

**THE  
MENTAL HEALTH  
ISSUE**



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The following editorial was published on our website on April 7, 2020, the last day of volume 40. Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, *The Link* was not able to publish that volume's final print edition—the Mental Health issue—and several articles were delayed. We have collected that issue's themed content to produce this special online issue of *The Link*. We thank volume 40 for all its hard work in difficult circumstances.

## Editorial: Mental Health, Inside and Out of Quarantine

Today was supposed to mark the release of our 40th volume's final print edition—the Mental Health issue.

As with most things in a world transformed by COVID-19, there has been a change of plans, but throughout the week we're nevertheless publishing many of these stories online.

Mental health was originally selected as a special issue for the same reason it is a perennial concern among student advocates. Services are too few, pressures are too many, and reduced stigma has not been matched by commensurate action.

Help for struggling students is meagre and scattershot. Appointments are scarce at Concordia's Counselling and Psychological Services, while our health insurance cannot even fund one session of therapy per month. Valiant student groups that try to fill in the gaps, such as Concordia Students' Nightline, face an impossible task.

Meanwhile, underfunded students are forced to balance the demands of full-time study with precarious means of making ends meet, often with little leeway from professors. Students of

all backgrounds are plagued by mandatory attendance policies and rigid performance expectations. Professors and departments fail to consider subtle ways in which they magnify the pressures facing Students of Colour as well.

Change is long overdue.

But at this time, reflecting on the mental health of the Concordia community is inextricable from the need to acknowledge the unique pressures of the moment in which we currently live.

This is a time of pervasive anxiety. The psychological hardship of this crisis is profound for many—fears for our own safety or the safety of others, possible or pressing economic hardships, social isolation, and many more variables weigh heavily on the mind.

The pandemic is a situation in which inequalities continue to be showcased. There is a divide between those in a position to stay home and make art or bread or even work, and those on the front lines, the “guardian angels” who still don't make enough money or have enough protections, whether it's

in healthcare, shelters, grocery aisles, or anywhere else.

Yet, this pandemic will leave a permanent mark on the psyche and mental health of all of us. Forget trips to the grocery store—even a pleasant late-night stroll can take on an oppressive, eerie tone as we reflect on our communal trauma. One wonders how long it will take before we can pass someone on the sidewalk without the urge to dodge into the road. Worse, none of us know when this will end.

People should not feel pressured, whether internally or externally, to “make the most” of this pandemic. It's not a holiday, and it's OK to need to process what was only recently unimaginable. We must all use our energy to show compassion to one another—and to ourselves.

Hopefully, in this way, we can achieve a more compassionate society that will last beyond the current crisis.

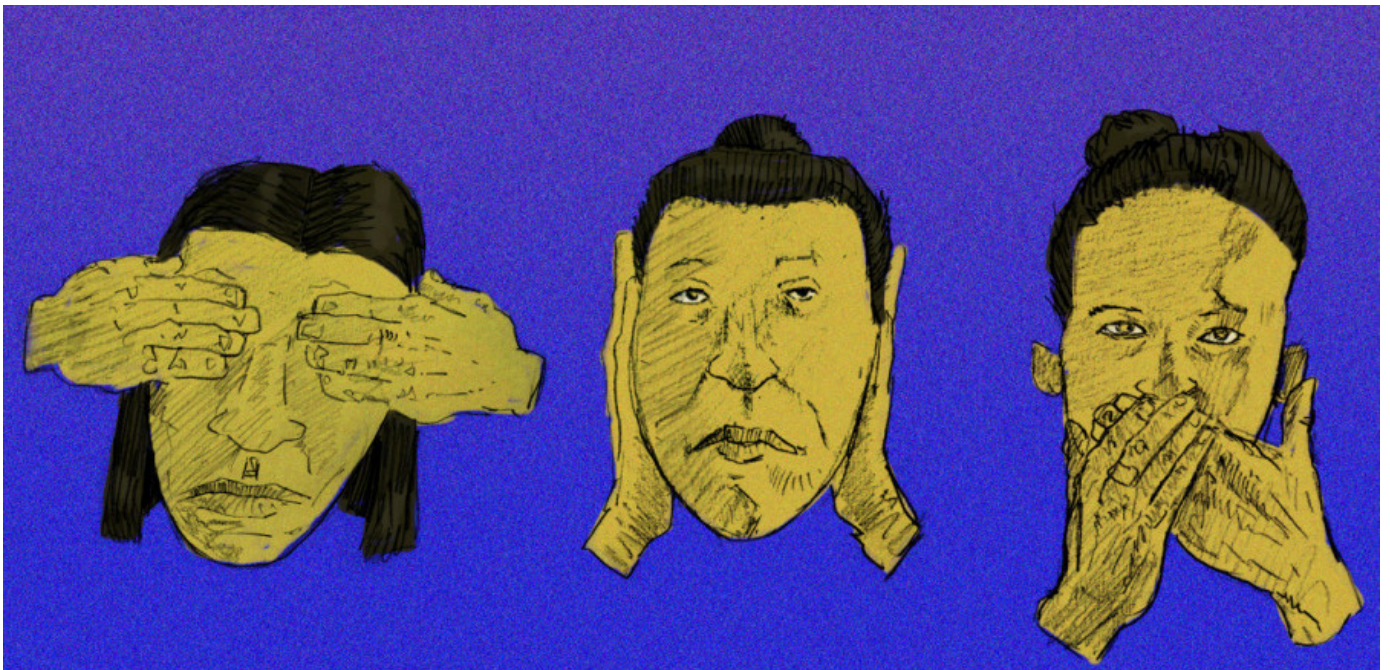
There's no doubt it will be paramount for resources to be available when this isolation is over. In fact, it was paramount that they were available before isolation began.



# How Mental Health Is (or Isn't) Handled in Asian Communities

## An Intergenerational Gap Separating Parents From Their Children

Sheena Macmillan



Graphic Joey Bruce

Growing up with two Asian parents who immigrated to Montreal in their thirties, Christy Lo says she grew up very Chinese.

Her dad is from Hong Kong and her mom from Cambodia. Lo attended Chinese school on Saturdays and spoke Cantonese at home with her dad. She admits her Cantonese skills have gotten rusty over time.

Certain pressures are synonymous with an Asian childhood. Succeeding in school and doing so with a stiff upper lip are two pillars of a first-generation Asian kid's upbringing for many.

Lo, now a psychology student at Con-

cordia, can attest to that; these pressures took a toll on her mental health as well.

"My family doesn't believe in mental health," she said. "It's not a thing for them."

When she would tell them how stressed or depressed she was feeling, they would tell her, "You're just sad for a little bit, why won't you just get over it? If you're stressed, why won't you stop being stressed?"

This attitude hit its peak at the end of high school, when Lo was in grades 10 and 11. Because of Bill 101, she had to attend French school. For her and her peers, learning French from scratch was

a huge obstacle. She could follow the material but struggled to understand it in French.

At the time, there was a huge disconnect between her and her family. She wouldn't speak to anyone at home. Her parents would get upset at her for not speaking to them, but she kept quiet because they would only yell at her when she expressed her emotions.

She started to get depressed. Her parents would question her bad grades, searching for a familiar problem they knew how to fix. When she would routinely explain the language barrier and the difficulties she was experiencing,

her parents would simply tell her, “Just learn the language.”

“I didn’t understand my feelings because [depression] doesn’t exist, but I’m feeling this,” she said. “I started cutting myself and being on the more suicidal side. Things didn’t fit. And when things didn’t fit, there was no way to cope with it.”

When she started cutting herself, she would wear long-sleeve shirts to cover her wrists. Her parents didn’t find out because, as Lo put it, they weren’t looking for anything.

Like many Asian households, she grew up with a “doors always open” policy. Lo rebelled and kept her door closed, further distancing herself from the rest of the family. “I fought for the right to close my door! My [younger] brother can close his door now because [of me],” she said through scattered laughter.

When she first told them she was cutting herself, they were very hurt and cried. The next day, her parents were less empathetic. They told her, “Why would you do that? You’re just leaving scars on your body, and that’s gross.”

As things kept escalating, her parents were forced to accept her depression when she tried to take her own life. While her parents didn’t fully understand Lo’s depression, they finally acknowledged this was weighing heavily on their daughter.

“It’s not like I’ve forgotten what they’ve said. They’ve said some pretty hurtful things,” she admitted. “At least it’s in the past. They’re much more understanding now, and they’re apologizing for what they’ve said.”

Once Lo was in CÉGEP, her parents made more efforts to support her. Even so, it wasn’t without bumps in the road.

“There were times where they would get frustrated, because to them it’s just feelings,” she said. To Lo, her parents seemed to feel it was nonsense.

Her parents started to change their attitude only a year ago, she said. “They give me my own space and have put less pressure on me.”

She grew up similarly to many Asian kids, with her parents pressuring her

to pursue medicine or law. Now, she understands their berating came from a good place. Her parents grew up in poverty and wanted what they felt was best for her.

Since her roughest patch in high school, things have become more stable. “[My parents] understand what it means to see a psychologist. Even though they can’t help me, they understand there are other people who can,” she said. “Not everything is in their power.”

Ahlyssa-Eve Dulay, an illustration student at Dawson College, felt the same struggles as Lo in high school. The high expectations and strict rules her parents grew up with in the Philippines were put on her and her older brother, with Dulay taking the brunt of it.

**“My family doesn’t believe in mental health. It’s not a thing for them.”**  
— *Christy Lo*

Dulay grew up in Côte-des-Neiges, going to French schools attended by mostly Filipino kids. Usually, their first language was either English or Tagalog, so learning French didn’t come naturally.

Pursuing a career in the arts isn’t always welcomed in Asian households. A career in medicine or business provides a stability prized by Asian parents that is not found in the arts. Dulay acknowledged how fortunate she is to have more accepting parents, keeping in mind several of her own friends forced into nursing by their Filipino parents.

“My mom is supportive of me being an artist,” she said. “I’m very lucky to have family members that let me have a choice.”

While her parents agree on her education, they don’t see eye to eye on everything. “Our problems here aren’t

comparable to their struggles,” she said. Dulay remembers her parents scolding her. “You’re not suffering how we suffered there in the Philippines,” they would say. “How can you be depressed when we came here so you can have a better life than ours?”

Oftentimes, first-generation kids feel guilty for complaining about their lives in Canada because they’ve heard their parents’ hardships in their home country. Growing up in a developing country like the Philippines is never comparable to growing up in the Western world, and Asian parents will make that difference known.

There was an innate dismissal of Dulay’s emotions, with her parents saying, “I suffered more than you. Why are you sad?”

For Dulay, talking about your emotions to your parents is like showing a sign of weakness.

“My mom told me, ‘If you need someone to talk to, you can talk to me,’ but I know I can’t talk to her.” Opening up that conversation would only lead to more judgement and misunderstanding.

The language barrier was its strongest when she was in high school. “[My parents] don’t know French, and it’s hard to teach your kids how to do their homework when you don’t understand French,” she said. “They got frustrated, and it showed.”

She remembers her mother routinely getting upset over her assignments. Dulay understands now her mother wasn’t upset at her; she was upset at her own inability to understand the homework.

The ongoing pressure to succeed and the struggle of everything being in French were the cruxes of her turbulent emotions.

“I was sad almost every day. It was the first time I felt [depressed],” she said. “You have all these expectations and pressure on you.” Her fear of failure was hard to shake.

After telling her parents how she was feeling, her words were met with a rocky reception. “My mom didn’t know how to react, so she just got angry. My

dad tries to be more empathetic, but he's still confused."

"A lot of Filipinos love to judge and compare their kids, and that took a toll on me," she said. "It stays with you."

The majority of her education revolved around being better than her peers to finally receive praise from her parents, but even when she did her best they wouldn't praise her. They would always push for more.

"I'm doing this for you," she remembers thinking. "You forget you're doing this for yourself."

Amanda Wan grew up with more academic freedom than stereotypes would allow. "Grades were important but not the focus," she said. Wan's dad is Chinese, Filipino, and Spanish, while her mom is Italian and French.

Wan, a communication studies student at Concordia, remembers her Filipino grandmother always asking, "Why don't you want to be a nurse like me?"

Even so, her decision to pursue something outside of the medical field was well received, a reaction she's grateful for.

Growing up attending a predomi-

nantly white school, Wan was bullied for being Asian. They would laugh at her, call her names, and exclude her from things. This led to the beginning of her anxiety and depression.

At such a young age she didn't know exactly what she was feeling, but she did know it wasn't normal. Something was wrong but she couldn't pinpoint it. "It was a weird place," she said.

Just like Lo and Dulay, things were at their worst when Wan was in high school.

She was struggling with school and her sexuality. Her social anxiety grew stronger and it was hard for her to make friends. She started to self-harm. A classmate of hers found out and told the school, leading to a very heavy conversation over the phone between the administration and her parents.

"My parents were shocked and confused, and started off by thinking how I could feel this way if my life is 'perfect,'" she said. "They then came around and got me some help."

"My parents were sad to hear I was struggling and wished I told them sooner," she added.

Wan was clinically diagnosed with

depression and anxiety towards the end of high school, and was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder when she was in CÉGEP.

Mental health is something she's struggled with for most of her life, and she admits it's been a struggle. While she's had her ups and downs, she says she's getting better.

"I was never really able to open up to my family about the struggles I've faced. It took me years to finally open up," she said.

"They never really took it seriously at first, and I was just scared to let them down," Wan said. The fear of letting their parents down is something at the front of many first-generation kids' minds.

Slowly, a bridge is being built between Asians born in the diaspora and their immigrant parents. While the inter-generational gap is still vast, those struggling with their mental health are building up the strength to tell their parents and start the conversation.

"I was always supposed to see how I'm privileged, but that never really has anything to do with mental health in my opinion," said Wan. **L1**

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We're looking for writers, photographers, graphic artists, videographers, and more to contribute to our monthly magazine and to our online sections.

Come see us in our office, room H-511  
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# Nightline and the Art of Listening

Concordia Students' Nightline Volunteers Share What It's Like to Answer Anonymous Calls

Esteban Cuevas

You may have seen their slogans on posters in bathroom stalls or on the walls inside campus buildings:

"Anonymous, confidential, non-judgmental."

"Need to talk? We listen."

For the past two years, Concordia Students' Nightline has provided Concordia students the opportunity to phone in and open up about anything they have in mind.

The service is confidential and prides itself on being judgment-free.

Nightline recently won its referendum to become a fee-levy group, meaning it will receive a subsidy per credit from students—in this case, five cents.

With an increased budget, the service will seek to open every day of the week. Currently, it's available Thursdays to Saturdays from 6 p.m. till 3 a.m.

As of now, the service has 32 volunteers in its ranks, all anonymous Concordia students from different programs and paths of life. Yet, they all share the same wish to help others.

Even friends and family are unaware of the volunteers' involvement with Nightline. "Yeah, I'm basically like Peter Parker," joked Charlie after I compared her secret activities to those of comic book superheroes who often live a hidden second life.

Charlie—not her real name—has volunteered with Nightline since it was created in 2017.

Volunteers require anonymity to ensure the service is available to as many people as possible. The Link has agreed not to reveal their identities and has instead assigned pseudonyms.

"Anonymity is so important to us because we feel that we take the service away from every person we tell," said Charlie. "You may not want to call the service if you know I'm working there."

As a psychology student who wishes to become a therapist helping people who are dealing with mental health issues, Charlie joined to work on her listening skills.

She said most volunteers share a sense

of empathy when it comes to helping others.

"I feel like everyone has a feeling of wanting to be part of something bigger in the university and also wanting to contribute and give back to the community in some way," said Charlie. "That's a general reason why people join."

**"I'm offering them that space where they're able to open up and talk about what they want. I didn't realize until then how therapeutic it is for people."**

*—Charlie, a volunteer with Concordia students' Nightline.*



Graphic Joey Bruce

Volunteers are trained in active listening, a technique that prizes robust comprehension and intent focus on the speaker. Nightline and its volunteers say this can be hard to come by, as most people do not listen to understand, but to reply.

“I didn’t realize that until I was trained,” said Riley, another volunteer whose real name could not be identified.

“What I had been doing was not listening. I really think people spend more time waiting to talk than listen.” Riley, like Charlie, wishes to become a psychologist and believes active listening is a critical skill.

For Charlie, active listening is “like being an oral journal for people.”

“When someone is talking to me and I’m recognizing what they’re saying, I’m offering no judgment,” said Charlie.

“I’m offering them that space where they’re able to open up and talk about what they want. I didn’t realize until

then how therapeutic it is for people.”

Nightline was created in part to cover the gaps of Concordia’s Counselling and Psychological Services, which is not available all the time.

“We are here to provide something Concordia services cannot, which is supportive listening,” said Camille Zolopa, president of Nightline, who added that Nightline has a broad mandate.

“It doesn’t have to be anything mental health related,” said Charlie.

“We definitely have callers who call just for two minutes to talk about their day. People will sometimes call to chat about music, what’s happening around the world, or even SpongeBob.”

One of Charlie’s most memorable calls happened when she found herself on the other side of the phone.

She couldn’t sleep, and with so many thoughts running through her head, Charlie decided to call Nightline herself.

She ended up talking for three hours.

“There were so many things on my mind. Not only bad things, but also great things,” said Charlie.

After that, I felt so relieved and I thought, ‘Wow, someone is actually out there to listen to me and understand me.’ And I thought, ‘That’s how some of my callers feel after I talked to them.’

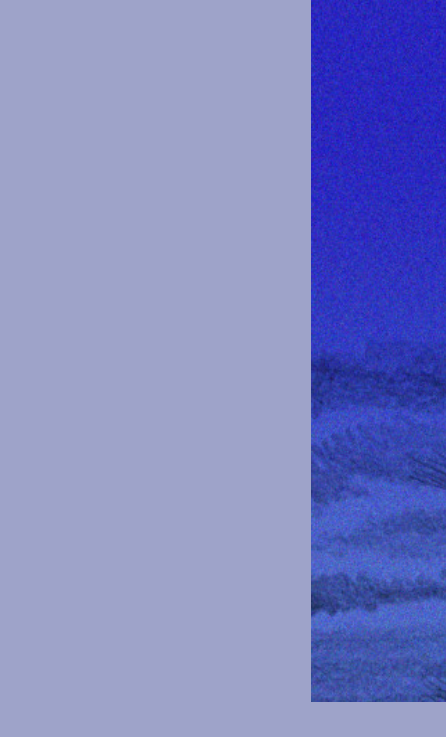
Nightline volunteers believe the service is also important to help students cope with the stressful school environment.

“School really puts that pressure on people,” said Charlie. “You have to perform well. A lot of people I see worry about their GPA.”

According to a poll by the Quebec Student Union, a federation of student unions at various universities, one in five university students deals with depressive symptoms serious enough that they should receive care.

With more than 40,000 students





at Concordia, the university's mental health services can be overwhelmed by people seeking appointments. Nightline helps fill that demand.

"I see many students complaining about how they're not able to access a psychological centre and how they have to wait months for an appointment," said Charlie.

"It's not the fault of the centre. They only have a certain number of therapists."

There are not a lot of other options for students, Charlie said.

Even though volunteers are not professionals, each one goes through a selection stage with Nightline before being trained for dozens of hours to acquire those listening skills.


The service also differentiates itself from other mental health services by using a non-directional approach.

"We are not here to find a solution for the other person," said Charlie. "There may not be one. We never know."

"The more you learn about it, the more you realize there's a void of [listening] in the world," said Riley.

"When I talked to my friends, I used to always give advice. And it's like, no. Just shut up and listen."

Riley said that for callers, getting things off their chests can be a cathartic experience.



Being on the other side of the line is also an experience.

Volunteers must take shifts until late at night—sometimes until 3 a.m. on weekends—and receive a wide range of calls from people they will never meet, all while not being able to confide in people in their lives about what that's like.

While some calls volunteers receive are lighthearted, others can be deeply challenging.

"All of us have gotten upsetting calls," said Charlie. "It can be for various reasons—suicide, things that are happening in their life, abuse, etc. That can be very heavy for anyone to listen to. [...] We all have our own triggers."

Many of the volunteers have experienced their own share of mental health issues or have had someone in their own life deal with it.

Though it can bring them comfort by helping others and knowing other students go through similar struggles, some calls can leave volunteers with unresolved feelings.

"I find it a little bittersweet," said Riley. "Sometimes you connect with callers and relate to their situation. You want to know what's next. It's sad in that sense."

"You don't get to follow them on their journey. When the call is over, it's over. But it's also really nice. You get to feel

like you helped them. You feel like you made a difference in that person's life. Even if it's a little bit," she said.

Volunteers are expected to share their experiences with each other after a call.

While they learn from this, it's also a way to help deal with unresolved feelings and difficult calls.

"The community is so tight. We're like a family. You really have to be there for each other in order to make the nightline succeed," said Charlie. "If I have a call where I am personally affected, I would expect or I would want one of my co-workers to support me."

Through all its facets, volunteers at Nightline take a lot of pride in what they do, even if they cannot earn credits or be publicly praised for their work.

"That's the beautiful part of our organization. People join not because we get credits," said Charlie, who wishes to continue being part of Nightline for a third year. "It's a very selfless thing to do."

Due to the closure of Concordia, Nightline is using a temporary number, (438) 812-6484.

Charlie emphasized that anyone, even someone who is not a student, is welcome to call for any reason.

"Call us—this might be something that can help you." **LI**

# It's Time to Finally Retire the Myth of the Tortured Artist

We Can't Overcome Mental Health Stigma by Glamourizing Dangerous Tropes

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Megan Hunt

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Take it from somebody who knows: improving your mental health is hard work.

From cost-prohibitive medical expenses to ever-present social stigmas, recovery is virtually always a process riddled with barriers. One particular challenge faced by the estimated one in five Canadians struggling with mental illness, however, is rarely discussed—not wanting to recover in the first place.

One of the most popular, tiresome, and dangerous tropes used to romanticize mental illness is the myth of the tortured artist. It's an idea you're already familiar with: the Sarah Kanes and Vincent Van Goghs and Robin Williamses of the world were geniuses not in spite of their mental illnesses, but because of them.

Inaccurate tropes like these are still nearly ubiquitous despite the recent explosion in public conversation surrounding mental health. On one hand, our era of social media and awareness campaigns has made living with mental illness at the very least a much less lonely experience than it has been in the past. Many of our grandparents were born into a world that had yet to see the publication of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and now Generation Z has created strange, wonderful TikTok subcultures for unfiltered discussions on mental health.

However, this heightened awareness is a double-edged sword in some ways. Ignorance and stigma may not

be as prominent among young people, but the glamourization of mental illness certainly is.

It might be easy to scoff at this trope, but it's even easier to embrace all its trappings without even realizing it. As someone who is both mentally ill and a self-proclaimed artist, for a long time I accepted the idea that pain is some sort of twisted gift for creative souls. I can't say that these romanticized, inaccurate ideas ever kept me from pursuing treatment or self-growth, but they certainly left me afraid that, as my moods improved, my creative inclinations or, worse yet, my talent, would decrease.

**Your  
creativity  
is not  
being  
caused  
by your pain.**

A true child of the Internet, the first communities I felt comfortable sharing my mental health experiences with were social media spaces like Tumblr, and, as a result, I was exposed to a lot of glamourization and misinformation from a young age. I also saw these normalized in the creative communities I was

exposed to as a young artist.

As a teenager, when I began taking my interests in writing and theatre seriously, a lot of influential artists such as Sylvia Plath and Sarah Kane were regarded by my peers almost as though they were martyrs for their art. It was easy to accept this as an objective reality, especially when it's so ingrained into the lore surrounding many of the world's most well-known artists.

Ultimately, this idea introduced me to two dangerous and nonsensical mindsets: first, that artists who aren't suffering from mental illness are doomed to a life of mediocrity, and second, that those who are mentally ill must embrace their own suffering to bolster creativity.

If only this idea were in any way reflective of how creativity or mental illness actually work.

Let's put to rest the idea that the link between artistry and mental illness is a causal one. Yes, there are plenty of artists who struggle with their mental health, and creative expression can certainly be a healthy and therapeutic way to cope with hard times, whether caused by mental illness or otherwise.

That being said, your creativity is not being caused by your pain. Research into human creativity is, for obvious reasons, quite complicated, but current findings suggest that many artists actually thrive when they are able to distance themselves from their sombre, serious consciousnesses.

In 2015, the Santa Fe Institute Work-





Graphic Joey Bruce

ing Group released a comprehensive report entitled “How Creativity Works In The Brain.” A key finding indicated that creativity is strengthened when artists find themselves in “flow,” a mental state in which one can “suspend the conscious evaluation of their output and simply play.”

In fact, many common symptoms of mental illness, including but not limited to inattention, chronic fatigue, anxiety, and psychosis, can actually keep artists from reaching their full potential. If we can accept that mental illness could prevent a person from being able to get out of bed or make rational decisions, we should be able to accept that it could make it difficult to pick up a paintbrush or a guitar.

It can be painful to watch the publicized suicides and overdoses of our

favourite artists and wonder whether there was more that could have been done to help them. The belief that emotional anguish is an intrinsic trait of the world’s greatest minds allows us to view real-life tragedies in an almost spiritual manner. For these artists, suffering is fate, and there’s no sense searching for accountability when it comes to fate.

Artists can also exempt themselves from responsibility through the tortured artist trope—especially privileged artists. This insufferable concept offers artists a false choice between the slow, nebulous process of healing and the promise of creative fulfillment, the latter of which is obviously more appealing.

Fortunately, I’ve since been able to find healthier communities and support systems and unlearn the idea of the tortured artist.

Nowadays, I see art as something that, at the best of times, can be a therapeutic outlet. It is not a substitute for medical treatment or lifestyle changes, and it’s not something that can make a bad situation go away—but it can make a bad situation feel a little bit better, and there’s value in that.

Of course, this is where capitalism comes in.

The connection here is simple—art can rarely be both a psychological reprieve and a form of labour, and in our current burnout culture, the latter is unavoidable. We live in a society that expects us to monetize everything, to view our most precious creations and life-altering breakthroughs as potential revenue streams. Art under capitalism is labour, and labour is something to exhaust, not enlighten.

In many ways, the trope of the tortured artist can be used to masquerade exploitation within artistic industries. It has tragically bred a generation of artists who want to be miserable but successful, and there are powerful people and institutions who can profit from this.

Alo Azimov, a Montreal-based storyteller, comedian, and producer understands this reality all too well. They said that in many cases, industry professionals will discourage artists from seeking help for mental health afflictions, especially in cases where it could impede their ability to make money.

“If there’s someone bringing in money, [...] there’s always a circle of enablers,” Azimov said of their experiences in the Montreal underground comedy and theatre scenes. “When you’re in it, you don’t realize until you’re out of it what was going wrong.”

Enablers certainly pose a risk to artists in both professional and underground scenes, but there are also outright abusers who extend the trope of the tortured artist beyond their personal experiences.

Many acclaimed (and predominantly male) filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino, David O. Russell, and Alfred Hitchcock have been accused of behaviour that, at best, shows little regard for

the safety of their collaborators and at worst, is verbally and physically abusive in nature. As audiences, we have granted leniency to “genius” artists to the point that we often treat their abuse as integral to their artistic process. We rarely extend this leeway to women, queer, and racialized artists.

Overall, the tortured artist isn’t just a capitalistic invention, it’s also a patriarchal one, something that’s been used to gloss over unacceptable behaviour long before the #MeToo movement was a blip on Hollywood’s radar.

Obviously, this trope is more than just a public misconception. It’s an idea that’s systemic and has impacted both individual artists and entire industries. Fortunately, many artists are hopeful that the myth can be killed by creating healthier, more supportive communities, Azimov concluded.

Azimov’s career as a performer began in Montreal’s club scene, where they opened up about their experiences with mental illness and suicidality during sets. Now, as a producer, they have created shows specifically focused on mental health, implemented support groups for performers, and generally seek to book underrepresented artists in shows whenever possible.

On a personal level, they say that

setting boundaries has been key to surviving in a demanding and fast-paced industry.

“Don’t be afraid to say no,” advised Azimov. “That is going to help you not burn out. Remember that no one has a right to your space, your time, your body.”

Of course, artists can certainly look to their personal experiences with mental illness or adversity without contributing to harmful stereotypes.

It’s absolutely true that retiring mischaracterizations of mental illness does not mean that artists should be silent about their experiences, but rather be mindful of their approach. The tortured artist is an idea that’s long been ingrained in our collective psyche, but it’s important to remember that we always have the power to replace a bad idea with a better one.

Instead of viewing recovery as a creativity killer, I try to remind myself that my experiences with mental health treatment have made me a better friend, a better student, and yes, a better artist.

If there’s one thing that artists can do as a community to finally retire the trope of the tortured artist, it’s to remind each other that getting better might be tough, but we end up better for it. **L**



# Cooking as a Therapeutic Activity for Managing Symptoms of ADHD

**For Some, It Alleviates Anxiety and Creates a Space for Focus and Creativity**

**April Tardif Levesque**

Have you ever found yourself taking 40 minutes to slice vegetables for a soup or salad instead of studying for a final exam the next day?

You might wonder why you're doing this, against all logic.

If you have ADHD, you might be used to the procrastination game and know you have an ability to hyperfocus on virtually anything that is not the task at hand.

"Why on earth are you making a salad when you need to be studying for your final?!" Mom shrieks, tearing me out of my bubble.

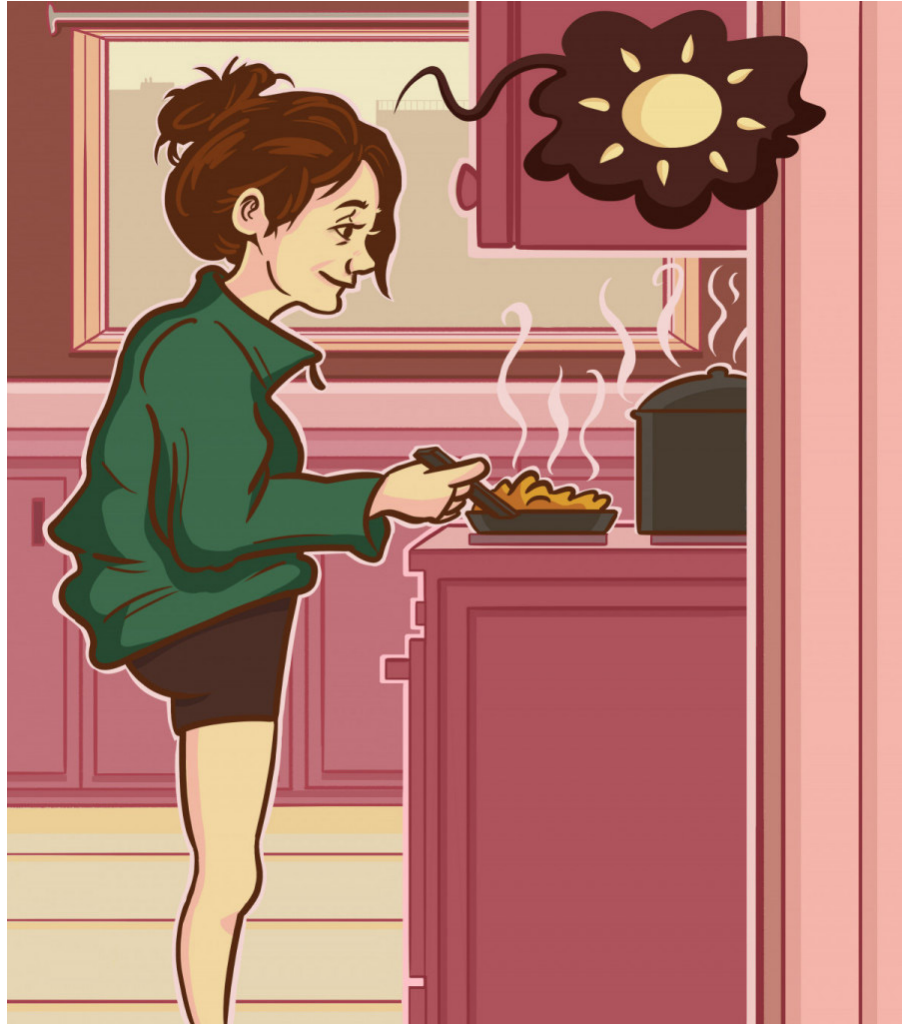
"Because it makes me feel calm!"

That's when I began putting things together. When ADHD was explained to me by my therapist, she mentioned that it isn't at all the common notion of a complete inability to focus; in fact, there are different ways in which it can pronounce itself.

ADHD will cause me to occasionally lack attention toward things that require my focus and gives me the ability to hyperfocus on something else.

The underlying cause might be stimulation (or lack thereof).

I can spend hours on a YouTube journey through different species of birds when I have an assignment to research.



**Graphic Carleen Loney**

If there is anything less interesting to me than the rabbit hole I'm in, my brain just feels like a toddler on the floor at a store, melting down and refusing to move forward.

Procrastination is the gateway to utter panic, and utter panic is not really helpful to my focus.

What I found as the root of my pro-

crastination was the realization that anything that can calm that feeling of stress might be preferable to the task at hand.

Cooking has become my instrument of choice to manage procrastination and anxiety.

As a slow, repetitive, creative process that requires sustained attention,

cooking became one of the least destructive ways to channel that need for calm and focus.

Cooking good, healthy, home-made food is a remedy to the self-neglect that comes with being mad at oneself for procrastination.

Self-care is the antidote to self-hate.

I call it optimal procrastination.

A sense of failure is no way to approach the challenges of managing ADHD, and cooking can create a sense of accomplishment and of wellbeing.

I began to wonder if this was a common experience and not simply anecdotal and true for me.

I fired up Facebook and polled my friends. Overwhelmingly, people confirmed they too found solace in cooking to alleviate their ADHD and anxiety symptoms.

Some cited more anxiety from meal-prepping, but the ones who did say cooking helped them called it therapeutic or cathartic.

I queried Google to see if I could find a larger group of anecdotes and found an article about hip-hop musician Loyle Carner teaching children with ADHD or anxiety how to cook.

The artist said he was inspired to do this because culinary

experiments helped him with his own symptoms.

Isabelle O'Carroll wrote a piece for Bon Appetit explaining how cooking helped her see her ADHD as a talent rather than something to be ashamed of.

"Everything outside of cooking didn't feel nearly as successful or fun," she wrote.

"At school, I was forever getting into trouble, not for being troublesome but for being late, forgetting my books, my pencil case, and once my entire school bag."

This article resonated with me, being what I thought was a type A- student and worker my entire career.

Anyone at *The Link* might describe me the same way—ambitious, but sometimes scatterbrained or exhausted. Sometimes, I feel like my whole aura is just burnout and exhaustion the moment I enter the office.

Then, suddenly, I can make a killer presentation, write a killer piece, be on top of the world.

These are not flaws, though.

What I learned from Loyle Carner's cooking school, O'Carroll's piece, and hearing from my therapist as well as friends and colleagues is that we have to work with our situation and not against it.

I accommodate my ADHD and

see it as a superpower, something that helps me always seek something new and interesting, something stimulating.

I can't be confined to dead-end situations, boring circumstances, or sit around moping. I always strive to grow, keep my hands busy, stay creative, think about solutions instead of accepting circumstances.

I speak my mind, sometimes by compulsion but always by a desire to improve things, keep things moving.

ADHD helps me truly know what excites me and what bores me, what motivates me and what kills my spirit.

It prevents me from settling for a life and situation I don't want or sit through things I don't like more than I have to.

More than anything, though, cooking helps keep the negative side-effects of ADHD at bay by keeping my hands busy while I think, create, take a break from stress, and get into a space of meditation.

I would thus like to credit ADHD with the absolutely incredible rosemary bread I was able to make this week, and for the fact that this article took far too long to write.

Sometimes, things must wait for the bread to rise. **L**



# Some Memories Should Remain Undocumented

Why Do We Obsessively Document Our Daily Lives, and What Does It Do to

Nanor Froundjian

“Wait, wait! Don’t touch it yet, I have to take a pic first. Do you mind?” Just as I was ready to take a bite into my exquisite scone, I stopped, placed my fork back on the table, and positioned my plate nicely next to hers.

How many times has this happened to you when you’re out with friends? Maybe you even recognize yourself in this—you know who you are.

Cell phones have given us the ability to take as many pictures as we want, and it’s a blessing and a curse. We always have a tool to capture something extraordinary, but we lose touch with the meaning of photography.

Sometimes, a memory is more beautiful when it’s only in our minds. A photograph can ruin that.

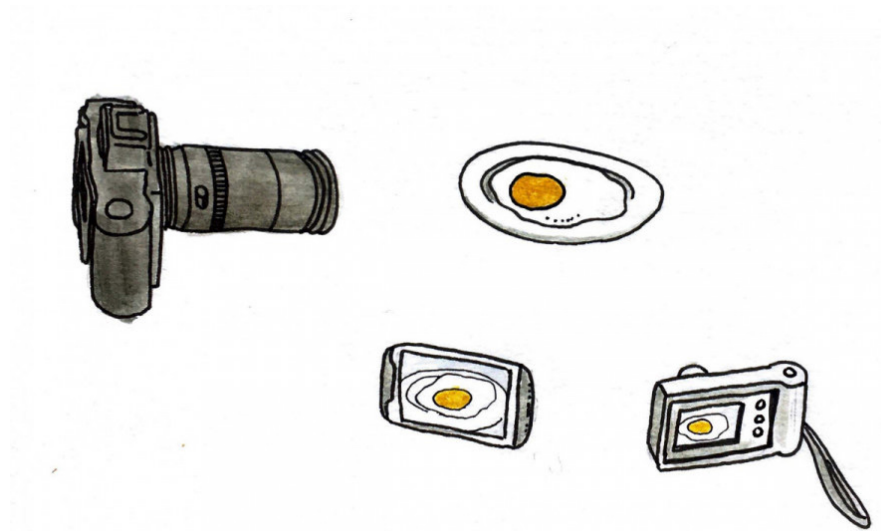
As I sat there in the café that day, daydreaming about my delicious scone while my friend took 37 pictures of it on the table, I asked myself: “Why is she really doing that?”

Why did you take the last picture on your camera roll? Are you ever going to look at it again? The value of photography is lost somewhere between the immediate access to a camera and the extent to which we rely on it in our everyday lives.

We capture a moment to turn it into a memory. But what does this obsessive documentation reveal about ourselves?

What are we proving when we take a picture? And who are we proving it to?

The ideology of Gen Z has led us to believe that photographing a memory



Graphic Joey Bruce

is essential and more valuable than the memory in our minds. Those pictures are either kept to ourselves as souvenirs or shared on the world wide web. Thorstein Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption would argue this obsessive habit’s objective is to prove our existence while creating an illusion of self-worth.

Once a trend becomes a mindless habit, we can forget how ludicrous it is. We stop questioning our actions because suddenly, it just seems like the normal thing to do. But it impacts how we live our lives, what we value and what we aim for. Most importantly, we begin to determine our self-worth from external validation instead of seeking it within ourselves. Over time, our reliance on it

only increases.

Sometimes, I purposefully don’t record or photograph my experience at an event because I want the memory to exist as a thought rather than in a tangible form. That way, I am left with a feeling associated with the memory that I can romanticize, whereas if I document it, I place the task of remembering on empirical facts—the image—and therefore forget the feeling.

Immediate access to technology and its capacity to save our memories makes us lose touch with the experience itself because we rely on our blurry iPhone pictures to hold the entire feeling of a special moment.

Joanne McNeil’s article “Tiny Proofs of the Existence of the Eiffel Tower,” pub-

lished in *The Medium*, spells out the way technology shapes the art we create. McNeil makes a reference to David Wojnarowicz's words, considering "intent" the primary motive of taking a photograph today. Photographing an iconic structure, then, serves as a method of personal documentation rather than practicing the art of photography. Is it to prove our existence? Or rather, a fear of forgetting?

McNeil calls the photographer's intent, and therefore their relation to

it was for previous generations because today everything is documented.

Although keeping memories alive through a photograph evokes a certain sense of comfort, it also destroys the very essence of a memory because it is so tangible.

And so, imagining the scene of a memory in its entirety is replaced by the physical material: a picture. The extreme reliance on objectifying moments in our lives renders "photographing [...]" a thoughtless gesture. We document in

through our tiny phone screens because our Snapchat story is obviously more important than the activity itself.

Andrew McGinely refers to the "if it's not on Facebook it didn't happen" mindset in an article he published in *TheJournal.ie*, drawing attention to the ridiculousness of a behaviour abandoning the connection to reality in order to pursue a connection to the virtual world. Throughout the article, he emphasizes the importance of living life—not simply being alive—and prompts the reader to

Although keeping memories alive through a photograph evokes a certain sense of comfort, it also destroys the very essence of a memory because it is so tangible.

the photograph, "psychic metadata." We take a shot of the Eiffel Tower not to have an amazing photograph of the architecture, but to keep a moment alive on a physical medium instead of solely relying on our memory.

In an era where everyone has a digital camera at their disposal, we do not need to think twice about the subject we are photographing. This luxury then changes the meaning and the value of photography.

Societal norms and mainstream media art determine the value we associate to a given artwork at a given time in society. What is beautiful now may not be beautiful in twenty or fifty years.

McNeil questions the validity or the relevance of a memory when the biggest part of the memory—the physical space—no longer exists, due to renovations or demolition in an urban landscape for instance. But she argues the feeling of missing a place, a home, a restaurant will never be quite the same as

case we ever need a reminder," McNeil wrote.

We keep nostalgia at a distance to alleviate the sadness it triggers by storing the memory in a photo, instead of taking the risk of forgetting it if stored in our minds.

Why do we document our lives? Where do we truly find meaning and value?

Experiences become a commodity with a certain social meaning attached to it. Suddenly, everybody is trying to create their own version of a commercialized experience. The value shifts from being the experience itself to being the product obtained from the experience—the material memory we take away with us.

There is a desperate need to document everything we see and a greater importance placed on advertising our experiences rather than enjoying the moment. A classic example is the live concert; we watch the performance

reflect behaviour and relationship with technology.

We transform a memory, something that is immaterial and abstract, into something material and concrete.

All that in mind, whether we document our lives to prove our existence or to have something physical to hold on to, this art form has definitely shaped the actions and reactions of Gen Z to their way of experiencing life as well towards their appreciation of art.

Documenting that which is not worthy of documentation diminishes the connection to the experience. It creates an overabundance of insignificant details that are published to occupy the public eye. And in turn, it clutters our minds with meaningless expectations of validation. We face the danger of losing sight of what is really important.

Next time you take your phone out to take a quick pic, ask yourself if that scone really worth a picture. **LI**



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Volume 40, Issue 7  
 April 2020

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