

UnBound Zine

ISSUE 4 | APRIL 2020



About UnBound

Unbound is a fully online magazine created in 2019 by Ohio-based musician, writer, and creative Lashonda Love. This magazine seeks to create a space for the voices and works of womyn, nonbinary, and transgender individuals as direct opposition to the frequent cis-male gatekeeping in professional creative communities.

Up-to-date submission calls and guidelines can be found at both unbound-zine.com and daisie.com.

Any and all inquiries can be sent to the UnBound Team at [**unboundzine@gmail.com**](mailto:unboundzine@gmail.com).

ABOUT ISSUE NO. 4/APRIL 2020

Dear Zinesters,

To our collaborators: You have done it again. You have done it in quarantine and through global crisis. You have created, contributed and shown us the raw and beautiful edges of your experiences and your talent. Issue 4 called you to create and share your works aligned with our theme of "mental health". Your work made me cry, laugh, Google things I had never heard of, and send group texts to the *UnBound* team saying "holy shit you have to see this". "You have to read this". I am proud of you. You are loved. You are brilliant and blinding and your voice *is* heard. Thank you.

To our readers: the following pages are heavy. Dark. Beautiful. Painful. Warm. Loving. These works represent our collective in all of our explorations of trauma, healing, growth, and community. Not every story or work is "happy" or "positive" and that rawness is just the way we like it.

I am incredibly grateful for the support and love of all you lovely zinesters and I am honored to share Issue 4 of *UnBound* with you.

If you would like to be featured in a future issue of the zine, please visit unbound-zine.com/submissions or email unboundzine@gmail.com.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lashonda Love". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Lashonda" and "Love" being capitalized and prominent.

Executive Director

Content/Trigger Warnings

Please read before continuing

Issue 4 of *UnBound* features works created with our “mental health” theme in mind. This work was created for a variety of reasons, but is published here to be shared with our community. Due to the nature of the content contained in this issue, we have decided to preface the following pages with a general content and trigger warning. Some of the topics covered in this issue are: depression, anxiety, PTSD, abuse/assault, the Manchester bombing (additional trigger warnings are included prior to the pages of this work), self-harm, suicidal thoughts and ideation, and dysphoria.

We understand that these topics can be painful and triggering for individuals to encounter and encourage our readers to seek out support systems as they engage with these works. If you feel that any of these topics will trigger you or create unnecessary discomfort/unease please practice the self-care of sitting this issue, or those particular works, out.

With Love,

UnBound Team

Al Di Lorenzo

THEY/THEM

 @almakesart

Al is an artist from Columbus, Ohio. Their work centers around themes of art, community, and technology. They use analogue and digital media to explore how these themes can come together to create ideal futures.

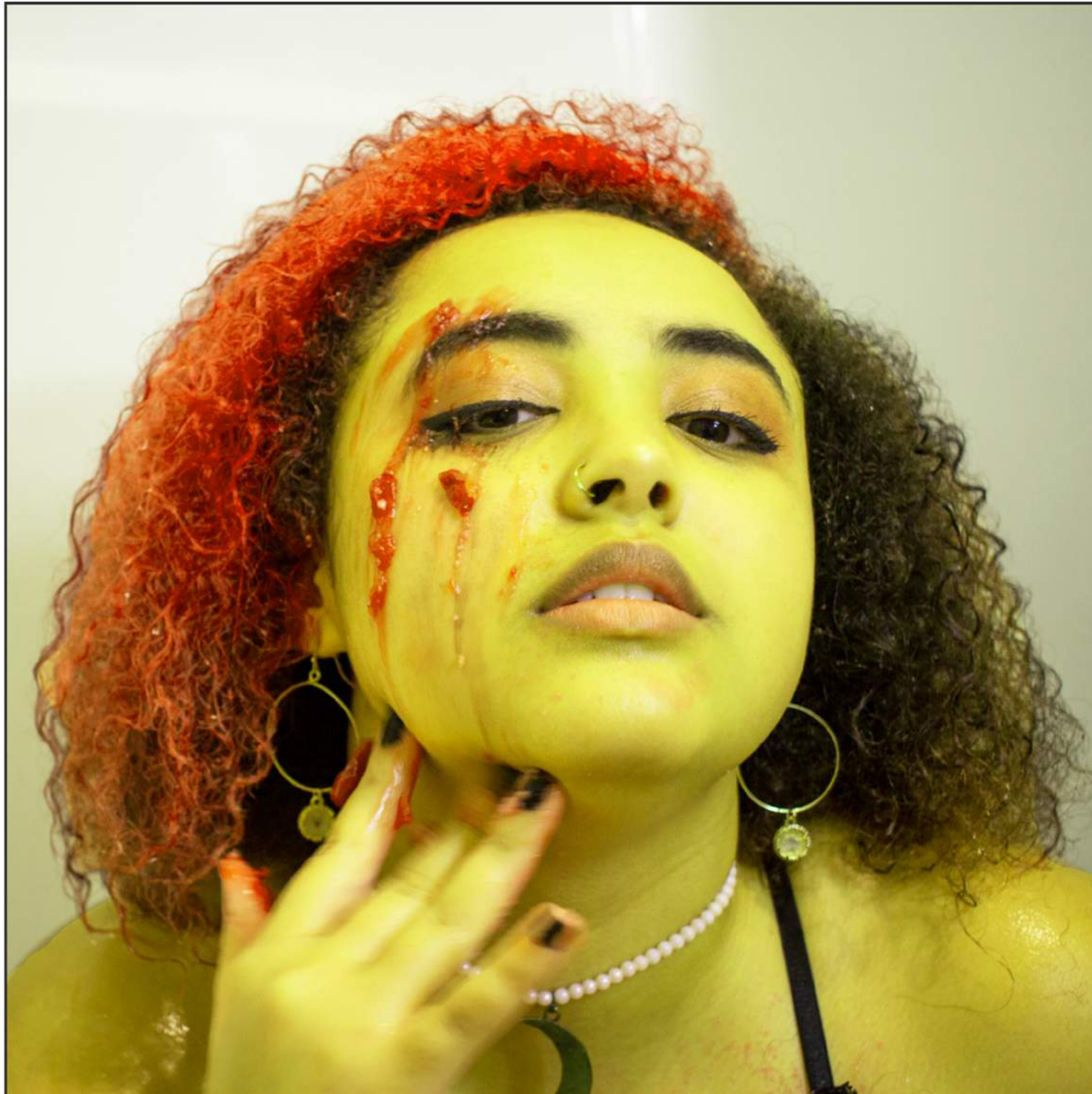
The images in this series, *Lov#*, contemplate mental health in a time of crisis. When so much seems out of control, coping can be difficult. In order to feel less subjected to reality, there is an alternate light that can be tuned into. This light is the inner being, a sun that shines from inside and helps one to grow when external conditions are less than ideal. Times may be tough, but if we can take care of ourselves and our loved ones, we'll be alright.

Email - aldilorenzoart@gmail.com

Website - www.aldilorenzo.art

"Light of Mind" 2020





"Green Queen" 2020



"Iris" 2020

Anne Mills

SHE/HER

Anne is a young, independent woman who currently lives in Columbus, Ohio. A recent college graduate, she is currently working at a women-owned financial planning firm, where she is constantly empowered by the strong women around her. Born a writer, Anne's voice has always been more powerful via written than it is spoken. As a profound thinker and listener, Anne's narrative is centered on what she sees and how she interprets it. As writing is one of the most powerful forms of self-reflection, she is hoping that her works will help her discover more about her place in this world, how her mental health is connected to her environment, and how this is all related to greater social forces at power. While everyone has an individual story, Anne hopes that her writing will relate to others and empower them to recognize their own voice.

A BREAKUP LETTER TO MY ANXIETY

Dear Anxiety,

I don't remember what it was like to live without you. For the longest time, you were a friend. When I was in danger, you protected me. When I was scared, you comforted me. You were always there in the back of my mind during the worst of times. Somewhere down the road, I confused your presence with security.

Despite all the good you did for me as a child, our relationship is no longer healthy. This change occurred gradually, and began with a few white lies. I would hear someone whisper, and you would tell me it had to be about me. Someone would look at me a certain way, and you would tell me that they had to be mad with me. Eventually, the way you would bend the truth became more manipulative. You convinced me to stay home, because no one really wanted me to come to the party. It was you who persuaded me that no matter what I do, I will never be good enough. I try to hide from you, anxiety, but you are there even on the best days. Instead of congratulating me at my college graduation, you gifted

me with the unshakeable feeling that I will always be a failure. You held the puppet strings in my romantic relationships, controlling how much of myself I gave to the other person. I can't trust other people, because you claim they'll never love me anyway.

You're always lurking in the shadows, but I know you're near; my heartbeat quickens, my palms dampen with sweat, the chills travel up and down my spine. In many ways you've made me a prisoner in my own body. So, I'm ending this relationship in order to free myself. I'm learning how to manage and embrace the uncertainty that you taught me to hate. I'm stronger without telling me how to feel. Don't try to stay, I'll just keep turning you down.

Anju Art

SHE/HER

I am a mixed media artist that primarily works with acrylics and resin. I make functional Art, paintings and jewelry.

All works created 2020

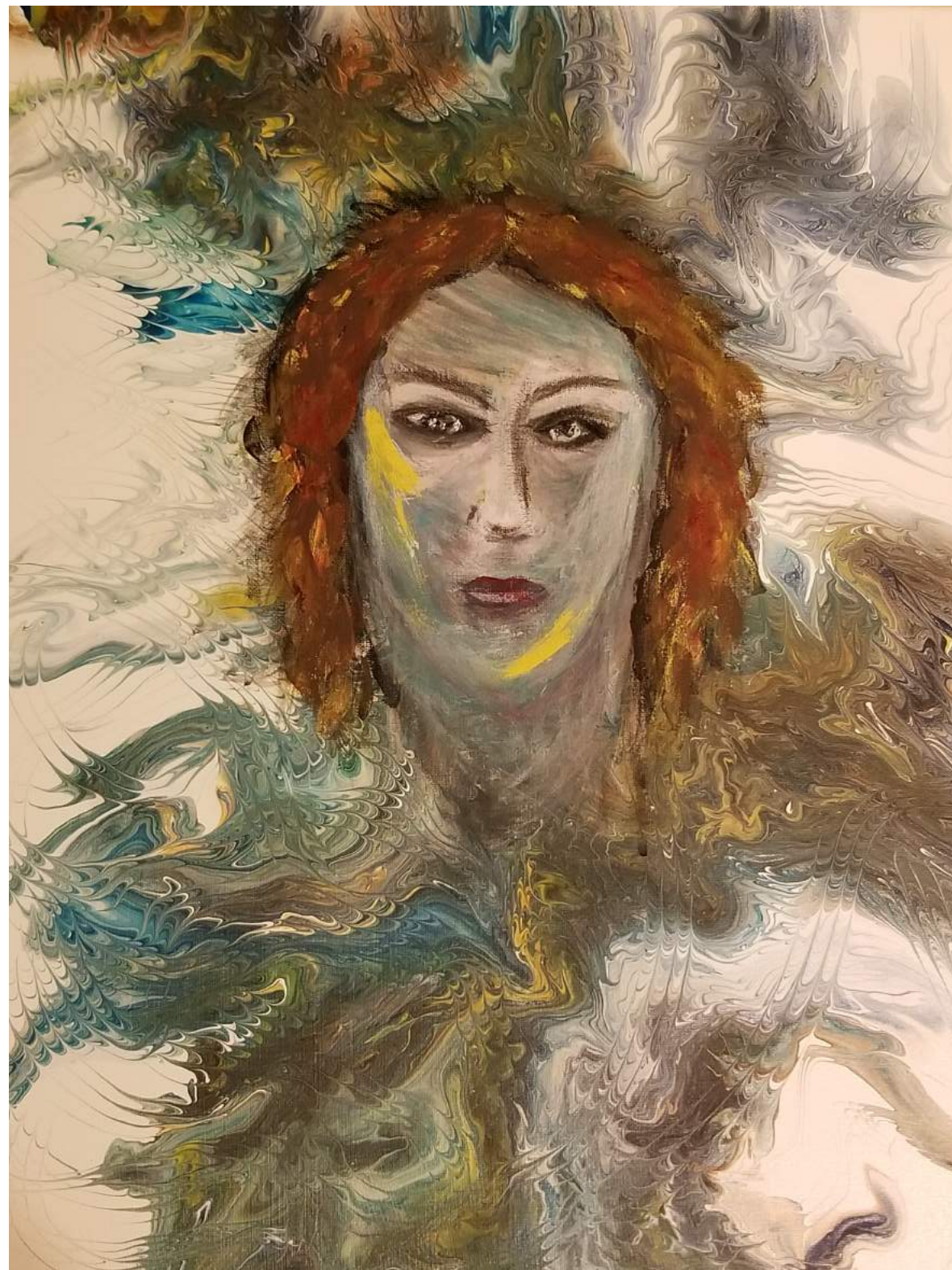
8x10

Watercolor and pencils
Flashbacks

11x14

Acrylics
The Awakening





Candice Cook

SHE/HER

my name is Candice and I'm 25 years old and I identify as a female. I grew up around licking county and have three young sons. I was raised by a single mother, which also means a strong woman. I have always had a passion about getting out how I feel, which is why I wrote these poems.

DEPRESSION

I can just sit here and literally feel my heart sink to the bottom of the ocean. All of my energy drained, my heart got over-flooded with all of this rain. No one knows, no one sees, no one understands, not even me. It's so hard to hide it, because when this smile isn't shining, people begin to notice something strange about it. I don't want them to see, to see the monster hiding inside of me.

She hides in the darkest corner of my body, so no one knows. She comes to me in my weakest moments to make sure I'm never alone. Her presence keeps me up at nights, it's like I am fighting an invisible fight. Some days I am convinced that she has won, and that my fight is away and finally done.

But then I wake up to the morning sun, and realize that I AM STRONG.
(Even at her weakest moments, she shows strength.)

(UNTITLED)

These words that you speak to me hurts more than just skin deep.

The violent gestures you show to me comes back to haunt me in my sleep.

When you suddenly awaken me in my peace, I startle to the sound because of what you've done to me.

You've pounded in my head countless times how worthless I am and how I deserve less than a dime.

You broke me from the inside out, and I stayed to watch you do it.

I'm just as guilty as you are, I'm just working myself through it.

I'm broken inside, everything that once was happy died.

You took everything from me, how else can you torture me?

I beg to be free, how do you have the power to take that from me?

When I look around I feel negativity and hate towards me. How can I try so hard and end up no where I want to be?

Charlotte Leighton Woods

SHE/HER

 @midnight_maverickfx

My name is Charlotte, a 19 year old SFX Makeup student from the UK. I'm off to university in September to study at Pinewood Studios, and I love using creativity to make the world a better place and raise awareness.



Trigger Warning

Manchester Arena Bombings

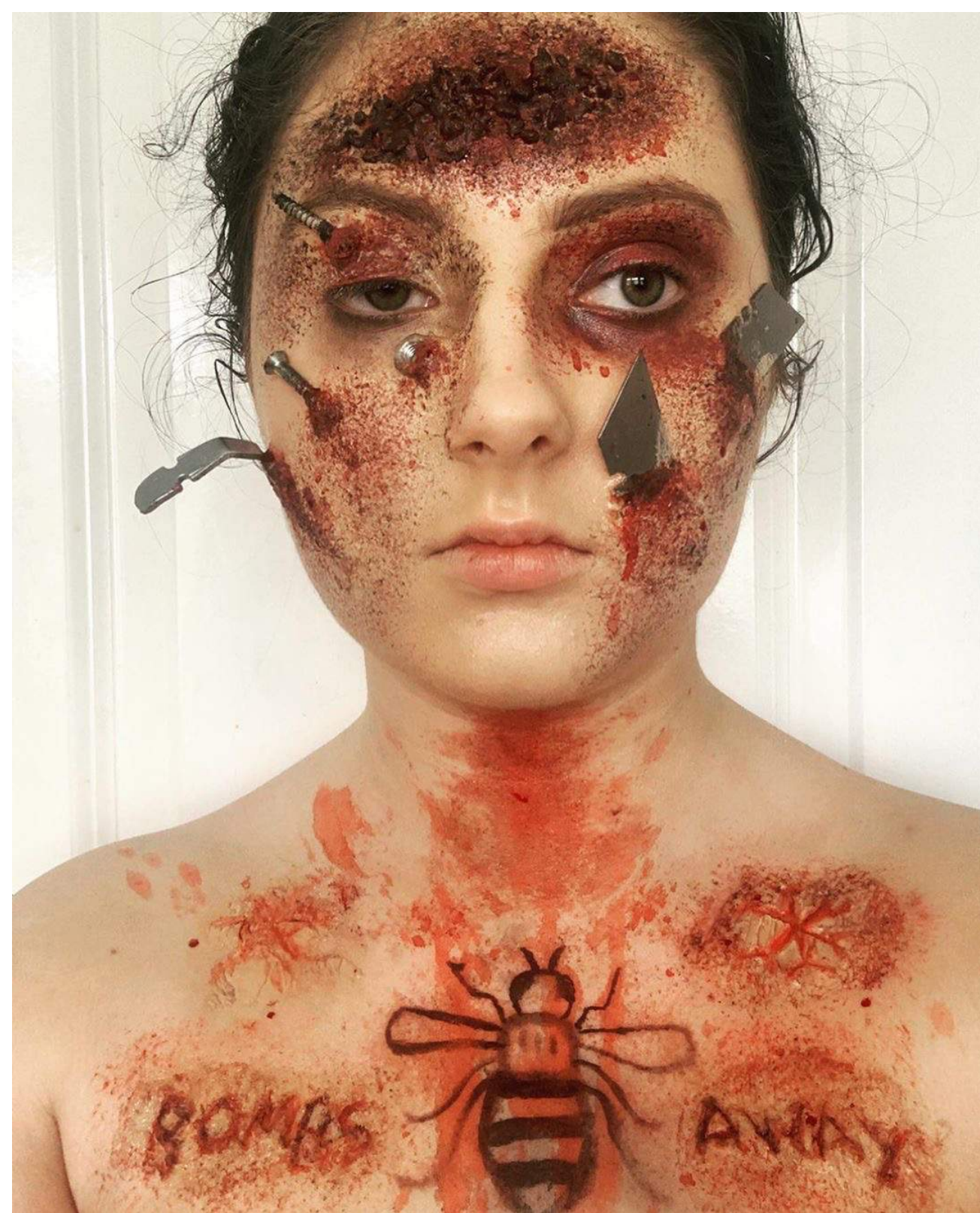
What you are about to see is purely SFX makeup, however it depicts the image of a victim of a shrapnel bomb, along with other pieces of makeup relating to a controversial song by Eminem that has caused a lot of upset

This has been created to spark awareness to people ignorant to the subject and how truly horrific it was, not to cause offence, nor to make money, unlike Eminem.

I understand that what I have created could be incredibly upsetting, and so I've taken every opportunity to point this out as not to upset anyone. The makeup will be the next picture, please do not swipe if you think it may upset you.

This is a buffer page courtesy of the UnBound Team.

Let me tell you a story about a person destroyed by a terrorist attack. That person is me. That person was 22 Ariana fans. That person was 139 wounded. That person was 14,200 people who attended. That person was the families of those affected. Those people are not, and will never be 'too sensitive' to this subject. We are not snowflakes for being hurt, wounded, scarred, or for mourning. We are not snowflakes for not understanding the need for people to try to make money off our pain. Eminem did this, because apparently the only way he can sell music is by using 'shock lyrics' what a shame his talent alone can't do this. But this isn't about Eminem. This is about those who defend his choices by insulting the hurt. You're entitled to your opinions and your music choice, but don't you dare tell me that I, or anyone else, are over reacting for not understanding why the most horrific day of our lives was used for a line in a song to make MONEY. This is the reality. What I have painted for you today might look scary, disgusting, shocking, so imagine what the day was like. Imagine holding your friends hand while you run through a crowd of terrified people, you can smell burning, you can hear crying, an explosion ringing in your ear, that explosion is still ringing, it still rings in my ear. This is the reality, this is what your song is about, pain, horror and death. Am I still too sensitive?



This is a buffer page courtesy of the UnBound Team.

Christy Olson, MSW, LICSW

SHE/HER

Christy Olson, MSW, LICSW, is a therapist who specializes in supporting clients who live with chronic illness and chronic pain. She is passionate about social justice, musical theater, and cheese, and she hates having to charge her phone so often.

You can find more of her work

at www.dazzlingspoonscounseling.com/blog and www.facebook.com/DazzlingSpoonsCounseling.

DO YOU HAVE TO, DO YOU HAVE TO SAY 'MALINGER'?

"The child asks to stay home from school frequently; I suspect malingering."

When I read that sentence in an online group for therapists, my blood boiled. *Malingering* means to "exaggerate or feign illness in order to escape duty or work," according to the first hit from the Google search on my smartphone. As a therapist, my reaction stems from my belief that it's my job to stay curious and not rush to judgment about clients. It also bothered me because people have said similar things about me.

You are allowed to fire your doctor

I have Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS), a genetic connective tissue disorder that I've had since birth. But I was undiagnosed for the first half of my life and then misdiagnosed for most of the second half of it, because no one believed me about my own experience. When I brought this to my father's attention recently, he just said, "we thought you were making it up." We could debate the appropriateness of this attitude in a parent, but there is no question that it was unethical on the part of the doctors who clearly thought that same thing about me. The first doctor I asked for help with applying for disability, the one who misdiagnosed me with fibromyalgia, told me, "I am not going to help you try to get out of

working.” After that I never tried again. I didn’t know I had the right to change doctors; I kept seeing him for almost six years. I wish someone had told me I could fire him. I never got to read what he wrote in my medical record, and now I am not sure that I should. I probably don’t want to.

A troubling trend

Lucy*, a medical coding auditor who lives with chronic pain, agrees with me. “This very thing gets to me on a daily basis,” she said. “Sometimes I feel that [providers] document their inner opinions and forget their audience and permanence of the medical record. I do get that there are difficult situations that are necessary to note, but some are just troubling.” Lucy also believes that many therapists need to do better when it comes to listening to their clients and understanding what they go through medically. “There is a huge need for mental health professionals that understand the complexity of these conditions.” Lucy told me she’d gone to a therapist who “claimed to have experience with chronic pain patients...but she clearly did not understand.” While I wish she’d had a better experience, I’m glad Lucy knew that she deserved someone who would listen to her and that she could fire her therapist.

A collection of judgment and prejudice

In *The “M” Word: Accusations of Malingering are Harmful to Patient Care*, Joshua Ellis said, “the seed of doubt grows into a small tree of criticism which blooms into a collection of judgment and

prejudice that prevent the patient from receiving the care that he or she deserves. All of this can happen after a patient is accused of malingering.” This can look like Gina being told by her doctor to “just take some Tylenol,” when she has undiagnosed endometriosis. It can look like Brian, who has hypermobility in his knees, which causes him to frequently collapse when going up and down stairs, receiving instructions from his physical therapist to “run more on the treadmill to build up those muscles, and be sure to stretch after”—when he should be reducing impact on his knees and learning to control his range rather than increasing it—because “he must be making it up.” It can look like Heather, a single mother who holds it together in public for her children being denied mental health care because “patient seems fine—likely a drug-seeker,” even though she spends her nights anxious and crying, terrified that she won’t be able to cope much longer.

These people, and too many others like them, have a hard-enough time already without so-called “helping professionals” making things worse. You always hear stories about somebody who knows somebody who’s taking advantage of the system, who’s committing fraud, who’s just looking for drugs or a handout. As a therapist, I have never met one of those somebodies. I only see people who are far too hard on themselves, who usually won’t accept the help they need because their greatest fear is being “a burden,” so they rarely mention their pain. It’s time for health-care professionals to start paying attention and believing their patients. It’s time for *malingers* to get the hell out.

**Names have been changed for privacy*

A RECIPE FOR SELF-COMPASSION

I have an activity hangover today. Earlier this week, my gastroparesis flared more intensely than it has in a long time (the improvement was a good thing, but it also lulled me into a false sense of security), so I was already down a few spoons for the week. Then yesterday evening I went to a book signing, one that I'd been eagerly anticipating for several weeks. Fortunately, my partner was willing to drive. He picked me up at work, and then it took us about 45 minutes to get to the event, which we'd anticipated. What came as a surprise was how long we had to sit and wait after that. It started at 7 p.m., so I thought we'd be done by 8:30 or 9. By 9, I had started to think about leaving. My chair had no arms to lean on for support and very little padding. It felt like my nerves were being crushed between metal and bone. By 10, I really wanted to leave. Even though I was exhausted, I had to get up and walk around to relieve the pain. But I kept telling myself that leaving without getting what we came for would be worse than toughing it out. When it was finally our turn with the author, even though we got her autograph and a photo op, I could think of nothing clever or meaningful to say. (I hope I thanked her!) After that, we left—at 11.

Measuring spoons

On the way home, my physical pain improved somewhat, thanks to the padded seats in the car, but I couldn't shake an uneasy sadness. As my partner, who is usually in bed by 10, sped silently up I-5 (I assume he was trying to beat the laws of physics through sheer force of will), I searched for the source. Then it hit me.

"Uh, I don't know how to say this to make it seem any better..." I trailed off.

"Just say it," he said, not unkindly but with a sigh.

"I think it wasn't worth it. And I think it was only worth it to you because you knew how much I wanted it. So now I feel doubly bad. I really want to measure my spoons better before I suggest another event for us."

I don't remember exactly what he said—something about how it's true but it's OK—that I couldn't have known how things would go. He's always understanding and reassuring, and I appreciate it. I still feel guilty sometimes.

I know that I shouldn't, though. Because how do you measure accurately when the recipe is different every time and no one tells you how many spoons you'll need until you've run out? *Mise en place* is damn near impossible when you live with a chronic illness (or two or three or...). So pretty much all I've done today is shower, eat, and watch TV (my partner is a therapist too, and he'd never seen *Frasier*, so we have a lot of bingeing ahead of us!). While I'm always saying things like "your worth is not determined by your productivity" and "when your body tells you to rest, listen" to my clients, we all know it's a lot harder to believe those things about yourself. If you're struggling with that right now, I hope it helps to know that therapists do too. And though it's still easier said than done, the best thing for all of us is *self-compassion*.

Progress, not perfection

Self-compassion says “I didn’t accomplish what I’d hoped for, but that’s OK because I’m human.” It says “I wish I’d planned better and avoided the pain and inconvenience, but there’s no way I could have known exactly what was going to happen.” Self-compassion allows us to treat ourselves the way we would treat the person we love most in the whole world. Who knows? With enough practice, the person you love most might just be yourself. For me, some days it’s true and some days it isn’t—and that’s OK, because I’m allowed to be a work in progress. You are allowed too.

In closing, I think it’s important to note that I did accomplish something else today: I wrote this blog post. I hope reading it made you feel less alone. But even if no one ever reads it or finds it helpful, I’m still going to be kind to myself about it. And I’m going to have some ice cream. How will you practice self-compassion and self-care today?

Eli Mercury

SHE/HER

 @modelstoneblue

Hi, there- I'm Eli. I'm a 23 year-old Gemini who chooses various creative outlets that include photography/modeling, and writing.

My work can be reflective of a couple different things:

First would be the acknowledgment of past trauma and the healing process associated with it, typically seen in my writing. It can be dark, and messy but it's important for me to acknowledge. Creating dark content gives me a safe way to express the negative things I've felt in life.

Second would be the reflection of my growth and confidence that I've worked so hard for, which is typically seen in my modeling and photography. It's self expression of my pride and self love. Creating beautiful images gives me the opportunity to show people the beauty I see in myself and the world around me.

RELAPSE

I'm keeping these feelings locked up, knowing nobody has the right key and if I had to guess, that's why I feel alone with so many people around me.

feeling empty, lonely, broken and craving a cut too but I'm hiding these emotions because they piss me off and they really upset you.

I'm on the bathroom floor and here come the tears, falling heavy like they've been building for years.

I can barely breathe; I grab a razor and pull up my sleeve- I remember you saying if I did it again, you'd fucking leave.

I quit for so long, dealt with the pain in so many other ways, but it feels like a losing battle I'm facing every day.

I'm holding my breath, I can't make any sound- if he finds me, how the fuck will I explain that I sometimes don't want to be around?

I don't remember my coping skills; I can't ask for help because if I open my mouth, I'm scared I'll scream so I close my eyes and pray this is just a bad dream.

the blade bites hard as I press down in a straight line, I put my head in my hands and try to tell myself everything's okay and that I'm fine.

DEAR ME

dear me,

we're only six and most days we do great, I'm so proud of all the progress we've made. we've done a great job managing our anger, and thinking before we speak, we're working on patience and smile a lot more. we've stopped fighting with our siblings and leaving toys on the floor. everyone agrees it was just a phase and they knew we'd overcome it.

dear me,

ten years old, look at that! we've grown so much but I'm a bit nervous about how long this phase is lasting- we're pretty sad and we say we want to die but that can't really be true I'm sure, we're just a kid and don't know any better. we won't clean our room and keep obsessing over death, the teacher at school is upset too because she caught us smoking cigarettes at recess. I know dad told us that we don't need help and to just stop being weak, but I don't think it's normal that when we're sad we lay in the street.

dear me,

how'd we make it to fifteen, isn't that crazy? I've googled our diagnosis every week since it was given to us a few years ago, guess it wasn't a phase. I don't know how much longer we'll last at the rate we're going. drinking, smoking, drugs, and boys? when did

we decide we liked to party when it already takes all our energy to get out of bed in the morning? I guess it's okay, people keep saying how much fun we are! mom and our therapist keep telling us we need to find happy things because they saw the cuts on our wrists, but everyone's smiling when we're getting high in the garage so I'm sure it's fine.

dear me,

twenty years old with a kid, that isn't where I saw this going but at least it got us sober. sometimes it's hard not to wonder where we'd be if we had gone through with the adoption. we must pull it together and stop crying ourselves to sleep at night, it's making us a bad mom and people will talk if we fuck this up. we can't think about killing ourselves or have fits of anger, we must better than that and lead by example.

dear me,

we made it to twenty-three and it cost us a lot but we're still here. some days it feels bad, but I think it's a good sign that we're not weak like dad said. I think it's a good sign that we can do anything we put our minds too! I wish there was something that made us feel better so living wasn't so hard, but medication and therapy were both a bust and it's a lot easier to just do us.

Emma Posey

SHE/HER

 @dystopiancake

These poems are all working with aspects of and rocks/minerals as metaphors for mental illness and trauma. "Pumice, Tabasheer, Sandstone, Diabase" is dealing with (PTSD), "Triboluminescence" uses the principal as a vehicle for exploring mental illness and "Diamond Dysphoria" is exploring dysphoria through the metaphor of diamonds. They were all written in 2020.

A little about myself. I enjoy writing, cosplay, painting, video games and pop culture criticism. I often find myself discussing identity or trauma in my creative works. I hold a Master of Arts in English from UMO (University of Maine Orono). I've been creating forever, but only recently starting to share my work publicly.

PUMICE, TABASHEER, SANDSTONE, DIABASE

Pumice feels abrasive,
Shallow cuts, the pain is dull.
Floating as it seems unable to sink
in.

Tabasheer forms within the limbs.
Slowly, quickly, small or large.
It does not make sense.
Rattling everything it finds inside.

Sandstone does not break easily.
It endures even as you wish it gone.
Eventually it turns black.
It can be bleached, but is no longer the same stone.

Diabase is intrusive.
It works itself into foundations.
Underneath the pavement, invasive but unseen.
Is the foundation made stronger?
Or only a bluestone, a pervasive melancholy.

TRIBOLUMINESCENCE

Did I or the disease cause the friction?
All I remember is sparks.
Light flowing from my veins,
Each time breaking me
Apart.

The more it breaks, more light escapes.
Hit me harder.
Clear as crystal is a lie.
Memories are trapped in quartz cages.

The light is beautiful.
If only healing
Did not mean breaking.

DIAMOND DYSPHORIA

There is a lie about diamonds.
That they start out as coal.
They both start out as carbon,
but coal is never a diamond, and
a diamond was never coal.

Yet the myth persists.
Diamonds are often misunderstood
Seen in magazines, jewelry stores
Grams of diamonds seen as a symbols of glamour, artifice.

Few notice the many hours spent
carving out the gemstone.
In an office, crying, hurting, bleeding
As the cuts form the diamond seen
In magazines and jewelry stores.

Erin Lyons Ricketts

SHE/HER

 @63timesitried

Erin is a young woman from Columbus, Ohio who is passionate about introspection, feminism, horticulture, animals, and writing creatively. She is excited to contribute to UnBound Zine because it combines her love of critical thinking, female empowerment, and syntax.

HARD FUCKING WORK

You know what's even more annoying than having to sit through a lecture full of platitudes?

Realizing how goddamn accurate they sometimes are.

People say these things that feel insultingly simple and dismissive, that can be difficult to find value in.

Time heals all wounds.

Happiness is a choice.

It will all be worth it in the end.

Your negativity is the only thing stopping you.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

It'll all be worth it in the end.

Nothing worth having comes easy.

It feels like people say these things just to say them. It feels completely worthless, condescending, even. *Well that's nice, Karen, but I've wanted to kill myself since I was 10 and I'll never have a chance in this fucked up world, but thank you so much for your fucking fortune cookie idioms.*

It seems these clichés don't leave room for mental illness, don't allow for complaint. It seems that they're used by the older generations in order to slap us into apathetic submission to the harshest realities of life. *Life is hard and we all have to do it so suck it up.*

The problem is, I'm rapidly getting older. I'm becoming an actual, real adult, compared to, say, the infant I still was at 19. I've been an adult long enough to make adult mistakes. And I'm changing. I'm growing. I am finally, *finally*

doing **better**. And I'm realizing, *fuck man*, some of those idioms have been passed down through generations for a reason. They're not just expressions meant to desensitize young people to the atrocities of life, they are actual pearls of wisdom meant to give strength and hope.

By definition, a cliché is an overused, unoriginal expression or idea that was once considered meaningful. The problem with clichés is they vastly oversimplify (generally good) complex ideas. While I understand that condensing expressions into short phrases is quite a lot less work than a long, detailed conversation that might not be well-received, I think it can be difficult to truly comprehend and resonate with the meaning without a great deal of critical thought and self-evaluation. And who wants to put that much mental effort into '*Happiness is a choice*'?

This brings me to introspection and introspective responsibility. Introspection is the evaluation of one's own mental and emotional processes. In order to be responsible for my mental health, I had to first become comfortable with introspection. I had to learn to look at the ugliest parts of myself, no matter how much it hurt, in order to find how to fix them. I had to look at and understand my trauma to understand the unhealthy coping mechanisms that came from it. I had to look at my fears and find their source. I had to look at my mistakes and figure out why I did what I did. Then, I had to be responsible and choose to change these things, plan how I was going to do that, and stick to it no matter how difficult.

Without divulging too much personal information, I want to explain my journey to introspective responsibility. It wasn't some beautiful moment on a mountain top or into the middle of meditation where I found happiness and a fundamental understanding of my own mind. It was in the deepest parts of my greatest suffering and it felt like it was *literally killing me*.

I have major depressive disorder, anxiety, OCD, and CPTSD. I frequently dissociate and have suicidal thoughts. I'm a recovered self-harmer and self-saboteur. I suffered sexual and psychological child abuse and neglect. My extremely toxic family trained me to be easily manipulated and controlled. I became terrified of disappointing or angering people, of not doing what I was asked, of not bending over backwards to please. I would become physically sick with fear of creating a negative reaction in somebody, so much so, that I was constantly allowing myself to be pushed into situations I didn't want to be in. Naturally, I carried this into adulthood.

I only woke up to this when I found myself in a situation where I had allowed myself to be pressured into things that consequently hurt the people I loved. Things I knew were wrong, because I was afraid, illogically, of what would happen (what the reaction would be) if I said no. The consequences were astounding, crippling, life altering. I was in danger of losing everything. I was a victim for so long, and finally, one day without even realizing it, I became the victimizer.

This was the turning point because up until then, the only person my mental illness ever hurt was me. Nobody had ever had to suffer because I couldn't control what was going on with me. Mental illness is an ugly, lying, little monster that tells you you deserve to be in pain, thus, it wasn't a problem for me that I was perpetually in a state of suffering. But hurting somebody else was never something I thought myself capable of.

When confronted about my actions, my mental illness viciously tried to commandeer my mind. I began to dissociate. I went deep inside myself, in this unbreakable tower I created long ago, my safest, yet darkest place. I had tunnel vision, became dizzy and light-headed, and I could barely understand what was being said to me, as if I were under water trying to hear and respond to what was being said. I was trapped in my foggy mind and completely non-verbal. Every time I got trapped in my tower, the ability to speak was just out of reach. I could feel the words in my mouth, but I couldn't

force jaw to move or my lips to open and speak them. I would try to will myself to produce sound, but it was impossible.

Except, I was being confronted for undeniably fucking up. If I couldn't pull myself out of it, I was going to lose everything. It was suddenly my responsibility to put aside the most impossibly difficult thing in my life, and fix what I had broken. Because if I couldn't, then what? I couldn't love somebody, hurt them deeply, then place my mental illness above their pain.

It was in that pivotal moment that I found new strength. I was shaking with weakness and fear, but desperation endured strongest. I knew I needed to be responsive. I felt every atom in my body vibrate with effort as I powered through, my chest was raw with pain and my stomach was churning. My head was swimming with thick, foggy depression, and my jaw was physically wired shut. But I parted my lips and spoke out loud, all the way from my tower. For the very first time in my life.

Even before this incident, I was repeatedly told I needed to take responsibility for my mental illness. At first, this enraged me. My entire body would burn in outraged flames, furious and indignant. It sounded so insensitive, uninformed, condescending... I argued, "Don't you think if I could control this, I would? Don't you think I try every fucking day from the moment my eyes open to not be this way? You have no idea what it's like." But after this life-changing situation I got myself into, my entire perception had to change. Because, goddamnit, now I *did* have to take responsibility. I was responsible for causing great pain. I needed to also be responsible for 1. Fixing it and 2. Improving myself so it wouldn't happen again. I didn't even know what this really meant or where to begin. I truly believed I already was responsible for my mental health and I hadn't the faintest idea how regularly and severely I allowed myself to be manipulated.

I realized I could not simultaneously accept my mental illness and try to fight it (e.g. suicide/mental health jokes, general attitude that I'd always be stuck with it, feeling that it was a huge part of me and/or took up most of me, letting negative thoughts go unchecked, finding part of my identity in my depression, etc.). Any excuse to keep feeding the fire was dangerous. And until then, I had no idea how much power I had given it.

I'm not meant to be happy. Everybody would be better off if I died. Life isn't worth living. I will never be happy. Fuck my life. I am fucking worthless. I hate my life. I want to kill myself. I want to disappear. I wish I'd been aborted. I wish the universe would strike me dead.

Kind of foolish, really, to think I could constantly have these thoughts without a negative consequence. Kind of foolish to think these kind of thoughts weren't giving my mental illness power. Kind of foolish to think I could think like this and simultaneously love myself. But slowly, I learned to stop allowing those thoughts to go unchecked. I began mentally correcting myself. The rational side of me recognized these as lies, and I began to use that voice of reason to conquer my feelings. I felt like I hurt everybody in my life and people would be better off without me, but I could reason that this was untrue by forcing myself to dwell on concrete facts, and reminding myself that my mental illness was an asshole for suggesting it. Then I had to bully my mental illness back into its corner and let it know it didn't hold any power over me anymore.

It takes a great deal of will power to fight these demons in a normal state of mind, let alone when mental illness has effectively taken over. And in the aftermath of my mistakes, my mental illness was at its strongest. I was constantly on the brink of giving up, and the hard work it took to rewire my brain physically exhausted me every single day. The beginning of my journey

to wellness was paved with days and days of suicidal thoughts, exhaustion beyond what I'd ever known, and pain greater than any I'd experienced.

I had never been good about remembering my medication every day, and eventually stopped taking it altogether. I immediately began medication again after this situation occurred and actively sought out counseling. It was no longer acceptable to forget my medication or feel iffy about therapy because I had the responsibility to get my shit together and fix this situation. I only became diligent when there was a severe consequence to slipping up.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned through introspection is that the human brain is a dirty, dirty liar. We lie to ourselves *constantly*. Rewrite things, *constantly*. Learning not to trust everything my brain tells me was how I learned to de-legitimize my harmful thinking. Practicing will power was how I curbed it. And as time went on, it became less natural for me to have this type of harmful thinking in the first place. When the harmful thinking does intrude, it is much easier to shut it down.

I also had to learn to see the signs of manipulation, and find the strength to defend myself against it. I had to learn how to hear when somebody was trying to manipulate me, not to feel responsible for other people's feelings, to stop doing things I don't want to do purely out of obligation, to stop letting people make me feel guilty about things I don't need to feel guilty about, to be comfortable with being misunderstood, and most importantly, to silence the intense fear that came with not giving people what they want.

The responsibility of fixing my mistakes was what gave me the willpower to put in the hard work that was necessary. I never would have been able to make the progress I have if I didn't first learn the importance of introspective responsibility. If I hadn't been told *You did this, now you need fix it and make sure it never happens again*, I surely wouldn't have ever gone through all this painful work just for me. My mental illness never would have let me. Learning

to look inside myself and question why I did the things I did was the first step in figuring out what I needed to change and why and how. And having no choice but to do it, or lose that which I loved, was the fire under my ass to not stop when it got hard.

The reason I've shared my story is because I want people to understand it took extreme duress, and the biggest fuck up of my life to see what needed to be done in order to change. **It. Is. Not. Easy.** It is the hardest work I've ever put into anything, and it took about an entire year before I could look back and see true progress. This was **the hardest time of my life**. My mental health was the rockiest before it became the smoothest. It was a back against the wall, no other way out of this with any semblance of dignity and joy, kind of decision to force myself into healing. It was the threat of losing my entire life as I knew it that gave me the drive to fix me.

I want people to know this because I want to circle back to the beginning of the article. The most back-breaking, soul-strengthening, painful work of my life made me appreciate these clichés. I realized the hardest thing I'd ever done was also the most fulfilling. I realized happiness is a choice, a difficult one that needs to be made over and over and over. I realized my negativity was my cancer and giving it an inch was giving it a mile. I realized time might not always heal, but it tends to make things easier to bear. I realized I will not always be successful in controlling my mental illness, but I need to *always* stand back up and try again if I don't want to regress. I realized it has gotten a little easier as time and diligent practice have gone by. And in the end, it was so worth it, I'd go through every ounce of pain again if it meant I got to keep what I know now.

Do I still have depressed days or even weeks? Yes. But I have learned how to identify the lies I'm telling myself, reconstruct them into the truth, comfort myself and work through it quicker and with less suffering. Do I still have

suicidal episodes? Yes. But now they last an hour or two instead of a whole day. Because deep down my voice of reason knows I do love life, people would miss me if I were gone, and I do have purpose and worth. It would be irresponsible of me to allow my mental illness and its lies to control the way I think when I *know* they're bullshit lies, and when I'm able to distinguish these lie-feelings from what I know to be cold, hard facts. Though it's extremely difficult in the moment to decipher what's fact because mental illness screams at me not to listen to logic, I am learning to allow my voice of reason to be heard from my tower, taking its hand and following it out of the darkness. It grounds me and helps protect me from spinning too far out of control. This has been invaluable in taking back my power.

I try really hard not to spout clichés to my friends with mental health issues, because I know how condescending, and frankly, stupid they sound. I try to remember how I felt when well-meaning people degraded me with their vague platitudes before I started my journey. I try to remember I've only recently gained an appreciation for these proverbs because I've gained knowledge through being forced to rapidly mature, change, and improve myself. I was only able to see clearly enough to start my journey because I had no other choice. I believe it often takes a tragedy, or at the very least, the risk of losing something or someone they intimately cherish, to move people deeply enough to realize what needs changed. I try not to preach to my friends who are still figuring out their journey, because it didn't help me to hear these things before I was ready, and I assume it won't help anybody else who isn't ready yet either. The last thing I want to do is condescend anyone. I want to share the wellness I've found. And it seems my message can only be shortened into platitudes, or intricately explained by a *painfully* long magazine article.

I so desperately want to prevent other people from having to go deeper into hell in order to find their way out of it. I wish I could plug this knowledge and

power into every mentally ill person's head, because everybody deserves to heal and if I can help even one person to start this journey without needing a tragic situation to recalibrate their thinking and make them realize their only option is out, I'm going to do it.

So the best advice I can give is learn introspective responsibility. Don't give your mental illness power over you. Look at yourself and learn where your biggest struggles come from. Identify the patterns in your behavior that have led you down dark paths, and do everything you can to break those patterns. Learn where your fear comes from. Spend time thinking about your greatest mistakes, why you made them, and what you can do differently in the future. And get ready for the hardest work of your life. Find your motivation to tough it out and work through it. Be patient and kind and generously forgive yourself. Learn to know when you need to keep pushing and when you need a break. Seek out a support team who is on the same page and knows how to build you up and keep you fighting. It is the hardest thing you will ever do, but the freedom from mental malady will be the best damn thing you ever have.

Gia Frank

THEY/THEM

My art is primarily digital and collage based photo manipulation and light illustration. I am a nonbinary bisexual artist.







Greta Sharp

THEY/THEM

 @greta.sharp

I am a 23 year old artist and writer living and working in London, and have shown my films in various exhibitions and film screenings in the UK. My work draws from my personal experiences, and focusses on sexuality, memory, language and relationships, both with myself, the world around me and the people and things in it. This is an autobiographical/non-fiction work, talking about my experiences of living with C-PTSD as an adult survivor.

Website: gretasharp.co.uk

C-PTSD

ON COMPLEX-PTSD

I was going through my files on my laptop (because I have so many untitled documents from writing I have started and not finished) and found this piece that I started writing for a submission (not sure what to) and decided I would leave it as is, because it reflects very real feelings that I had and still do have sometimes. SIX WEEKS have passed (at the current time of writing) and my perspective has already changed so much, that I wanted to share it. Healing isn't linear, these only reflect two different days in my life which doesn't mean I won't go backwards again to go forwards, but I think it is something quite extraordinary to notice the changes within. I also think it is really important to sometimes acknowledge the truly shit stuff about healing from trauma - we don't always have to put a positive spin on things, and I think just acknowledging where we are at is really important and valid.

2nd February 2020

It has been roughly one year since I realised the effects this has on my life. I have always thought I was simply a highly emotional and

sensitive person, with a layer of skin as thin tissue paper. I convince myself the people who are supposed to love me, in fact despise me and have never cared about me. My brain finds all the evidence to support this claim so that I end up pushing them away and rejecting them before they can reject me.

I have been gaslit so many times that I can no longer stand up for myself if someone isn't treating me right: instead I question my sanity on the situation. I tell myself I am over-reacting and it is all in my head whilst simultaneously believing that how could I possibly have ever thought that someone could care about me.

I find every reason possible to prove that the person I'm dating is either going to manipulate me or leave me or both. I don't understand what a true partnership is because I'm always on the defense, always trying to look out for signs and protect myself. Others are always a threat to my own safety, and any flaw in their character is proof of their innate evilness.

It is emotionally draining and exhausting. I go to bed anxious and wake up anxious, the only relief from my thoughts being when I sleep. I have lost countless friendships and potential relationships. Everyone gets fed up of my incredibly high standards (because anything less than perfect behaviour means they are trying to cause my pain and hurt me) or rightly doesn't want to put up with my emotional outburst and ups and downs.

I'm in the thick of it. I've read countless stories of people being able to overcome it, but that seems so far into the future I'm not sure its even possible. I am only beginning to notice the part I play, which makes it ever more defeating that I know I am doing this to myself. The fact I can start to see what I'm doing makes me even more anxious that I can't stop myself from behaving like this.

I was built with tools to destroy myself, and that is what I'll continue to do. It's like having a disease where the body starts to destruct itself from the inside, faster than new cells can build. My mind destroys itself at a faster rate than I am able to overcome my patterns. Each time I try to move forward, it pushes back harder. The more I resist, the more it resists my growth.

19th March 2020

I've spent the last few weeks manically looking for flats and jobs so I can get out of my current situation (living at home with toxic family and in a job I don't enjoy) which I know is my 'functioning adult' response to danger. I get productive and practical to get myself out of a situation I don't like, in the same way I got myself out of abusive relationships and situations before. (But in retrospect, think I might have just been doing that because I broke up with someone? So I wanted to occupy my brain with other stuff) Last week I broke down crying in my therapists' office because my 'inner child' couldn't cope with all the pressure and stress and constant researching / house viewings / job applications. (The inner child is basically a concept that we all have a wounded child inside

because we all experienced trauma to varying degrees, and this child carries wounds into our adult life, which our adult self needs to care for and re-parent to heal). She was tired and wanted to snuggle up and just watch Netflix and do some colouring but I wouldn't let her because it wasn't productive. So we had reached a standstill, I am very stubborn when I want to be, and neither of us was agreeing to budge.

Now I am in self isolation, a lock in (rather than a lock down because it sounds less scary and more cozy), off work because my parents' are ill, and we are all practicing social distancing. I have been forced to stop flat hunting and job searching because no one is hiring and I'm not sure I even have a job to go back to at this point. The chaos that I usually feel inside has been reflected in the world around me. But I grew up in chaos, so this is what I am made for. I've found a silver lining and it's called reading all the books I bought but never got around to reading, re-watching Killing Eve, and having time to MAKE SOME FRIGGING ART.

I've been getting upset that some of my friends don't reply to me for several days (I'm friends with a lot of people who aren't great at replying) even though they tell me they love me all the time and always listen when I need to talk about things. But I'm feeling shame for being needy (I was always punished for being emotional and needy as a child) and it triggers me into wanting to push those who are most important to me away. I tried reassuring myself that they do love me and I don't need to be worried, but my therapist pointed out to me that this was just another way of disregarding my

feelings, so instead, I should give myself what I want (a cuddle, a bath, some reading), and once the heightened feelings have calmed down and I am feeling soothed, that I can look at the facts and work out a good course of action. I feel my body physically shut down when my therapist starts talking to my inner child, like she can't cope with someone being nice and soothing to her, but its teaching me how I need to talk to myself. But I feel so calmed after my sessions, so I'm trying really hard to speak to myself in that way too.

I still get triggered quite a lot, like at least once a day, but I'm slowly learning to notice that I'm triggered, rather than assuming that my feelings are facts about the present. When I feel rejected or alone, and I get triggered and want to harm myself, I work to soothe myself, and then ask myself if there have been any other times when I felt this way? Like when I'm on holiday on my own and I get lost, I freak out, because it reminds me of the time I was 13 and my dad ran away from me on the way home from athletics training, and I had to find my way home in the dark.

I've been thinking about the times I hallucinated as a child, which freaked me out because I didn't know what was real or not. And trying to let her feel all her feelings, rather than shut them down, carry on as normal, and be the most productive person in the room. I go between varying ends of the spectrum of dissociating, from highly anxious and productive, to zoning out and not being able to feel my body (yoga is massively helpful for this). But

everyday is a struggle, some just more so than others. I feel a lot of feelings all the time, and I realise new things everyday.


I've also developed really bad back pain and its making me think about how feelings are carried in the body. Like the weight of carrying around my baggage (both literal and metaphorical) has caused this pain. And even though I've taken a break from sex and dating, and have a massive drop in my sex drive, I'm still struggling with masturbation. I cried the other day afterwards because I felt a massive release: I kept stopping as I was getting flashbacks, but decided to pause and work through them, bringing me back to the present, so when I felt safe enough to finish, rather than forcing myself to just so it would end (like I had to before), it was like a massive burden had been taken off.

I've come to realise I'm a love and sex addict: because of the abuse, my emotional needs were only met through sex as a child. I was so deprived of non sexual love and affection that I crave it to no end as an adult. This is what causes a lot of the problems I now have with relationships. So I've stopped so I can 'learn to swim in a flat sea.' I only understand love through sex. Even when I fancy someone and think about spending time with them, I always just think about sex because I don't yet know other ways of connecting with someone. I'm still a very long way off from being able to have someone else in my life in a romantic and sexual way, which is so unfair and lonely, and I often get down when I see lots of my friends in long term relationships, but they haven't been through the same things that I have, so I'm just starting from a different place to them.

I think the past month or so has taught me that how I treat myself is the most important thing. I can't choose how others treat me or what happens to me, but if I can learn skills that most people do as children, then I can build a world for myself where I choose who I have in my life, and am better equipped all round for dealing with any hiccups. I think I'm understanding that it really is my responsibility to look after myself, and where others failed me, I have to learn to parent myself in order to begin to heal. I feel as if I'm headed in the right direction, but I have no idea where the final destination is, because I simply haven't the faintest idea what it means to be good to myself, and what it means for others to be good to me.

Heather Johnson

SHE/HER

 @brokkoli_bb

20-something queer-do. Born and raised West Coast (US) kid raising hell in the Bible Belt.

Create.
Destroy.
Do crime.
Smoke.
Sleep.
Repeat.



Heriberto "Eddie" Palacio III

HE/HIM

 @palaceofarts

Heriberto "Eddie" Palacio III (B. 1994) is a multidisciplinary Artist that explores human relations and awareness through research that investigates social constructs, masculinity, gender studies, emotional intelligence, and African American studies. His exploratory studio work consists of various mediums that prioritizes audience's interpretation of context over the aesthetic of medium specificity. He continues to explore the value of emotional intelligence in various communities and how to acknowledge and potentially repair relationships within them using this research and his studio practice. His larger utopian goal is to raise awareness of the need for emotional intelligence so that marginalized communities are better equipped to build relationships between peers through art for the betterment of our social relationships. This goal is meant to be open ended, having no true resolution, and is more-so taking steps toward long-term healing within damaged communities.







Jessica Leeds Richman

SHE/HER

 @jleedsrichman

Jessica is a freelance writer and digital content coordinator from Ohio. She enjoys writing about taboo topics, uncovering the truth, and smashing the patriarchy.

Portfolio: <https://jessicaleedsrichman.contently.com/>

CHRONICALLY ILL, MENTALLY STRONG

For the last nine years of my life, I have lived with constant pain and fatigue. Sometimes it flares and other times life is more manageable, but the one constant is that it is always present and unpredictable. I have seen countless doctors and as a result, I have suffered from significant medical trauma. I am fortunate enough to have a father who is a physician and a mother who is a strong advocate, yet I repeatedly find myself having to justify my reality to doctors on a regular basis.

I live with invisible—or as I prefer to call them—non-apparent illnesses. This means that when the average person looks at me they can't tell that anything is “wrong” with my body. I present well, so healthy people tend to assume that I am one of them. This has advantages in terms of not experiencing blatant discrimination, but it also means that my limitations are not as noticeable unless someone truly pays attention and is empathetic to my situation. More so, folks have a harder time knowing how to look at my illnesses and how to comprehend and accommodate them. I do understand this struggle, as I am still working on figuring out what my needs are and how to communicate them in a way in which others can understand and work with me.

One particular challenge in this journey has been learning to process the guilt, shame, and trauma that I have dealt with as a result of the way society views and works with my body.

Though I am currently on the best combination of medications and treatments that I have yet to find, life is still fraught with obstacles. I have seen more medical professionals than any 22 years old should have to see, but even with all of these appointments, not one doctor addressed the mental and emotional toll that living in chronic pain has on me.

I've been privileged enough to be able to attend therapy, and most of my therapists' strategy was also to recommend that I ignore my health issues as a way to get through each day. They seemed to think that if I pretended it didn't exist then it would just go away. Obviously, this method was not successful.

In October of 2019, I started seeing a new therapist—one who also lives with chronic pain. Our experiences are different, but I have never felt more validated than during our weekly meetings. She has helped me to recognize the ways in which I have used dissociation as a means of survival and she has helped me to process the unresolved strain I have lived under for nearly a decade. But most importantly, she has normalized the experience of chronic illness and shown me that everything

I am going through makes sense and is legitimate in its own right. I am learning how to treat myself well and how to live a good life, a good disabled life.

Kali McDewitt

SHE/HER

A terribly misunderstood misfit who just wants to write about the sadness she knows like her friends. Denison graduate, and currently working on living her life with the ever present fear of clowns. Really into piña coladas and not getting caught in the rain, who wants to get a cold?


DIVINE DEPRESSION

in the soft quiet surrounding the broken bones of yesterday.
within the leaves carelessly thrown by trees.
next to a man made creek running against the litter and large rocks.
if you are quiet.
if you hold your head a certain way.
if your internal screaming stops. you can hear it.

underneath the fragile branches.
her body lay bare of anything except pain. you look twice, maybe you are mistaken.
she can't be here. she can't be slowly wasting away.
her heart makes the loudest splintering noise.
an unmistakable deafening crack in the shadows of life.
yet she cries for the moon and whispers at the sun.
screaming out the name of the lost and lifeless.
now she must rise again. shut off. turn around. smile.

Lashonda Love

ANY PRONOUNS/NONE

 @snozzberry.gif

Lashonda is writer, musician, and artist born and raised in Columbus, OH. She holds her B.A. in Music Performance from Denison University and is the Executive Director of *UnBound*.

As a queer, pagan, woman of color raised in a low-income, trauma-affected household, Lashonda centers the intersections of identities as well as trauma storytelling in their works and projects.

3A: AN OBJECT OR FILTHY STATE: SQUALOR

One round red bug treks up my arm stops
I feel a small uncomfortable prick it moves again
What would it be to flick it off? But I don't I can't

My eyes swivel up to the ceiling to flaking white walls. In the corner, pockets of air have formed underneath the paint like petrified bubbles

today muggy afternoon boils the crumbling drywall. I turn my eyes away. The tiny red bug crawls onto my earlobe finally and I feel hollow an

undead version of myself the smell of feces wafts through the house. it's no surprise for the sewage system to give up on itself. I went

into the basement last night barefoot, disheveled from sleep, to see if it had really flooded with shit. choked by the fumes. There's a moment when you're so

focused on looking for something you don't notice, in front of your eyes, something else

my fingertips grazed the hulking carcass of a rat eyes wide
open mouth gaping I ran back out of the basement

I stare around my bedroom stuffed to the brim with papers
clothes books. Cockroaches scurry in and out of piles on piles.
My parents scream that they can't see the floor how do I move?
I don't

In the living room, dining room, mom has books and papers
and clothes piled high on the couch, the dinner table, the desk
Roaches scurry from the sink when I turn the lights on they

Scurry from beneath potholders and picture frames. I once
pulled a bowl from the cabinet no not once
more times than I can count. You have to watch before you

pour your cereal into it rinse it out if you aren't careful
you'll find a carcass or roach shit. One round red bug
trekking up my arm and onto my earlobe

out of my schoolbooks, I leave my backpack on the porch
scan myself in the bathroom at school, *smash* the lone
bedbug crawling out of my binder during 7th period

it's not normal to be so

down so weird everyone at school notices
wonders what is wrong with me pegs me as the weird girl
I didn't know how to be normal going right back home to it

My partner and I lay watching *Hoarders* in bed I feel
anxiety rising palms sweating realizing realizing
realizing why I throw so much away why I wash every dish even

after it comes out of the dishwasher why
I need just one color of clothes hangers and they all need to
be facing the same way and they need to be in order of
function and then size and then coverage and then color and
sometimes those in different orders it doesn't really matter
because its about
control

I shared a closet with my hoarder mother which was not as bad
as sharing the home was... but it left its mark nonetheless

I've been told it's not normal to be so "down"
I guess they meant gloomy depressed anxious OCD PTSD

And yes there's more than *this* unpack unpack
but *this* is a poem about dirt



Sarah McCoy

SHE/HER

 @sparkletrasharts

I'm an autistic attorney using art as a way to forge my path through life. I've been creating through various means that change depending upon my mental health status. When I'm too depressed to paint, I may move to poetry. When I'm too depressed to write, I sometimes drift off into detailed sketches where I don't have to focus so much on myself. A lot of my art is female centric because I, like most other female identifying or gender-fluid individuals, have been sexually abused and am constantly looking for ways to take my body back. I find the female form entrancing and empowering, and I hope my art encourages, comforts, and provokes thought within you.

It's hard for me
What is? Everything, you see?
Have to think to breathe

* * *

You alive in there?
Just hating myself again
But you don't *look* sick

* * *

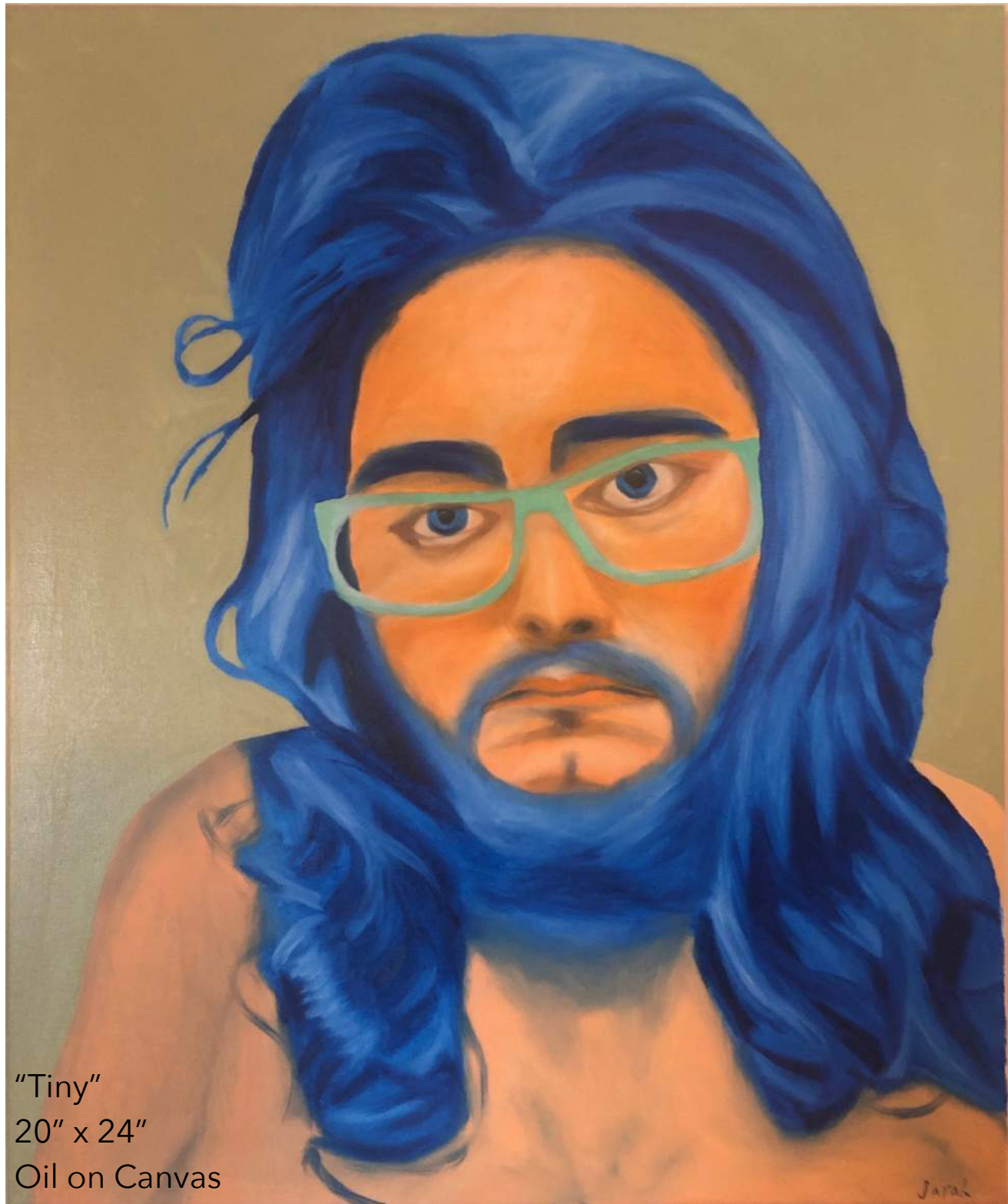
Depression's a bitch
Sometimes I'm not even sad
Just a little dead

* * *

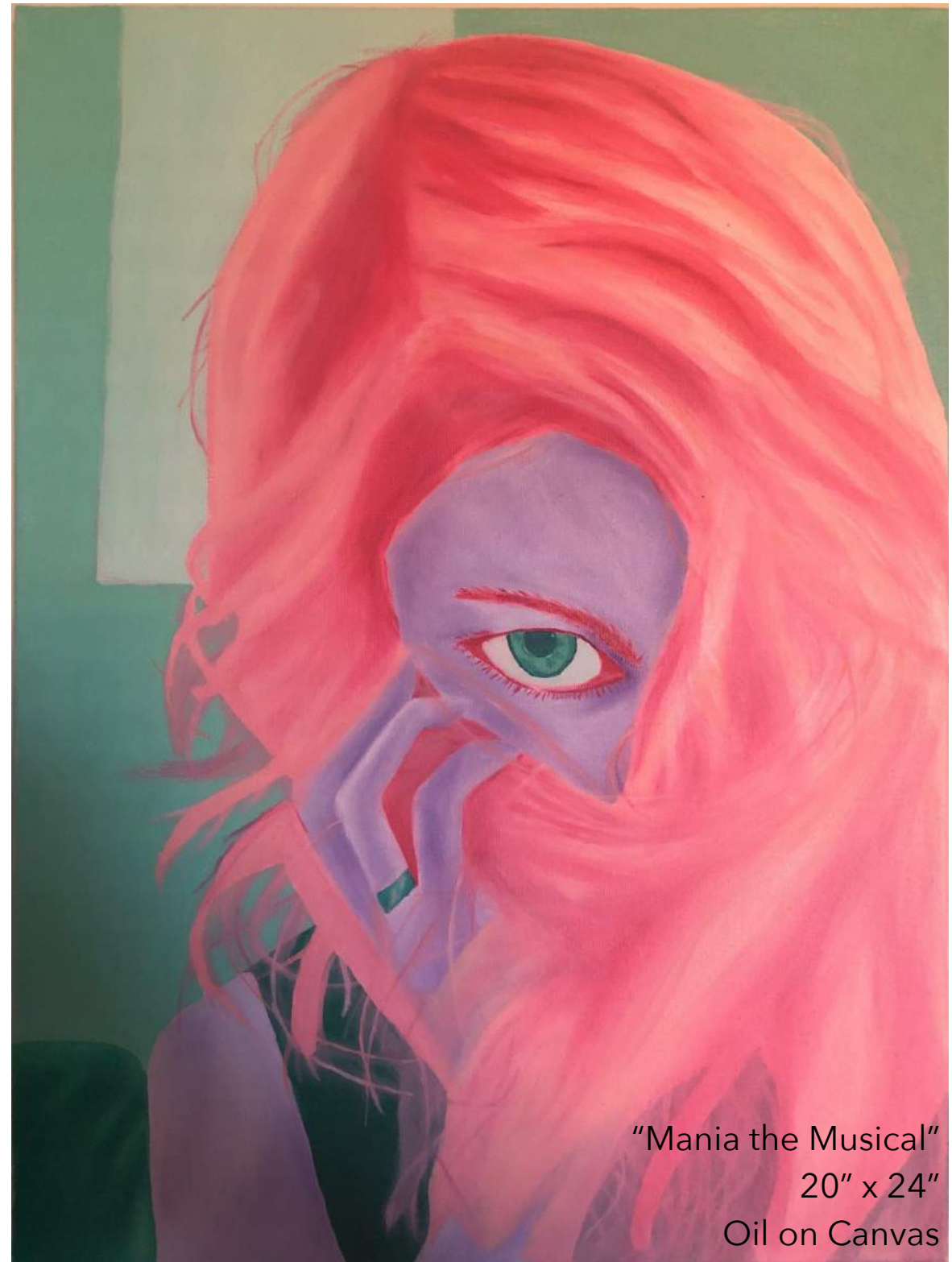
Suicidal thoughts?
Tell me what that even means
Last year, last week, *now*?

* * *

Therapist again
Says she can't help anymore
Well, ok - fuck her!




"Tiny"
20" x 24"
Oil on Canvas



"Mania the Musical"
20" x 24"
Oil on Canvas

Skye Cardoz

SHE/HER

 @skyecardoz

Skye Cardoz is a writer from Mumbai, India. She has a thing for writing beautiful tragedy. She writes articles, short stories, poems, and love notes. She has also had an article published in Thought Catalog and has self-published a short story on Kindle. She is also a momma to two plants - Allie (aloe vera plant) and Snek (snake plant).

CONSUME ME

Your eyes
Your stoner eyes
And the way you kissed me
After we made love
The softness of your lips
The warmth of your arms
Your arms
Your arms
Your arms engulf me
Scaring away pieces of me that were afraid
Afraid of the world, afraid of you

I am an anxious girl
Living in an anxious world
I know nothing but paranoia
You come over for a drink
And i keep looking at the clock
Keep thinking someone is going to bust us
Someone is going to take you away from me
And I'll be here
Abandoned

The monsters will figure out you're gone
I'll no longer smell of you
I'll no longer smell of love
They'll find me alone in my bed
They'll mock the sheets that no longer hold
your scent

They'll find me trying to hold on to you

And they'll laugh


Paranoia has got to me and i don't know how
to call you here
I miss you
I miss you
But you're gone
You're in another's sheets
You're kissing another's lips
You're in love
And I'm in love
And it's not the same
Because you're safe
And the monsters have found me
And they've taken me
And I'm confused
I'm trying to figure out if it's worth it
I'm trying to figure out if I should scream for
help
I don't think you can hear me anymore

So I let them take me away
I let them consume me
I let them tease me, as i try

I remember your lips
Your stoner eyes
The way you held me
The way you told me I was safe
And I wonder why you went away

Shunayna Vaghela

SHE/HER

 @shunayna_

Londonder born and bred, Shunayna has been creative for years. Having worked in film, TV, and publishing you could say she can't get enough. Illustrating and Writing are her creative expressions of choice, and when she isn't buried under swathes of drafts, you can probably find her on a new travel adventure.



"Growth" 2020



Shunayra Vaghela



"I'm Fine" 2020

Shravya Kishor



Shravya Kishor

Rebecca Kittle

SHE/HER

Rebecca Kittle is a wellness educator and creative marketer from Columbus, Ohio. Cultivating positive change and empowering others towards optimal health sustainable balance and deeper fulfillment inspires her.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AS A HEALTH COACH

Name something you never plan to post online. Something private and relatively personal. Got it? That's sort of what this article is for me. I am publicly admitting that I go to therapy...and love it. There, I said it. It's actually not so bad. Maybe I'll add it to my dating profile. Let's be honest: the stigma of therapy sucks. It's still a faux pas in many social circles, despite recent celebrity endorsements by Michael Phelps and Katy Perry; it's viewed rather negatively or pitifully, at least.

Then there's Positive Psychology. My experience with a therapist who specialized in positive psychology dramatically changed my own pessimistic perspective. In fact, it's been so positive that I can't help but sing its praises! So, what is it, exactly? This relatively new practice teaches someone how to focus on good and meaningful things in order to live a more purposeful, happier life. While it incorporates much of the field's previous foundational findings - it's way more chill, bright and useful.

What qualifies me to discuss psychology?

I have a license in life experience, but not in psychology. If that is a turnoff, go watch YouTube. As a health coach and yoga teacher, though, I have experimented with a variety of healing methods. I'm pretty damn motivated to move beyond my fears, self-doubt, woes and general stuck-ness. I've dabbled in

a range of modalities: tapping (EFT), acupuncture, cranial sacral therapy, hypnotherapy, and past life regression, to name a few. Rest assured, I fully believe that what works for one person doesn't necessarily work for another and in taking things with a grain of pretty pink sea salt. All that being said, I do hope to inspire someone to give positive psychology a shot.

Therapy 101

When did I get first introduced to therapy? At 8-frickin-years-old - that's what happens when your parents' marriage counseling turns into a family thing and ends in divorce. By 9, I was the only one still seeing the shrink: what a weirdo. Mom's trusty dusty Ford sped us across town once a week during lunch to see Dr. Peggy. How do you explain missing kickball Wednesdays to a bunch of 4th graders at your new school? The dentist? I prayed for braces, the ability to disappear or the nerve to punch Mom's boyfriend in the face. The law of attraction functioned at 33 percent: Becky got braces.

Anxiety + Depression + OCD-ish

My Diagnosis? Mild anxiety, borderline depression and obsessive tendencies. I wasn't full-on OCD like counting sidewalk cracks or washing my hands repeatedly, but they said it could develop. By the way, I'm not making fun; it wasn't funny. I would endlessly ruminate on the past and obsess about the future. Apparently, that's how my little preteen brain achieved a feeling of safety

amidst all the change in my life. The habit of incessant worrying never really left me, though I handle it much better today.

Survival Mechanisms are Normal

That's the funny thing about our brains; they get wired in certain ways so that we can survive whatever's happening in our current reality, especially as children. The "surviving" can be in response to something horrible, like abuse, as well as absurdly simple things, like playing a game, and literally everything in between. It's all just stimulus and response, feedback loops.

Realizing how normal I was to experience crippling anxiety and painstaking perfectionism has brought me so much peace as an adult. There was nothing wrong with me! In fact, my brain was super healthy and just doing its job. It took decades, though, for me to not feel ashamed and truly believe this.

Is forced therapy helpful?

Got to be honest: therapy felt like a punishment as a child and again at 15, after my first heartbreak. I utterly loathed going to those sessions and refilling my Rx for anti-whatever pills. It all seemed to affirm how unfixable and impossibly flawed I was, like a chipped, marble statue.

Yet, I am lucky that my parents made a phenomenally compassionate decision to (firmly) offer me outside support. And,

hello, I was privileged to have it. What if they hadn't insisted? Only I know how deep the ravine of plunging self-esteem was inside. I would even go as far as saying that Dr. Peggy may've even saved my life as a teenager. Forced therapy, then, despite how uncomfortable, definitely helped me. However, some people swear that therapy scarred them for life or ended their marriage. Everyone's experience is unique and valid.

How is Positive Psychology different?

I never expected to go to therapy again after routinely douching my brain with self-help throughout my 20s. Around 30, though, life turned upside down. Ever been there? Well, if you've witnessed a bug inadvertently fire itself straight into a glass door at full speed, (or maybe a drunk friend's done this at a pool party), that was me. Shat on by reality. No amount of Tony Robbins could get my head back in the game.

Eventually, I lady bossed up and Googled a local therapist, fully anticipating a disappointing series of first-time visits. Eight years later, to quote Shania, that therapist is still the one. I am so incredibly blessed to have connected with an amazing human and skilled professional who practices positive psychology. Her approach immediately stood out to me; she strategized positivity. The methodology is light, even when it's heavy, feels good and most importantly: it works. Even if you never work with a therapist, you can still apply the principles to your life.

Assess Your Strengths

One of the first steps in creating a personalized strategy in positive psychology is to assess your top character strengths. The [VIA Institute on Character](#) identified 24 character strengths consistent across cultures worldwide. Their website explains, "When you discover your greatest strengths, you learn to use them to handle stress and life challenges, become happier, and develop relationships with those who matter most to you". The site boasts a free quiz to determine yours, ranking all 24 terms from highest to lowest, generating a truly unique profile. For example, my top strength is gratitude which I practice daily before bed to release stressful thoughts. (Gratitude is another key concept in positive psychology.) Intentionally aiming your attention towards your strengths works as an effective strategy to cope with difficult thoughts and emotions.

Use Mindfulness

Mindfulness is another impactful tool from positive psychology. The [American Psychological Association](#) describes it as "a moment-to-moment awareness of one's experience without judgment." It's being present to what is, anchoring all five senses in what is happening now, without attaching to thoughts or emotions. The number of mental and physical health benefits are overwhelming. When I first started learning, I was encouraged to try it while commuting. Do you ever find yourself suddenly at your front door after work, completely unable to recall how you got there? We

operate on autopilot as humans, a lot. With mindfulness you notice the colors of other cars, the humming of the tires, how tightly your hands grip the steering wheel...you notice life as it is.

Breathe Deeply

While developing mindfulness, I uncovered the superpower of deep breathing for reducing anxiety. I have yet to mention anything about my fair share of panic attacks. Conveniently, these would only happen at work or while driving. Deep breathing finally helped me harness control over my fight-or-flight reaction, which is triggered during an anxiety attack. Top tip? Force an exhale. There's also a technique by Dr. Andrew Weil called 4-7-8 breathing that's money. It creates an elongated exhale that automatically increases inhaled due to the vacuum effect in the lungs. The resulting boost of oxygen activates the parasympathetic nervous system. Basically, it calms your ass down in less than a minute.

See your Blind Spots - the Good Ones

The greatest gift of positive psychology is that it shines a light on your blind spots: the good ones. Many sessions with my therapist are spent highlighting all the small (and not so small) victories that I tend to completely overlook. After all, that's the role of a great counselor; she helps you see your blind spots, without judgement, and use your strengths to thrive.

Where ever you are in your journey, whether in therapy now (and love it, like me) or never will be, that's totally okay. Just know that

you are not alone; support is always available. Trust yourself, your strengths and your breath, to carry you from one moment to the next, to live out this brilliant life in the way that only you can: happy, healthy, and fulfilled.

SOURCES

VIA survey link <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>.

APA mindfulness: <https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-mindfulness/>

Dr. Weil 4-7-8 breath: <https://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/>

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