle'

It's not up to the individual to solve a collective, societal and deeply structural problem

to pay your rent. Under pressure from an unequal and punitive economy, doing things purely for enjoyment becomes pointless, and gives rise to feelings of guilt for being unproductive. But when leisure activities turn into productive work, they stop being leisure. The chance provided by leisure time for breathing and recovering from work – and the mental health benefits of this – disappear.

But hobbies which can't be turned into capital for a job application, a development opportunity, or a lucrative side hustle – like binge watching TV or daytime naps – are not spared from the influence of our current economic structure. They are often the direct result of the pressures of a highly unequal economy, an unstable working world and an expectation for the individual to wrestle with structural problems alone. The last of these is due to a decline in collective or state-funded support services, such as mental health services and strong trade unions. There is nothing restorative about withdrawing into ourselves as a response to the stress caused by work and the wider economy. It's not uncommon to hear people speaking of exhausting and debilitating

anxiety and depression which precludes them from leaving the house, or engaging in communal pastimes. Craving Netflix and chill time, staying in the atomised confines of your living space (which might be a single room), and cancelling on plans with friends, are welcome and safe options as an escape from the pressures of work and finance. They can often feel like the only desirable plans for time off for a tired and drained body and mind. And ever more of us feel this way, with an estimated one in six adults having experienced a 'common mental health disorder' like depression or anxiety in the past week according to a recent Parliament briefing.

'Wellness' and fitness activities are other popular pastimes which are hard to professionalise, but still fail to create a space of true escape from the neoliberal working world. No less individualistic, a fixation on fitness and health represents a troubling need to control the body in the absence of control over wider external circumstances, and is imprinted with a narrative of the need for continual individual self-improvement.

The harmful ways in which neoliberalism underpins many of our leisure activities should not be a further source of guilt for us – it's not up to the individual to solve a collective, societal and deeply structural problem. But steps towards resisting a harmful system might be found through small acts of collective care which defy the primacy of individualism. This could be through carving out time with friends where problems can be shared collectively and understood as structural, rather than due to individual failing. One of the challenges to resisting cultural neoliberalism is the way in which it denies that it is an ideology at all – instead positioning itself as neutral and inevitable. Collectively acknowledging the value system which underpins all aspects of our lives – including leisure as well as work – is a first step to resisting it.

Emily Scurrah is a researcher at NEF.

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RACISM IS DRIVING US MAD

*When **Samara Linton** worked on a mental health ward in Newham, she noticed that patients tended to look more like her own family than her medical peers. She looks at why BAME people can't access mental health services as easily as their white counterparts – and why, when they do get support, they have lower recovery rates*



Newham has one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the country. It also has some of the highest rates of poverty and homelessness. And it was there I used to work on a mental health ward. In the course of my job I wrote countless letters to housing support services, worried about the impact of continued homelessness on my patients' wellbeing. I watched as welfare officers tried to guide patients through the twists and turns of the benefits system, and I pleaded with unwell patients who wanted to self-discharge because their zero-hour contracts meant that while they were on the ward and unable to work, they could not receive any pay. And, as the days went by, I noticed that these people often looked more like my grandparents, my aunts, and my uncles than they did my medical peers.

People from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are more likely to experience poverty, low income, unemployment, poor housing, and homelessness than their white counterparts. This socio-economic disadvantage increases the likelihood of developing mental health problems, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of further socio-economic disadvantage.

The link between socio-economic disadvantage and mental health problems is well-established. In the UK, the poorest fifth of the population is twice as likely to develop mental health problems than their wealthier counterparts. People who are unemployed are two to three times more likely to die by suicide than those in employment. One US study found that the risk of chronic mental health problems increased as unemployment rose, but noted that this was especially true for Black people in 2007 to 2011, during the heart of the economic recession.

In the UK, low-income Black and Asian families were disproportionately affected by austerity measures, losing an average of £8,407 and £11,678 respectively, each year. Tax policy, welfare and wage reforms impact BAME women in particular, who are more likely to be caring for children and older family members.

In addition to material deprivation, income inequality has negative impacts on mental health. Countries with higher levels of income inequality see a higher prevalence of mental health problems; unlike physical health, as countries get wealthier, rates of mental health problems increase.

In Kensington and Chelsea for example, average income ranges from £15,000-a-year

for residents of World's End Estate to £100,000-a-year for residents living on the other side of the King's Road. A man living in Golborne ward can expect to live for 72 years versus 94 for a man living in Hans Town, near Harrods. As is the case across the UK, Kensington and Chelsea's BAME residents are more likely to live in the more deprived parts of the borough, such as the northern region, where the Grenfell fire broke out. For many, this tragedy was the result of structural racism and classism, evoking anger as well as grief.

BAME people have poorer access to mental health services than their white counterparts, and even when they do gain access, they have poorer outcomes. BAME groups have higher rates of inpatient admissions, involuntary admissions, restraint, being placed in seclusion, and community treatment orders, and they have lower recovery rates than white people.

Still, the term BAME often masks the social structures, hierarchies, and intersections within its umbrella. For example, Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups have the highest levels of poverty in the UK, but Black groups are the most affected by mental health problems. Black women are more likely to be diagnosed with a common mental disorder such as

anxiety or depression, but suicide rates are highest among young South Asian women. Black men are the group most likely to be diagnosed with psychotic disorder and detained under the Mental Health Act.

Eche Egbuonu, the organiser of Prison By Another Name, has bipolar disorder and frequently shares his experience of being taken to a police cell when he became unwell instead of to a safe environment for medical assessment. Shortly after being released, an altercation at his home led to the police being called. This time, he was tasered, handcuffed, and detained under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act. Like many Black men across the UK, Egbuono is distrustful of the mental health system.

Despite national initiatives to address racial disparities in mental health, these inequalities persist, and BAME people have to rely on grassroots organisations to provide the support they need. One example is Black Thrive, a Lambeth-based partnership for Black mental health and wellbeing, which aims to reduce mental health inequalities by addressing inequalities in areas such as housing, education, and employment. Another example is the Chinese Mental Health Association which runs housing and employment support projects. However,

many grassroots organisations have suffered funding cuts, undermining their capacity to promote wellbeing and racial equality.

Tackling racial inequalities in mental health requires tackling the interlinked racial and socio-economic inequalities that exist in wider society. The Human Rights and Equality Commission has called for a comprehensive race strategy that includes education, employment, housing, pay and living standards, health, and criminal justice in Great Britain. A UN Special Rapporteur remarked that “the structural socio-economic exclusion of racial and ethnic communities in the UK is striking.” The government thanked the Special Rapporteur for her report but rejected her suggestion that its policies, regarding austerity, immigration and criminal justice, further entrench racial inequality, stating simply that they are committed to the total elimination of all forms of racism.

When we refuse to see racism within its wider socio-economic and structural context, limiting its definition to explicit displays of prejudice, people suffer. When we refuse to see mental health within its wider socio-economic and structural context, increasing funding for crisis support but defunding women’s refuges, people suffer. The UK may

not be 100% racist, but racism permeates through all levels of society, and, 100%, it’s driving us mad.

*Samara Linton is a junior doctor, writer and co-editor of **The Colour of Madness: Exploring BAME mental health in the UK**. She is currently working at BBC Three as a production trainee.*

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TALK IS NOT ENOUGH



*Over the past few years, organisations have lined up to say that we need to be more aware and accepting of mental health issues. But we can't settle for awareness without proper mental health funding for prevention and treatment, write **Sarah Arnold** and **Daniel Button***

February marked the annual Time to Talk day, a day aiming to encourage all of us to be “more open about mental health – to talk, to listen to and change lives”. This is a common response to mental health these days, with celebrity endorsements galore. Even members of the royal family have launched their own campaign – Heads Together – to “end the stigma around mental health” by changing “the national conversation about mental wellbeing”.

Talking about mental health is clearly very important: it can help us cope with illness and can undermine the stigma that has been too prevalent for too long. People feel more able to talk about mental health than ever before and we are now looking for support from our friends and family and from health services. Given the increased propensity to talk about mental health you could conclude that things are on the up for the 25% of people who experience a mental health problem each year. But too much emphasis on talk risks covering up less encouraging trends.

First off, both mental and physical health have been deteriorating for some groups of people, because the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age are worsening. Our broken economic model is at the heart of this. Neoliberalism is making us sick. Talking about mental health won't help, unless it extends to talking about the reasons why so many experience mental ill health, and what collective action we can take to address those drivers.

Secondly, as the stigma around mental health clears, more of us are seeking care when we need it. This, along with the rise in ill health, is driving demand for mental health services. While it's clearly a good thing that people are no longer suffering in silence, mental health services do not have the resources to help everyone who make contact with them. What's the point in encouraging people to be open about

mental health and seek support if that support is not available?

Mental health has never been as high a political priority as physical health, and the result has been less money for mental health services. Mental health accounts for 28% of the burden of disease in the UK but mental health services receive only 13% of NHS spending. Funding for mental health research is particularly poor. Currently the NHS spends only about £9 per person affected by mental illness – which has remained roughly unchanged in the last decade. This contrasts to cancer research where total spending equates to £288 per person affected.

The result of underfunding is wide ranging, including long waiting lists for support and a workforce stretched to breaking point. It has even been reported that some commissioners insist that patients have to have had suicidal thoughts before they can be referred for support in an effort to keep costs down. Services for children and adolescents are particularly overstretched: around 75% of young people experiencing a mental health problem are forced to wait so long that their condition gets worse, or they are turned away and are unable to access any treatment at all.

If you do manage to access care, treatment tends to be one size fits all, with most receiving cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) through the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme. While this is the right treatment for some, it isn't suitable for everyone. Only one in five people who undergo treatment have a reliable recovery and 40% drop out after starting the course.

Recent years has seen an increased commitment to valuing mental health equally with physical health, supported by commitments to increase funding. The NHS 'long-term plan' – which sets out how extra money for the NHS is to be spent – commits

to increasing mental health spending by at least 2.3 billion a year by 2023/24.

But these commitments are not enough. The Health Foundation notes that commitments “will mean simply maintaining the status quo which sees just four in 10 people who need it receive mental health support”. Mental health services would need an extra £0.7 billion (30% extra) on top of the cash promised just to increase this to seven in 10. Doctors still identify insufficient funding for mental health services as one of the most significant barriers to providing optimal mental healthcare.

Talking about mental health is clearly very important. But in a time when the wider conditions in which we live drive increasing rates of mental ill health and health services are unable to cope with increasing demand, talk is not enough. We need to address the drivers of mental ill health and ensure universal access at the point of need to high-quality mental health services.

Daniel Button is a senior researcher at NEF.

Sarah Arnold is a senior economist at NEF.

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WELLBEING & GDP

The goal and objective of all economic policy should be collective wellbeing," said Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon this January, in a speech where she said that wellbeing should be as fundamental as gross domestic product (GDP).

It's always encouraging to see politicians challenging GDP as the primary measure of economic progress. But while calls to think more about wellbeing can be a force for progressive change, they aren't necessarily so.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the new economy movement embraced the idea that wellbeing, rather than economic growth, should be the primary goal of economics. During these years, the grip of neoliberal economic orthodoxy was tight. Those thirsty for a new economic vision seized upon the suggestion that we could entirely reboot our economic system around wellbeing, rather than economic growth.

As more and more people woke up to the challenge of the climate crisis, wellbeing was a new way to think about progress which didn't rely on endlessly buying and consuming more stuff. The hope was that, if economics adopted wellbeing as a primary indicator then the implications would be transformative. Wellbeing research shows that increasing the income of the worst off can create massive wellbeing improvements, while increasing the income of the already wealthy could have no impact at all. Wellbeing research also demonstrates the importance of security of work and housing, and the value of working shorter hours. Such findings all pointed away from the neoliberal orthodoxy and towards a transformative, redistributive economic agenda.

In 2010, however, the Coalition government embraced wellbeing alongside the Big Society and 'social action'. Phrases like 'community resilience' and 'bounce-back-ability' (the latter something I've heard used more than once by policy types, with no sense of irony) suggested that individuals and communities are responsible for improving their own wellbeing. This mentality says we can boost our wellbeing by pulling our socks up, doing some cognitive behavioural therapy and building a community garden.

This formulation of the wellbeing agenda can be not only misleading but deeply damaging. Headlines like "Happiness depends on health and friends not money" are deeply insulting to the 14 million people living in poverty in the UK today. Many wellbeing advocates prescribe mindfulness or volunteering, but finding the time, resources and motivation for those things isn't easy when you're living in a cold and overcrowded home, working two jobs to make ends meet, or fighting an increasingly punitive benefits system. All the while, these messages suggest that if you're not happy, it's basically your fault.

Crucially, the focus on wellbeing as something we possess and control as individuals gives little space for understanding oppressions, such as those based on class or race – oppressions that are enmeshed with Britain's colonial history while being reinforced all the time by austerity and our criminal and education systems.

What wellbeing initiatives often lack is a real analysis of

power. Many of the drivers of poor wellbeing are built into our neoliberal economic system that, since the 1980s, has been designed and maintained by the wealthy for their own interests. Too often, charities, academics and policy initiatives sidestep the question of power when making the case for the measurement and pursuit of wellbeing as a primary goal of economic policy.

At its best, wellbeing can be a powerful framework for a radically new economic vision. But in order to unleash this potential we need a clear power analysis: an understanding of whose interests are served by our current economy and what it will take to rebalance it. At a national policy level, that means looking at inequalities in wellbeing and supporting policies that can change the structural, upstream causes of poor wellbeing, such as poverty, precarity and ingrained racism.

Having a power analysis is just as important for wellbeing work at a local level. Many community wellbeing initiatives focus on bringing people together to take local action. Many have used NEF's Five Ways to Wellbeing as a framework to think about these activities: being active, connecting, giving, learning new things and taking notice. These initiatives can provide an important opportunity to help build the social connections and collective control needed to create systemic change from the bottom up. However, on their own, the Five Ways to Wellbeing aren't going to tackle predatory loans, the housing crisis or local authority cuts.

Initiatives that rely on people coming forward to volunteer their time often help the already privileged, mirroring power structures in the rest of society. However, the outcomes of these activities aren't necessarily progressive. A few years back, people on our street came together to clear an overgrown area in a local park and create a playground for kids. The result is cute – handmade benches and donated toys suggest a model community initiative. Their motivation? Local sex workers had been using the area for work, and residents wanted to clear them out. No one, as far as I know, talked to the sex workers about any of these plans. Apparently, they don't count as 'the community'.

Even where community initiatives are genuinely inclusive and diverse, it's perfectly possible for people to improve life for some in the short term without tackling the underlying causes of inequality and poor wellbeing. Learning from the progressive traditions of community organising and community development, we need a better understanding of what turns, for example, a local play scheme into a group fighting against local cuts to children's services. We need an analysis both of power inequalities within our communities, and a power analysis of the elite economic systems we're up against if we're going to create a real wellbeing revolution.

Annie Quick led NEF's work on inequality and wellbeing until 2018.

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HOW INEQUALITY MESSES WITH YOUR M I N D

*The bedrock of society is the quality of social relationships, and it is there that inequality does its greatest damage. If governments are serious about improving the wellbeing of their population, they need to make substantial reductions in inequality, argue **Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett***



Most people have a very naïve view of how we are affected by the scale of income inequality. But the truth is that inequality changes social relationships: it strengthens the social hierarchy and feelings of superiority and inferiority. Essentially, the bigger the differences in income and wealth, the more powerful class and status divisions become, and the stronger the impression that we are ranked by personal worth or merit.

Evidence of the divisive effects of these processes is unmistakable. In more unequal societies, people are less likely to marry someone from a different class background, residential segregation by income increases, and social mobility decreases. But inequality does more than reduce social mixing. It increases class differences in a wide range of social problems and lowers national levels of

performance: health inequalities increase and average life expectancy is lower; class gaps in children's educational performance increase and average standards are poorer. The same is true of obesity and probably explains why more unequal societies have more violence, more bullying in schools, more drug problems and more mental illness.

Almost all the problems associated, like these, with deprivation, are worse in more unequal countries, and not just a little worse, but much worse. Infant mortality rates are at least twice as high, but in some studies levels of violence (as measured by homicide rates) or teenage birth rates or imprisonment rates are sometimes 10 times as common in countries with larger income differences. These effects of inequality are greatest among the least well off but, to a lesser extent, almost everyone suffers higher rates of these problems where income differences are larger. The explanation is,

of course, that it is relative deprivation rather than absolute deprivation that matters and the sense of relative deprivation is increased by bigger income differences.

While strengthening class and status distinctions, inequality also – inevitably – increases the belief that some people are worth much more than others. In a more unequal society, some people appear supremely important while others are made to appear almost worthless. As we come to judge others more by social status, we worry more about how they judge us. The result is that people feel increasingly insecure about their own self-worth. There are, of course, large individual differences in how susceptible people are to these insecurities, but inequality raises the bar for everyone. A study of people's anxiety about others' judgements of them found that in more unequal societies people in all income groups – from the richest tenth of the

population to the poorest – feel more status anxiety.

Research measuring levels of stress hormones has found that we are particularly sensitive to what psychologists have called the ‘social evaluative threat’. That is situations where we feel our self-esteem or social status is at stake, in settings where we fear being judged negatively or thought less of. That includes not only the most obvious stressors like public speaking, but almost all of the situations in which we feel shy or awkward. Because it heightens the social evaluative threat – strengthening our concern for how others judge us – inequality is a potent stressor at the heart of social life. It increases social anxieties and worries about social comparisons right across the population. A growing proportion of people suffer low self-esteem and a lack of confidence, finding social encounters and gatherings so stressful that they withdraw from social life, with almost inevitable consequences for rates of depression.

Others react differently, feeling instead that social contact requires more of a performance, more attention to self-presentation to overcome anxieties and negative judgements, like the fear of being thought stupid, unattractive, boring and so on. Rather than being overcome by low self-esteem and lack of confidence, some people react by trying to build themselves up in others’ eyes and flaunting their achievements and abilities. With an increase in inequality, self-enhancement and narcissism increase. As studies have shown, people increase their expenditure on fashionable clothes and status goods, trying to present a positive self-image and impression of success. In short, inequality boosts consumerism.

Because inequality makes social life more stressful and divisive, it is accompanied by a marked decline in community life. People are more out for themselves. There is a decline in trust and people become less willing to help others. Striking at the heart of social life, this is a particularly serious cost of inequality because friendship, involvement with others and the quality of relationships are powerful determinants of both health and happiness. Given the more stressful

nature of social life and the increasing insecurities about self-worth, inequality is also accompanied by increases in drug abuse and alcohol problems as people try to self-medicate.

Our susceptibility to the social evaluative threat – the strength of our concern for how others judge us – has its roots in our desire to be valued. We want to be valued because, in our evolutionary past, social status and inclusion were keys to survival. Both low social status and social exclusion made survival much more precarious. Monkeys in dominance hierarchies are ranked largely according to strength, from the strongest at the top to the weakest at the bottom. To keep out of trouble they have to know not only their own status but also that of other individuals in the troupe. They have to be good at assessing dominance and subordination and at knowing how to treat higher and lower ranked animals.

The cognitive capacity for processing these issues is called the ‘dominance behavioural system’. Psychologists have shown that not only does this system remain an important part of our human cognitive make-up but, as a result, we are highly sensitive to status issues, indeed so much so that it has been discovered that our responses to dominance and subordination trigger – or exacerbate – a range of mental, emotional and personality problems. To quote the research by Tang-Smith, Johnson and Chen: “Manic tendencies appear tied to experiencing a heightened sense of pride and being willing to use more aggressive behavioural strategies to pursue dominance.” In contrast, “Anxious and depressive tendencies appear particularly tied to low levels of subjective power, and more willingness to describe oneself as having hubris.” Pride and the subjective sense of achieving power are important dimensions of the dominance system for understanding mental illness.

Confirming this analysis, studies have shown that more unequal societies have substantially higher rates of mental illness, including depression, narcissistic personality disorder, schizophrenia and psychotic symptoms. Where there is great inequality, it is, after all, easy to feel that you are regarded as inferior and either to accept that judgement, or to experience your life as a continuous fight against being put down. Or,

alternatively, people may believe in their own superiority, or feel they that the only thing that matters is competing for status.

Inequality plays such havoc in modern societies because social relationships are key to human wellbeing and inequality worms its way into the heart of those relationships. Governments endlessly fail to recognise that a whole swathe of problems related to relative deprivation within our societies have a common cause – they get worse when inequality increases. Our task is therefore to reduce it.

Richard Wilkinson is professor emeritus of social epidemiology at the University of Nottingham.

Kate Pickett is professor of epidemiology at the University of York.

Together Richard and Kate founded the Equality Trust, have authored The Spirit Level and their new book The Inner Level is available from Penguin.

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AWARENESS OF WHAT?

*After struggling with his own mental health, **Jake Mills** found the support available to him was sorely lacking. Here, he writes about the danger of mental health awareness, and the national crisis that lies beneath the social media veneer*



CONTENT WARNING: THIS ARTICLE CONTAINS A BRIEF MENTION OF SUICIDE

Mental health 'awareness' has become a phenomenon over the past couple of years. From people sharing their experiences online to big companies espousing their commitment to ensuring the wellbeing of their workers and customers, there are few corners of the world left untouched. There's a mental health awareness week, an awareness day, a day for talking, you name it.

Awareness and the erosion of stigma around mental ill health is obviously important. It means that people feel more able to talk to one another about the issues they're having and it means not having to hide what often are quite serious periods of ill health. But the real question is: what happens when the stigma melts away and you feel able to go and seek support?

From the outside, the media attention around awareness can make it look as

though those who suffer from mental ill health now have everything they need in terms of support, treatment and recovery. But, beneath the veneer, it's a different story.

Six years ago, I was at a very low point and I decided to take my own life. I had a loving family and was in a great relationship but felt as though there was no point in living anymore due to the crippling depression that overtook me. Thankfully, someone found me before it was too late.

But unfortunately, the support I received following this was as inadequate as the support I received before it. The police gave me a telling off and I was not signposted to services. I called my GP, who offered me a telephone appointment, and then told me to simply double my antidepressants.

To put it lightly, I felt pretty crap about the whole situation – as though it was an everyday occurrence for people to want to end their own lives and receive no sympathy for it if they happen to survive.

This opened my eyes to the reality of the situation. After my own recovery I decided to dedicate my working life to ensuring that no one else had to go through what I went through – and if they do, that they receive the help and care that they need and deserve.

Today, I run a successful mental health

...what happens when the stigma melts away and you feel able to go and seek support? From the outside it looks as though those who suffer from mental ill health now have everything they need in terms of support, treatment and recovery. But, beneath the veneer, it's a different story.

charity – Chasing the Stigma – which has developed the UK's go-to mental health signposting tool, the Hub of Hope, and a burgeoning workplace mental health training programme which provides basic training so people can signpost those in need to relevant services and urgent assistance.

Through the Hub of Hope we have signposted over 120,000 people across the UK to relevant mental health services near them. By combining tech and a simplistic approach, we have managed to make a huge difference in the mental health market by providing an accessible pathway to services.

Most of the services on the Hub of Hope are charities. We have found that, like us, most of the organisations we work with are set up and run by those with a personal experience of mental health problems or illness – be it themselves or those close to them.

The fact of the matter is, we are having to use our own trauma and pain to spur ourselves on to improve services for others. Should this really be the case? Should we really have had to go through hell – and risk triggering our own issues – to ensure that no one else does?

This is something that the government – through the NHS – should be doing. It's a national scandal.

There is no such thing as mental health parity in this country. People with mental health conditions are still treated as second class citizens by the system – and that's why we felt we had to launch a new campaign to highlight the disparity between words and actions.

In October 2019, on the day after Mental Health Awareness Day, we launched 'Everyday'. We wanted to highlight this gap between what is being said and what is actually happening, and remind people that mental health issues are not confined to one day of the year. Everyday, people struggle and everyday, people work extremely hard and give their own time to help those who are in need.

From therapists to academics, psychologists to psychiatrists, paid charity workers to volunteers, these are the people who are putting their time and energy into tackling the mounting mental health crisis in this country. These are the people who we should be listening to – not a fancy social media banner designed by a marketing team to increase a company's followers.

The issues all boil down to funding and access. Mental health services are scarcely funded compared to physical health, even with recent promised increases. The introduction of the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) services has indeed improved access for those suffering from mild mental health problems, but waiting lists are long, and navigating the referral process is overwhelming for many. To actually get an appointment requires a maze of tasks which put many people off before they've even reached a therapist.

The services are so overloaded that they can only cater for the most severe cases and the mildest – anyone who sits in the middle risks being left behind.

Eating disorders, thankfully, have their own dedicated pathway but the wait is, on average, 18 months – and many are turned away after assessment due to not being 'ill enough' because the demand is so high. This also causes distress for practitioners, as they want to help but



...we are having to use our own trauma and pain to spur ourselves on to improve services for others. Should this really be the case?



find that their hands tied.

As you can see, it's all a bit of a jumble. But for someone in a distressed state, this jumble can be dangerous.

Suicide figures have increased across the board over the last 10 years, but there was a stark rise among young women, particularly those under the age of 25, and those with an anxiety disorder. These groups have been traditionally viewed as low risk. Most have a history of self-harm.

Through our work, we have tried to navigate this difficult system to make it more accessible and show that there's more than one option out there. But there needs to be action on all fronts, from the government to the NHS, from local authorities to charities. Adequate funding is needed to fill the gaps and provide services that are fit for purpose.

Economically, it makes sense. If more people receive proper, robust treatment at an earlier stage, they are more likely to reach a point of recovery. This means that not only will they be able to work, earn more, spend more, function in their home life and be healthier individuals but they will have happier, better lives and improved wellbeing.

Funding mental health services benefits everyone in society, not just those who are suffering right now. If society as a whole comes together to ensure that this problem is tackled everyday, and not just on a few select days throughout the year, then we can all work towards a brighter, happier and more cohesive future for this country and those who live here.

Jake Mills is the founder and CEO of Chasing the Stigma, the Hub of Hope and Ambassador of Hope training programme.

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[illegible]A circular portrait of a young woman with dark hair, wearing a nose ring and small red hair clips. She is smiling and looking directly at the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing some colorful objects.

MISERY is a mental health collective and sober club-night for queer, trans and intersex Black people and people of colour (QTIBPOC) based in London. Parties like MISERY, together with Hungama and Pxsy Palace, are the descendants of spaces set up to empower some of the most oppressed communities, who have also been at the very sharp end of austerity, racism and homophobia.

homelessness. Spaces like these popped up all over the country, with Zindagi in Manchester (2001) and Saathi in Birmingham (2003) addressing community issues like domestic violence, homophobia and racism. They offered a few hours of freedom away from family and work, where being both gay and Asian was often unacceptable. They also became a place to make friendships - a new chosen family where you relate through dance, music and lots of glitter.

The unique energy that MISERY brings is its total embrace of mental health and healing. It's sad girl energy, it's sober and authentic, vulnerable but actually also pretty fun in many ways. It's a night which has touched spaces across London – from the carpet floor of Bethnal Green Working Men's Club to the Yard Theatre in Hackney Wick. It fills a huge gap of much needed mental health and community support in an incredibly crowded and busy, yet isolating city. In a period of overwork and stress, where cuts to support services are acute, privatisation is rabid, and gentrification continues to fragment our communities, the need for relational healing and community is a huge source of power and stability for many.

The outlandish hedonism of queer parties is wonderful. But the beautiful stripper heels, striking colourful makeup and dance music are usually also accompanied by cocktails and maybe other substances. There's no hate for that here, it's fun to indulge. Let's trash what's respectable and get inebriated if that's what you'd

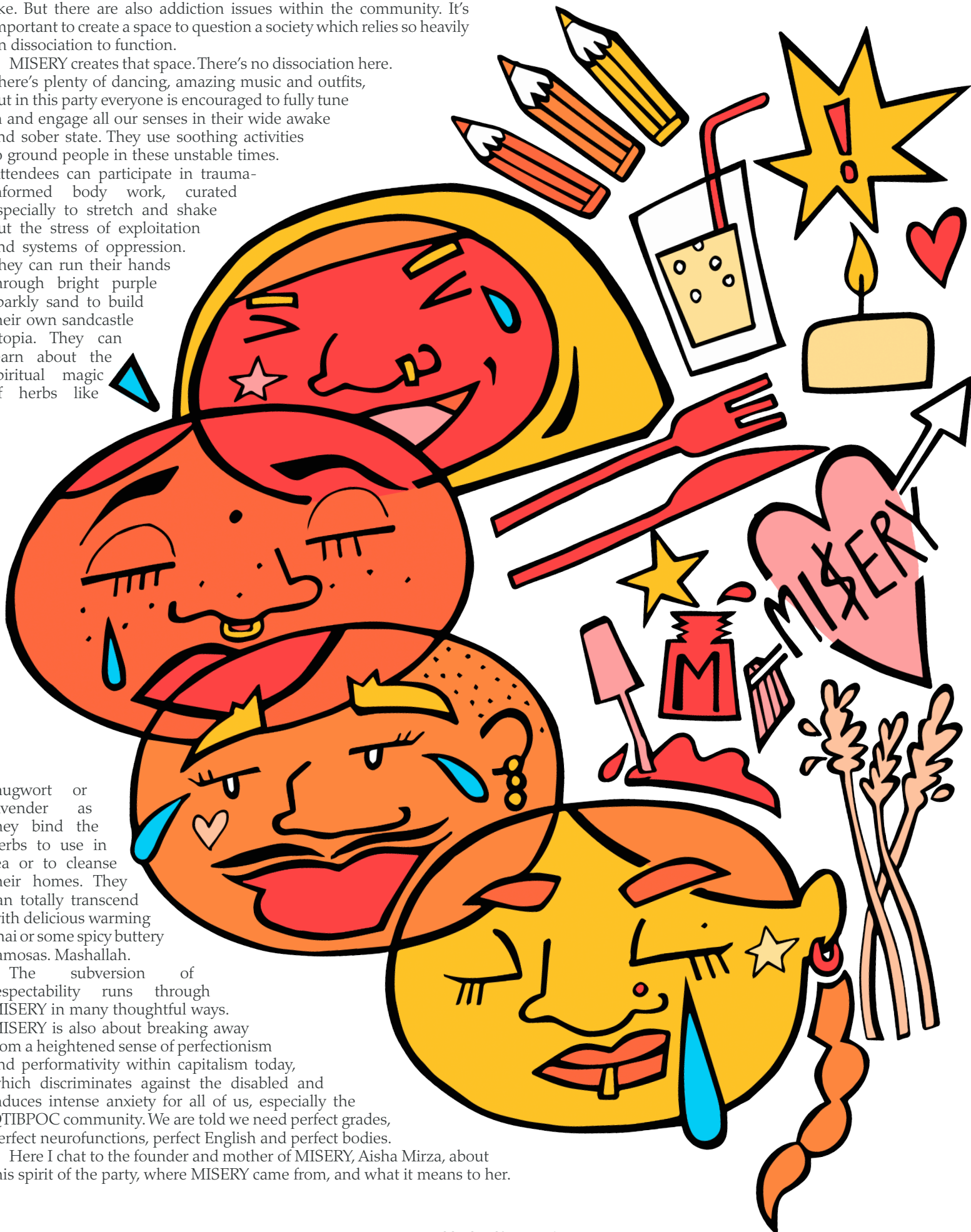
like. But there are also addiction issues within the community. It's important to create a space to question a society which relies so heavily on dissociation to function.

MISERY creates that space. There's no dissociation here. There's plenty of dancing, amazing music and outfits, but in this party everyone is encouraged to fully tune in and engage all our senses in their wide awake and sober state. They use soothing activities to ground people in these unstable times. Attendees can participate in trauma-informed body work, curated especially to stretch and shake out the stress of exploitation and systems of oppression. They can run their hands through bright purple sparkly sand to build their own sandcastle utopia. They can learn about the spiritual magic of herbs like

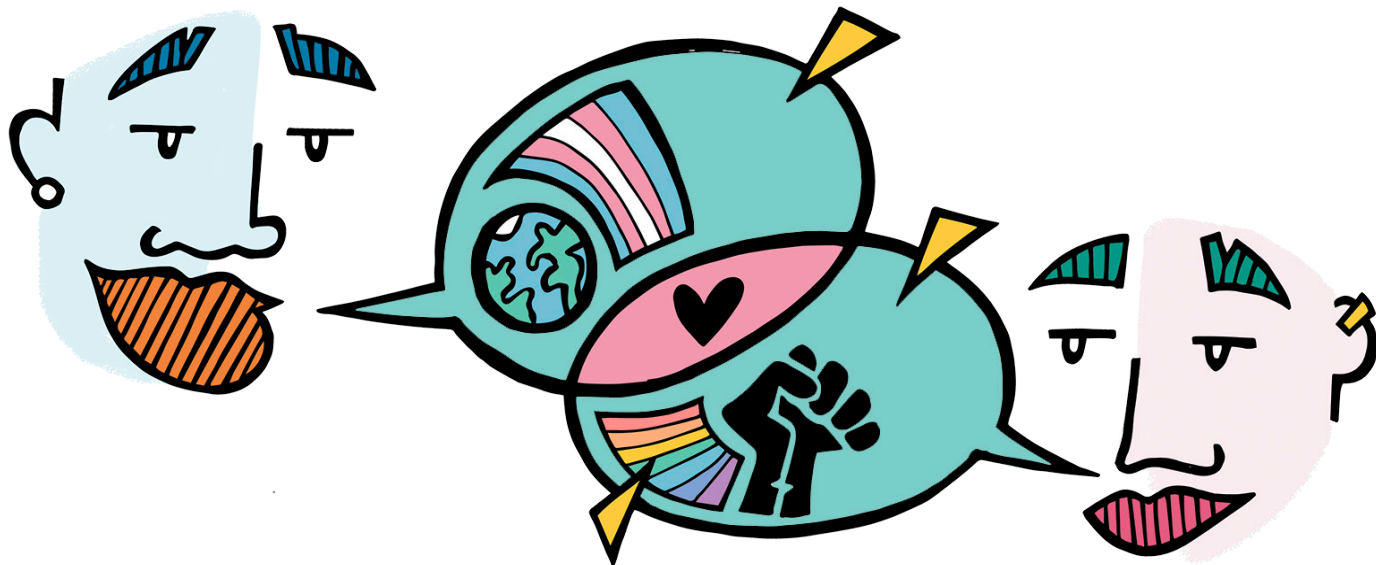
mugwort or lavender as they bind the herbs to use in tea or to cleanse their homes. They can totally transcend with delicious warming chai or some spicy buttery samosas. Mashallah.

The subversion of respectability runs through MISERY in many thoughtful ways. MISERY is also about breaking away from a heightened sense of perfectionism and performativity within capitalism today, which discriminates against the disabled and induces intense anxiety for all of us, especially the QTIBPOC community. We are told we need perfect grades, perfect neurofunctions, perfect English and perfect bodies.

Here I chat to the founder and mother of MISERY, Aisha Mirza, about this spirit of the party, where MISERY came from, and what it means to her.



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CONVERSATION

Q & A

NILU: I love the name MISERY. It's really funny and pretty radical. Why did you decide to call it that?

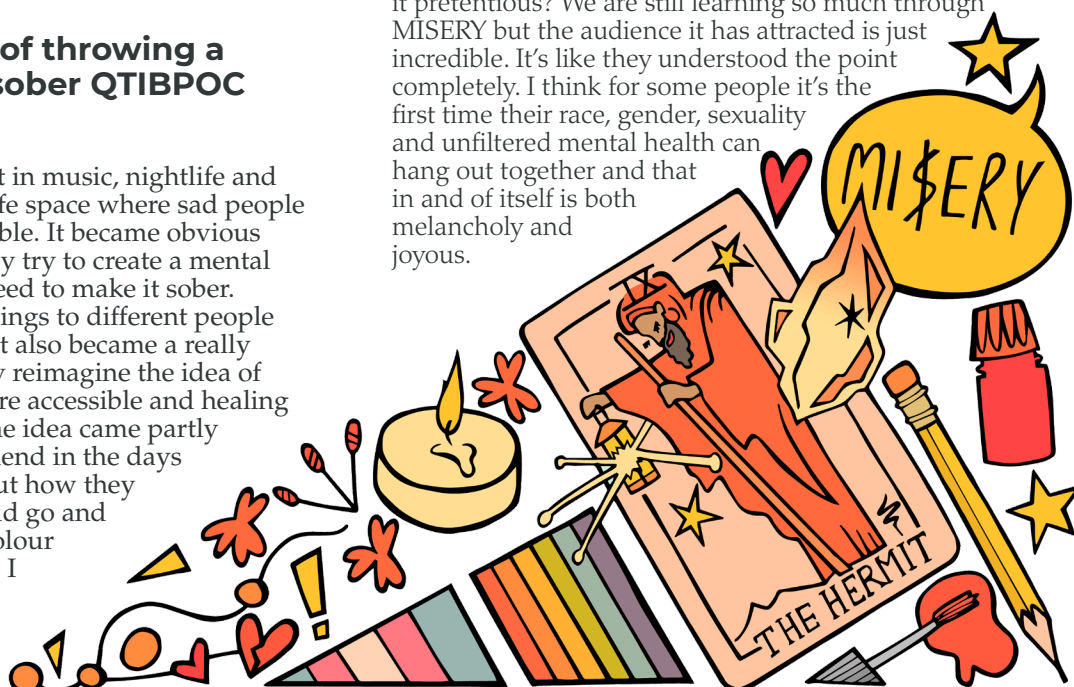
AISHA: There is pressure on everyone, but particularly people of colour, queer people, marginalised people, to be happy and strong and fierce and inspirational and hot. We so often hear accounts from people who have been miserable, once they have found their way out the other side of it, as though sadness can only be tolerated in hindsight. No one wants to be sad all the time, but MISERY is an invitation to come as you are, to talk and heal collectively, to be sad or quiet in public, to celebrate, and to give gratitude for those before us and around us who have not had that option.

NILU: Where did the idea of throwing a mental health centred, sober QTIBPOC party come from?

AISHA: I wanted to fuse my interest in music, nightlife and mental health by creating a nightlife space where sad people and introverts might feel comfortable. It became obvious pretty quickly that in order to really try to create a mental health centered space we would need to make it sober. Sobriety means a lot of different things to different people at different times and in that way it also became a really exciting opportunity to collectively reimagine the idea of sobriety – to hopefully make it more accessible and healing and less judgey and moralistic. The idea came partly from conversations I had with a friend in the days before they killed themselves, about how they wished there was a place they could go and be around other queer people of colour and be their whole, depressed self. I wanted to experiment with the idea of truly coming as you are.

NILU: Now you've created this space where people are actively encouraged to be sober - to be conscious and fundamentally to feel. Isn't this also profoundly terrifying for many people?

AISHA: I never thought of it as terrifying – but I'm a very 'feel your feelings' kind of person, so the masking of real feeling or thought or need or desire will always be scarier to me than being present. My fears were around creating something that was irrelevant or even harmful to our community, or of missing the mark and failing to communicate and hold the intention in the space. Like, how can you responsibly ask people to risk being sad in communion? What are the limits on that? Is it pretentious? We are still learning so much through MISERY but the audience it has attracted is just incredible. It's like they understood the point completely. I think for some people it's the first time their race, gender, sexuality and unfiltered mental health can hang out together and that in and of itself is both melancholy and joyous.



NILU: I'm really into the 'One 2 Hun' idea within misery party - could you tell me a bit about it?

AISHA: One 2 Hu is a new service, where we have a QTIBPOC therapist at the event, and they have their own quiet space and people can come speak to them – like a half-hour drop-in service. It's not a crisis service because we can't do that, and it's not like therapy, but it's like... do you have something on your mind like that you would like to talk about? Is there something you need to share, do you need to be signposted to somewhere else, do you have questions about therapy itself? The thought process behind that was just trying to break down barriers between people of color and wellbeing services.

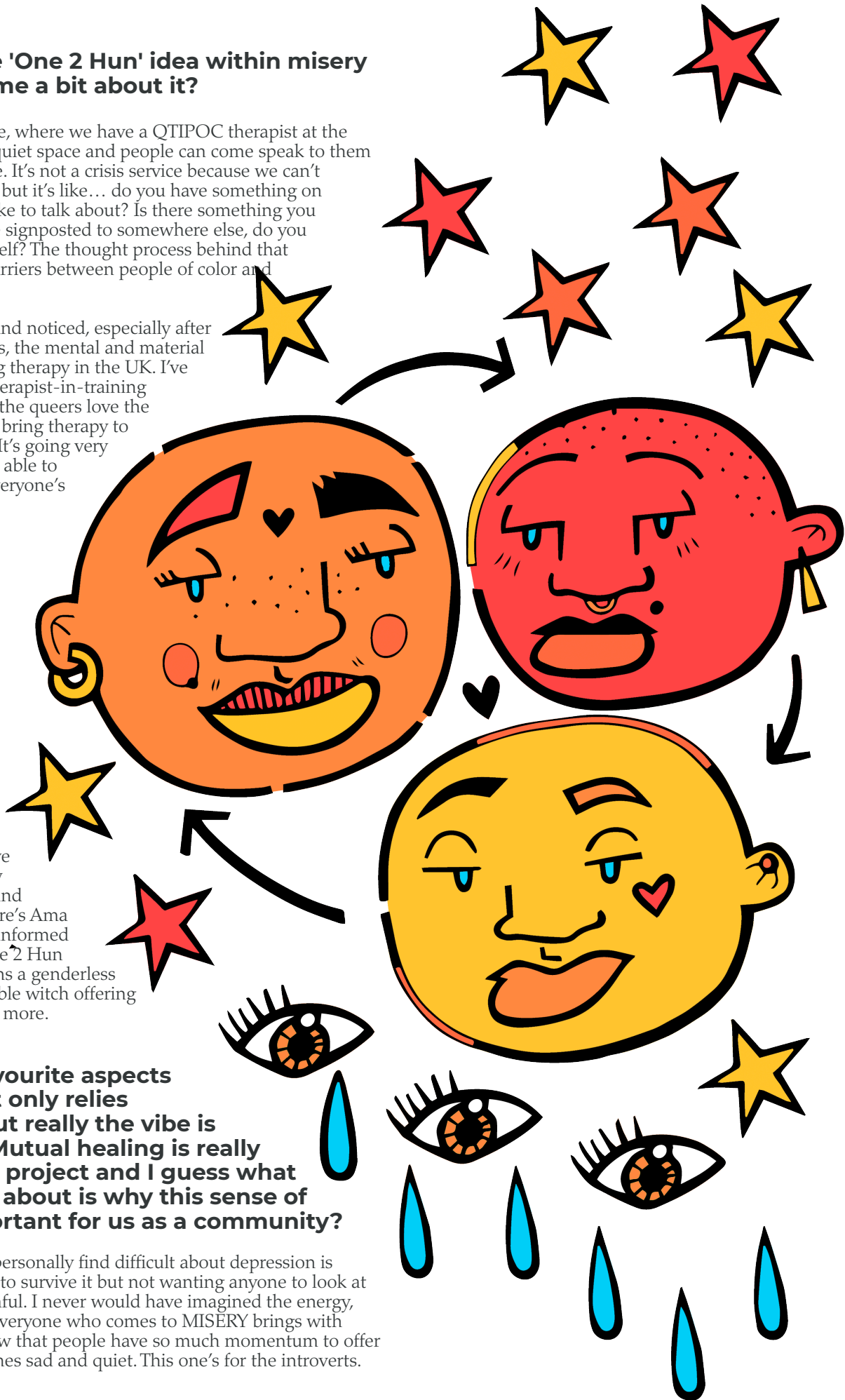
I'm a huge advocate of therapy and noticed, especially after living in New York for a few years, the mental and material blocks for QTIBPOC in accessing therapy in the UK. I've been working with QTIBPOC therapist-in-training Sabah Choudrey. We thought, if the queers love the club and they need therapy, let's bring therapy to the club and see what happens. It's going very far and I feel really pleased to be able to offer it as a free service due to everyone's support of MISERY.

NILU: You have such amazing talent at MISERY. Lots of different kinds of QTIBPOC 'healers'. Could you tell us a little bit about them?

AISHA: Yes! We have a gorgeous crew of QTIBPOC MISERY healers and helpers who, like most people involved, have gone above and beyond to support and grow the project and bring such love and care to the space every time. There's Ama who does massage and trauma-informed bodywork, Sabah who is our One 2 Hun therapy practitioner, Jon who runs a genderless nail bar, Grace who is an incredible witch offering tarot and birth charts, and much more.

NILU: One of the my favourite aspects of misery is that it not only relies specialised healers, but really the vibe is carried by everyone. Mutual healing is really the foundation of this project and I guess what I'd love to know more about is why this sense of community is so important for us as a community?

AISHA: One of the things that I personally find difficult about depression is knowing you need other people to survive it but not wanting anyone to look at you at the same time. It's so painful. I never would have imagined the energy, vulnerability and vast care that everyone who comes to MISERY brings with them. It's so so nurturing to know that people have so much momentum to offer something so delicate, and at times sad and quiet. This one's for the introverts.



IT'S NOT JUST ALL IN YOUR HEAD

Mainstream psychology tries to solve problems in people's individual minds. But the world we live in has a massive impact on our health. **Sally Zlotowitz** reflects on what's wrong with the way we think about mental health, and her journey from clinical to community psychology



One of the reasons I wanted to become a psychologist was because of the 1985 Oliver Sacks book *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*. In it, Sacks describes a man whose brain damage means he struggles to identify objects and people, including his wife, despite intact vision. I found these stories of patients' behaviours after brain damage fascinating, so much so that I went on to study neuropsychology and train to become a clinical psychologist. Clinical psychologists train and work, predominantly in the NHS, in a variety of mental health settings. They offer assessments, therapies, training and consultations with a range of 'service users' and their families, from children and adolescent mental health services, to adult secure inpatient hospitals, end of life care and including brain injury survivors.

I feel privileged to have had this vocational training. However, it soon became apparent to me, as it has to many others before me, that actually the mainstream field of mental (ill-)health and the adjacent fields of wellbeing and self-improvement, are overly focused on micro-processes of the brain and mind – like which tiny part of the brain seems to be responding differently during depression – and neglect the broader social, economic, cultural and historical influences on psychological health. When I considered my whole political self, I realised I had journeyed down the wrong psychological path. Let me explain why.

What's wrong with the mainstream way we think about mental health?

The UK mental health system, including its NHS treatments, narratives, research and practice, is inadequate. The system is founded on biomedical approaches that liken 'mental illness' to physical diseases, dependent upon diagnoses, brain-based, neurochemical explanations, and frequently offers medication as a first line of treatment – despite the biomedical approach being highly scientifically contested. Meanwhile, psychological explanations are aimed at individual minds: our own personal distorted thinking patterns, unconscious drivers developed from early experiences, poor coping skills in response to stress, and failure to talk about ourselves to others

because of stigma. Therapists then help us to reveal these patterns to ourselves.

These models are 'intrapsychic': they focus our attention on our own mind, pushing for introspection and self-improvement. These approaches are so entrenched within our culture that many of us now believe that due to some deficiency in the self, we are unwittingly holding ourselves back. Such explanations and therapies, combined with medication, form nearly all professional treatments for mental ill-health (and of course the basis of the 'wellness' industry) – regardless of the individual's social circumstances, cultural background and the wider state of society.

There is without doubt a place and a role for these models. Medication can lift people out of the worst feelings, many (including me) would argue for the benefits of mindfulness, whilst mental health professionals would point to the scientific evidence for therapy. But these models tell a fraction of the story. They ignore the wider social and economic factors that form the fabric of our psychological experiences, and do little to intervene in them. The bigger picture about psychological health is arguably being intentionally obscured.

The bigger story

It will come as no surprise to readers of this zine that 10 years of austerity in the UK has led to a rise in mental health distress, including a rise in suicides and millions more antidepressant prescriptions. Those exposed to the punitive benefits system, those mired in debt because of a fall in income, or those who are struggling in the 'hostile environment' will attest to the dramatic effect of economic and social policies on mental health. Psychologists Against Austerity (of which I am a member) have shown how these policies affect people psychologically, including increasing people's experiences of shame and mistrust of others.

Our own social and economic conditions and the wider social fabric we are situated in significantly contribute to psychological health – as well as physical health. Estimates are that between 50-75% of our health is determined by these external factors and the ways they affect our behaviour. The nature of the places in which we live and

work, the resources we have access to, as well as the quality of our communities, government systems and social connections interact with our personal histories to generate our core psychological experiences. Jenn, from the *Poor As Folk* blog, powerfully describes the experience of poverty:

"The emotions certainly take their toll. Hopelessness is unbearable... Fear is constant. You're always afraid of what's next. I'm afraid of opening my bills to find new late fees. I'm afraid of losing utilities. I'm afraid of being evicted because we can't afford our rent. You want to think positive, but the idea of 'what's next' is always looming. Things that might seem minor to one person can spell disaster for a family in poverty."

So, it is unsurprising that the experience of distress is unequal, with those at the sharp end of structural inequalities suffering the most. Poverty, inequality, racism, debt, removal of community spaces, poor housing, social isolation, mistrust of statutory services and other forms of oppression, adversity and discrimination (often experienced in synchrony and accumulatively) have a knock-on effect on how people feel about themselves and the world. This seems so incredibly obvious, and yet, most of our interventions and mental health spending are aimed at individuals.

Mental health research, which is chronically underfunded, devotes much of what money there is (at least 50%) to underpinning brain and psychological processes. As a former fan of the brain, I understand the fascination with pointing to bits of grey matter (and let's not forget, saying nucleus accumbens does make you sound quite clever). But we must question whether some of these hugely expensive studies lead to new or useful knowledge, (my favourite examples of obvious conclusions being: 'green spaces are good for your brain' and 'poverty is bad for children's brains'). Especially when a mere 3% of funding goes to prevention research. Moreover, there is far too little research or data in the UK that brings to life the experiences of people of different and intersecting ethnicities, abilities, classes, genders and sexualities and what they might want in terms of both services and community. Understanding the real root causes of mental distress, and how to create

the conditions to foster good psychological health, would lead to impactful community and societal interventions delivered through new policy, social action and partnerships.

The survivor activist movement has often driven the reforms of institutions in mental health. Current activist collectives, such as Mental Health Resistance Network, Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) and Recovery in the Bin, campaign vehemently to make the links between mental health and the economic system, such as how the neoliberal agenda is bound up with mental health treatments and coercion into employment. For instance, Recovery in the Bin have created a satirical 'neoliberal wellbeing' questionnaire that asks participants to assess such statements as, "I use inspirational quotes to excess" and "It is my personal responsibility to overcome structural inequality". Meanwhile, DPAC have bought sets of the ridiculous, unwieldy recording equipment (two tape recorders, yes tape!) to lend to claimants so that they can record their benefit assessments. Tape recorders are the legally required recording equipment by the Department of Work & Pensions, but they won't provide them - a clear wielding of power. These powerful campaigns play a crucial role in making economic structures and policies visible, as well as holding mental health services and professionals to account.

On the Covid-19 crisis

The Covid-19 crisis has starkly brought to our attention the importance of context for our psychological health. You don't need mental health experts to tell you that that social distancing is going to affect how you will feel or that the social and economic uncertainty is likely to make you feel worried. We can all expect to have these emotions and it is important they are not pathologised. Individuals shouldn't feel ashamed or inadequate if they are struggling psychologically under the abnormal social conditions of the crisis.

This pandemic is sadly exposing the ways in which the policy decisions that have gone before - organised around austerity and neoliberalism - have undermined our collective psychological resilience and exposed the nation to more psychological health risk. Communities that are well connected and in which people experience mutual trust will enable people to feel safer and more supported, and therefore less likely to experience psychological distress. Yet our communities have become fragmented as publicly-owned, accessible community spaces have been sold off, exacerbated by a culture of hyper-individualism and competition. Similarly, most decisions are being made 'for' people because there is a lack of participatory methods or democratic ownership of our

institutions, adding to the experience of feeling out of control. And heartbreakingly, it is marginalised groups again who will suffer disproportionately in terms of their psychological health as Covid-19 exacerbates the inequalities already generated by austerity.

Community psychology

Coming to realise that the field of mental health lacked a real analysis of power, I ventured into what I hope will be my final resting place as a psychologist: community psychology. Community psychology (and the related field of liberation psychology) has its origins in Latin American critical and radical education and theology via thinkers like Paulo Freire and Ignacio-Martin-Baro. Rising out of anti-colonial practices and thinking, community psychology has unsurprisingly been neglected by reductionist mainstream European psychology.

Community psychology explicitly links socio-economic conditions, structural violence and oppression to psychological distress. Its practices involve working in partnership with marginalised communities to create social change, social justice and inclusion - overlapping with other practices and bringing some unique aspects. Research is an active part of the work, but crucially, there is a preference for participatory action research in which members of a community engage as peer researchers, doing research with, rather than being researched 'on', and orientated towards social action. There are many groups and organisations (almost always outside of the NHS) that draw on community psychology. Youth charities, MAC-UK (where I work), The Advocacy Academy and The Winch all work with young people to take action on racial and economic inequalities as the root causes of serious youth violence and distress. Collectives that include community psychologists in Manchester and Scotland are working towards age- and dementia-friendly places or alternative economic systems, such as Steady State Manchester's 'Viable Economy' framework.

The concepts of peer support and mutual aid are also within the theory and practice of community psychology. As mutual aid groups have started to form the backbone of community support during the Covid-19 crisis, there is hope this will strengthen our community ties and a sense that we all can contribute and all need support. Many of us in the profession have been encouraging clinical (and other) psychologists to shift their practice and mobilise in support of community action. Moreover, at MAC-UK, we are using community psychology principles to inform our response to Covid-19 - encouraging excluded young people to use their music creativity to express themselves

and reach out to other young people, writing a briefing paper for policymakers that outlines the concerns of excluded young people around the new Coronavirus Act (such as new police powers) and joining campaigns to ensure marginalised communities are not disproportionately affected.

I now see it as my professional duty to consistently draw attention to the links between what is 'out there' and what is in the brain-mind, to politicise our discipline and to encourage community psychology practice amongst colleagues. Activist networks such as the survivor activist collectives mentioned earlier, plus some health professional organising through Psychologists for Social Change, Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility and MedAct, to name a few, are pushing for change both within the mental health system and outside of it. But to revolutionise mental health requires a groundswell in order to overturn the dominance of the biomedical model in favour of a socio-economic one. Our collective success depends on us joining these movements together.

Sally Zlotowitz is a clinical and community psychologist and director of public health and prevention at the excluded youth mental health charity, MAC-UK. She is a Co-founder of Psychologists for Social Change.

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FOR THE LOVE OF THE PLANET

*From the climate crisis to mass extinction to acidifying oceans, we're living through an environmental emergency. What is this doing to our mental health? **David Powell** investigates the strain of eco-anxiety and what we can do to live with it*



You never look at *The Scream* by Edvard Munch the same way once you realise it's not a painting of someone emitting a scream but of someone hearing one. And not just any old wail, but what Munch described as the "enormous infinite scream of nature". Munch may not have meant his aghast figure to be suffering from what we today know as 'eco-anxiety' – he probably had in mind more of a general 'aargh' of the human condition. But to a 21st century interpretation it's a nailed-on metaphor for

a profound sense of unease and worry about the state of the natural world – shared by very many people, and most definitely by me.

It's crept up on me. I've never been particularly prone to debilitating *anxiety*-anxiety. But I remember in 2018, when it hadn't rained in London for 42 days straight and all the parks had turned to dust, first realising that something was amiss in my innards – something different. The Earth is broken, and that's awful.

It's bad all right

Given that the planet Earth is perhaps the only place in the universe where we can live it's right to be a bit anxious about things. And things – health-of-planet-wise – are not tip-top.

It's hard to write a piece about eco-anxiety without saying things that are going to make people eco-anxious, so let's get this out of the way and then we can talk about what to do about it. Scientists say there are nine different 'planetary boundaries' which keep life on Earth kind of ticking along as it is as long as we don't mess them about too much. But we're messing them about big time. You'll know all about the glitzy ones – climate change, species loss – but there's also the acidity of our oceans and our soil health and many other bad things. If you really want to bum yourself out, have a google search.

And it's not just the scale. It's the urgency. Everyone is screaming about how quickly we need to do everything: that this is the only window for action that means anything, and that we have to get to zero carbon emissions within a generation. Former head of the UN panel on climate change, Christiane Figueres, talked recently about her mental image of humanity tiptoeing along a narrow mountain ridge, with apocalypse and war on one side, and a sustainable future on the other. No pressure.

This kind of starkness in our depictions of crisis is a natural response to the alarming science. We are, after all, not trying to make people feel warm and cuddly inside, but to *get off their bottoms and DO SOMETHING*. If you want to make people feel unsettled and uncomfortable, telling them it's an emergency is a good way of going about it. But it doesn't help the blood pressure.

And to be totally clear here: it is an emergency. What we are doing to the Earth isn't like anything else we've ever done. We – and everything else – are alive thanks to the benevolence of the Earth's richly complicated chemical soup, and we're souring it. Chuck on top that we face this monumental embuggerance while petty, dangerous nationalist populism is on the rise around the world – where countries and culture appear to be turning in on themselves at exactly the time that we probably need to zoom out a bit – and yeah, it's a miracle that we are not *all* thunderstruck by the Fear.

And of course we are not, in the main. We get on with things. On we pootle, only occasionally shushing this nagging sense that the arse might be about to fall out of everything. But for me at least, that shushing is getting harder.

Size is everything

It's all so... *big*. It's this 'bigness' that's the problem, freak-out-wise. We who are very small, one of billions, asked to understand and act to prevent the collapse of *everything*.

I suspect part of the problem here is that we are not really evolved for this stuff. Evolutionarily speaking, it was only yesterday when the main business of the day was running away from angry hairy things that want to eat us. But ecological collapse or climate breakdown on a planetary scale is pretty different to running away from an angry hound. The teeth of eco-collapse are terribly sharp, but it's not something that *feels* like it's going to stop us going about the business of the day. Our chimp brains tell us still to worry, but there is no immediate monster at the door.

Most of the time. It's no surprise that environmental disasters are themselves bad for the mental health of those they increasingly strike. Solidarity and empathy, so essential for a global response on the scale required, brings home the injustice in which those who have done the least to cause climate breakdown are those on the front line of its impacts. Imagine being, for example, the elder from an indigenous community of North America, interviewed for the Guardian, who says: "We are people of the sea ice. And if there's no more sea ice, how do we be people of the sea ice?"

And spare a thought for young people in particular, for whom this is, after all, their future that's literally on fire. Schools in New Zealand have been doing a lot to teach kids about climate change and, all too aware that its implications may be a lot to take in, have had a specific focus on helping them cope.

But the new thing is what the American Psychological Association recently called "a chronic fear of environmental doom". I'm not sure the word DOOM is a particularly helpful one for the eco-anxious to read. But yes, it is a very specific kind of horror – a dystopia made real and present.

I've time for philosopher Timothy Morton's view that the best scary films are the ones that make you think that everyday life has something evil hiding in the shadows. Because climate change and ecological collapse are not, despite the attempt of some economists to make us think so, 'external' to us: they are us. We have nowhere else to live; we are comprised of nothing else than the soil and the air and the dust of stars. If it all goes wrong, that's like finding out you really *have* got an alligator hiding at the end of your bed. There is something truly terrifying hiding in the dark corners of our safest places, and that's the scariest thing of all.

Perhaps it's not, at root, the vastness of eco-collapse that we really dread, but something altogether more human and close to home. Perhaps it's mostly about love: the love we have for home, and for each other, and nature, and life itself. And its loss.

Anxiety is OK

Given all of that, both anxiety and denial are entirely understandable psychological responses. Perhaps they're different sides of the same coin, as Joanne Macey has suggested; different ways of dealing with a horrible truth. In many ways I agree with those who deny the science of climate change: I too wish it wasn't happening, but the most extensive peer-reviewed scientific endeavour in history has overwhelmingly concluded that it is.

It would after all be far, far worse if we *weren't* being anxious about it all. I'd go so far as to suggest that if you *aren't* feeling a little bit anxious about the state of the planet, you probably aren't paying attention.

Alas, the human brain doesn't just stop worrying about things just because we instantly tell it to and trying to squish down our anxiety is not a particularly tasty recipe for sound mental health. We need to work what to *do* with that anxiety; the question is not: *am I right to feel anxious* (probably, yes); but instead: *OK, and what can I do about it?*

And so, what can you do?

1) Look after yourself

Just because a situation is urgent that does not mean that we have to run around shrieking with our hands in the air. That kind of thing can get one pretty tired. Go easy on yourself. Too many people that try to change the world for the better take all of its weight onto their shoulders, and a sense of the awfulness of everything isn't likely to exacerbate that.

You're no use to a movement if you're dyspeptic with fear. Try to get some sleep, and eat properly, and do things to take your brain out of it all for a while. Meditate, if that's your bag (I recommend it, and I'm no hippy).

This is not some kind of appeal to a hyper-individualised response to anxiety, particularly one triggered by a vast systemic failing of how we run our economy, and exacerbated by our atomised, neoliberal and lonely society. These are collective problems and they require collective action. But giving ourselves a break is a pretty important first thing to do.

2) Face it

It's hard to outfox something terrible if

we don't admit that terrible thing is real. Life is not a Disney tale and there are precious few happily ever afters. And that's OK: as neurobiologist Sam Harris suggests, happiness is more likely to lie in a "clearer understanding of the way things are" than "pious illusions".

Yes, this is how things are. Those ice sheets crumbling off Antarctica, those glaciers withering to vapour, those dead koalas – this is how it is. We can, if we want, try to live the rest of our lives pretending that it's not happening, or we can face it. As Caroline Hickman from the Climate Psychology Alliance says, "...with the majority of anxiety, once you engage with the thing that's scaring you or you get beyond it, the anxiety goes away".

So, engage with it. Talk about it: openly, honestly, constructively, with those that may feel the same, or even those that don't. Our society is after all truly terrible at talking honestly about the things we are anxious about, in general: death, aging, loneliness, decay. (It is, however, very good at buying products that promise to take those anxieties away).

3) Think non-linearly

Perhaps the scariest thing about climate change is that its impacts are not necessarily linear. Every fraction of a degree by which average temperatures increases the risk of genuinely catastrophic things happening. There is, for example, a vast amount of methane – a considerably more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide – locked away under Siberian permafrost, but the more warming we get, the less permafrost and frosty it will be.

But human change is not linear either.

2019 was an extraordinary year of climate mobilisation, during which Greta Thunberg went from being an unknown teenager to a global megastar and *Time* magazine's person of the year. In what seems like the blink of an eye, a thing we couldn't really talk much about in public is now something that we can most definitely talk about. Greta's rise is a phenomenon best understood as a symbol that allowed the release of a collective anxiety that had been building for years.

4) Do something

Just...*do something*. Small or big. Accept there is no right thing to do and no perfect plan. Try not just to scream about how something needs to change, but in a tiny way, change it. Plant something. Fix something. Help a new project grow.

Act because others might notice and it might change something, no matter what. As Rebecca Solnit suggests in *Hope in the Dark*, light your candle even if it doesn't appear to much illuminate the murk, because you never know who else might be lost and might see it.

Act because there is an intense and rewarding fellowship in standing together with others.

Act because acting is about taking control of something that might otherwise be destabilising and chaotic.

Act to translate the ineffable awfulness of the very big into the seeds of hope, and the precious nurturing of something better.

Act out of solidarity and empathy, and to jointly share the emotional burden of these times. Doing something out of love for life itself is a very beautiful thing, and the love of others is perhaps the single greatest defence against anxiety of which I can think.

And act because – well, what else are you going to do?

A profoundly human response

At the root of the right sort of response to eco-anxiety can come a curious but quite profound new optimism. Responding to ecological mayhem can actually remind us of something we all-too-often lose: that we're all in this together, and humans are capable of not just awful but also wonderful things.

As US radio host Chris Hayes says, "the solution to the climate crisis is just *the most profoundly human one* – how we relate to each other as human beings... and what human beings mean to each other and how they treat each other and what they will do for each other. And I still feel there is something beautiful about being alive at this moment for that reason."

Amen to that.

Dave Powell is the co-host of Sustainababble, a weekly comedy podcast about climate change and the environment. It's available in all the usual podcast places or at www.sustainababble.fish

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Doing something out of love for life itself is a very beautiful thing, and the love of others is perhaps the single greatest defence against anxiety of which I can think

Finding joy

Neoliberalism and inequality make millions miserable.

Adam Ramsay explains how figures like Jordan Peterson exploit this mental health crisis - and how introducing a sixth *Queer Eye* host can help



That neoliberalism changed us isn't a side-effect. It was the point of turning every joy of human life into a commodity. In 1981, Margaret Thatcher famously told the *Sunday Times*: "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul." And she did. By the time she left office, the suicide rate among young men had increased by 50%.

I'm not sure I count as young anymore. But at 35, I was born into the world Thatcher created. And like many of the people I love, I've spent much of my adult life struggling with the epidemic of depression she unleashed. For many, that makes me another potential customer. Some products – the drug fluoxetine, Kung Fu classes, the Netflix show *Queer Eye* – have helped. I'll come to them. But I've seen too many others conned in their desperate searches for help.

Neoliberalism makes millions miserable, producing vast markets for fake cures. Pablo Escobar, Billy Graham, Mark Zuckerberg and Jordan Peterson all got rich hawking false solutions to the crisis of disconnection.

But just as lonely rats will choose cocaine over food, while rats kept in groups will get high in moderation, the drug is no more

cause than cure. The problem is isolation in communities torn apart by brutal inequality, a world where we're told to run ever faster to keep up. A society of spectacle, which taught me to aspire to celebrity.

In the 12 years from the collapse of the global financial system to the pandemic-induced collapse of the real economy, Western economies massively inflated the prices of their assets with billions of dollars of quantitative easing. As a result, those who already owned assets – houses or otherwise – did OK. Those who didn't struggled. Wages have been stagnant in the US and the UK for decades, and millions who believed that by now they would have entered the middle class have discovered that they are very definitely working class.

In June 2018, the World Psychiatric Association published a paper which gathered research from across the developed world and showed that there is "a statistically significant positive relationship between income inequality and risk of depression". Equally, people at the rough end of racism are much more likely to suffer from poor mental health.

This shouldn't surprise anyone. Inequality rips society apart. It tears us away from those around us, severing the connections

of community. My neighbour is a doctor in one of Scotland's poorest areas. Many of his patients who want help with depression face, he says, lifelong circumstances which would make any rational person miserable. But he can't prescribe the abolition of poverty.

For alt-right psychologist Jordan Peterson, the solution to this situation – and the reason he is beloved of the powerful – is to accept it. The sixth of his famous 12 Rules for Life – the title of his bestselling 2018 book – is "Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world." In other words, 'know your place'.

Peterson's message isn't just "Don't change the world." It's "Don't change who the world tells you that you are." And it does profound damage. In January last year, my friend Danielle, a brilliant activist who had started to come out as a trans woman, took her own life. Like thousands of others every year, she was struggling with a world that refused to accept her.

Too often, mental health is individualised. As with physical health, we are taught to believe that it is down to us, on our own, to sort it out. And as with physical health, this is essentially a neoliberal lie.

For much of the Left, the reaction is

the opposite to the right's individualism. It is: "Organise with millions of others to overthrow an economic system which makes us all sick."

Of course this is something we should do. But exhortations to join the revolution aren't much help to those who are desperately miserable now. Our political systems – particularly in Britain and the US – are designed to alienate. The purpose of them is to put off mass participation. And most people are put off. The prospect of wading through the factional flame wars of party politics, or of being beaten off the streets by increasingly militarised police, is unlikely to salve the hole in your chest where your soul has been ripped out.

So many progressive groups are full of people searching for salvation from the depression pandemic. And, fairly consistently, they fail. We fail. Because while hurling yourself at the great injustices of the world is a great way to feel significant, it's also a brilliant way to distract yourself from inner turmoil, rather than resolving it.

And in activist communities, feelings so often play out in over-intellectualised power politics. If everyone is telling themselves they are there for the greater good, then it's hard to admit the real reason you're upset is that your ego has been bashed. It's hard to admit that you're just performing your own neuroses when the planet's burning. It's easier to disguise hurt feelings behind ideological spars. Too often, people find it easier to split a movement than confront their own demons.

In this context, Jordan Peterson's suggestion that you "tidy your bedroom" can seem to many like the only option: it answers the crisis of alienation by showing you something you do have power over. And it works: tidying your room is a remarkably effective way to feel better, for a bit. For a generation living in shared flats or parental homes longer than they expected, your bedroom may be the only space that you can control on your own.

Fortunately, the idea that you have control on your own or not at all is just the propaganda of the powerful. Because while activist groups are a terrible alternative to therapy, organising with our peers is the best tool we have for taking back control of our lives.

The challenge for the left, then, is to learn how to organise miserable people, and to

learn to organise while miserable. Depressed people shouldn't be encouraged to treat politics as a distraction from their misery, but to look straight into their misery, and use it as a lens to better understand the world and a motivation to change it, together.

And that has to include giving the sort of depressed young men lured to Peterson the chance to connect with those who are different from them, to emancipate themselves from social hierarchies which are making them miserable, too.

This learning is already happening in many ways, through political networks, unions, and campaign groups. It's a major theme of openDemocracy's Transformation section. But what it needs is the touch of popular culture.

Last year after nine months of therapy I was still utterly miserable, and my counsellor had suggested it was time to start trying pills. It had felt good to say the words

him stylish clothes, grooming him, doing up his house and supporting him to confront troubles in his life.

What this means for each character varies. But the underlying message of every cry-athon episode is the same. Toxic masculinity and competitive ultra-capitalism have taught men life lessons which make us miserable. To find joy, we need to unlearn.

While reality TV is notoriously cruel, the Queer Eye cast specialise in kindness. Each of them opens up about their own struggles: grooming expert Jonathan Van Ness is an HIV+ non-binary former sex worker and ex-meth addict. Interior designer Bobby Berk is estranged from his Bible-belt family, and was a homeless teenager. Culture expert Karamo Brown is of Jamaican-Mexican heritage, grew up "very poor" and became a father at 17. Fashion aficionado Tan France comes from a "very strict" Muslim household in Doncaster, and is one of the

first openly gay people of South Asian descent on a major show. Chef Antoni Porowski, the son of Polish migrants to Canada, is estranged from his mother.

Each episode, I would sob to a stream of touching moments and familiar feelings, and an unbearable pressure would slip from my chest.

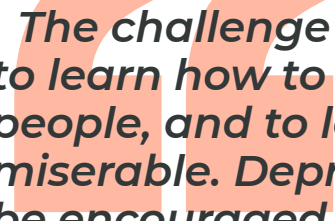
In season five, released on Netflix this summer, the politics stops being subtle. They help a gay pastor accept himself. They study the psychological violence of Black impoverishment in three

episodes with heroes bound by its chains. They show the struggle of migrant families through the eyes of a fishmonger and a pediatrician.

They even spend a week with a young climate activist, helping ensure that she and her Sunrise Movement housemates don't burn out in their drive to stop the planet from burning. And, of course, they return to their old theme of toxic masculinity.

While it's easy to criticise the show as consumerist 'change your wardrobe, change your life' claptrap, the underlying messages are much more positive. Again and again, men are supported to open up to those around them, and ask for help.

Where Jordan Peterson sees a world of individuals who must make themselves



The challenge for the left, then, is to learn how to organise miserable people, and to learn to organise while miserable. Depressed people shouldn't be encouraged to treat politics as a distraction from their misery, but to look straight into their misery, and use it as a lens to better understand the world and a motivation to change it, together

out loud – "I think I have some combination of depression and ADHD." And it had felt even better when the doctor listened, asked careful questions, prescribed fluoxetine for the former and referred me to a specialist for the latter – leading to a diagnosis this spring.

I'd got through the previous months with patient support from my partner, and two brilliant Netflix shows, Rachel Bloom's mental-health musical *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, and the rebooted *Queer Eye*, a careful exploration of toxic masculinity and male depression in the dying days of neoliberalism, neatly tucked into the format of a makeover reality TV show

In each *Queer Eye* episode, the 'Fab Five' co-hosts give a struggling hero – usually a depressed man – a lifestyle refresh: teaching him to cook something scrumptious, buying

strong, the Fab Five understand that we rely on each other. It's no coincidence that the show isn't based around a single, charismatic, middle-aged white male guru, but instead, a collective. It's not just chance that, while Peterson is only really an expert in magical thinking, the Fab Five each have their own, specific craft.

At the turn of the millennium, when the original aired, liberals in the US still largely believed in the American dream. Help people access the spaces of the class above them, and you give them a ladder to socially climb. The world is made of winners and losers, and the original Fab Five helped you win.

As we arrive in the 2020s, the next generation of liberals in the world's declining superpower are beginning to see through that mythology. Fulfilment doesn't come from reaching up, but from reaching out to those around you.

Despite the role of our economic system in producing the depression pandemic, Queer Eye – like the American liberalism it grows from – is missing an understanding of class.

That's not to say that it doesn't look at poverty. A number of its heroes are clearly imprisoned by lack of funds. But again and again, the lesson it teaches is that the path to financial security runs through entrepreneurialism. And this is where modern American liberalism evaporates in the daylight of reality. The data shows that people in the US consistently overestimate the possibility of social mobility, and repeating that bedtime story helps no one.

The final episode focuses on a gym owner in an historically Black area of Philadelphia. Gentrification threatens his business and his community. But the only response to this from the team is to modernise the gym – which, in all likelihood, won't be enough as the area's landlords jack up the rent.

Just as you can only really explain the astonishing popularity of the musical *Hamilton* when you understand it is an attempt by liberal America to snatch their country's foundation myth from the shadow of Trumpism, the popularity of *Queer Eye* makes most sense when you see it as an attempt to reframe the national myth: the American dream.

Generation after generation of US TV shows repackage the lie of the American dream, leading millions to miserable attempts that are doomed to fail, and luring them away from the statistically proven route to improving their prospects: workplace organising.

And this is why *Queer Eye* needs a makeover. Because just as social movements need to learn from *Queer Eye* about

masculinity, misery and joy, *Queer Eye* needs to learn from social movements about how real change happens. What better time than season six to introduce a sixth character, specialising in helping people organise not just the objects around them, but their community?

In some episodes, they might focus on workplace struggle, establishing a trade union branch with colleagues and helping them negotiate better conditions with employers. After all, the data is stark: US workers who are members of unions earn significantly more than those who aren't. And yet trade union membership has halved since 1983.

In some, they might knock on neighbouring doors and set up a tenants' union. All across the Western world, renters have responded to the housing crisis by getting organised. And in others, maybe they'd organise a marginalised neighbourhood to confront a local oppressor. Every community has plenty.

All politics is culture war: we interpret our material interests through lenses ground by society. And as the critic Raymond Williams powerfully argued, you can't separate culture as 'how we live together' from culture as 'the arts'. The latter is a powerful tool for carving the former.

And so as the *Queer Eye* crew look ahead to their next season, glinting with medals for their battles against patriarchy, it's time for them to start to unpick the American dream and expose it for what it is: the core lie at the heart of American nationalism.

With Black Lives Matter launching under the first Black president, the US has started to understand that change isn't a matter of individual progress. 'People like you' getting to the top of the ladder doesn't make it

easier to reach the rungs. Emancipation is achieved together, or not at all.

In last year's European elections, the far-right didn't do as well as many had projected. Since Trump's 2016 election, millions everywhere have been inspired to take part in politics, desperate to oppose his cruelty. Across the world, white supremacists and defenders of patriarchy aren't feeling dominant. Their shouts are the squeals of the losers, the howls of white men failing to adjust to a world we're increasingly being made to share.

In the coming years, millions of members of Generation Z will arrive in polling booths for the first time, and, across most of the Western world, polling consistently shows this is a cohort inspired not by Peterson, but by Greta Thunberg, Bernie Sanders and Black Lives Matter.

Adam Ramsay is Editor of OpenDemocracy

This is an edited extract of Adam's piece 'Queer Eye, Jordan Peterson and the battle for depressed men' first published on Open Democracy

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**Fulfilment doesn't
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GREEN & PLEASANT

LAND



*As we imagine the world we want to live in after the pandemic, **Sofie Jenkinson** examines the role of the parks, gardens and green space in our mental health*

Fingers in soil. Toes in sea. Air in lungs. When you've got a mental health problem the very weight of being alive can feel relentless. But, for me at least, my mind is rarely lighter and calmer and my mental health rarely better than when I'm doing something that connects me to the outside.

The black dog that sits and waits; the black cloud that billows large then small then large again; the heavy rock in the pit of your stomach; or the ice-cold boiling-hot juice that runs through your veins as soon as you wake up – whatever it is, there are some days when nothing helps. Truly nothing. And even opening the door to the outside world feels impossible. In those times feeling like you have somewhere safe to be – both inside and, ideally, out – is very important.

We've seen this play out in real time in the last few months, in the most extreme ways. If there was ever going to be anything that threw into sharp relief just how important space in the outside world is to our mental health, then a pandemic was surely it.

There are different kinds of space we need to feel safe, and then there are others we need to feel free. There's the very inner – a warm and safe and secure home. The immediate outer – any outdoor space available to you via your home. The places you live – your immediate streets and community and parks. And then there's the great outdoors – from the lakes and moors to rivers running through valleys and cities and national parks. And when we are lucky, some of that space is either ours or it's public.

The provision of public green space is so important – for people's health and, as we

have seen through lockdown, for people's sanity – somewhere to detach from work, to socialise and to find joy in the every day. The ancient Greeks knew how important public space was, they had central gathering places – agora – in all towns. The Victorians too who, during the industrial revolution, built parks into London as it was growing around them. Often referred to as the city's lungs parks gave respite to those working in the filth and the soot, rather than just those of a higher class simply taking a turn. And this didn't just happen in London but in other cities too – in Newcastle, Huddersfield, Derby.

And so, as we all became enclosed in our homes and time outside became government mandated and exercise-linked, the call of and need for the outside seems, for most, to have become stronger. The pandemic turned our parks from lungs to living rooms – and for many it made all the difference. Because those lungs, which were always there and oft used but never relied upon, have come into their own. Not just, as might have been the original aim of some of our parks, as a valve for relentlessness work but as a space to do the things that make a life a life – to meet, to talk, to play, to celebrate and commiserate, to comfort and love.

But as in many other areas, the crisis highlighted many existing inequalities: private outdoor space is limited, especially in cities, and is usually the preserve of the better-off; public green space is not uniformly good and not everyone feels welcome in it; and in this green and pleasant land a lot of our green space isn't even public to begin with.

Deprived urban areas were hit hardest when it came to limited access to public space – with the calls to close overcrowded parks likely to hit those on low wages, especially people of colour, harder. As my NEF colleagues Alex Chapman and Jasmeet Phagoora found in their research in April, the proportion of people visiting parks or public green spaces almost halved at the start of lockdown, with the reduction much

more pronounced in poorer local authorities than wealthier ones.

The evidence available shows that access to green space is usually more difficult for those on low incomes – ONS data shows that houses closer to green space are more expensive, and a study by a group of academics at Sheffield University found that population pressure on green space could be approximately 60% higher in the bottom income quintile compared to the top.

This crisis, which has made all of our worlds smaller, serves as a reminder to fight for easily accessible, high-quality public green space. Guy Shrubsole's tireless work in uncovering who owns the land in the first place has brought home just how stark the situation is – his work found that half of England is owned by less than 1% of its population. During lockdown Shrubsole, alongside Friends of the Earth, launched a campaign to open up golf courses to the public, as it turns out golf courses not only take up more space in Britain than parks but that they are used by far fewer people – just 1.34% of the population use golf courses whereas London parks alone receive 223m visits in a year. And so if we are to, as Chancellor Rishi Sunak put it recently, do more than simply exist we need high-quality public space that everyone can enjoy to be seen as priority, not just a luxury.

My Dad, the son of wool mill workers in Yorkshire, was born in the nook of a valley. No matter how hard people up there worked, when they left the floor there was always the moors – the horizon. "Among these dark satanic mills?" indeed. Maybe people love that song (Jerusalem) because of its uplifting timbre and the opportunities to shout-sing through or maybe it depicts what people think about when they think about 'home'. The patchwork of green, trimmed with the blue of the coast you see when you are landing at the airport. When I think of England, I think of green and of

sea. My Dad, who no longer lives in his beloved Yorkshire, tells me often about his longing for the moors – of what it means to have been born in a glacier-carved valley in the Pennines. He said that when he first moved away from the moors he yearned for the horizon and after a few years of living in London this was something I came to think of daily. I didn't grow up in a valley but instead enveloped in a crease of the Shropshire Hills – the kind that Houseman carved his words into. When I started to live more of my life indoors, in offices where windows didn't open and in cities where you rarely see the stars, I longed to plunge my hands into dirt. And since lockdown, living and working in a one-bed flat, I regularly long to jump into open water.

The last few months have been tough for most of us – the gnawing days of lockdown stretching ahead as we stutter and reach towards the elusive 'new normal'. Whether it should have done or not, this crisis came in hard and fast and took out a lot of what we had come to know. The structures we'd built, the routines and the dividing lines. But also the little moments of release that reconnected you with the world and dispersed some stress – like the breeze hitting your face as you finally leave work and make your way home. And so, as we cram all of the ripples of our lives into tiny spaces and roll back hard fought and won work/life boundaries, feeling diminished, we search for something to keep us sane, for something to give us those little moments. For the things that make life, life.

For those of us that experience any type of mental illness, the pandemic has thrown up a variety of different issues. As this year has worn on and the world has felt bleaker with every sunrise, many people's mental health has become worse. For me, the past six months have been splattered with quite a few dark spots, the last few weeks especially so. And not for the first time has the outdoors, the green, the sea, open water and a collection of pot plants been my saviour.

The year after I moved to London, in the aftermath of the pomp of the Olympics, I had a breakdown. I stopped being able to use public transport, which meant I used to get stuck – at work, at home, or on the street outside tube stations. I walked more, saw more, found more parks. As I emerged from this period of serious mental health crisis my friend took me to a plant shop tucked under a railway arch with a corrugated iron roof and I bought my first proper plant. As I started to recover I filled my room and my house to the gills with plants – usually the forgiving cheese plant who survived on the days where I could barely feed and wash

myself, let alone them. There was something soothing about their presence and watching them grow – giving something outside yourself life. I began to get better and care more about looking after them, and as I did so I found that looking after myself became easier too.

This love of (and need to) bring green inside for the days I couldn't be outside snowballed in the intervening years and my flat is slowing becoming a burgeoning jungle. In lockdown this has spread to the small morsel of semi-private outdoor space I have – a space that is not green and is not somewhere I thought a novice and patchy indoor gardener like myself would have any luck. But the act of pushing your hands into soil, planting a tiny seed and seeing what happens to is, it turns out, enough. There are tiny miracles every time you go out and check. And unlike the many, many other things I've tried in the past to occupy my mind, I didn't mind if I was bad at it. Everything else – painting (is the paper supposed to be this wet), lino cutting (ow that's my finger), drawing (is that a hand or a foot?), reading (I better just look that up), meditation (am I supposed to be thinking about what I'm having for tea?) just didn't go that well.

During lockdown seed sales skyrocketed and the Royal Horticultural Society reported that the number of people going to their website for advice grew fivefold. The joy I've experienced growing these little plants has endured, whether they've lived or died, whether I've excelled or just tried. And I guess all of this makes sense when trying to find hope, when digging for optimism – to be able to create something and watch it thrive. A simple pleasure, where the result brings joy, but if it turns out to be a disaster, it doesn't really matter.

If you think about how so many of us took solace in the green-ery of gardening or the outdoors in this time makes total sense – the connection between a healthy mind and time outside just seems logical. But what it is not is equally accessible to everyone – and it needs to be.

After a particularly bleak blast of news last week I stumbled across an episode of *Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing* set on the River Usk. Both men sat with their wellington-booted feet in the river, cup of tea in their hands, looking downstream as the sun hit the water. I found myself soothed and enthralled. "When my mother-in-law was knocking on", said Bob Mortimer, "I used to see her staring at a butterfly or a flower with a smile on her face...and I'm beginning to realise...it's worth living for that, isn't it?" As we get older, but also as we emerge from this

period of being inside or being in one place most of the time, I think we will all start to have those moments more.

As the world starts to return we have to think: what kind of world do we want to find? One with more space to be in, more time to be in it with people we love, more opportunity to marvel at the nature that surrounds us. Not just living to work – but part of an economy that supports us and builds green space not just for us to recover from work and be more productive, but to facilitate a good life, instead of living with eyes trained on a GDP point on a graph. An economy that doesn't only place value on a forest once it has been cut down.

The Reset inquiry alongside the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Green New Deal heard 55,000 people and found that overwhelmingly people want a greener, fairer country. Meanwhile the Climate Assembly recommended a range of ideas to Parliament for reaching net zero, their main priorities focused on restoring the natural world, local community, and engagement and urgency. And the big man himself David Attenborough, talking about his new series about life on the planet, acknowledged the problematic relationship between the natural world and capitalism, saying: "... you have to have the wisdom to realise that you can live sustainably, that it is possible that your economics could live on a rather different system from the one which is based on profit."

So what we are waiting for? Let's use this moment to fight for and build a society, an economy and a world that puts people and planet at its heart. One with secure, high-quality jobs that support a green economy and give people a comfortable amount to live on, more publicly-owned land for us all to enjoy, and more rights to explore the land we don't own, more paid time off to spend among what we love – people or trees..

As Arundhati Roy puts it: "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way...on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing."

Sofie Jenkinson is the Head of Communications and News at the New Economics Foundation and Trustee of Rethinking Economics

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The page is decorated with various teal-colored leaf illustrations of different shapes and sizes, scattered around the text.

THE REVIEW: LOSING EDEN

WORDS BY MARGARET WELSH



“

Alienation from the natural world is a factor in the mental health crisis in the West.” That’s the thesis of *Losing Eden: why our minds need the wild* by Lucy Jones. The book explores the evidence that spending time in nature is vital for our mental health, from relaxing our attention, to maintaining our circadian rhythms, and triggering our parasympathetic nervous system. Time interacting with the natural world is now used as treatment for mental health problems, from mild or moderate (often through ‘social prescriptions’) to severe and complex.

One of the most fascinating chapters looks at research which is beginning to investigate the effects of exposure to soil on the intricate communities of microbes which live in the human body. Our bodies’ microbes influence “our health and well-being through complex ecological processes” including treating chronic inflammation, associated with decreased resistance to stress and depression. Jones writes: “Our microbiota are healthiest when they are diverse – and a diverse microbiota is influenced positively by an environment filled with organisms, which are found more

abundantly in outside space than inside.”

For Jones, this research is not just informative – it’s personal. Throughout *Losing Eden* she traces stories from her own life, including a decade of depression and alcohol abuse. She attributes her recovery to psychiatry, medicine, psychotherapy, human support – and spending time in nature:

“Walking daily on Walthamstow Marshes [...] I started to feel that I belonged to a wider family of species, a communion of beings, the matrix of life, from the spiders to the lichen and the cormorants to the coots.”

This personal angle stops the book from being a list of scientific studies. It’s a call to go outside and stick your hands in some soil.

But the mental benefits of time in nature



***It's a call to go outside
and stick your hands
in some soil.***

are becoming inaccessible: “Simply put, we’ve moved inside. We live in cubicles, cars and tower blocks, spending only 1 to 5



per cent of our time outdoors.” For those of us who can spend time in natural spaces, environmental depletion limits what we can experience. “[O]ur economic systems, our obsession with infinite growth and the way we perceive the world around us” are responsible for our ecological and climate crises. This is a vicious cycle: our non-relationship with nature impacts on our mental health and makes us less likely to defend natural spaces and species. And the resulting losses will intensify our mental health crisis further.

But Jones avoids the easy conclusion that to fight the mental health crisis everyone should spend more time outside. Access to nature is not evenly spread across society:

“Children who live in deprived areas are nine times less likely to have access to nature, through green space and places to play, than children in affluent areas, who may also have access to private gardens. Children living in the poorest homes are six times more likely to have never set foot in a wild open space than those in more affluent circumstances.”

In the UK, people from ethnic minority groups or with lower socio-economic status are less likely to have access to natural spaces. For working-class people, argues Jones, exclusion from the countryside began with the start of enclosure in 1604 and has finished with fewer than 200,000 families owning two-thirds of countryside land.

When poverty is the main driver of mental health issues, inequality of access has serious health repercussions. Richer people can ‘buy’ their way out of stress through expensive leisure activities and holidays. But for poorer people, access to soothing natural space is vital. This means access to nature can reduce health inequalities – environments which do this are called ‘equigenic environments’.

Our economic system hovers just out of sight in Losing Eden. While innovative ‘social prescription’ for time in nature opens up new possibilities for mental health treatment, local authorities have adopted it as a response to austerity, with the activities carried out by the voluntary sector. (Full disclosure: I first met Lucy Jones while volunteering with the Women’s Environment Network at one of these ‘green care’ sessions at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park in east London.) ‘Equigenesis’ was developed by a researcher who became

disillusioned with his attempts to reduce structural health inequality and wanted an approach that could be carried out on a short timeframe.

One question the book doesn’t explore is: how much nature counts as ‘enough’ to have a positive impact on our mental health?

The answer seems to vary throughout the book. Edward Osborne Wilson, who coined the term ‘biophilia’, says that “lawn grass, potted plants, caged parakeets, puppies, and rubber snakes are not enough.” One

“**Our warming climate means that nowhere is untouched by human impact. If we can’t define what is ‘natural’, then how can we say that ‘nature’ is good for our mental health?**”

study suggests that employee wellbeing can be impacted by pot plants and views of trees out the windows of an office. In one Chicago housing project, researchers found that a few trees and some grass close to their apartment was enough to improve residents’ wellbeing.

But what counts as ‘nature’ anyway? The separation between humans and ‘nature’ is a pretty fuzzy one. We think of the countryside as ‘natural’ but much of our farmland is monocultural, sustained by artificial fertilisers and pesticides, and devoid of wildlife. Even before the Industrial Revolution, humans still changed the environment around them through practices like coppicing or animal grazing. Even the most remote parts of the world aren’t ‘natural’. Our warming climate means that nowhere is untouched by human impact. If we can’t define what is ‘natural’, then

how can we say that ‘nature’ is good for our mental health?

If we only define what is ‘natural’ as what is not-human, then it’s confusing to suggest that a managed urban park is a natural space that benefits our mental health. But Jones recognises that it’s more complicated: “‘Nature’ itself is problematic as a word because, of course, we are part of nature even if we don’t think we are, or accept we are, so in a way it solidifies the separation between people and the rest of the living world.” Investigations into how our environment affects our microbiome show that “[w]e imagine our skin and bodies to be armoured, or a shell impenetrable to the outdoors, that we have somehow transcended our biological origins” but “we are woven into the land, and wider ecosystems, more than we realise”. This sentiment – that access to nature is vital to our mental health, and that we are already more entwined with nature than we realise – is the book’s most important message.

Margaret Welsh is communications officer at the New Economics Foundation.

WHAT IS A ZINE?

Since we published the last issue of the New Economics Zine, we've had quite a few people ask us: "Why a zine?" We thought it might be worth a little explanation, as the origins of the humble zine are quite interesting.

A zine (pronounced 'zeen' as in 'magazine') is defined as a small-circulation self-published magazine or fanzine which usually consists of a mixture of original and appropriated work, produced by a small group of people. Traditionally zines are produced and reproduced using a photocopier (or earlier on a mimeograph) to keep costs low, with contents hand-cut and -pasted, and usually have a circulation of 1000 or lower (with many having runs of less than 100).

Zines have been a significant means of communication and community creation in subcultures across the world for many years. They were commonly used as a way of sharing and developing skills and telling people's stories rather than as a way of making money.

Zines started their modern-day life in the 1930s and 40s in the science fiction community following a letter page in a popular magazine opening up communication lines between fans. The Comet, created by Science Correspondence Club is considered to be one of the first. Today the word 'zine' itself is usually added on to a descriptor eg political zine or literary zine.

Next came comic zines and horror zines and others connected to sci-fi circles, before zines made their way over to the music community. In the mid-60s rock fanzines appeared and were carried into existence for the next few decades – including a generous handful on The Boss (Bruce Springsteen). In the 1970s zines became an integral part of punk culture, particularly in the DIY and hardcore scenes, though many used the term 'punkzine' to signal that they were not publications designed to uncritically celebrate any band or musician and to reject that element of celebrity (and capitalist) culture. Some of the most notable publications include UK-based Sniffin' Glue who covered bands like The Clash, The Ramones, and Joy Division and Maximum Rocknroll, a punk and hardcore zine based in San Francisco, which started life in 1982 and only closed its doors

last year.

Later, zines turned up to a spectacular degree in the 90s riot grrrl scene through bands like Bikini Kill, Heavens to Betsy, Bratmobile, L7, and Sleater-Kinney. Both Bust (first published 1993) and Bitch (published 1996) started out as zines connected to riot grrrl and later became full-scale magazines. Riot grrrl was a subculture that made its home in the intersection between punk, politics and feminism often touching on issues such as patriarchy, domestic and sexual abuse, race and class and female empowerment. By 1993, an estimated 40,000 zines were being published in North America alone, many of them devoted to riot grrrl music and politics. Current London-based punk band Dream Nails are from this tradition and have published a couple of zines to go with their music releases in recent years stating: "DIY is about never asking permission, about being self-sufficient and about believing in yourself. In a capitalist patriarchy where women are told to be dependent, DIY is about developing your own strength. Instead of waiting for someone to tell you you're good enough, tell yourself!"

Zines were popular for lots of reasons – they gave people creative freedom to make and talk about what they wanted, they also acted as very useful methods of communicating with groups, and before the days of the internet they gave people not just creative outlets but ways of getting their voices heard. Then, as now, the means of production and the capital to invest in machinery like printing presses was accessible to very few people – consolidating the power of those who were able to produce news and print. So being able to produce your own counter information was very valuable. The tradition of using leaflets and pamphlets and small-circulation newspapers and publications to spread information, create community and find like minds goes back far – from the tracts detailing the most important political and religious issues of the time in the mid-1600s leading up to the English Civil War, through the anonymous leaflet campaign of anti-Nazi resistance group White Rose in World War II, through to the modern-day leaflets handed out by Extinction Rebellion. Zines are just one part of that story but have played a very particular role in radical and activist spaces throughout the last century.

The development of desktop publishing software such as Quark and Indesign (which is how we make ours!) led, to some degree, to the professionalisation and democratisation of publishing for the masses as it allowed you to do at home what those in newspaper and magazine offices had been doing for a while. It replaced the big sheets of metal with letters and pictures on a plate (in essence a big stamp) made out of moveable type placed by hand or casting of the type in molten lead with picking up a text box and shifting it across the page. But, fun fact, many of the tools you find in desktop publishing take their names from metal typesetting, such as leading and kerning. All major publications of course now use desktop publishing and digital printing with most phasing out hot metal and linotype printing in the late 70s and 80s. When the Guardian stopped hot metal printing in 1987, they held a mock funeral for the practice.

Traditional zines initially seemed to die down with the emergence of desktop publishing and the internet as avenues for expression and communication. But zines remain alive – you can buy a zine about birds, about restaurants, about art and literature, about things men have said at work, about sexuality, about politics, about basically every aspect of life. And there's even a zine about zines called Broken Pencil.

We felt like the name 'zine' was appropriate because we planned a small-circulation, non-profit and accessible product that, at its heart, is battling with the widely-held orthodox notions of mainstream economics. We wanted this to be a space where those ideas can be shared and can flourish from anyone, not just academics or those inside thinktanks.

While we acknowledge that our zine is not hand cut, pasted and photocopied we believe the spirit of the original zine movement is held in the way we commission, make and distribute the zine. We commission, edit and layout everything in house, feature original artwork from at least two illustrators every issue and print on sustainable and recycled sources of paper through a company that used to be a printing coop in Manchester, born out of Rochdale Alternative Press.

But, whatever you think of the name, and whatever you think of 'zines', we very much hope that you enjoy reading our little project.

CONTENT WARNING: BRIEF MENTION OF SUICIDE

A DEDICATION TO ED

I would like to dedicate this issue to someone who is no longer with us. In fact, I would like to dedicate it to all those who are no longer with because of mental illness.

I met Ed at university while working on the student newspaper as I sat typing directly into Quark, like I am typing directly into Indesign now – very much frowned upon! Together we trained to be magazine journalists – laying out pages like this and staying up to the wee small hours trying to get things ready for print. I was always late and always stressed and he always seemed so together and ready for anything – there was basically no book he'd not read, and I've yet to meet a more effortlessly brilliant writer. He was a swan, swimming so calmly with his feet pumping underneath. And most of us didn't realise.

As soon as I met Ed I felt I'd know him forever. He was one of the most brilliant people I've ever known – he wasn't like everybody else and there was something about him that spoke to me, and me him. We both struggled with our mental health but for a long time I didn't know that – or at least I didn't realise I knew that. There was something about the way we knew each other and understood each other that made more sense once I knew.

If and when people found out

he struggled they were usually very surprised. But I don't think I was. The weight of the world as it is, especially when your brain is prone to thinking and thinking and thinking of the million and one ways things can go wrong, worrying about how you may let people down and chalking up all the ways you miss the mark – well, that can take its toll. This is a weight I know very well, one I am sure he did too. And there is always so much going on for people we may never know.

Two years ago I lost my friend when he took his own life.

I wanted to dedicate this issue to Ed for a few reasons. Firstly, because I miss him. I miss his birthday-card-hating, prose-toting, book-reading, dry-witted presence in the world. And I think a lot of people have someone to remember and so I wanted there to be a space for us to remember how much we miss them.

Secondly, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be where I am right now, laying out this magazine for you, without him. I certainly wouldn't have made it through those years of university without him and I might have given up doing anything with this skill at all had I not had his support.

And third, the thing that killed my friend kills thousands of people every single year and I will no longer let a moment pass where I keep my silence on it. An underfunded and ineffective

system is what greets those that find themselves mentally unwell – and it's not good enough. Being put on a medication that 'might do the trick' is not good enough, pontifications in newspaper columns about people going to the GP because they want to be put on 'happy pills' (which couldn't be further from the experience) is not good enough, campaigns calling for the end of stigma and increased awareness that don't mention lack of properly funded or adequate services aren't good enough, and an economy that only truly values your financial worth, your productivity and your professional success is so obviously flawed it seems silly to even point out.

And so this dedication is borne out of remembrance, of love and of anger.

Ed deserved so much more from the services that were supposed to be there to help him. Services that have been systematically ignored and underfunded by government after government. He deserved more from an economic system than one there to laud how busy you are and what your job is and not how much of a great person you are. And he deserved more from the world.

So let's fight for a world where people want to be and want to stay – to live and be happy. We all deserve that.

– *Sofie Jenkinson*

WHERE TO GO IF YOU NEED HELP AND SUPPORT:

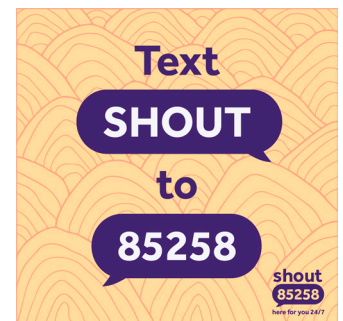
If you need help of advice or have been affected by anything discussed in this issue you can contact:



Contact Samaritans for free anytime from any phone on 116 123 even from a mobile without credit. This number won't show up on your phone bill. Or email jo@samaritans.org or visit www.samaritans.org



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