

THE FRAME



Women and Mental Health

Cover Artist: K.H. Anjaan

"Regal Emerald Queen"

The Regal Emerald Queen is a testament to the royalty that women inherently carry in our genes and the vitality that courses through our veins, as represented by the rich emerald colour of nature, which is the epitome of life and endurance. This piece is curated from a series of photos that I have captured in various moments where I felt life pulsing around me in nature, grounding me in mindfulness and meditating on the affirmation to "grow where you are planted."

In the cover design, the primary focus is on the photo where wildflowers are growing through the fence, superimposed on a background with emerald and gold swirls. The wildflowers are a reminder of our resilience as women, as the adversities and glass ceilings we are always shattering, as our strength to stay connected with our roots and flourish in all circumstances. The emerald-gold swirls reminded me of the motifs in Van Gogh's *Starry Night* where the organic patterns tie into the themes of nature as well as paying tribute to all the art that Van Gogh created symbiotically with his mental illnesses — a testament that we do not exist except as holistic beings that need to focus on our wellness holistically and also, that our art and creativity are therapeutic tools to delve into.

Each of the photos with the pink flowers is a reclaiming and taking ownership of the colour pink in each of its seasons. The first photo has the silhouette of a woman, with her brain about to be plugged into her heart and that, in my understanding, is how we need to connect with ourselves on a spiritual level to practice mental wellness. The second photo of the roses focuses on the stature of the flowers reaching up to the sky as an invitation to grow and connect with our inner royalty. It also serves as a reminder of our ability to accomplish great heights when we take care of ourselves.

The last photo shares a quote I think embodies the soul of womanhood and resonates with the idea that despite the ever-changing beauty standards, to cultivate beauty of the mind is the gold standard and our self-compassion, healing and wellness are the measures of that beauty.

The gold rings around the photos are reminders that we are all wearing crowns as an embodiment of our womanhood, that we are all interconnected and that life is not a linear rat race but a series of journeys.

This piece is my ode to all the queens in the sisterhood — may we all strive and thrive, may we all grow and glow, may we all prosper and flourish and may we all engage in revolutionary acts of self-compassion and self-love.

Long live the sisterhood!

Lots of love,

K.H. Anjaan

THE
FRAME

About Anjaan

Using various forms of art as a means of expression, Anjaan dabbles creatively and curiously in the art of photography. Particularly drawing meaning and connection between nature, her art, spirituality and wellness, Anjaan finds the creative arts to be a therapeutic process to explore herself and the world around her. For the past five years, Anjaan has been using her photography to design art for her poetry and publications centred around mental well-being, holistic wellness and therapeutic art processes. Anjaan aspires to continue to use her artistic skills to explore and promote wellness in intersectional communities.

K. HANJAAN
DESIGNS



@anjaanography

ISSUE 02

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HAPPY
NEW
YEAR



Letter From The Editor

Welcome to this jam-packed second issue!

And thank you all for your feedback about the first issue. It was really encouraging to read all the positive things said about it, and your sharp-eyes really helped iron out some of the kinks - especially important for someone with ADHD word-blindness like me. I was really proud of how it came out, but I think this one is even better.

I began writing this introduction on a 7-hour train journey from Oslo to Bergen, Norway, passing through a motionless, uninhabited world of pristine snow-covered fields and frozen lakes; a world which couldn't be more different to where I call home in suburban North-West London, England.

'Other-worldly' might also be a good way to describe the experience of compiling this issue for me, too. I've been very conscious throughout this process about being a man editing and compiling a magazine trying to tell women's stories. While women's issues or experiences shouldn't really need to be (wo)man-splained at all, this experience has been an invaluable learning opportunity for me personally. I thank all of you for the stories contained in these pages, regardless of how you've chosen to present them.

This issue is about women and mental health, and very hopefully about the uniqueness of the female experience, but I very specifically wasn't looking to create a document of female voices just for female readers. We learn about each other's experiences by sharing, regardless of gender or any other protected characteristic, and my hope is that the following pages act as a gateway to discussion and empathy.

What's contained within these pages are a testament to the depth of expression in the world if we give voices a platform to be heard, and your artistry and enthusiasm have inspired and energised me throughout the exhaustive process of editing and designing this issue. What's presented is presented as unedited as possible - these are the author's stories, after all.

I hope the dressing I've put around the work does it justice. And thank you all for reading, contributing and sharing.

Until next time,

David L.
Editor, The Frame



What do you do?

I'm a psychotherapist, supervisor, trainer, author and editor.

How long have you been doing it?

I trained as a child counsellor in 2000, qualified as a psychotherapist in 2009 and as a supervisor in 2016. I've been writing for publication since 2003 and editing since 2008.

What were you doing before?

Before setting up in private practice, I worked with CAMHS for 11 years and before that I taught A' level psychology in an FE college.

Why did you end up as a therapist?

I found that lots of people who studied psychology did so because they wanted to learn about themselves, their families, or their experiences. I decided to build on my counselling skills and trained to work psychodynamically with adolescents, because I enjoyed that age group and wanted to be able to support them in a way that I couldn't as a lecturer.



Jeanine Connor, Psychotherapist and author of 'Stop F*cking Nodding: and other things 16 year olds say in therapy'

What's your most important skills as a therapist?

Being endlessly curious about and interested in people's stories, having an ability to make people feel comfortable enough to share those stories with me, and helping them to dismantle their stories, make sense of them and put them back together in a more manageable form.

What inspired you to write a book?

The people I work with inspire me. My first psychotherapy book, *Reflective Practice in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, was an amalgamation of all the leftover material in my head from years of writing columns and articles with short word counts. *Stop F*cking Nodding* is an homage to all the 16-year-olds I've had the pleasure of working with over the last 25 years. Book three, about adolescents and young adults, is percolating...

What do 16-year-olds say in therapy, anyway?

My cheeky answer is, read the book and you'll find out! The characters in 'Stop F*cking Nodding' talk about the ordinary and not-so-ordinary stuff to do with being 16, including low self-esteem, perfectionism, self-injury, suicidal ideation, 'fucking around' with weed and alcohol, 'fucking around' with sex, sexual fetishes, gender and sexuality. There's a lot of sex in the book because there's a lot of sex in the lives of 16-year-olds and a lot of sex gets talked about in my therapy room.

Do you nod a lot?

Yes, I think I do! And since the book came out, I've become hyper-aware of it. I also have a very expressive face; I don't hide how I'm feeling.

What do you do when you're not working?

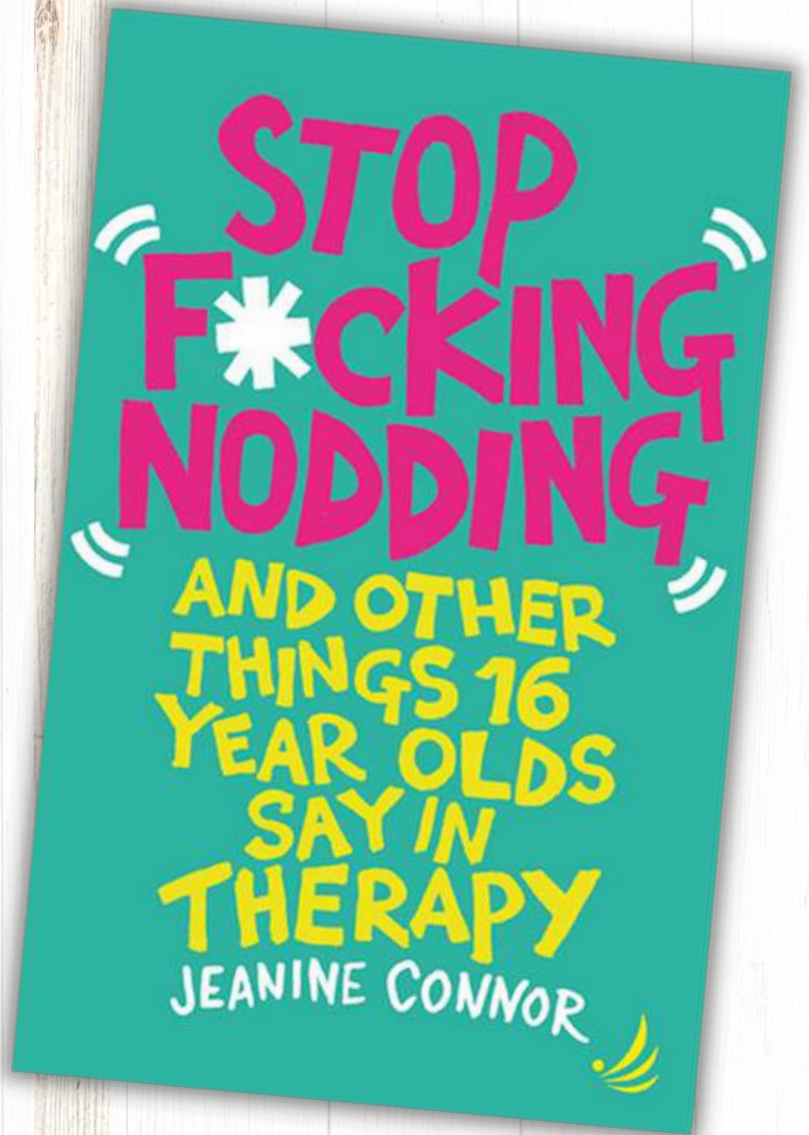
I'm an avid gardener and heliophile and my happy places are gardens and beaches: the tropical loveliness I've created outside my own back door, local beaches on the East Kent coast and tropical gardens and beaches further afield.

Tell us a random fact about you?

Linked with the previous question – I have a large collection of houseplants: 80 and growing (in quantity and size!) I have about a dozen in my therapy room.

What you'd like people to know...

I'd encourage anyone who works with or lives with adolescents to remind themselves what it was like to be their age. Adolescence is a tough transition and it's even tougher today than it was for those of us who grew up in previous decades. I want people to know that, and treat young people with the kindness, curiosity and respect they deserve.



**SEE OVER FOR AN
EXCLUSIVE EXTRACT FROM
'STOP F*CKING NODDING'**

Jeanine Connor is a child and adolescent psychotherapist, supervisor and training facilitator, whose work is psychodynamic in orientation. She has supported young people, and those who work with young people, in a variety of settings for 25+ years. Jeanine is the author of Stop F*cking Nodding and other things 16 year olds say in therapy (PCCS Books, 2022) and Reflective Practice in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy: Listening to Young People (Routledge, 2020). She is the editor of BACP Children, Young People & Families journal, reviews editor for BACP Therapy Today and psychology editor for Curriculum Press.

Jeanine's website can be found at www.seapsychotherapy.co.uk



@jeanine_connor

Chapter 4: In transition

Melanie was referred to me for psychotherapy by her GP because she was displaying symptoms of anxiety, depression and social isolation. I invited her to attend a first session, so she could decide if I could help her. Melanie was sturdily built and tall for her age. Her hair was dyed green, cut short and mostly hidden under a black beanie hat, pulled down over her eyebrows. She wore no make-up and her skin looked sallow. Her eyes were bloodshot, as if she'd been crying or had a late night, or maybe both. Melanie's clothes were nondescript and shapeless and didn't seem to fit her. These observations are not meant to sound disrespectful. It's important to acknowledge what I notice about a young person when I meet them for the first time, because they form the beginnings of my clinical formulations and hypotheses.

I made my introductions and invited Melanie to tell me why she had come to see me. I heard that she'd dropped out of school because of bullying. She slept all day and stayed up all night. I registered this topsy-turvy existence and continued my exploration of Melanie's home life. I established that she had a younger sister who lived at home and an older sister who came and went. Melanie had 'sort of' moved out to live with her nan because she didn't get on with her sister's boyfriend, who often stayed over. I was struck by all the comings and goings, the blurred lines about who lived where and the distortions between night and day.

I heard that Melanie had no routine in terms of sleeping or eating and that she seldom left the house. When I enquired about social contact, she told me that she had friends who visited her at home, but she rarely went out because she was too anxious and had experienced panic attacks in the past when she was away from home. I asked if she had any idea about what might be causing the panic and low moods and she said everyone stared at her because she was a freak.

'That's quite a statement. Why would they think you're a freak?'

'Because I am.'

'I'm wondering why you think of yourself that way?'

'Because I'm trans.'

I checked I'd understood by asking Melanie if she identified as transgender and she confirmed that she did.

I said, 'I'm sorry you have assigned the label 'freak' to yourself, but I can understand why you, and others, might be struggling to understand why you feel – I don't know – different.'

Melanie looked at me, as if interested, but didn't speak. I wasn't sure I'd got it right and so I clarified my statement by thinking aloud.

'By "different" I think I mean different perhaps to how you once felt, and different to some of your peers. I'm also acknowledging that there might be a difference between how you feel on the inside and how you are on the outside. Am I on the right lines?'

'Absolutely. All of that.'

'Good. I wanted to check. Sometimes words mean different things to different people. Talking about different, you've been introduced to me as Melanie, is that the name you prefer?'

'No. I hate it. I prefer Lane.'

'Lane.' I said the name aloud. 'Would you prefer me to use that name?'

'Yes, please.'

'And pronouns?'

'I use they/them.'

'Okay. I'll use those too.'

Other people's clothes

We continued our explorations in the next session. Lane told me they left school because no one could accept them, and I acknowledged how hard that must have been and encouraged them to tell me what they could about their feelings.

'I've felt like this since Year 7.'

'Can you help me to understand what that feeling feels like?'

'I feel like a boy.'

In my experience of working with young people, the transition to secondary school, accompanied by the onset of puberty, is often a time when feelings about gender and sexuality come to the fore. Young people start to question, or question more vociferously, who they are, what they feel and who they are and aren't attracted to.

In the introduction to her brilliant book *Gender Explorers*, Juno Roche states that children question and explore their gender in order to lead happy, functional and aspirational lives (Roche, 2020). It was evident that Lane was neither happy nor functioning, and I attempted to build some context around their experience of gender identity. I was struck by their story of family instability, erratic relationships and capricious fathers. I wondered how this had influenced Lane's sense of self, gender identity and relationships. I wondered if there was anyone Lane was close to, and they named their uncle.

'He knows I'm transgender, and he lets me have some of his clothes.'

'And he accepts you for who you are?'

'Yes.'

I realised then that Lane was dressed in their uncle's hand-me-downs, which explained why they didn't fit them properly. Or rather, Lane didn't seem to fit the clothes properly, because they were bought to fit a different man. I wondered what this might symbolise about Lane's sense of 'not fitting' – in the clothes, the family, the school or in their own female body. I encouraged Lane to say more about the clothes.

'I like men's clothes because they are more comfortable.'

'I wonder if you feel more comfortable while you're wearing them? More comfortable inside, I mean.'

'Yes. I feel male and I want other people to see me as male, so I wear male clothes.'

This made sense, in theory, but in reality, there was something missing; Lane didn't seem comfortable, so I encouraged them to tell me more about what it was like to be Lane.

Female bodies

Lane described the daily ritual of binding their large breasts with bandages to flatten them. Over the bandages they wore tight-fitting Lycra vests, followed by a t-shirt and then a looser outer layer. I felt terribly sad that biology had given Lane the body shape they had. As I read my thoughts, Lane said they wished their breasts were smaller, and I felt self-conscious about my own. So much was being communicated between us through our bodies, physically and symbolically. I decided to open up the exploration and enquired as to when Lane's body had started to mature and if they could recall what that was like.

'These grew overnight,' Lane said, indicating their breasts.

'Overnight? Gosh! Do you remember when?'

'Year 7. I got my first period the same week.'

'That's a lot to get used to all at once. I'm wondering how ready you were for those changes?'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, I think I mean practically ready. Did you have the stuff you needed? Sanitary stuff, a bra?'

'I had pads, but no one told me anything about periods or anything.'

I was struck, as I often am when speaking with young people, by Lane's lack of preparedness for puberty. Linked to my question about practical readiness was a curiosity about emotional preparedness. When practical information and resources, such as bras and feminine hygiene products, are presented in a sensitive and timely way, it can help young people to be more emotionally ready for puberty. It was apparent that Lane had been neither practically nor emotionally prepared for the inevitable.

It was also evident that the baggy outer garments were disguising multiple layers of physical as well as emotional pain. When I commented on how uncomfortable the binding sounded, Lane told me that the bandages cut into their skin and often they rubbed and bled. They said that sometimes the wounds became infected, but they couldn't touch or clean them because they couldn't bear to look. I wondered how they managed their periods and they said they found them repulsive. They couldn't bear to see the blood coming out of them and so they didn't bathe or shower at all during menstruation. The way that Lane described their infected, self-inflicted wounds and their lack of sanitary hygiene did indeed sound repulsive. I felt desperately unhappy that Lane's body was not being looked after or nurtured and that it had instead become a source of disgust.

'That makes me feel sad for your body, Lane. It's like how you're treating your body is the opposite of self-care. In fact, I'm thinking of it, in a way, as a kind of self-harm.'

'I suppose.'

'Does that make sense to you, even if you don't see it that way?'

'Sort of.'

'What I'm hearing you say is that sometimes you don't take care of your body and that you're not being kind to it.'

Lane looked tearful.

'I'm wondering if you ever hurt yourself in other ways, maybe more deliberate ways?'

'Sometimes.'

'Are you able to tell me about that? Only if you want to.'

'Sometimes I use cigarettes to burn myself here.' Lane pointed to their chest.

'And sometimes I cut myself here and here.' They pointed to their abdomen and inner thighs.

I sensed an enormous amount of self-loathing, which Lane was acting out in violent acts against their own body. The room was filled with a heavy sadness that lingered long after they had left the session.

A safe space

A way of understanding self-injury is as a 'cry of pain' (J. Williams, 1997). This model sees self-injury as a reaction to circumstances in which the individual feels trapped, with no means of escape or rescue. This way of thinking seemed to me to make sense of Lane's sense of being trapped, not only in their own 'repulsive' body, as they saw it, but also in their own confused mind. The body was being attacked, ritually and compulsively, through over-zealous binding and lack of self-care, as well as more deliberately through burning and cutting. For Lane, self-injury had become a way of coping with their confusing thoughts and emotions, which I was beginning to understand as possible gender dysphoria – a feeling of incongruence related to the gender assigned at birth (Holleb, 2019).

I offered a safe, consistent, reliable space that Lane could come to each week. I monitored their self-injury and tried to make sense of their thoughts and feelings around identity and sexuality with them. Together, we arrived at a place where we recognised the fragmented parts of the self, so that the process of reintegration could begin.

© Jeanine Connor

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*Lane is completely fictional. The themes in their story are real.

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**This is an edited extract from
'Stop F*cking Nodding – and Other Things 16 Year Olds Say in Therapy'
by Jeanine Connor.**

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SAMANTHA FRASER



DANIELLE CRAWSHAW



CHLOE SCOWCROFT

THREE LIONS

The victorious Women's Euro 2022 campaign captured the attention of the English nation, with the final being watched by 50,000,000 people and delivering the first major football trophy won since the men's World Cup in 1966.

'The Frame' editor David Levy sat down with three of the players from the official England Lionesses supporters team to talk the rise in interest in women's sport, mental health, and barriers to entry...

The Frame: I thought good place to start would be to get some background on each of you - what you do, who you are and where you grew up, and how you got into football and involved with the England Fans team.

Chloe: I've been playing football on and off since I was about six years old. I had a break for about seven years - I had a really bad injury and broke my hip, and then come back to it. I used to play at Walshaw, and it was through them (I got involved with England Fans FC). Me and another player from that club went down to go and just train. I think we had a few dropouts, and then me and this other girl just kind of got put in the squad.

The Frame: Was there any resistance for you? Did you ever face any kind of prejudice?

Chloe: Yeah - I played with lots of teams between six till about nine, I think it was, before we legally split boys and girls. Luckily for me, there was a team near where I lived called Sale, but to be told as a nine-year-old "I'm really sorry, you can't play for us anymore because you're a girl." was tough to hear. Luckily for me, I've got a great family behind me. So, they buckled together and found me somewhere.

The Frame: Did you understand why that was?

Chloe: I think I did at that age, but maybe not as much as I do now. They said it in a child-friendly way and I was protected by those around me. But I know girls that had the totally opposite experience to me so I was definitely lucky on that side of things.

The Frame: Were your parents always supportive of you playing?

Chloe: 100%, yeah. My mum's one of my biggest supporters. She literally got me to games wherever they were. And if she couldn't, my nana and granddad took me. I've had a massive support from family.



Sam: Mine's a similar story to Chloe's, actually. In primary school, I was the only girl on the team. I remember I was picked to put the kits out in the changing rooms and the cleaner came in and asked why there was one kit in the other changing room. I was like, "Oh, that's my kit." And she was surprised - "Oh, you're playing?" That's always stuck with me. I went to a summer football camp and that's how I got involved with my first club. I was spotted by one of the coaches who said, "We want you down to Hopwood Hall Girls." I won 'Player of the Camp' and all the boys were like, "how's a girl won this?" Then I got scouted for Blackburn Rovers when I was 12, 13, something like that. I played for Rochdale and Oldham, and now I'm at Bury.

My mum played when she was younger and it was harder for her growing up, because there was no team - she wasn't allowed to play anywhere. In high school, they set up a girls' team. Like Chloe, I also took an eight-year gap and came back again.

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IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, I WAS THE ONLY GIRL ON THE TEAM. I REMEMBER I WAS PICKED TO PUT THE KITS OUT IN THE CHANGING ROOMS AND THE CLEANER CAME IN AND ASKED WHY THERE WAS ONE KIT IN THE OTHER CHANGING ROOM. I WAS LIKE, "OH, THAT'S MY KIT." AND SHE WAS SURPRISED - "OH, YOU'RE PLAYING?"

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The Frame: What was the feeling when you were just the one person in the other room?

Sam: I loved it. I was like - 'I've got my own space and my own changing room!' Loved it. But for the cleaner to be like so confused, it was just a weird feeling - was I not supposed to be there?

The Frame: As a girl playing football, did you ever get any pushback from men's teams or men you encountered?

Chloe: Yeah, definitely. In primary school, there were no girls' teams. And I was at a good level. But in year six, they said, "We've never done this before, but we want you to be in the squad for the team." So, I was the first girl ever in the school to be on the football team.



The Frame: What was that like for you?

Chloe: Oh, it was incredible. I still remember my squad number and everything. It was just the best thing. As a 10-year-old, it's just the best feeling to know that you're good enough to play.

When I went to high school, I stopped playing again - no girls team in high school. It was all boys. We used to play in the yard when it was break. And some of the lads a few years above me were like, "no, you can't play." I found out later it was because I was better than them.

The Frame: Did you ever dream about going pro?

Sam: Yeah, I had that dream at one point. I got close to a scholarship in America at one point, but that sort of fell through. I wish I had done that, but it was the money at the time - we couldn't afford it. It was a lot of money.

Danielle: Mine's a complete different story to these guys. I didn't kick a ball till I was 15 years old. I played all the sports under the sun. I was mad Man City fan. I've got a season ticket and watched football but I didn't play it. It was never an option for me - I come from a Jewish background where girls didn't play football. We didn't do in school, but my friend invited me down to Bury to try out. I loved it and I've been pretty much been playing ever since. I went to Bath University and played for their team, and represented Jewish Great Britain in the Maccabi Games. After university, I came back and played for Bury. It's the only club I've ever played for.



The Frame: What did your friends and family make of your playing?

Danielle: I was that weird girl that liked P.E. People were mean because I tried. It was so uncool to join in, which I know is so opposite to other schools, but in my school it was cool to do well in exams, but not to do well in sport. That's just how it rolled at my school. I had to play it down a bit because if I tried too hard people would say stuff. But I don't think they viewed me playing football differently to other sports - it was more that you did anything at all.

The Frame: Did you get treated any differently once you started playing for a known-name like Bury?

Danielle: My guy friends were like, "Oh, that's cool. You play football." But obviously in their head it's not the same league level as the men's, but they still invite me for a kick around the park. When I went to the Maccabi Games people then thought, "Oh wow, you're actually okay at football." People looked up to that.

The Frame: I'd be interested to know about any observations or any experiences you've had about your football on your mental health - whether or not it's affected you positively or negatively, or if you think it's of particular importance that you play so that your mental health is maintained or anything like that.

Chloe: I think playing football is a massive part of keeping my mental health positive. A few years ago, I struggled really, really badly with my mental health. It was actually exercise and football that dragged me out of that. And so for me, playing football is massively important.

The Frame: Did it affect your mental health when you had the big break for your broken hip?

Chloe: Yes but it wasn't just the break - I'd had a few personal issues that had gone on. It just became one big snowball that kind of just broke me in the end. It wasn't until I started moving around more and started playing more that I noticed uphill movement in my state of mind.

The Frame: Did you just discover that doing exercise was going to make you feel better by chance? Or was it something that had in your mind it was important to do?

Chloe: All the people around me had mentioned it, but when you're that low, I don't think it crosses your mind to actually do it. You have to be in a place where you're ready to do it. I mean, don't get me wrong, even now, on some of my tough days, I really can't be bothered going out the house and getting in the car and driving to training. But I pick myself up and do it because I know that after it, I'll feel so much better.

Sam: Mine's again quite similar to Chloe. I had personal issues a few years ago, and then, a friend got in touch with me and said, "Are you up for a kick about, get your mind off things." So, we went to the park, and then the next day she said, "should we join a club?" So, we went down to train at Bury and in that first session, I thought I was going to die. I thought my legs were going to fall off - it was horrific! But I just loved it straightaway and kept going back. I began to notice I was in a better mood at work. I felt good. And I do put it down to football.

Danielle: I struggled quite badly when I went to university - I'd gone to Bath, which is three hours away from home. I didn't cope too well with that. I'd had some anxiety being so far away but knowing three times a week I had a training session was a huge comfort. If I ever got a small injury and took some time off, I'd definitely notice the difference in myself, and I missed my sessions.

Sam: I agree with that.

Chloe: I agree as well - I just play injured now!

Sam: I know. You need to stop.

Continued on page 57



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ADHD & ME

AD/HD



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NOUN - Acronym for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.



Emma

Note from the editor:-

When I began putting together this magazine, there were certain topics I had in mind. One of those was ADHD, a particular passion of mine given my own late-life diagnosis.

In October 2022 I came across Emma on Instagram. I was really taken by her artistic sensibility, and she felt like a person looking to tell a story. Her bio (at the time) mentioned a recent ADHD diagnosis - I couldn't have found a more perfect candidate.

A large part of my work as a therapist is guiding people through the emotional journey of ADHD diagnosis. I often equate it to grief, where those diagnosed seem to go through all the various stages of loss - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance - with an inescapable feeling of permanence. Nothing feels the same thereafter.

I was also aware of the potential dangers of asking an ADHD-er to write an assignment. What followed told more of a story than perhaps I had anticipated - one of panic, sadness, frustration, and a perfect encapsulation of the ADHD lived experience. Eventually, Emma and I worked together via WhatsApp voice notes, translated into her words which follow.

This is Emma's story.

ADHD facts

ADHD IS THOUGHT TO AFFECT ONE AND A HALF MILLION PEOPLE IN THE UK, BUT WITH ONLY 120,000 ACTUALLY DIAGNOSED WITH THE CONDITION.

AS CHILDREN, BOYS ARE THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE DIAGNOSED THAN GIRLS, BUT ARE NOT THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO HAVE ADHD.

THE CURRENT WAITING LIST FOR DIAGNOSIS VIA THE NHS IN THE UK IS CURRENTLY ANYWHERE FROM 12 MONTHS TO SEVEN YEARS.

PRIVATE DIAGNOSIS CAN COST UP TO £1,000.

APPROXIMATELY 37% OF PRIVATE DIAGNOSES ARE SOUGHT BECAUSE OF EXCESSIVE WAITING TIMES FOR NHS SERVICES.

SYMPTOMS OF ADHD IN UNDIAGNOSED ADULTS CAN INCLUDE

BEING EASILY DISTRACTED OR STRUGGLING TO COMPLETE TASKS.

HAVING TROUBLE SITTING STILL, FIDGETING, OR INTERRUPTING OTHERS.

GETTING BORED EASILY OR HAVE A TENDENCY TOWARDS RISKY OR ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOUR.

ISSUES REMAINING MOTIVATED, OR EXTREME SENSITIVITY TO REJECTION OR CRITICISM.

HAVING LOW SELF-ESTEEM, OR A SENSE OF INSECURITY OR UNDERACHIEVEMENT.

A STRUGGLE WITH TIME-KEEPING, WORKING MEMORY, ORGANISATION, REMEMBERING APPOINTMENTS AND/OR PROCRASTINATION. MAY OFTEN LOSE IMPORTANT ITEMS OR FORGET THINGS.

I'm definitely experiencing a huge amount of overwhelming feelings and overstimulation a lot of the time. I'm just getting very, very easily and quickly irritated by things and people. I've been trying to write this article for ages, and to begin with I was just so busy that I couldn't physically focus on it anyway, and then, the few times where I was like, 'Oh, I do have the time', I would go back to your email where you had put the questions and just sit and stare at it, and my brain would just go into power down mode, as though someone had drained the battery or pulled the plug or something. I would get in this frozen state of paralysis, I suppose - just not knowing how to start. I'd be simultaneously getting frustrated at myself because I know I'm an intelligent human being, but then berating myself for why I just can't get on with it - just choose one of the questions and just start. But still, all the while, in this frozen kind of place. Then to top it off, I'd be feeling immensely guilty because I'd made a promise to write this article, and I really wanted to. There's a feeling of guilt and shame that I still hadn't been able to start it - that I hadn't been able to say 'Oh yeah, here you go, here's the finished thing'.

It's like attempting to write the article for the magazine is emblematic, I suppose, of how I feel about so much of my life, where there are so many things that I want or need or to have to do because I'm an adult, and I'll try and make myself do those things but I just can't seem to do them, and then I'm back in the vicious cycle of attacking myself for it. Trying to write this article has been like shining a light on how I've felt for most of my life about most things I've tried to do, and how much I wish I knew how to be able to help myself move through that frozen state of complete executive dysfunction and paralysis. It really gets on top of me sometimes.

The opportunity to write this piece came just after I'd received my diagnosis, and it felt like very apt timing. I felt really good about it. Then most days I'd be feeling quite overstimulated as I was really busy at work, and it started to become a thing that I knew that I needed to do, but was starting to feel anxious about not being able to find the time to do it. Then when I would sit and try and write, I wouldn't know where to start and just felt overwhelmed. I'd berate myself and feel ashamed about it - why can't I just do this thing, I should just be able to do it and get started. I tell myself off a lot. And then it just started to build up more and more the longer I was leaving it.

I found out I had ADHD, or suspected that I had ADHD, thanks to Instagram. It was probably towards the end of 2021 or the beginning of 2022. I was just having a scroll on Instagram, liking lots of funny posts and memes and relating heavily to a lot of those posts and thinking, 'oh that's funny, I do that', and then 'and I do that. And that.' After a while I started thinking 'oh that's odd, every single post that I seem to be heavily relating to are all from ADHD-specific accounts. That's strange.' And then I went down this whole thought process of thinking 'well that's ridiculous, I can't have ADHD because I'm not a seven-year-old boy'. And then I would come across posts that would throw that myth out the window.

So I began to think, 'Well, okay. So, obviously, you can have ADHD then as a woman and as an adult. But surely, I can't have ADHD because I did really well in school'. I would end up stumbling across posts that would also dispel those myths as well, and the more I sort of started going down that rabbit hole, the more I came to realise just how much I related to everything I was reading. As I continued to research,, there was a lightbulb moment where suddenly, and for the first time, everything about me and my life made so much sense. Initially I kept it a secret pretty much from everyone, except for a couple of very select close friends who I knew also had ADHD, and are also women. I would talk to them about it, pick their brain about it, say, 'this is what I do - is that an ADHD thing?' They'd then share their experiences, which was incredibly validating.

What I came to realise through the information-gathering of my ADHD journey was that the reason why I did so well at school was because when I was in all the subjects I particularly enjoyed like English, history, art, or drama, I was hyper-focusing. I was completely fascinated by whatever the topic was and so when it came to doing the homework, because I was so intensely fascinated and interested in it, I would go into full hyperfocus mode and would go over and above what I actually needed to do and I would churn out these incredible homework pieces or essays, which would be met with praise and astonishment from both my parents and teachers. Because of that reason, I think my ADHD symptoms really flew under the radar.

My maths was always abysmal; I think it's likely I have dyscalculia. I can't do basic mental arithmetic. I've never been able to learn my times tables. It took me a lot longer as a child to be able to learn how to tell the time. But all of these things were masked by doing so well in other, more creative subjects. I was also incredibly busy all the time. I had lots of hobbies - dancing , gymnastics, swimming, netball, and playing the saxophone, among others. I was always doing something. As an adult, life started to really become difficult when I left the educational system - suddenly had no structure to my day, and didn't know how to structure it myself.

Dyscalculia



/ˌdɪskəlˈkjuːlɪə/

NOUN - Dyscalculia is a specific and persistent difficulty in understanding numbers which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics.

source: British Dyslexia Association

Over the course of the past few years, I had a lot of feelings of frustration at myself. I couldn't understand why I was such a high achiever in school, and then as an adult, appeared to be just failing at life. I felt like I just was bad at being an adult. It baffled me why things seem to be so easy for certain friends, and why it seemed to be something I would struggle with. I've always felt like I'm very behind in life. I know part of this is having chronic perfectionism, which I've really tried to work on undoing. I've also realised that holding myself to often unattainably high standards has been a way of masking that I'm struggling with my ADHD. I've always put this outward appearance to people that everything's fine and I'm doing really well, but for a long time I was just very confused as to why I seemed to have so much promise and do so well at school, and seem to be absolutely failing and not getting anywhere. As the years went on, it started to become more distressing. I'd get more and more into intense feelings of depression or numbness, and getting myself into a lot of very negative thought cycles. I felt broken.

I really want to help build more awareness about ADHD; particularly in women and how ADHD can present itself differently and often goes undetected, and what it's like to be diagnosed as an adult. I really think it's important for those with ADHD to really show themselves kindness and understanding - something I've been learning to give more of to myself since the diagnosis.

My diagnosis really changed the way I viewed myself and whilst this is still an ongoing process, it's enabled me to be more compassionate to myself. I'm learning about the areas in which I need to ask for help, and the diagnosis is also allowing me to know that it is okay to ask for that help if I need it. I feel less alone in how I'm feeling now because I know that I'm part of a community of people that also experience many of the same things I do.

I'm still very much on a journey of exploration and learning how complex ADHD is, and whilst there are many similarities that ADHD people will share, how it also differs so much from person to person. I think it's viewed by people who don't have an understanding of what ADHD is as something that's just people with tons of uncontrollable energy, or talk all the time and forget things, but it's so much more than that. The depth and complexity of ADHD as a condition is far greater than I had ever really thought about, as is the emerging understanding of just how much it affects me in so many areas. I hope that by sharing my experiences it might be helpful to someone else fighting a similar silent battle.

Emma is an actor, dancer, mo-cap performer and filmmaker, whose short film 'Cliché' was part of the Official Selection for the Lift-Off Film Festival 'Hollywood First-Time Filmmakers Showcase', and screened in New York at the MicroMania Film Festival.

@emmakirrage



@emmakirrage



BACK TO SCHOOL

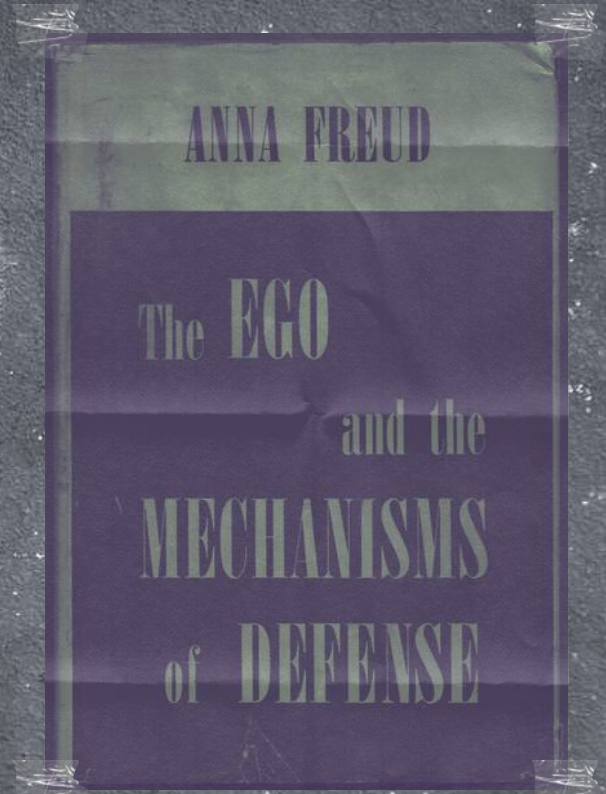
CLASSIC WORKS, MADE SIMPLE(CISH)

An Austrian-British psychoanalyst born in 1895 in Vienna, Austria, Anna Freud was the youngest daughter of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Educated at home, and later at the Cottage Lyceum in Vienna, Anna began her training in psychoanalysis in 1913 with her father, later continuing her education at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute.

In 1924, Anna Freud and her family moved to London, where she continued to work as a psychoanalyst. She soon established the Hampstead War Nurseries, where her care and treatment for children who were victims of World War II became a model for the practice of child psychoanalysis and child psychotherapy.

Her most notable work, her 1936 book "The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence", provides a comprehensive theory of the ego, which she defines as the part of the mind which mediates between the demands of the external world and the needs of the person's unconscious. She theorises how the ego develops a set of defence mechanisms to protect itself from anxiety, coining now commonly-used terms such as repression, denial, projection, and displacement, describing how they operate in the mind. The book solidified her reputation as a pioneering theorist, and became a founding work of ego psychology.

Anna Freud died on October 9, 1982, in London, England. Widely recognised for her contributions to psychoanalysis and child psychology, she was a pioneering voice for women in the field, and key figure in the developing exploration of the human mind.



1936



From Fantasy to Reality.

**Accepting the reality of being a female
sex addict.**

words by Jess Esmond



New year, new me.

I have told myself this at the beginning of every year, as I wrote impossible lists of all the New Year's resolutions that would make me a new, better person.

For the last 25 years, I've been fantasising that if I made these changes, ranging from short bouts of extreme dieting, dangerous relationships or dysfunctional patterns of work, I could become someone else.

I could change from the girl who had suffered decades worth of trauma, who was privately addicted to porn and was terrified of intimacy. That was a version of myself I wanted to lock away and banish.

Sure, I would feign surface level acknowledgement of my past. It loomed so large in my life I couldn't fully ignore it. I would make anecdotes out of some of my less severe experiences to partners and close friends - but all the time I fantasised that if I could just be someone funny, smaller, more attractive, successful at work, then I would become this new mystery fantasy person without any past trauma.

Porn and sex was a temporary relief that always helped, for a short amount of time. I put myself into increasingly difficult situations and my life started to split. There was real me who was falling apart, struggling with disassociation, panic attacks, binge eating, binge drinking and obsessive use of porn and sex. Then there was fantasy me, the person I imagined myself to be each time I engaged with porn or sex, someone confident who didn't have any problems, and certainly no problems with sex or relationships. The gulf grew between the person I fantasised about being and the way I really was.

I couldn't imagine a life without porn and assumed with a deep and silent dread that I'd just have to live as an addict forever.

Something like sex addiction, I wrote in the initial email to my new therapist when asking if they had space to take me on.

After years of fantasising about new me, in reality I was stuck in a rut, and my relationship with sex and porn had been the one constant and now my relationship to it was totally unmanageable.

With the help of my therapist, I began to hesitantly unpick a lifetime of experiences, traumas and reactions and found myself identifying with this new uncomfortable label.

Female Sex addict, fantasy addict, 'doing the work', sobriety. I found the terminology shame inducing, and also painfully familiar.

My dad was a lifelong abusive alcoholic who had always adamantly refused any concept of sobriety. He was always adamant his life should have been better, that he deserved better, that the family were holding him back. A fellow serial fantasist.

Initially I was convinced that I could "just quit" my addiction. Retreating into fantasy, I dreamt that I'd just get sober, stay a few months and BAM! I'd feel just fine and not really have to look any further into the roots of the issue. Sober me, new me.

Sobriety was very different from my fantasy, I felt like trash. Sober me was full of shame and misery. The panic attacks I'd been experiencing intensified, as did my long anxiety and depression. This sobriety thing wasn't quick and it sucked, what was the point?

But I didn't retreat back to fantasy me, because although new me felt terrible, I felt just as awful as when I had been in active addiction, a time where I would escape to fantasy constantly.

I found strength in my own identification as a sex addict. I am a female sex addict, I would look in the mirror and tell myself. I was riddled with a lot of the same symptoms and struggles but I had something I strongly identified with that related to my real life, my past and my present.

Reality is a lot harder than hiding in fantasy. It means being accountable. It means having to deal with and process real emotions. I used to loathe the phrase "doing the work" but once I started doing the work, new facts about my reality that I was always scared to look for emerged.

I'm not alone as a female sex addict. I have had a pretty rough time, and I don't have to be invincible. Any addict's substance, drug of choice, is not the root of their addiction, it's the pain that's underneath that they are trying to soothe and escape from, the same way I was trying to escape.

I'm still a 30 something woman who is a sex addict, and struggles with their mental health, acknowledging my CPTSD, anxiety and depression is now part of my life rather than trying to escape it.

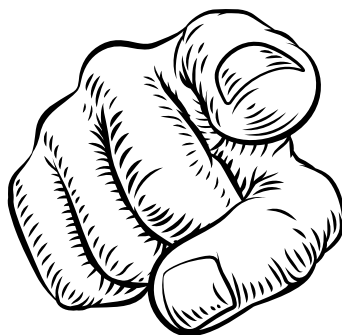
Acknowledging and accepting my status as a female sex addict has changed my life for the better.

So, new mantra: new year, same healing me. Not as catchy or aspirational, but realistic and hopefully achievable. In my one year, one month and 15 days of sobriety I've not transformed into the new me I always fantasised about.

But this year I'm continuing as the new me who doesn't have to escape to fantasy to cope with reality. New sober me is facing up to their addiction and past. That feels better than any new years' resolution I could have ever made.

Jess is about to begin studying counselling and hopes to join the conversation about female sex addiction.

Jess is on Twitter and Instagram @jezmondy



WE NEED YOU

THIS FANZINE RELIES ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PEOPLE THAT READ IT, WHETHER IT'S IN THE FORM OF ART, POETRY, PHOTOGRAPHY, ESSAYS, ARTICLES OR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES - AS LONG AS IT'S MENTAL HEALTH RELATED, AND:

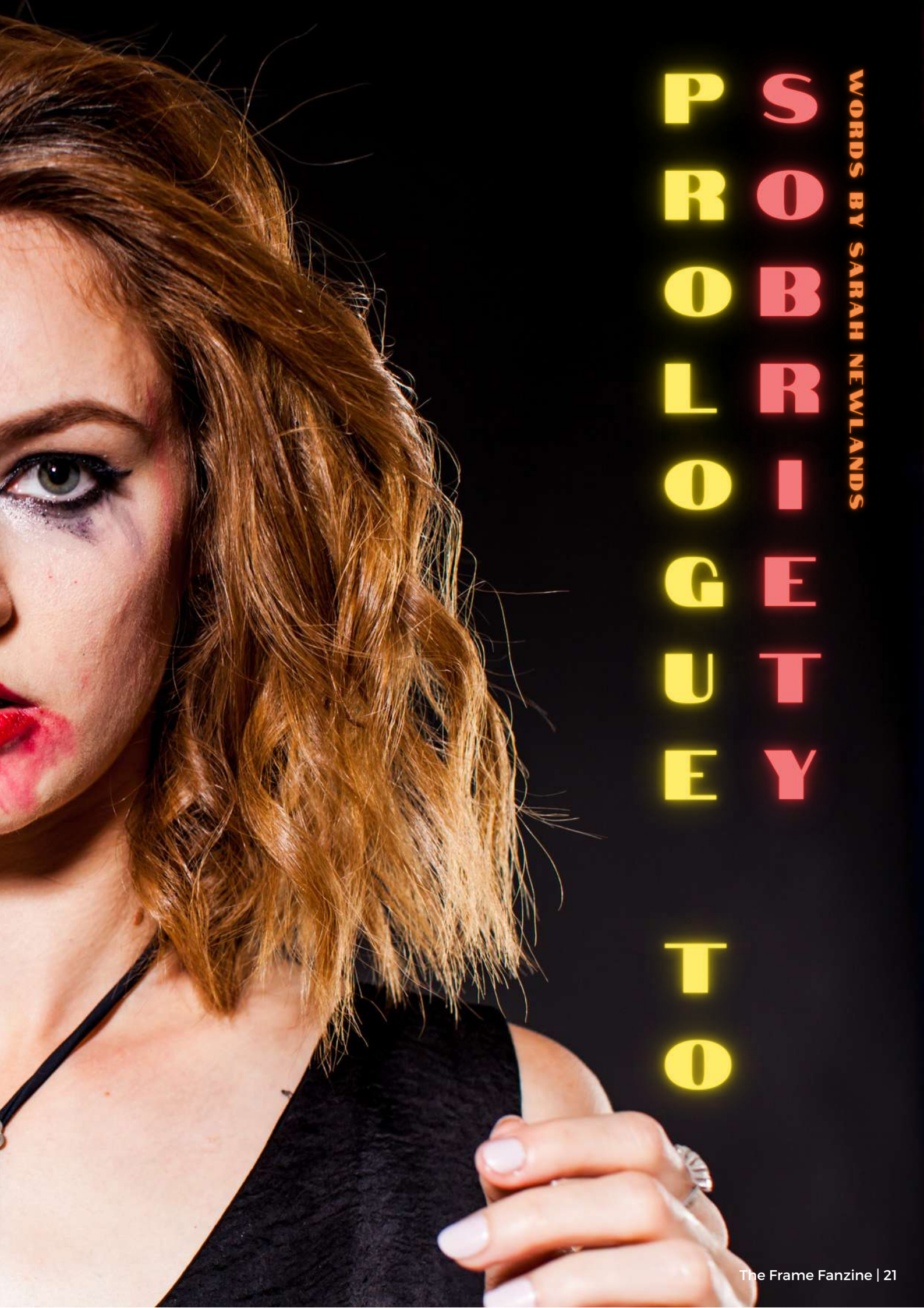
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WORDS BY SARAH NEWLANDS

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O

I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MANY 'DAY ONES' OF SOBRIETY I HAVE HAD, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN MANY.

There were countless mornings when I woke up with a pounding head, bloodshot eyes and a truck load of guilt, exclaiming, "I'm never drinking again..."

What was different about the final time I said that? I honestly couldn't tell you. But what I can tell you is that the work begins way before you reach Day One, before you even know it. This could be you reading this right now.

I was 37 when I gave up drinking alcohol, but I think the work began as far back as when I was 32. I had two young toddlers at the time and I knew my reasons for reaching for that glass of wine had changed.

Most of the time I wasn't drinking to be sociable and fun (although I've since realised I was neither of these things when under the influence); I was drinking because life was HARD. The relentless doldrums of wrecked sleep, tantrums (them and me), potty training, fractious mealtimes, routine fixation, loneliness and fatigue led me to reach for that first glass of wine to calm all that noise down.

And after all, I DESERVED it, didn't I? It was a heck of a lot of noise after all...

But did I really deserve the increased anxiety it caused me in the long run; the insomnia, the low energy, the poor judgement, the rubbish skin and the endless cycle of low mood/ drink/ pass out/ do it all over again?

I spent at least five years in a sober curious state, questioning my habits – the prologue to Day One, if you like. I didn't realise it at the time, but I had already started the work.

If you are a grey area drinker like I was, you might tell yourself all sorts of stories about how you're "not an alcoholic", or that you can easily stop for a week/ month, so there's no harm done. Sound familiar?



This article was written by Sarah Newlands, a sobriety coach, meditation teacher and EFT practitioner.

Sarah decided to qualify as a sobriety coach after she managed to stop drinking alcohol altogether in 2018, having been a 'grey area' drinker for decades. Now, her main aim is to give back the support that she did not manage to receive herself whilst giving up alcohol.

www.sarahnewlandsc coaching.com



@sarahnewlandsc coaching



SIGNS OF ADDICTION

psychological

- **diminished self-esteem**
- **mood swings, unpredictable temper**
- **tiredness**
- **paranoia**
- **agitation; quick to anger**
- **poor memory**
- **feelings of hopelessness**

- **exacerbation of existing mental health conditions such as anxiety, stress or depression**

Those are certainly the stories I told myself. I became a self-enabler, perpetuating my socially acceptable habit, telling myself I couldn't possibly be doing any short or long-term damage. After all – I did Dry January so I must be ok right?!

So why did I stop? Well I was sick of the cycle of guilt, shame and enabling. My thoughts were dominated by, “Am I drinking too much? Shall I have a drink tonight or wait until tomorrow? If I drink while I eat it's ok... Am I doing my body damage that I won't see until it's too late? My friend drinks just as much if not more than me” etc, etc. I can tell you now that those stories were the real noise – not the tantrums coming from the living room...

Those stories were the start of something though. The start of my sober curious journey which led to my Day One. Yes – there was still hard work to do, but I think once you're acknowledging that you want to get to Day One and discover the beautiful world that awaits you on the other side, that's half the battle done. Once you've reached Day One, you've already completed your sobriety prologue.

So what next? Day One is where the magic begins... The better sleep, the higher energy levels, the clearer skin, brighter eyes, pure sober joy and laughter, lighter mornings, and time – so much more time!

What's not to love?

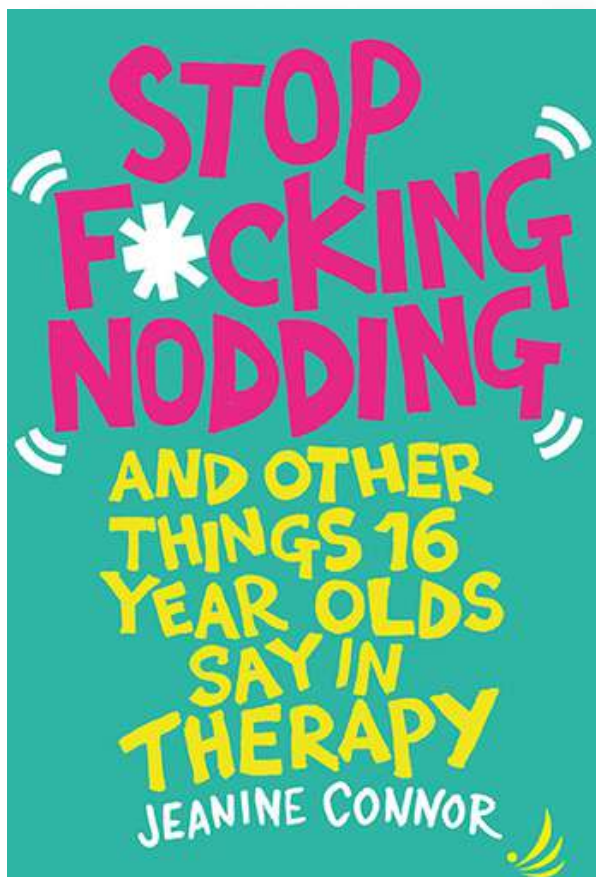
physical

- **decrease in self care; poor hygiene or disinterest in personal appearance**
- **difficulty sleeping, including development of insomnia**

behavioural

- **dishonest or secretive behaviour**
- **increased unreliability at work or in social situations**
- **loss of interest in hobbies**
- **prioritisation of time alone**
- **continued use of substances or engagement in behaviours, despite negative consequences.**
- **trying and failing to stop**

What We're Reading



'...a gift to therapists, and indeed anyone who works with teenagers, or who parents them, or has one in their life.'

Graham Music, Psychotherapist

'... engaging, honest and courageous... an essential read for those training to work therapeutically with young people but also for practitioners wanting to explore the meaning of authenticity, keeping it real and generally being kind to yourself in those moments of self-doubt. Prepare to laugh out loud and simultaneously have your heart in your mouth at the same.'

Jo Holmes,
Children, Young People and Families Lead, BACP.



Riotously funny, searingly honest and brilliantly insightful, Psychotherapist Jeanine Connor's fantastic book takes us into one of the most complicated, frightening and unpredictable places in the world – the mind of the 16 year-old.

Although written with therapists in mind, the universality of trying to understand the teenage experience means there's something here for everyone. Whether therapist, parent, teacher, or just someone who was sixteen once upon a time, the book's themes of sex, identity, gender, self-esteem and the difficulties of trying to navigate an increasingly adult world will undoubtedly resonate with us all.

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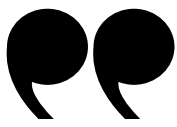


Her Twitter bio describes herself as an "overeducated and unrepentant whore who talks far too much".

She's a vociferous blogger, a force of nature, and a vocal advocate for the right to a career of your own choosing.

Her name is Maggie McNeill.

Stripped



“Oh, really, what do you do?” she asked me, expecting nothing shocking, I’m sure.

“I’m a whore,” I replied matter-of-factly.

'Introduction' from The Honest Courtesan by Maggie McNeill



I was both apprehensive and excited to meet Maggie, a former stripper and now semi-retired escort. A prolific writer of her “whore’s-eye view” blog ‘The Honest Courtesan’, her writing is articulate, passionate, and whip-smart, and perhaps most interestingly for me as a therapist, (when I’m not trying to compile a magazine) makes a strong argument for comparison between our two professions with which it’s hard to disagree.

As she comes into view and we begin talking, I’m immediately struck by how charming Maggie is, and how quickly I feel at ease with her. She meets me as promised, (or, as she put it, with “fair warning”) early in her morning, wearing a hooded bathrobe. I’m pleased - after all, I want to meet Maggie the person, not ‘work-Maggie’. We soon joke; her about swearing and being an Anglophile, and me about the various ways I’ve sought to remove various sticks from my very British backside.

Reading Maggie’s blog also made something very clear, and it was one of the reasons I so wanted to meet her - she had no time for stereotypes, shaming or anything less than absolute, matter-of-fact ownership of her chosen profession. She speaks exactly as she writes; an enticing cocktail of youthful honesty and rebellion, and a kind of directness which feels like it could only come with weary experience of justifying something she clearly feels doesn’t need to be justified. I began by asking Maggie to tell me a little about herself.

Maggie: ... like a capsule biography kind of thing?

Well, I was raised Catholic in South Louisiana. In the 1960s, South Louisiana was still pretty backward - picture English country in the 1950s, that was the cultural milieu. I went to school in New Orleans and then, when I went to college, my parents were only willing to pay for my education if I lived in one of the dorms. Eventually, I had to leave and when I moved to an apartment I had to raise the money for that, so I did that with sex work. I didn’t advertise, I didn’t work for an escort service or anything like that, it was just word of mouth. I only did it for a couple of years before stopping, getting my degree, and getting married. I was a librarian. But then my husband left me with a gigantic shit-ton of bills.

The Frame: How long were you together?

Maggie: Seven and a half years. It took a lot to recover from. I don't form bonds that easily, and when I do form them they're very hard for me to let go of. Back then, I definitely had a tendency for co-dependency, and it took me quite a while to recover from his leaving me. When I did, I decided to start stripping.

Three years later, I started escorting and had my own agency for a few years before I married my favourite client. When we broke up a decade or so later, it was very amicable. We divorced but we also stayed in contact, and I don't think the causes of our breakup were particularly sex work-related. He was texting me yesterday because I've had the flu. We're still close. I bought a farm in 2017, and moved there at the start of the pandemic. I (semi) retired at the beginning of 2021.

The Frame: Do you miss it?

Maggie: The escorting? I'm semi-retired. I still see guys, but I only see existing clients. I don't see new clients anymore. I don't do things halfway. I do them full throttle. I wanted to analyse why people burn out and I came to realise it was the shit you didn't like, not the shit you do. For me, that was being on call and not knowing my schedule. I began by cutting out same-day appointments. I was like, 'No. I'm not going to friggin' jump up and be ready for you when I thought I was going to be having a nice dinner at home tonight.' With changes in the law which made advertising much, much harder, and the fact that I'm getting older - I'm closing in on 60 - I reached a point where I felt I couldn't adapt my methods any more. It's not just about seeing clients in the room anymore. You better do porn, and you have to have social media. You have to advertise in clever ways. That's not me. I can walk into a room, look a guy in the eye and go "hi there" and have him think I'm the greatest thing in the world. I create an experience, and then I leave. That's what I'm good at.

The Frame: But you still have your website. You don't take on any new clients?

Maggie: No, no new clients. There was one exception - I was in Seattle and a good friend of mine who's also an escort had promised a client a duo and the other girl had flaked. She called me up and said "Maggie, Maggie, do you want to make 'x' thousand dollars?" and all I had to do was show up and be pleasant. She'd already done the screening and everything so it didn't really matter that I didn't know the guy. I trusted her judgement. I don't want to have to 'screen' new people any more.

The Frame: Is that also the performance part? Not the sexual performance, but the 'getting to know you'?

Maggie: Yeah. I'm not good at that stuff. Yeah, that's the part I dislike. All the "come into my parlour.... Aren't I hot? Look at this picture of me against a tree." I can't do that. If I had been good at that, I would have fucking moved to New York and joined an ad agency.

The Frame: Or you could have become a therapist.

Maggie: I am, in a way. In fact, I do have guys that will contact me to do phone consultations. They'll have relationship issues and things like that. I had a guy contact me just a few months ago. He was travelling a lot and having a relationship with a woman in another country. He was fine with the financial dimension of the relationship, but his kids were freaking out. He was asking me for advice on how to explain to his kids that he was older than they were and he was perfectly fine with this woman having a financial motive. I have lots of those sorts of conversations.

The Frame: It's such a skill set, to be adaptable to all these different people

Maggie: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely.

The Frame: Reading your blog, you're very clear in that you have a very positive attitude towards sex work. I'm really conscious that I don't want this to become some horrible 'tell me why men come and see you' cliché.

Maggie: I wish more people understood the similarities between therapy and sex work. I have a friend in the United States, he's a Sex Therapist, and one of the reasons he and I got to be friends online is that he gets exactly that point. He's written a lot condemning the myth of sex addiction, things like that. Unfortunately, there's a big segment of the therapy community which is very ignorant about sex. How can you know so little about human sexuality when you have a psychology degree? I think a lot of these folks get their sociology degree or their psychology degree and they go into therapy, and in their personal life they've had three partners. One in high school, one in college and the one they married. How could they understand somebody whose sexual experience is so much broader than theirs?

The Frame: You mentioned the things you didn't like about your work, what did you enjoy?

Maggie: The two things I liked the most are, I'm afraid, the two major responses sex workers give in every damn study I've ever seen, which is time and money. The money is very good. We make as much money as I'd say... lawyers, when they start out. And the other is complete control over your own time. Which is vital, so vital. When I had the escort service, a lot of the girls who worked for me were single mothers. They needed their own time and to be able to say "I'll work while my kids are in school." One springs to mind that would take her kids to school in the morning, she'd sign in, and then she'd sign out when it was time to pick them up in the afternoon.

In New Orleans - New Orleans is a 24-hour city - we had clients who would call in at 5, 6, 7 o'clock in the morning. I'm not about to be disturbed from sleeping for that shit, but we had one girl who was a morning person and her mother lived next door. Those clients worked for her. She'd sign off around 10 in the morning, and her mother would have got her kids up and given them breakfast, and she got the rest of the day to be with them. Women with health issues of some sort or another. Sometimes you wake up and you're not able to work. What regular square job is going to accept over and over, maybe once a week or once every couple of weeks, an employee calling in and saying, "I'm sorry, I just can't come into work today." But when you're an escort, you have that flexibility and control. You can say "I want to work this much and no more." My friend Mistress Matisse once said-, and I think this is a really good quote, "I look upon my sex work less as a career and more as a means of subsidising my lifestyle." Yeah, I can see that. Right. It's like, this is how I pay the bills.

The Frame: Your career was the best part of 25 years?

Maggie: In January of 1985 I did my very first call so we're talking about closing in on 40 years now. But full-time escorting started in January 2000. So, 20-something years. If you count the stripping, a little more. Let's just say most of my adult life.

"Aren't I hot? Look at this picture of me against a tree." I can't do that. If I had been good at that, I would have fucking moved to New York and joined an ad agency.

The Frame: Why did you gravitate that way in the first place? Why was it stripping and not working in a movie theatre or something?

Maggie: The reason I chose it is the same as the reasons I left it. I have, as you observed yourself, a very dynamic, forceful personality. I couldn't count the number of jobs I've walked out on because a boss was acting unreasonably to me. Can't give me the schedule I want? Okay, find somebody else then. One boss I remember gave me a huge dressing down over some problem that had nothing to do with me and when he finally got done, I just said "No", handed him his key, and walked out the door. It don't play well with others as they say, and I don't want to run anybody else's life, either. I don't want to be the boss and I don't want to be bossed. And so I looked at stripping as a way to make money without being bossed. I quickly found, of course, that strip club owners and managers still think they can boss you. And that's why I quit that and started escorting. Had the same problem with the first escort service I worked for, so I immediately turned around and started my own escort service. That solved that problem.

The Frame: It's interesting to hear about the importance of control and the ownership of your own time. I think the general picture of someone who does sex work is that they're being pimped out and exploited. That doesn't sound like that was your experience.

Maggie: Every methodologically sound study that I've ever seen - not the bogus studies out there from prohibitionists or paid for by the government - even studies from so-called hot beds like India and Cambodia show that for domestic adult sex workers, the coercion rate is roughly 2%. For migrant sex workers, the coercion rate is something like 5% to 8%. For minors, it's usually about 10%. But we're still not talking about vast numbers here. 10% is not even remotely like you'd be led to think. This is one of my pet peeves. I write often about how that 2% figure also happens to be roughly the fraction of women in the general population who report having a coercive or

or abusive boyfriend or husband. Why do we view these as different? They're victims of domestic violence. Have you ever seen the movie 'Baby Face' with Barbara Stanwyck?

The Frame: I've seen it. But I can't-,

Maggie: It's a pre-Code movie so they were able to speak more frankly about things. Barbara Stanwyck's dad owns a bar and he's pimping her. Even in 1933, they recognized that the majority of the so-called pimps are somebody with power over the girl like a parent or a boyfriend, not just some random dude who abducted her off the street or something. Somebody that she has a bond of affection and loyalty to, and that's what's controlling them. It's not beatings or magical potions, it's the innate machinery that we all have as humans to form bonds being misused, same as other kinds of abuse.

Do you remember that little girl JonBenet Ramsey who was abducted and murdered? [a notorious unsolved case in the United States of a six-year-old beauty queen] I was talking to a friend of mine about how the little girl was involved in all these weird pageants and stuff. My friend said, "That child could vamp better than I can." It's a peculiarly Anglo-American thing where you have this cultural idea that it's okay to exploit your kids in every way, as long as it's not directly sexual. You can think about it, but you can't do it. And of course, this is bizarre because this is not how human behaviour works but in the US there's a whole purity cult that's developed, and it's a very artificial line that's being drawn around age, sex and exploitation; that all adolescent sexuality is somehow pathological.

These people think that no teenager has sexual impulses unless they're implanted by some outside party or by TV commercials, or the internet or a bad boyfriend. Otherwise they'd be happy, sexless cherubs until the stroke of midnight on their 18th birthday at which point they suddenly become fully realised sexual adults. It's nonsense but you can't talk about it. There's some places in which if

you say words like adolescent sexual development, you're immediately branded a paedophile. It's like saying if I study forensics, this means I'm a serial killer.

The Frame: Were you always in charge of your own destiny in that way?

Maggie: Oh, yeah. I developed an aversion to being bossed around at a pretty young age. I didn't like it when I was a child and I still didn't like it as a teenager. I don't think adolescent rebellion is pathological. I think adolescents rebel because we often treat biological adults as though they were children. I didn't like being treated like a child when I was a child, much less when I was a young adult. You can say 'we've decided that this thing is better for this young person'. That's not the same as saying 'Oh, this thing is perfectly safe and has no consequences'. When you treat young people like children, they're going to rebel. Some faux witty people might suggest that I'm still an adolescent, but my issues with authority are extremely deep-rooted. A psychologist would have a field day with me. My mother might say 'don't move a muscle' and I would flicker my eyebrow. Or she'd say 'I don't want to hear a peep out of you' and I'd go 'peep'. These are memories of being 6 or 7. I'm just not wired to be compliant.

The Frame: That adolescent rebellious streak that still exists in you; the thing which I felt in your writing and gives you so much of your fire, is that about your mum? Are you still rebelling?

Maggie: I don't think it's that directly causative. My mother was 22 years old from South Louisiana with a high school education, and she was given me as her first child. She had no idea how to cope. My mom was always a good girl, my mom did what she was told and she expected her children to be the same as she was. And when she got this little fireball, she did not expect that. She didn't know how to cope with that so our relationship was always best when she leaned on the side of benign neglect. Unfortunately, she tried to manage it more often than she should have. But I do think that my choice of career derives from the

problems with my mother - the refusal to be managed. I can do authority when I choose to. A lawyer or a doctor I chose? That doctor has the ability to cure whatever is wrong with me. I'm paying her to tell me this so damn straight I'm gonna listen. But I chose her. To me that's very different from "hi, I'm your boss and you do what I say." Yeah, fuck you. No. Sorry.

The Frame: I'm really interested in the relationship with your mother and how that was.

Maggie: When I started stripping in September 1997, my mom immediately started arguing with me about it. I still remember to this day one of the things she said to me which was 'I just don't want you hanging around with women like that. And I said, 'mom, I'm women like that'.

She didn't understand about women trying to make a living in a world that doesn't want them to and when after we argued, she disinvited me from Thanksgiving. About six months later sent me a letter and said something like, 'I'm not going to change my mind,' blah, blah, blah, and we haven't spoken since. When I moved, I sent her my address. When I got married for the second time, I let her know. When I got divorced, I let her know again. No response. One of my sisters is still in contact with me, so if my mom expresses a desire to see me on her deathbed or something, I'll go and be there without causing a scene. I'm smart enough to look at my mom's relationship with her mother and see that there's unresolved issues there too.

The Frame: I mentioned cliches before, and one of the cliches about sex workers is that they're 'damaged' in some way. I'd like to hear your take on it. I'd be interested to know about any times you felt as though your work affected you.

Maggie: I do think it's true that there's a higher percentage of mental health issues among sex workers than among the general population, but they have the arrow of causation wrong. The problems don't cause the sex work, the sex work is a solution to managing the problems. I have a

friend whose mental health is extremely poor. She was able to manage herself as a sex worker for 20 years because when she was in one of her stay in bed, not able to go anywhere or see anybody days, she could just cancel her appointments. You can't do that if you work at the grocery store. I have another friend who always has health problem. Again, she does sex work, she can manage her schedule. There's a vast difference psychologically between making myself pleasant and functional to one person for one hour, versus making myself pleasant and functional for eight hours among dozens of people in somebody else's environment, that I have to commute an hour to get to. The other thing is that sex work never had any negative for me.

There was a time when I was still doing same-day appointments, and I was texting some friends, feeling pretty depressed, pretty down. I got an email from a guy who had an unusual name, so I was easily able to see that he was the dean of a large university. I could see his picture, no issue with safety there. He'd paid for a 90-minute session but 30 minutes later he was totally worn out and said 'Maggie, I'm just gonna go to bed, you can go'. And I said, 'oh, you okay?' He said 'absolutely, You keep the money, I just need to go to bed.' So, I get back into the group text with my friends. I say, "There's very little more therapeutic than being paid \$600 for 30 minutes work." I felt dramatically better. I mean, having that kind of positive reinforcement, being told you're beautiful, and being wanted and desired. That does a lot for your ego. That isn't to say I haven't had bad experiences. But they weren't existential crises. They were just bad experiences with guys that were assholes. Next.

The Frame: Do you think it ever negatively affected you in other areas of your life?

Maggie: How do you define negative? You could say sex work has enabled me to entrench myself in my refusal to submit to authority. For people who think that every individual has to knuckle and comply, for those folks, yeah, sex work has affected me negatively because it has given me the

ability to circumvent that. But for individualists, I don't think-

The Frame: I'm thinking more about identity. In my mind, there's 'going to the supermarket Maggie' and then there's 'work Maggie'

Maggie: I used to maintain a façade; I maintained a façade in high school but I reached a point where maintaining a façade was too much work. The only difference between work Maggie and supermarket Maggie is the degree to which I let those I'm in contact with see my negative traits. So, the positive parts of supermarket Maggie and work Maggie are exactly the same, but work Maggie downplays her depression, her anxiety, things like that. 'Work Maggie' holds her tongue if she thinks a guy is a dick. As the years have gone by, I've had fewer and fewer and fewer boundaries between the two. These days it's more... this is something I do. Several of my really good clients know my legal name. They know where I live. I don't need to keep those artificial boundaries anymore because I feel comfortable. I don't feel like I have to create a separate persona. People accept me as I am, or they don't. I know I'm a good person. I know where I am is healthy.

The Frame: Did attitudes about what you do or towards you change as online porn grew in popularity?

Maggie: When I started working as an escort, only one of the roughly seven escort services in New Orleans had a website. The others were in the phonebook. Since porn has become more ubiquitous, especially with the arrival of sites like OnlyFans, sex workers are expected to do porn too, not necessarily full-on porn, but they're supposed to come up with new pictures every month, or every week. And that's too much like a job for me. When I sat down with the photographer who did the pictures for my very first escort website at the beginning of 2000, I told him the aesthetic I was looking for - I said 'Playboy, not Hustler.' You will look in vain on the internet for pictures of my genitalia, you will not find them. Tits a plenty and legs, waist, butt, but

no crotch. I just think it's vulgar. I think it's déclassé. I look at the classical nudes, and do I ever see Aphrodite with her legs spread apart? I do not. And those are the aesthetic sensibilities I absorbed in my classical education. And so, that's where I've always been. When porn started becoming a big thing my answer was no - don't have to do that, don't want to do that. Take me or leave me as I am. This isn't a judgement about women who do, because if you're coming into escorting now, you need to do that to compete. I made my brand 20 years ago; I don't have to do that anymore. And I won't. And again, that's my obstinacy.

The Frame: Just before we sign off then Maggie, the last question is one that's been rolling around my head - what would be your advice for someone else looking to get into sex work? Would you advise anyone else to go into it?

Maggie: It depends on the person. I never had children of my own but there were these two young girls I remember, and they both looked at me a bit like a mother. In college, one of them went into sex work for a little while and the other one didn't. I would have tried to dissuade the one who didn't if she had decided she wanted to do it - her personality wasn't conducive to it. The other one was more suited. It's not right for every person - if you're not comfortable with your sexuality, if you're not comfortable running your own business, if you're not able to keep a schedule and manage your time, if you're not able to handle the social censure, or if you're not able to navigate the familial issues that can arise, this is not the career for you. But how is this different from anything else? If some young scatterbrain who couldn't focus on anything for more than an hour told me that he was going to law school, I would say good luck to ya fella, but I don't think that's going to go anywhere. When it's any other career, society doesn't judge the type of people suited to that career. But with sex work, our society wants to say that because some people aren't good at it, or unhappy in it, or because some people are downright miserable at it, that we should judge the entire profession. We're the only ones where negative experience is used to condemn the entire

profession. If a doctor has a heart attack due to stress nobody says 'we should ban medical science', but they do with sex workers.

The Frame: To end, I thought it might be an idea to give a sign-off or a piece of advice you might want to share. Not from the perspective of being a sex worker, but from the perspective of being a woman who's run her own business and her own life for a long time.

Maggie: Yes - it's nearly always wrong to judge someone by what they do, rather than by who they are. I'm an incredible nerd. I have two walls full of science fiction DVDs over here. I have played Dungeons and Dragons since I was 14 years old. What people choose to do for money is not the totality of their being.



As we sign off, I get the tantalising feeling Maggie is letting me in a little more. She shows me the book she's reading - a horror novel - and I'm intrigued about her playing Dungeons and Dragons. I think she's trying to tell me she's still a bit of that rebellious kid at heart.

Our call ends and I'm immediately taken by how strong the urge is to message Maggie and to tell her how much I enjoyed her company. A part of me wants to talk to her more, get to know her better.

Maybe that's the skill Maggie has above all others, though. Always leave them wanting a little more...

Maggie can be found at her blog 'The Honest Courtesan' at www.maggiemcneill.com or on Twitter @maggie_mcneill

PICK OF THE PODS

THE BEST PODCASTS FOR YOUR EARS AND YOUR MINDS



The Happy Vagina

British actress and film-maker Mika Simmons talks health, pleasure and intimacy, with an aim to educate and as well as entertain her audience. Her straight-talking, to-the-point questions embrace the occasional awkwardness and seek out difficult conversations, with the host an engaging and clearly engaged participant.

The podcast has seen notable guests including Chloe Delevingne, Laura Whitmore, Dita Von Teese, Gwyneth Paltrow and Olympian Nicola Adam, while Simmons' book 'The Happy Vagina: An Entertaining, Empowering Guide to Gynaecological and Sexual Wellbeing' was released in August 2022.

Listen to: Jennifer Grey: Out of the Corner. The Dirty Dancing and Ferris Bueller's Day Off's actor talks acting, her memoir, and finding confidence.

 @thehappyvagina

 @thehappyvagina

The Christina Crowe Podcast

A relentless and passionate deep-dive into a wide range of mental health topics, hosted by Canadian Psychotherapist Christina Crowe. Crowe is a fantastically insightful presence, mixing solo episodes packed full of useful advice with interviews covering topics such as ADHD, the mental health of health care workers, OCD, bullying, and trauma, among many others.

Listen to: E33: 'Literally, can you picture it?' All about Aphantasia, with Tom Ebeyer. Crowe talks to Tom Ebeyer, the founder of the Aphantasia Network, about this little-known condition.

 @CNDcounsellor

Women & ADHD

Diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 45, a late diagnosis turned her world upside down. Join Katy Weber each week as she interviews other women who discovered they have ADHD in adulthood and are finally feeling like they understand who they are and how to best lean into their strengths, both professionally and personally.

Katy Weber is an ADHD advocate & coach, founder of Women & ADHD, LLC, and author of the book 'Worth It: A Journey to Food & Body Freedom', and host and producer of the Women & ADHD podcast, ranked among the top 0.5% of all podcasts worldwide.

Listen to: Episode 104 with Dr. Kellie Stecher: Host and guest discuss Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria, ADHD and professional burnout.

 @womenandadhdpodcast

 @womenandadhd

A Woman's Grief

by Emma Conally-Barkham

You can spend so much time speeding through life that you forget to stop and notice or maybe you are afraid to stop as self-reflection may cause you to enter an introspection that is fearful and huge.

She died in the searing summer of 2018. Bang in the middle of retreat season, bang in the middle of the night. I had taken flight with water and bag after the 'phone call and after a period of standing in a peculiar stillness as the words, 'you'd better come quickly' sank in. She died and I was hollowed-out but I kept running in repeated mantras of, 'I'm fine'. A marionette's rictus smile, love and light dished out to students and retreaters alike. I felt that if somebody touched me, I would crumple in on myself like a helium balloon deflated, so I kept all at arms' length.

Back from New Orleans, the world closed down, March 2020. All the cruxes I usually placed under each arm to prop me up-travel, teaching, theatre and art, music, human connection were gone, so the running had to cease. I had to be still enough to grow roots down in home soil, not much frequented but now a sanctuary from an encroaching monster of uncertain deadlines.



I came face to face with myself, with a sorrow, which had been hanging on to my coat tails with each flight, each disappearance into a new experience. The roots took hold. I walked without purpose and started to write in her journal. The cheerful songbird cover of the journal in bleak contrast to the tracery of pencil strokes she managed only once. I felt an ache for all I had lost but the sweet turnings of the English seasons turned the cogs of acceptance and renewal in me. In the blazing spring of March 2020, I felt the sorrows expand and when they came to choke, I went out in nature. Here, I saw the tiny, unsung events of new births and deaths, the cycles of renewal and release. The winter I would usually escape, I approached with trepidation but instead I was frozen cold to ice and branches of trees in stasis.

The hidden depths of sorrow found a place in the quiet landscape of frost and also found an angry expression in the crashing waves of the North Sea. My priorities changed and many things I hadn't thought about percolated towards the surface. I was lonely, grieving and filled with a rage which had begun to topple over into everyday life. I realised I needed help. This realisation came way before I could bring myself to ask for it. Then came a period of finding the person who could help and break through my defences. A therapist who could untie my pride and silence. Of course, it had to be an artist. Visual, fiery and creative as myself. Those early sessions I just wept and she held the outpourings and pain finally articulated. Though I was left feeling drained after each session; I felt emptied of the past and was gaining empowering tools to move forward. Layers stripped back, defences down and a minute seed of trust in this process beginning to germinate as we entered a fragile, cold spring. I walked amidst the snowdrops, feeling I had a layer of skin removed. Writing was flowing out of me unbidden and the shoots of how I could carry this great grief forward were beginning to emerge.



EmmaLiveYoga



@EmmaLiveYoga

Emma Conally-Barklem is a yogi, writer and poet based in North Yorkshire, England. Her articles and poetry have featured in OM Yoga & Lifestyle, Spirit & Destiny, BWY Spectrum, A little Insight & Yours Truly magazines. Emma completed a summer residency at the Bronte Parsonage Museum and was named one of Ilkley Poetry Festival's New Northern Poets 2022. Her first collection, 'The Ridings' has been accepted for traditional chapbook publication by Bent Key Publishing in March 2023. Her yoga and grief memoir, 'You Can't Hug A Butterfly: Love, Loss & Yoga' has been accepted for traditional publication by QuillKeepers Press in 2024.

HOW TO BE MANAGE IMPOSTER SYNDROME AT WORK

WORDS BY SOPHIE NAYLOR

Have you experienced imposter syndrome at work?

There are many signs of imposter syndrome, and they will vary for each individual. Imposter syndrome at work is extremely common, so don't feel guilty about feeling it! It's a hard thing to overcome, but I have found some ways to effectively manage imposter syndrome at work so hopefully they help you guys too! If you are experiencing imposter syndrome at work, you may:

- Feel that the work you do is not good enough and your colleagues are always doing better than you
- Second guess every piece of work you create/every decision you make
- Wonder why you ever got hired in the first place
- Constantly worry that your manager will regret hiring you
- Worry that your work is always wrong
- Feel paranoid that your manager will 'find out' that you are 'inexperienced' and 'bad' at your job

The majority of the time this is purely anxiety and paranoia lying to you and you may feel deep down that these thoughts aren't true, but it can be difficult to tell yourself that and truly believe it. Imposter syndrome can limit your progress at work and damage your self-esteem, so it's super important to try to overcome imposter syndrome at work as quickly and effectively as you can.

Remember they hired you for a reason

Managers wouldn't hire you if they didn't think you were well suited to the role - that's a fact. They will have taken an extended amount of time looking over your CV, job experience, hobbies etc and they must have liked your answers and your vibe during the interview to even consider hiring you. No employer hires an employee on a whim, it takes a lot of harsh decision making to be sure you're the right candidate, so if they've chosen you then you definitely deserve to be there and you must have enough experience and transferable skills!

Get to the roots of your imposter syndrome at work

If you are constantly feeling that the work you produce isn't good enough and your colleagues are better than you, it may be due to pre-existing low self-esteem. Anxiety can constantly put you down and make you feel less than you are, so it may be a good idea to tackle your anxiety and low self-esteem at the root before battling your imposter syndrome, as tackling one first will help you to tackle the other.

Acknowledge your achievements

How do you expect to effectively overcome imposter syndrome at work if you're not willing to acknowledge your own achievements? Every time something good happens at work, it's a good idea to write it down in a notebook so you can keep track of how well you're doing. It's also a great idea to reward your achievements at work, maybe by buying yourself something, taking yourself out for a coffee or simply just having a self care day and incorporating some 'me-time'. If you want tips for a self care day, I have a blog post showing you guys my Autumn night time routine, which is super cosy and relaxing.

Fake it 'til you make it

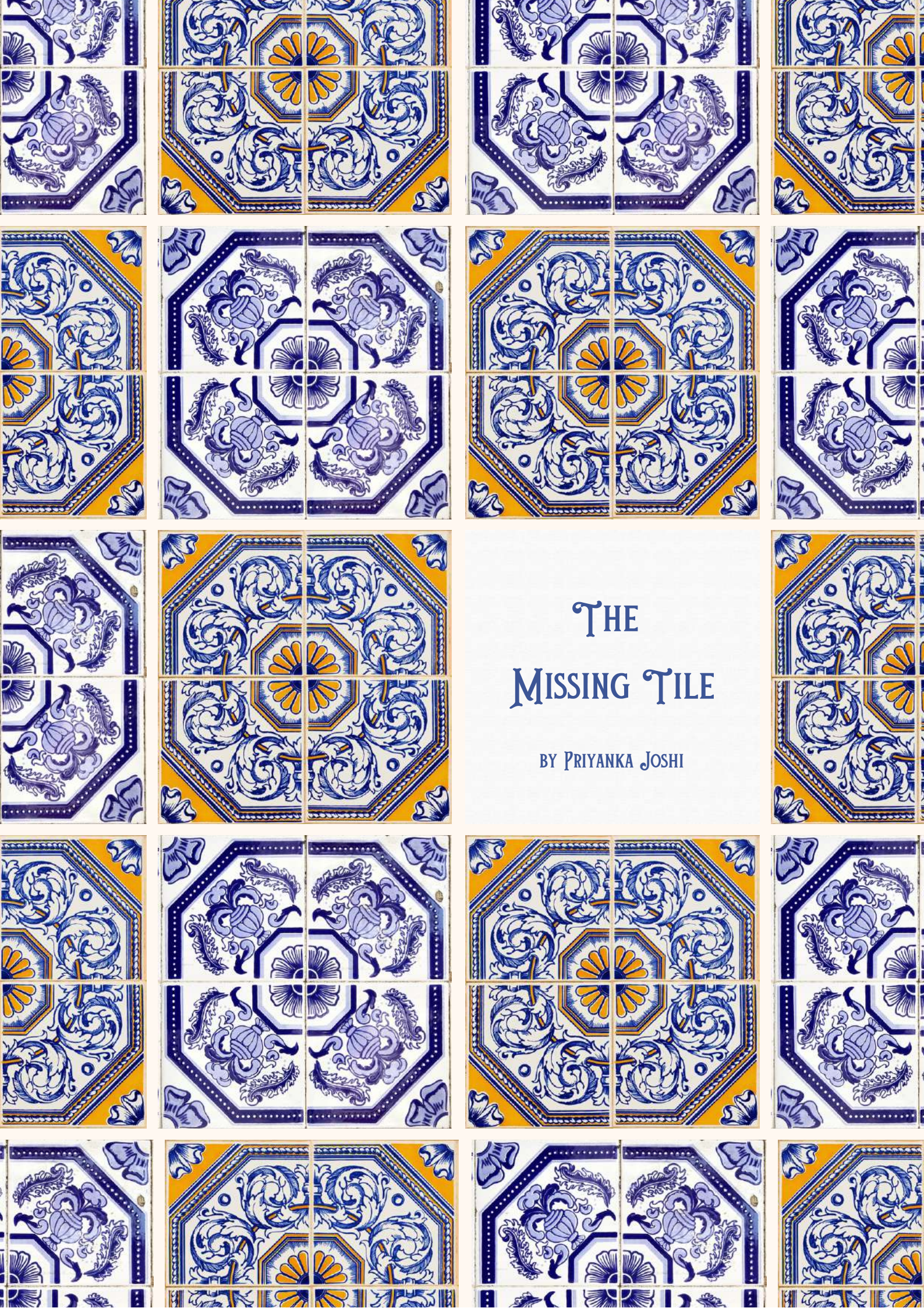
This is honestly my number 1 tip. This is the only way I have managed to smash interviews, build my CV up, gain experience and build work connections with people. When I first started my blog, I had no idea what I was doing but I pretended I did. Acting experienced made my readers trust and develop a rapport with me, meaning I stated to feel as if I actually did know what I was doing. Now I love writing blog posts and I'm super passionate about it! If you act like you're a badass bitch, you will eventually become a badass bitch. Just give it time.

Know your worth

Ultimately, your workplace need you as much as you need them. You are a valuable asset to the team and you need to recognise that. You will never be able to work to your full potential if you are constantly second-guessing your worth and your work. This will only hinder your success and you will become what you believe you are - as harsh as that sounds. You need to realise that you are important and your workplace is lucky to have you!

Sophie got into blogging as a way to help distract herself from negative thoughts and eradicate the stigma surrounding mental illness. She wanted to create a community where others knew they weren't alone, and felt less alone too. Sophie says: "I've made so many friends through blogging who I wouldn't otherwise know."





THE
MISSING TILE

BY PRIYANKA JOSHI

Do you have a missing tile to fix? If you sit and reflect for a while, you will realise that all our lives, we are rushing to reach somewhere, and be with someone. Whereas nobody is actually waiting for us, there is no place we need to be and there is no one incomplete without us and yet we try to find and fix that Missing Tile.

It's the same with everyone, some feel we are that missing tile for them but we want something else or someone else to fill that emptiness for ourselves. Honestly, we never are able to complete this jigsaw puzzle called life. As humans, we are on a constant lookout for something we don't have. We always focus on what's missing in our life more than what we already have, some might even hate being positive but in the race of fixing the missing tiles, we fail to appreciate the tiles which are holding us upright.

The Missing Tile Syndrome

A bald person will observe people with voluminous hair, a short person will focus on the tall person, if you are slightly overweight you will look at someone with a perfect lean physique and if you have a dark complexion you will long for fairer skin. To conclude, no one is happy with a ceiling filled with 99 tiles and has their focus on just ONE missing tile in their life.

I will give you a scenario, you are tall and fair in complexion, and you are single. Now, imagine yourself in a room where everyone has a close friend or a partner, whereas you are sitting alone with your cup of coffee and looking at them and feeling sad about yourself. Whereas someone behind you might be thinking about your height or admiring your skin colour.

It is not that we deliberately compare all the time, but since we are surrounded by people all the time and those are the exact people who either lift our spirits or completely break them, we try to fit in. Fitting in comes with a cost, a cost of overcoming your own inhibitions, accepting and embracing yourself first and then walking with your head held high in the crowd.

We all have one missing tile to fix in our lives, but while we keep our focus fixed on that one missing tile, sometimes we lose grip of the other strong and beautiful tiles surrounding it. We all have something in us, identify your core strength, and your superpower, work on it, refine it and become your best version, and do it every single day.

You don't have to compete or compare your shortcomings with others, don't let your insecurity stop you to explore your personality. Rather take your insecurities in your stride and deal with them. People want to transform their lives, but there is no single sure-shot mantra for transformation, it is an ongoing process. As you start to explore and learn about yourself, you realise what is needed to be done, and reaching that point of self-awareness is like half the battle won.

The Missing Tile Syndrome is a barrier to happiness. There will always be something missing in your life. When you see other couples, you feel sad about being lonely. When you will see people's kids, you'll think why can't you have children? The same holds true regarding our financial status, our work, and our looks. The list is endless.

We somehow play tricks on ourselves and undermine our happiness; by concentrating on the missing tiles every one of us has. So what is your missing tile? And, what do you choose to do with it? Focus on the rest of the ceiling with tiles, or focus on the ones we're missing? As this choice will determine how happy you will be with your present self.

Priyanka Joshi is a mental health blogger and copywriter based in Scotland. She is the founder of "Sanity Daily" a mental health portal and also hosts "Mental Health First" podcast show.

Priyanka's blog can be found at www.sanitydaily.com

@priyankasjournal 

Artist Submissions





Sharin F. Ali

Sharin F. Ali is a biracial poet and multimedia artist. Born to an Indo-Fijian father and European-Canadian mother, her unique upbringing heavily influences her work.

 [@sharinwrites](https://www.instagram.com/sharinwrites)





'Upside Down Introspection'



'Duality at Ease'

April Bermudez

April Bermudez



...on 'upside down introspection'

"Sometimes there is a need for introspection. It can take you to a place you've never been but sometimes, it takes you to place you know all too well. A familiar place, a familial place, a place of trauma and grief. Sometimes this is where you need to go for the truest, and sometimes painful, introspection.

This is where I needed to go, so I tried to recreate a room from my grandmothers house. And here is where I took a good look at myself, talked openly, even hurtful truths were shared.

Sometimes that's what you need."



...on 'duality at ease'

When all else fails, questioning me, is the truest source of knowledge.

**I need rest. I need respite. I need to be
At Ease**

This is dying and rebirth

Yin and yang

Night and day

As seen on TV."



@aprilbermudezart

April Bermudez is an emerging interdisciplinary artist from Los Angeles, now living in Las Vegas.

April started writing at a young age, in high school began an interest in photography, and her college career was mostly spent in the ceramics department, as well as being a life model for the drawing and painting classes and working at the college art gallery. April has participated in several international Call and Response collaborations, and was most recently featured in a juried online exhibition.



Turn to page 47 for Ashley's article 'Reclaiming Womanhood and Mental Health in the 21st Century'

VICTORIA JOHNSON



Victoria Johnson is 40 years old, a mom of two girls, and the owner of Skye Breese Photography. She is from Independence, Louisiana and has roots in upstate New York also. She currently resides in the Livingston, Texas area.

Victoria is a monthly contributor to Native Hoop Magazine and has several other publications under her belt. She has also had her work exhibited at a street photography showcase in San Antonio and at a Fine Art Gallery in the Houston area.

Victoria says: *"I shot those images a while back on the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation. My daughters, Aaliyah and Stormi are enrolled tribal citizens of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe and I have shot a lot of my work on their tribal lands. The particular location on the reservation that I shot these was a location next to Lake Tombigbee. It's a nice area to visit, to go for a drive or go for a walk. I enjoy shooting landscape/nature images in that area because it's quiet and it's peaceful. It's been therapeutic for me as well."*



@skyebreese82



@skyebreese15



@VJ16157349

! WARNING

This post contains mentions of suicide & trauma that may be triggering to some.

ME, MY DIAGNOSIS, AND I

WORDS BY TESNI WINFIELD

I always felt like I was different to other people and I never quite understood why. Then when I received my diagnosis, everything made sense.

Honestly, it was such a relief when I finally had an explanation as to why I had these thoughts & feelings. Sometimes when something so minor happened, it would aggravate me so much that I'd feel this burning anger inside of me. Nothing huge would really happen except me maybe shouting "where the f*ck is my sock!" at the top of my lungs before I whack my arm throwing open a door!

But jokes aside, those intense feelings would be tough when I was younger. Especially if something genuinely difficult would happen... heartbreak, grief, arguments etc. I found it really hard and through one really tough period of my life, I ended up suffering a psychotic episode. Due to my supportive network of family & friends, specified counselling & medication, I was able to stay at home and recover there. I was very fortunate to have that and I'm forever grateful.

My recovery.

It definitely didn't come without some hurdles. I had days where it all felt too much and all I would do was cry. I felt suicidal and I was genuinely lost in myself. It was bloody tough but with the help I received, I was able to see some light at the end of the tunnel. I know it sounds so cliché but it's true. Without that, I honestly don't know where I'd be.

I was actually diagnosed during this time. It's not something I can remember. I'm not sure if I was actually told at the time...maybe it didn't quite register in my mind or I forgot due to the psychosis. I don't really know but when I was told of my diagnosis a couple of years later, I wanted to know more.

Understanding my diagnosis

Initially the doctor called it EUPD (emotionally unstable personality disorder) a new name for it apparently. It definitely didn't sound like a name that I liked - very judgemental. As though my emotions are more heightened than others, I wasn't this unstable "crazy lady" that ran around shouting at people because I was having some sort of mental breakdown. I was just going through a difficult stage. It wasn't the sort of name I would use to describe myself.

When I got home, I looked it up straight away and the "old name" of BPD (borderline personality disorder) sounded more appropriate. It was called this because doctors previously believed that it was on the border between two different disorders: neurosis and psychosis. But these terms are no longer used hence the name change. When I looked more into it, I could understand why other people who suffer with the disorder also preferred BPD.

In a nutshell, it's a condition that affects how you think & feel. It made complete sense! All those strong emotions & thoughts that always seemed different, finally had a basis behind them. It also meant that I could learn new coping skills that I didn't know about and talk to other people going through the same thing. It gave me an explanation and a community of supportive people I never knew about.

Treatment

They say the main treatment for it is some kind of talking therapy and I've honestly found talking a MASSIVE help for me. Even just to let it out to try and understand it a bit more myself. I mean I have so many thoughts going round my head sometimes, that I find getting it all down helps release them slightly.

The cause of borderline personality disorder is unclear but it's been linked to traumatic events during childhood such as neglect or abuse. This is something I'll get into at a later date but for now, we'll leave that there.

Yes my diagnosis was the end to so many questions I had but it was also the start to understanding myself a whole lot more.

If you're there with things you want answers to, please speak to someone. Just asking for help is the first & biggest step you can take.

If you're still not quite ready but just want to see if it's something you could talk to your doctor about in the future, I've put some information below.

You might be given a diagnosis of BPD if you experience at least 5 of the following things which have lasted for a long time or have a big impact on your daily life:

- You feel very worried about people abandoning you.
- You have very intense emotions that can change quickly (for example, from feeling very happy and confident to suddenly feeling low and sad).
- You don't have a strong sense of who you are and it can change significantly depending on who you're with.
- You find it very hard to make and keep stable relationships.
- You feel empty a lot of the time.
- You act impulsively and do things that could harm you (such as binge eating, using drugs or driving dangerously).
- You often self-harm or have suicidal feelings.
- You have very intense feelings of anger, which are really difficult to control.
- When very stressed, you may also experience paranoia or dissociation.



www.thehonestborderline.co.uk/mental-health-clothing



www.thehonestborderline.co.uk/blog



[tesni.winfield](https://www.facebook.com/tesni.winfield)



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Me today...

I will continue to read up about the disorder and spread awareness on it because it still has such a massive stigma around it. And I'm hardly surprised with its new name.

I still get days where I'm not 100% but I talk about my feelings more. I get myself outside or by the sea, watch crap on TV, see friends and just generally do the things that I know make me happy.

That for me is where the magic really is. Those moments that make me smile & feel warm inside. That's what I live for.



Tesni says...

"Hey, I'm Tesni and I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD) a few years back. I love to share all about my mental health journey with all the ups & downs and everything I've learned along the way.

Let's face it, life isn't always sunshine & rainbows but I know how important it is to talk because even on those rainy days, the biggest lessons can happen."



Reclaiming Womanhood and Mental Health in the 21st Century

words by Ashley Tripp

The subject of “women and mental health” is so broad, it can be difficult to narrow down a subject into an article of less than 2,000 words. As I sat down to write this piece, I was overwhelmed by the enormity of it. It is hard to boil down the complexities of these two subjects - individually, much less together. I can only think about how both these topics are so closely connected. And that is the key: womanhood and mental health are intimately associated. Throughout history, these two subjects have also been linked. But as we continue through the 21st century, the connotation around women and mental health is changing. The conversation, which was previously dominated from the outside by patriarchal assumptions, is now being held with intention and purpose by women.


As I sat down to write this, I thought, “It seems that the words ‘women’ and ‘mental health’ often stick together like glue.” After all, throughout history, mental health-or lack thereof- was largely associated with women. Women were thought to be weak, emotional, known for fainting, and unfit for most things of importance. Mental health was boiled down to emotions. Emotions were, and often are still, equated with femininity. Moreover, women’s mental health and illness have been a subject of wicked interest in popular culture for years - from the “hysteria” diagnoses of the Victorian Era to Rosemary Kennedy’s lobotomy. Tragedies like those are dismissed as relics of the past- things that happened so long ago it would be unthinkable now. Yet, Rosemary Kennedy only died in 2005. This treatment and thought processes toward women are not so far away in time. Considering the amount of young women and teenage girls who currently have PTSD from psychiatric care and institutions, it is still a major problem. Therefore, while the stigma around mental health has changed some, it hasn’t entirely.

Therefore, it is actually essential that a severe dedication to mental health is considered a part of being a woman. After the domestic and sexist abuse endured by our ancestors- as well as the rampant misogyny today- maintaining sanity as a woman requires an active effort. After one adds in the traditional social ideas about femininity and mental health that I discussed above, it is unsurprising that there has been - and continues to be- a strong connection between women and mental health. So, it is expected that the correlation between the two is a common subject of conversation, both positively and negatively.

Unfortunately, conversation about mental health still retains some of the stigma of its past. Those who speak about it, primarily women, are often dismissed as too emotional with unrealistic expectations. Childhood traumas are mocked and minimized with terms like daddy issues and fatherless behaviour - terms specifically aimed towards women. As a society, many crack insults regarding female mental health (or lack thereof) as just a part of being a woman. Comments like, “Is it that time of the month?” float around freely in 2022. The mental health of women has become the punchline to many jokes. But the relationship between the two is uncontested. Even negatively, there is a common agreement that the two subjects are linked. Essentially, mental health or illness has always been a defining part of being a woman in society. However, it has become increasingly more openly discussed and linked. It is nearly impossible for the two to be separated.

Yet, for the first time, women are discussing our mental health and illnesses in ways that our mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers couldn’t. We are reclaiming the connection as a positive thing, rather than the negative associations of the past. We are owning our mental health efforts and mental illness struggles. Women are taking an active role in discussing and dealing with mental health, both individually and as a gender.

The ushering in of the 21st century, and all of the technology that comes with it, has played a pivotal part. For instance, we have access to Google, which means the ability to find information about nearly everything. This has let many women self-advocate and do their own research, taking an active role in their mental health.



Social media has played a pivotal part in this. One of the unexpected benefits of this global interconnectedness is the ability for people (yet primarily women) to share their trauma, emotions, experiences, and feelings with millions of strangers. We are using social media platforms to discuss mental health, and its struggles, with other women. Social media has allowed many more women than ever before to be a part of the conversation around mental health. Because of this, therapy has become (at least somewhat) more normalized and accessible. Women are also learning about psychological disorders, trauma, and the inner workings of mental health thanks to technology and social media. We are learning (and using) words like gaslight and red flags in common conversation, challenging the abuse our ancestors endured. We are openly discussing our traumas, working on our mental health, and shredding the images of “she has it all” and “I don’t know how she does it.” Rather than social isolation and quiet shame, nowadays, struggles are often met with understanding and even relief from other women who endure the same thing.

In my own experience, I have seen many women use social media, primarily Instagram and Tiktok, to come forward and share how another woman’s mental health “testimony” guided them on their own journey. Whether it is a shared diagnoses, certain symptoms, or even types of medications, women are discussing their mental health with each other. It is a truly profound and unexpected side effect of this mass connection. Women have often found solace in the stories of strangers when they are rejected by the arms of their own families regarding mental health and illness. The problem isn’t fixed, but women are creating outlets to deal with it.

Despite this community and camaraderie, there is an ever-present sense that mental health, and its struggles, are delicately intertwined with womanhood. Women have reclaimed the idea that we feel things more deeply, rather than turning away in shame. Trends full of Margaret Atwood and Sylvia Plath quotes set to the tunes of Phoebe Bridgers and Taylor Swift overwhelm social media. Women are not only acknowledging our mental health, we are owning it, proudly. Women have taken a topic that was used as a weapon against us, something to prod at our weaknesses, and remade it into an authentic strength. The strength of being a woman.

How does all of this connect to mental health? Well, embracing a sisterhood of mutual feelings, struggles, experiences, and emotions can have a deep and profound effect on one’s mental health. It is in accepting that women are dynamic and unpredictable and deeply-feeling that one can begin to make peace with their own mental health. A woman can readjust the lighting and see herself in a whole new way - mental health or illness included.

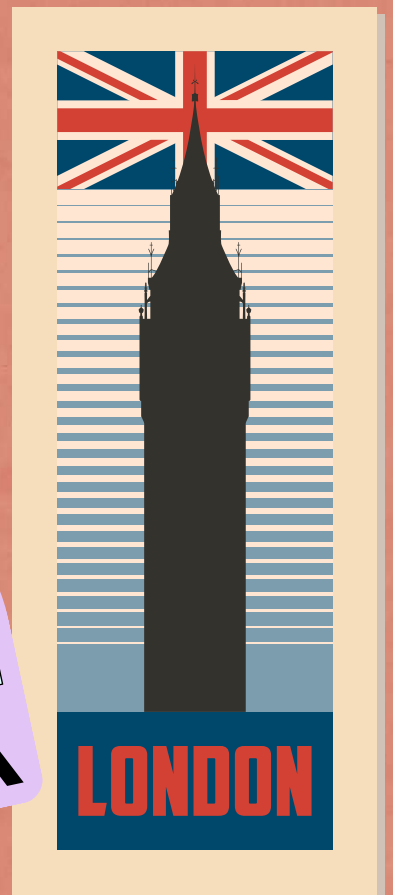
Women have reclaimed this association with mental health with power. Rather than minimizing ourselves to fit the “norm,” which has been decided by a patriarchal society, we are reinventing it. We don’t have to try to separate ourselves from these traditional labels anymore. We are able to do what our mothers and grandmothers fought for - express ourselves freely, mental health included. We are able to pair womanhood with honesty and authenticity through mental health.

In conclusion, women in the 21st century are reclaiming the link between womanhood and mental health. Rather than resist this historical association, women are reinventing what the link means. We are using modern technology social media to form bonds and gain information about mental health. These two things are allowing us to do something that our female ancestors only hoped for: giving women the power to have an active role in the conversation about our mental health. This conversation has not only reaffirmed the link between womanhood and mental health, but it has changed the connotation around it. Now, women are taking pride in our awareness about our mental health.

THE
FRAME

UNITED KINGDOM
28 JUN 2017 01 23
ARRIVAL ABCD
MANCHESTER

POETRY



Isabelle P

Instagram: @isabellepbyrne

'True'

I wonder what you see of me and I hope it isn't true.

As when your eyes look at mine they then so see straight through.

You'll try to mend me in all the ways you always do.

Yet you will fail to bind me back without any glue.

So leave me broken and leave me blue.

Just promise to love me and I promise I will too.

'Dirty Blood'

Dirty blood runs fast through slack veins.

With no electricity live in my mains.

Hefty heart hiccups then halts.

This body off mine has unfixable faults.

So dose me up and turn up the vaults.

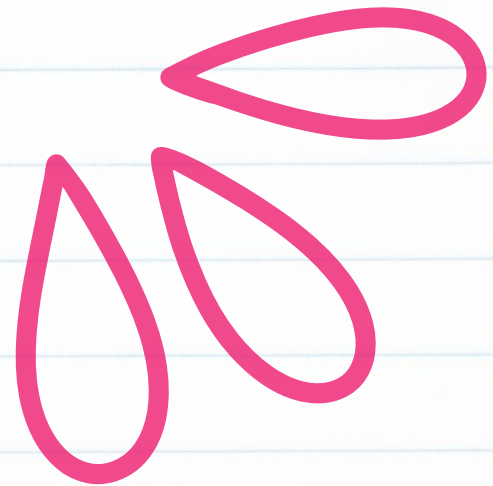
I might be unfixable but I'm unbreakable too.

Been through it all but still at the back of the queue.

That I'm fucking lucky to have made it through.

This armoured body of mine is all that I knew.

Now redundant it's just a pot from which I grew.



'Reign'

Those days I miss the brain that I could controlled with a strong reign.

It's hard to maintain a sense of what it means to be sane.

That every wrong move is followed by the cane.

But I refrain from the stain that it leaves me with.

I refrain from the pain it maimed me with.

'Bleed'

Just another heart to bleed.

As the valves open the blood drains thinner than honey but thicker than mead.

Must supersede the need to make myself bleed just to be momentarily freed.

Sat drained and bled with my pain fed not sure how to feel about the dread of not being dead.

As I lie bleeding out in the institute bed.

Since when did the constitution allow this institution


to use electrocution as a fucking solution.

Isabelle is a 29yr old poet from Manchester, England.

Her first book, published this year, explored her mental health journey through hospitalisation and receiving Electro-Convulsive Therapy, and navigating a ruined identity during recovery. Her work aims to extend the narratives around mental health and reduce the inward stigma that can make recovery impossible.

'overgrown'

seven years and three couches later
I'm sunk into the pillows and cushions
a profusion of blankets, all gifted to me
dogs and cats take turns nestled on top
keep me warm and still in their way
my body is rooted here, too weak to rise
from the overgrowth of my melancholy
only the thinnest of breaths
slight movement of my eyes
follows the birds as they flit
to the feeder outside the window



Michele Rule is a disabled poet from Kelowna, Canada. She writes mainly on the topics of chronic illness and relationships. Her recent publications include Chicken Soup for the Soul, Magic of Christmas edition, and the Pine Cone Review. Michele's first chapbook is Around the World in Fifteen Haiku. She lives with two dogs, two cats and a fabulous partner.



Rae Ann S. Van Beers

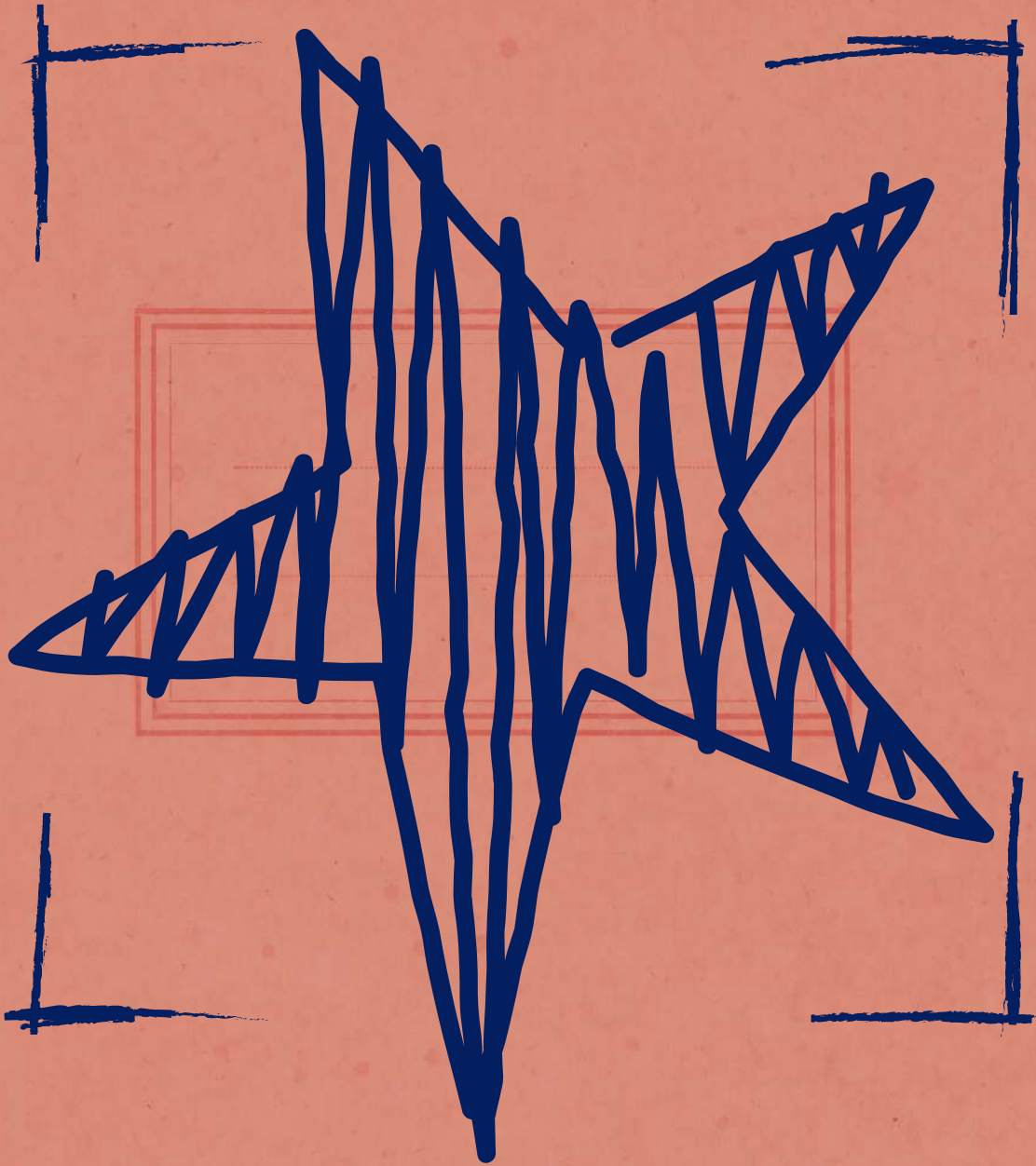
Social Media: @rannivb

Failure



I have a perfectly serviceable womb
that sits there,
dormant,
perplexing people who cannot abide waste.

Rae Ann Van Beers (she/her/hers) has been an educator for years, putting her education degrees to good use by teaching people from kindergarten to post-secondary students. Her secret dream is to return to her roots.

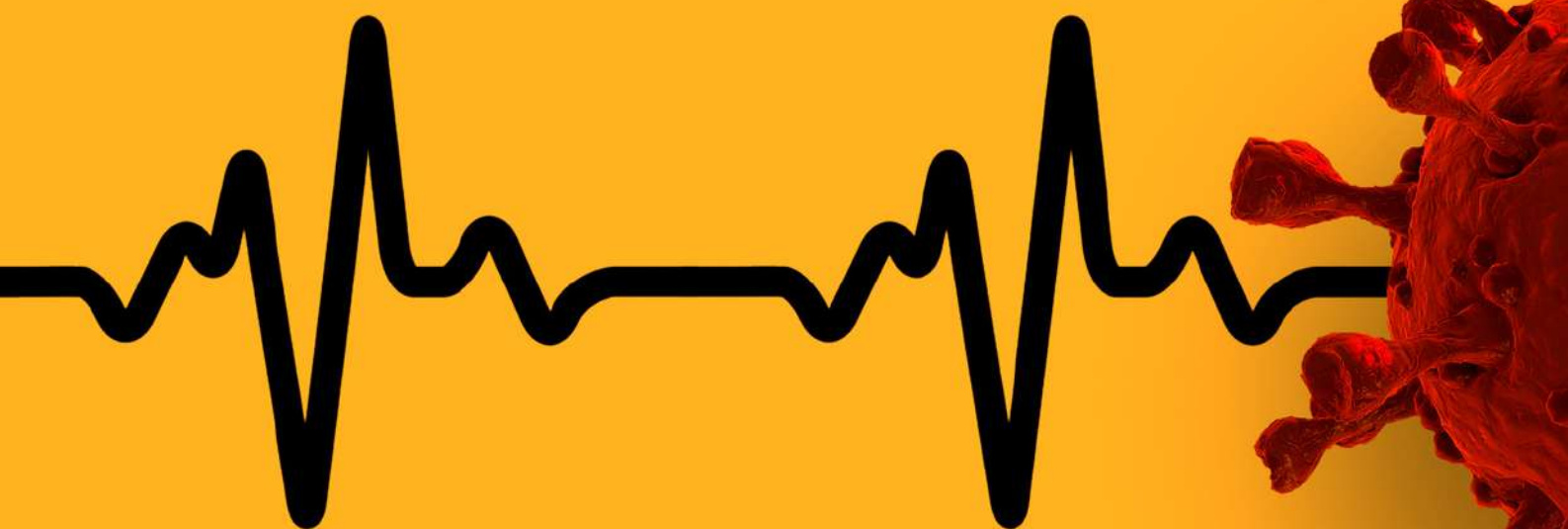


NEXT ISSUE

AVAILABLE APRIL 2023

ALL ABOUT...

LONG (LONG) COVID



THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON OUR LIVES -
STORIES OF YOUR EXPERIENCES, YOUR LOSSES, YOUR
SUCCESSSES, AND THE WAYS THE NEAR-TWO YEAR
PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED OUR MENTAL HEALTH.

PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSIONS (ALONGSIDE A SHORT BIO AND ANY
WEBSITES OR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS YOU'D LIKE LISTED) TO...

THEFRAMEFANZINE @POST.COM

Three Lions

Continued from Page 11

The Frame: What's the support like when you have to take some time out?

Chloe: I think it's mainly teammates that we get support from. Would you agree, guys?

Danielle: Yeah. There's two girls in my team now, and they've got serious, serious knee injuries. And I can't imagine what they go through, but they just come once a week to stay in touch with us and watch the games. I don't know how they deal with not playing. They're on the group chat and they come to the socials. But I don't see a wild amount of support for them, to be honest.

When they come to the once-a-week session, I make an extra effort to go over and check they're alright. I don't know them too well. I can ask them a few questions, but I don't think there's that much support for them.

The Frame: More generally speaking, I'd like to know your experience of the treatment of mental health in sport. How often is mental health mentioned? How much education did you get?

Danielle: None.

Chloe: None.

Sam: Yeah. Zero.

Danielle: "I need to miss training tonight. I've hurt my ankle" or "I need to miss training tonight. I didn't feel great" - they're not always perceived the same way.

Sam: No, they're not.

Chloe: No.

The Frame: Do you have any thoughts about what needs to be done to change that? You've all had your experiences, you've all had to discover that playing has helped you...

Chloe: I think the awareness is there now, which it wasn't years ago. Five years ago, nobody even considered mental health in sport, really. I think the awareness is slowly but surely increasing. And I think it just having that dedicated person on the team that will check in with players should be as important as checking someone's injury with a physiotherapist. We should have a mental health specialist.

Danielle: I guess it has to come from the senior members of the squad, but if someone was able to say "I need to miss a session because of mental health" younger members would see that's a valid reason. But some people might feel not ready to admit that's why they have to miss a session.

The Frame: Someone definitely will have missed a session or something because of mental health. Is it ever named in that way?

Sam: Probably not.

Chloe: No, probably not. Although actually I missed one because I was just feeling really low and I just didn't want to go. And I just said that I'm not available, I didn't say why. I just said that I'm not going to be there.

Danielle: Me too, did that last week. I couldn't face it, but I didn't want to give a reason.

Sam: I missed both last week because of it.

The Frame: This really re-enforces what you're saying - the second one of you named it, all three of you agreed.

Danielle: On a big group chat, like we have with 40 people at Bury, it's difficult to be the person who goes first.

Chloe: I think we're quite lucky because we're close anyway. And so I think if one of us is feeling a bit rubbish, I could message you two, and you'd be there to support me no matter how you were feeling. And it'd be the same vice-versa. Even if I was having the worst day of my life, if you messaged me, I'd be there for you.

The Frame: Do you ever get the feeling that discussions around mental health wouldn't be as welcomed?

Chloe: I think the younger players might struggle more to understand it than the more senior players. When I was younger, I wasn't around discussions on mental health as much. But things have definitely changed now, so they could shock us!

The Frame: I've got a question about coaches in women's football - have you generally been coached by women?

Sam: I've only had one female coach in my life - and was when I was about 9, 10?

Danielle: I've not had one.

Chloe: I think I've had one, but other than that, it's all been men.

The Frame: How then is it then being female, and having to talk about either physical or mental health with male coaches?

Chloe: I don't think I ever did speak to it with my coaches. I spoke to my mum about it, and if I had to miss something then my mum would just message and say, "She's not going. She's not well."

Sam: You didn't really need to give an excuse when you were younger, and it's like you need to give excuses now, but it was just no, I'm not well.

Danielle: I've had the same manager since the day I began playing until now, so we've built a relationship where I could tell him. We have a good setup where the manager is the guy you would go to mental health or physical problems, and the coach is just focused on football. I feel like I can go to my manager with these issues and he's very good. If you tell him to keep it to himself, he'll do that. I should just say it more, I guess.

The Frame: I was wondering if anybody has a particularly strong viewpoint on why it is that women's football has grown so much in recent years?

Chloe: I think it's more visual now than it was back when we were young. I think there's so many girls that are interested now that it's been made to know it's okay to play football. Whereas when we were younger, it was very much like I was the only person in any kind of team that played. I was very much the only girl in the league. Once they see

girls playing they think "Oh, I want to do that" and it's just grown and snowballed from there really.

Sam: When I was younger, if you were a woman playing football, you were instantly labelled gay. I think now it's not the case - more women and young girls can say "oh yeah, I can play now," without it meaning I'm labelled gay.

Chloe: I agree with that as well. It's the Lionesses, the WSL and the Champions League - they've massively supported not only women's game as a whole, but grassroots as well. They've inspired so many people throughout the last couple of years to be get into the game.

The Frame: Do you think that there is any kind of danger at all that it becomes about selling a product? Sportswomen and objectification are often closely tied.

Chloe: I think to some extent it is. but I think people are a lot more open-minded now. I think the girls are a lot more intelligent than we give them credit for and I think women are a lot more intelligent in regards to what they will and won't do now. They know they don't have to do certain things to make money.

The Frame: Sam, you mentioned before about the 'gay' label. It seem like LGBTQ issues, are much more accepted in women's football. Top players are very open about their sexuality. Top players are in relationships with other players, and it's very open. Why do you think it's different?

Sam: It's just toxic masculinity I guess - they're scared of what their peers all think, and they don't want the fans hounding them and coming up with chants. Whereas you go to the women's game, it's full of families and young kids.

Danielle: If you play women's football you've already had to go against the norm and you've already had to develop a thick skin, so maybe you're more open.

Chloe: I do think it's a masculinity thing, I agree. It's obviously wrong, but I think if a male was to come out they'll automatically be seen as less masculine than their peer. They're still doing exactly the same job, exactly the same sport, to exactly the same level. It doesn't change them in any way, shape, or form. But I think because two girls together looks better than two boys together, I think it's just accepted a lot more.

The Frame: Before we wrap up, is there anything anyone wants to add?

Chloe: I think for me the main thing missing at grassroots level is the mental health side. There's support there but there's not enough support there, especially for the younger players moving through to adult teams. I agree with what Dan was saying about the manager at Bury - I feel like I can talk to him. But for younger players coming through that don't have that established relationship and don't have that confidence to know that it's okay to not be okay, they're left asking "what do we do? Who do I talk to?"

The Frame: How does that get fixed, do you think?

Chloe: I think more awareness, more training. How do you deal with younger players and know what to say to them to help them? What direction can you point them in? Have you got any connections that you can say 'well, we work with this person or this place, go and see them, go and speak to them.'?"

Danielle: When you're doing your coaching badges, which I've just started, but maybe that would be a good opportunity to do more on mental health - you already do a first aid section for your physical health.

The Frame: Thank you everybody so much for your time. And thank you for talking about your experiences and being so open.



THE MANAGER, NICKY SIMMONDS

"I've been involved with football at a variety of levels and age groups, including working with Burnley, Bolton Wanderers and Bury's women's teams.

After completing my coaching badges, I knew I wanted to get involved in the women's game in some capacity, and as a player for both the Manchester United and England Fans FC men's teams, to get involved with our women's side felt like a natural step to take.

The way the women's game has evolved has been massive, and the growth in popularity of the England team, especially since the European Championship, has meant similar growth in women wanting to play, hence the reforming of our Lionesses team. We're a close-knit group and I'm proud to manage these dedicated, talented women alongside my fantastic team of Colin, Luke, Connor, Bryson, Nadine and Lindsay, all of whom volunteer our time and efforts purely for the love of the game."



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TOXIC POSITIVITY KILLING YOUR VIBES?

WORDS BY CHANDNI PATEL

Let's first of all say...positive vibes and positive thinking is the pathway to happiness in life no? But, is too much positivity bad for us?

What is this new term of toxic positivity and how can we avoid it?

Toxic positivity is an obsession with positive thinking, it's a belief that people should put a positive spin on all experiences in life. However, Toxic Positivity can be silent, negative and painful when people feel under pressure to pretend they're happy even though they are struggling inside.

What does this mean? It's self-imposed. People lean towards positive thinking as a coping mechanism to help improve their overall mental well-being and assume this will help solve solutions to their problems. As it's an invisible force it's not genuine, which means people can demonstrate fake kindness and a sense of positive thinking to help avoid sharing their problems and challenges to others.

Why do we act like this? It's an inauthentic happiness known as 'cold or hot' empathy gap. It refers to people's inability to empathise with how they would act or behave in a way to their own experience and emotional state that is different from the one they're currently experiencing.

The empathy gap refers to people's inability to empathise with how they would act or behave if they were to experience an emotional state that is different from the one they are currently experiencing.

There are 2 different forms of toxic positivity:

- 1) Contagious Toxic positivity- you can experience from someone or give to someone.
- 2) Self-imposed Toxic positivity- inflicted on yourself through yourself.

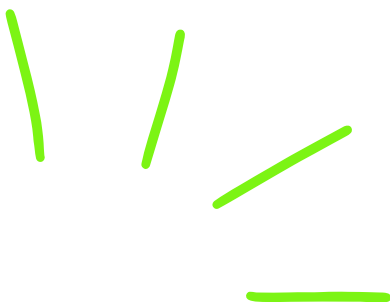
Research shows, more than 75% of people have said they sometimes, often or very often ignore their emotions in favour to being happy. Have you experienced this?

This approach is damaging because it discounts and discredits emotions that are not positive. Toxic positivity can be described as rejecting, denying, or displacing any acknowledgement of stress, negativity, and possible disabling features of trauma.

Furthermore, by defining toxic positivity as the constant encouragement and excessive tendency to only see the good side of something and failing to understand the emotion that accompanies the experience.

The 5 Danger Types of being too Positive:

1: **The Negative Jar build-up** - ever seen Jack in the Box where you twist the handle, and keep twisting the handle till the jumping clown pops up and scares you. Well that's what the negative jar refers too. Experiencing a bundle of thoughts and feelings all at once will eventually become too full where the negativity WILL find a way to come out leading you to feel emotionally unstable. Allowing the negativity to build up and grow will become more damaging for you. This can lead to tendencies of negatively-blocking your true feeling and emotions as well as isolation and self-withdrawal.



2. **Invisible friend** - There are two types of friends: Bad weather friend and Fair weather friend. The bad-weather friend has your back during the tough moment, up's and downs and the one you can rely on.

The Fair-weather friend is the one who sticks around during the good times and leaves you as soon as you got a real problem. They will advise you positive words like 'cheer up' or 'you got this' but low-key they are saying - don't bring those bad vibes my way. They may be seen as a friend by spouting words of positivity but they won't show sympathy or compassion towards how you're truly feeling.

3. **Fake Positivity** - Ever been in a conversation where you open up and the other person has to respond in a positive outlook by smiling and making a cheerful comment like 'cheer up, it will be okay... stay positive'. Those are the sort of signals which will trigger your brain in thinking negative as you just experienced fake positivity. Fake happiness disturbs us for a reason as real emotions are hard to fake. It all comes down to a person's body language and the way they present themselves.

4. **The Convince Ones** - This group refers to those who express sadness onto others through expectations. People actually felt sadder when others expected them not to feel negative emotions leading to higher levels of depression. We're all social creatures who rely heavily on social expectations. Ever been to a party and someone approached you saying 'this party is amazing right!?' and your response is 'yeah, it's the best!' but what you're really thinking is... 'uhh not really... the group of people, music and food isn't my current vibes'. This is called our social conditioning, where we live in a society, where we have to match everyone's positive energy and vibes which can become overwhelming and cause you to feel sad as you can't match the same as others.

5. **Over-Killed Positivity** - Ever came across that one person who is always or shall I say overly positivity in everything they say. Like Bree from Desperate Housewife who was always positive no matter what



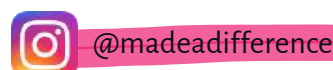
is thrown at her. Those individuals are the one who are suffering in silence who have to constantly feed themselves the positivity into their life in any given situation just to make them feel 'normal'.

Overall, we all know positivity isn't harmful for us but when positivity is forced to cover up or silence the human experience, it becomes toxic as positivity is an emotion such like we experience pain, worry, heartbreak or fear. The best approach to managing your mental health is to focus on meaning. Nowadays, people focus on the outside of happiness through materialism. But switching your mindset to finding the pursuit of meaning will embrace you in living a happier and healthier life as you begin to find the fuel to a meaningful life.

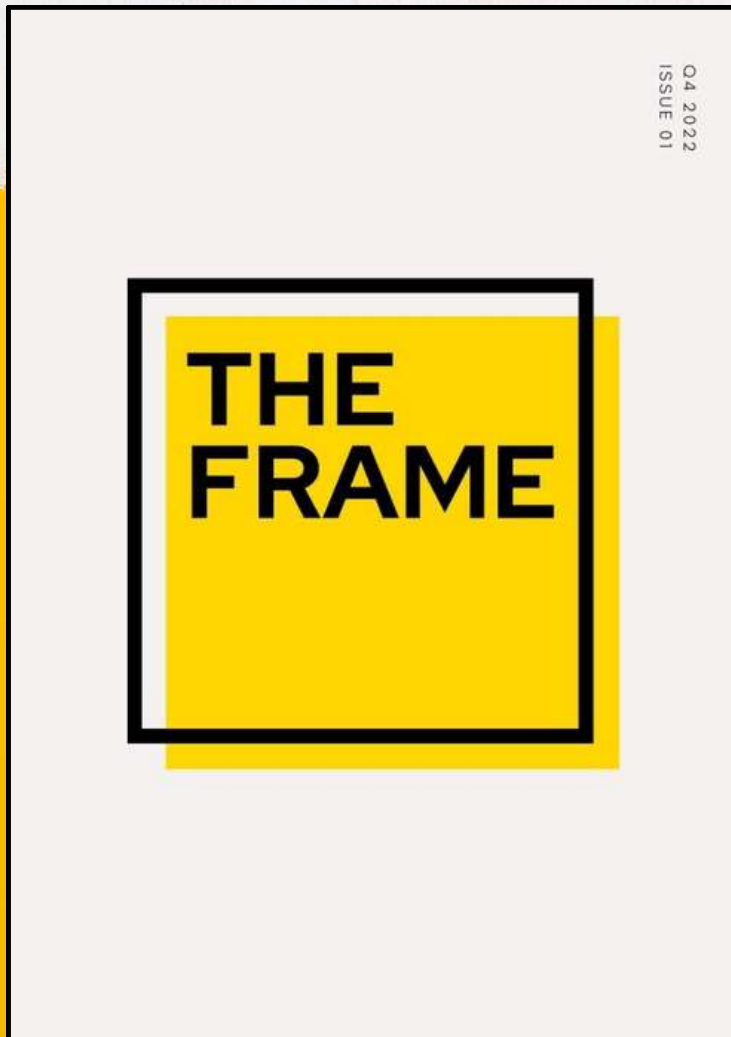
I hope this read helped inspire you to turn your life into a more purposeful journey in finding your authentic happy self.

Thank you very much for reading,
Chandni.

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The Frame was designed on Canva - www.canva.com

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