BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER BECAUSE THE SYSTEM IS NOT, AND WONT EVER BE, ON OUR SIDE

QUEERING THE NOTES OF SELF CARE, MENTAL (IN)STABILITY AND SUPPORT

AN INTRO

I'm going to start this off bluntly; I have a huge fear of being emotionally draining. I'm scared to be the emotional burden that affects my friend circles, or the one who just isn't fun enough to hang out with because my physical and mental health is too bothersome or too much to work around. I'm scared of being too much. And I'm scared of not being enough.

In the past months, I reached a pivotal point in my history of mental and physical health issues where I felt truly ashamed for having these pieces be apart of my body and self. I felt conflicted and confused because I knew that within these radical circles that I have participated in, there were at least basic conversations about ability and disability, but seldom did I feel like these conversations became prominent unless someone had committed suicide or was brave enough (or didn't have a choice) to be visibly disabled. And even then, visibly disabled radicals still have to deal with shame and stigma and 'feeling like a burden' on a whole new and different level. While it is important to remember that radical sub cultures are not devoid of the the affects of hegemony, I still kept hoping that while I felt (and still feel) so horrible, physically and mentally, that I could find a way to eradicate the shame, fear and judgment I was putting on myself and allow myself to feel like I could partake in communities that actively fought against folks feeling ashamed for their disabilities.

I want work towards eradicating the stigma of mental illness within radical anarchist oriented scenes, and I want to talk about how I see this as of *particular* importance for women, homos, and trans folks. I see mental instability as something inherently powerful in regards to the temporalities of queerness, and I am deeply invested in creating more dialogues about how we can help people from being killed in this death trap of a system we live in. I want to save

myself, I want to save my friends, I want to save all other queers and women feeling the depths of trauma and madness.

N O   C U L T U R E   O F   O U R S

Licensed social worker, author and speaker, Brené Brown, has received a significant amount of notoriety on her research around vulnerability, guilt and shame. She has spoken beautifully on numerous TedxTalks and has written several books, including *Daring Greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead.* While it isn't a politically radical book by any means, she sheds light on the ways in which our culture creates, what she coins as, a 'scarcity culture' which leads us to battle in all of our own ways the feeling of 'not being enough'.

I am a huge Brené Brown fan and am excited to finish the rest of her books, but I wish that these books and conversations where brought to light in a perspective that acknowledges the perils of capitalism and our institutionalized medical system, as well as engaging in a stronger conversation about the ways that patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity affect mental illness and the willingness to be vulnerable. Brown does talk about gender, and how men and women experience shame and vulnerability differently (with a stronger emphasis on women), but reading these passages of hers made me curious and confused what this information meant for individuals who are genderqueer, transgender as well as how lesbians and gay men experienced shame and vulnerability differently or to an even larger extent.

I am really impressed by the research Brown has done on the gendered roles that shame and vulnerability takes, but I wonder how we can transform the writings of Brown to make it more applicable and understanding to race, lesbianism and transgender individuals.

It should be pretty obvious by now, that we live in a psychoanalytic entrenched capital based death system that doesn't value anything but conventional notions of success. We leave behind so many people, topics, and diseases from our mainstream philanthropic bouts. Instead of our culture keeping the immensely high rates of LGBT folks and women who kill themselves at bay, we instead, as a culture, call them 'selfish', 'confused' and 'emotionally tormented for reasons will never understand'. And if you have ever had to go through the scarring experience of attempting to kill yourself, you will know how much the label of FAILURE gets stamped on your forehead in all sorts of ways. **And quite frankly, we can't even seem to muster up any conversation about people who attempt to kill themselves but fail.** Talking about our friends and family members who have attempted to die but did not and how to support those individuals never seems to really happen productively. When it does occur it always seems to leave a marking of, 'this is too overwhelming of a topic' or 'they are so confused and in pain'.

The reality is that there are so many systems in place that affect and contribute to people wanting to die and and an interest in suicidal ideation. I believe that (queer) folks don't kill themselves, but more so they were killed by a system that allowed them to. Our collective societal grief and interest in human lives either comes after the fact (once someone is dead), or really doesn't even exist at all. Trans Day of Remembrance, a single day in the fall that serves as a night to remember trans women (of color) who have been killed, serves as a great example of how the non profit industrial complex and institutional medical systems have left a day of mourning these deaths, but does little to change the preventative care for trans people, specifically trans women of color. Institutionalized medicine participates actively in the

destruction of trans women's lives including mis-diagnoses, a withholding of resources, and a lack of acknowledgement of their entire livelihood.

> **"we only seem to care about trans women of color's deaths once they are already dead, even though we all contribute to their death daily."**
>
> *-suzy*

Additionally, Our economic and health care system is so flawed that while mental disorders happen to everyone, but it is only wealthier people who can afford "adequate" care. To seek institutional mental support is something such few people can actually afford. And even if they can afford it/ or it does get covered by their insurance, It is a privilege in itself to be able to take the time off work to do so, or work a job that can take 'medical leave' to partake in a longer term treatment program, or even just any therapeutic program really. This also creates a facade that mental health, and the practice of taking care of your mental health, is a task for the economic and socially elite**.**

Eating disorders can be a pretty prime example of this since most often, mainstream media positions eating disorders as something that occurs to white socialite upper middle class girls, When in reality eating disorders happen to everyone, but its only people who can afford good insurance or can even pay out of pocket that can get "adequate" treatment for their disordered eating.

And once you do have the privilege of affording treatment, therapists often don't know a lot about queer and trans identities and issues unless they are 'specialized' or LGBT themselves and that is few and far between. I'm sure many of us who have seen a therapist have had to have many sessions where we just explained words to our therapist (once I even had to tell someone who to pronounce the word queer and another time someone asked me why I spoke of myself in the third person).

Oh yeah and **fuck the "It Gets Better" campaign.** Aside from Dan Savages sketchy politics and pure liberal agenda. The concept, while well intentioned (arguably), creates the illusion that theres a magical land that exists within capitalism and a world that still embodies a psychoanalytic equation of society, where everything get better. That once you follow this linear trajectory of life into the land of adulthood where adults have careers and jobs and cars and a husband or wife, that it'll alllllllllll get better. Adults never have problems and want to kill themselves! or get killed. nope, that never happens. ….Okay sarcasm over. What I mean to say is that while Dan Savage and I both have an interest in keeping LGBTQIA children alive, I genuinely believe that it does not get better and that framing it this way is ultimately harmful.

It doesn't get better, but It doesn't get worse.

And I think that what we can instill in each other is a radical acceptance of our current realities; that life is a constant ebb and flow (or a wave) of emotions and experience. It is fluid, murky and confusing; just like our sexualities and genders are.

WE RETURN TO OURSELVES TO RETURN TO EACH OTHER

I make a lot of self care jokes, or maybe not a lot, but I definitely do like to joke about it sometimes. Because I often don't feel like self care ends up coming in full circle the way I wish It would. And I mean that because I truly believe that our goal to take care of ourselves, aside from a pure necessity to do so (as exemplified above), is to ultimately be a better person to the people and communities around us. A few months ago, I was brought to tears speaking to a

fellow comrade/survivor/friend about what it's like to endure abuse, trauma, eating disorders, substance abuse, mental disorders, etc and how fucking hard it is to just be alive in this cruel world of ours. I still have to fight off these demons most days and probably will for the rest of my life and maybe a lot of you will have to do the same thing. But if theres anything that keeps me from not letting the fire take me in is that maybe, for some reason, I've had to endure these things and because, somehow, all of this can give me some clearer way to experience compassion on a level that can help other people. That all of us rough time kids out there can **protect** and **educate** others.

I think about all the people who grand-mothered me into this world: my friends, family and lovers that still protect and educate me on a daily basis. The people that remind me I'm not alone and remind me that we're not dead yet and we don't have to be. All my community members that remind me to stay self accountable while knowing I deserve love and care.

"We survived, so now we get to grow older and gain perspective and now we can help and thats so beautiful. It's a mess and it's life and I'm just happy I'm still around to see it."

-Meredith

Taking care of our trauma isn't because we want to live in a box the rest of our lives. Taking care of our health or setting boundaries, or communicating our needs is because these are things that we have control over (to an extent) that we can do to better ourselves so we can be better to others.

Self care also comes into play because we should know that even our closest family and friends cant always be there for us. We need to find validation on our own terms and to find love with solitude and being alone. This is of course in harder when we have a world what values economic and political individualism but not social solitude. While support from others is my main way of helping myself get through things, I began to learn that we all have to see the ways

you can help yourself as a toolbox of of different kinds of support. Meaning, reaching out is just one of the many ways you can help yourself. For example, your toolbox of support can include taking a bath, practice deep breathing, writing yourself affirmations, stating what you are grateful for, taking tinctures regularly, etc etc. Because above anything, you have your own self and yourself can be your best care taker sometimes. You need collective group of emotional/ physical support that includes, first and foremost, you.

Like all humans, I have messed up. Even though I have a fear of being emotionally overwhelming and realize that that fear is slightly irrational (since I know that my feeling/fear does not have to define me as a person) I also know that I *have* been emotionally overwhelming at some points. I see how hard it has been for my close friends when I tried to kill myself and how they managed to keep me alive. I can see how overwhelming is was to ex partners when I used them too much as a comfort blanket. But out of all those experiences, what seemed to be the most transformative, were my friends and family who were able to express their boundaries to me, as well as the ways that they could be there for me. **For mentally unstable folks, hyper communication seems to be a really key component to our interpersonal effectiveness. And to be honest, it is something that everyone can benefit from, even if you don't identify as someone who is mentally ill or mad.**

One of my friends once beautifully reminded me how one of the important parts of friendship which is that sometimes you will be an emotional mess and other times your friends will be an emotional mess. Sometimes you will need your friends, and other times they will need you. Ultimately, what we should be concerned with is finding the ways to communicate, advocate, set boundaries and find our intentions with seeking emotional support. And friendship is about knowing that maybe one day you'll be a mess and knowing that you'll need support, but that another day you'll be able to be there for them in a way that they need it.

I am incredibly interested in continuously highlighting the practices of strong communication, transparency and boundaries, because i think this is ultimately a form of compassion, self care, and are active ways to eradicate assumptions and stigmas surrounding mental illness. One of the more pertinent stigmas that I see around mental instabilities is that people who are mentally unstable are manipulative.

Manipulation is one of those terms that has been thrown into the category of 'political correct call out words'. You know, those words or phrases that are scarier to be labeled as more than it is for people who don't have a more radically leftist perspective (abusive, coercive, misogynistic, patriarchal, are other examples of this). While I think we overuse the word manipulation often, I think that manipulation gets thrown onto mentally unstable people even more. Part of the reason it occurs is because our irrational minds sometimes cannot decipher our intentions or what is factual. For instance, 'you broke up with me, there for you don't want to date me right now' is very different than 'you broke up with me, there for I am not wanted by anyone'. But as someone who is more unstable, it is harder to challenge your emotional mind vs your rational mind to come to a state of wise mind. Additionally there is a difference between 'You are being manipulative or you are being overwhelming in this current moment' and 'you *are* manipulative, you *are* overwhelming' . While I am not here to discredit prolonged intentional manipulation (as someone who has endured emotional abuse it is important for me to remind myself of this), It's also important to know that we are are not defined by your mental or physical illnesses and we can choose to not be defined by our actions, and we are not defined by what you are feeling.

Ultimately, It is not that mentally ill people can't be manipulative, its that everyone can be manipulative. And to act manipulative or abusive is different than being a manipulative and/or abusive person. We need to figure out ways to maybe either use a wider array of vocabulary to describe how we get hurt by one another and also maybe become less scared of

the absolute truth that we will, for a fact, hurt people. And sometimes that means we will be acting abusive or manipulative. It is accepting that reality that we can begin to start being better to our loved ones, without just a pure fear of those words.

BEING MENTALLY UNSTABLE IS HELLA QUEER

You may have heard of the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, or you may have not. At this point they roll almost exclusively in an academic realm, but at one point they wrote a book, titled *Anti-Oedipus,* which was the number one best selling book in Paris in the early 1970's (which is so hard to believe, god is that book dense as fuck). They expressed many things in this long ass book, most of which I could barely understand, but one of the things that they jointly articulated was the idea that traditional psychoanalysis was a way to suppressed human desire to tend to social normalization and control in furtherance of capitalism. Their book, Anti-Oedipus, demonstrated that the Freudian concept of Super-ego, Ego and Id was advanced in promotion of western concepts of capitalism which relied upon a hierarchical structure to control the means of production and the allocation and enjoyment of the fruits of labor. In other words, this homophobic, transphobic, and sexist form of psychology was once the only western form of psychology practiced and is now deeply entrenched in our current social and economic systems. Deleuze and Guattari proposed a (theoretical) alternative to Psychoanalysis in which they labeled it as 'the schizo'. Deleuze and Guattari see schizophrenia as a key component to

subversive postmodern politics that have the radical potential to bring down capitalism. For them, the concept of the schizo resists all symbolic and despotic oedipalization. Essentially, Deleuze and Guattari created this concept of the schizo as an alternative way of performing and living that they see as inherently anti capitalist.

In contemporary society, there are certain political agents who embody Deleuze and Guattari's vision of the radical schizophrenic.   Among those agents lies our very own queers. For these authors, queers in the mid to late nineteen eighties, were prime examples of resisters of capitalism, for they challenged desire in a way that hadn't been made explicit before. Deleuze and Guattari believed that queerness practiced a desire that was divorced from the concept of acquisition and lack.

My interest in (re)connecting Deleuzian theory to these topics of mental instability and support is because I think that we've lost a lot of the concepts that Deleuze and Guattari spoke of within in the aging of 'queer'. As I digest the readings of Deleuze and Guattari and all of the confusion I faced that comes with reading their philosophy, I began to ask myself how can we return to these theories to affectively change the ways that queer functions and (dis)functions. And the first thing that comes to my mind is reconnecting ourselves to the histories that brought us to where we are, as radically oriented women and homos, in the first place. **From the mental diagnosis of female hysteria that was routine for hundreds of years, to the American Psychiatric Association classifying homosexuality as a mental disorder up until 1973 to an only very recent removal of Gender Identity Disorder from Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, gender and sexual minorities know far too well about their rooting with being seen and feeling crazy or like a failure.** What I think that we can get from looking at Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of Psychoanalysis, their embracing of madness as an intruder of capitalism, is that I think that the embodiment of madness is not only important for erasing a stigma but that it is inherently queer insofar as it acts as a destabilizer from what we

see as a successful form of living within a capital success based system. Failure can mean

embracing the madness that comes with apart of queer histories. Failure to conform to a linear

success narrative of happiness that involved a set of heteronormative ways of living,and its

deep connection to madness and hysteria, demonizing phrases that have used to demonize and

plague sexual and gender others. Queer culture does not only mean producing new

performativities and temporalities but imagining different ways of being and existing and

embracing the imagination and desire to imagine a new body that was shunned upon us

through psychology for so long.

By connecting Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the schizo, could be a way for us to

theoretically engage, and hopefully influence us to understand why mental instability and a

vulnerability of emotions are inherently queer, and may be one of the only things that we can

hold onto when we think of the ontology of that murky catchall phrase.

C O N C L U S I O N

Theres that really cliche phrase that floats around anarchist patches and posters that

says, *"Be gentle with each other so we can be dangerous together."* And while silly as it may

sound, there seems to be some deep truth to it. I think that people who experience the wide

array of physical and mental disabilities and illnesses may know more strongly what it truly can

feel like and how much meaning it can have when you can feel cared for without fear of

judgement, and with certainty that that person is also caring for themselves.

I wanted to write this because I'm sick of hearing about people feeling so held at the

hands of the stigma of being too emotional. Or friends feeling to scared to make themselves

vulnerable to others. And I think that a lot of this happens because because we all are are not

adequately equipped to talk to, relate, or empathize with people with mental or physical

illnesses. It is then that I become curious about how we can begin to change that and begin new

forms of support and practice better ways of engaging with one another; So that we can begin to have more adequate conversations that don't revolve and exist inside the institutionalized medical systems imposed on us.

I cant say everything that I want to say in this essay, and I honestly wish that I could go on for much longer. But I hope that I can get at least a few things out of this which is that **we need to start taking mental illness seriously.** We need to start saving lives and looking to our own ways to prevent people from being killed in this system, especially trans women of color. As a mentally and physically ill person, I want to embrace each other and ourselves wholly and fully to our best ability, knowing that we will make mistakes. Knowing that we will need to set our own boundaries to adequately help each other. I want to find ways to cherish and recognize our madness that is seeped in our histories and look at ways to embrace it further within our radical queer agenda.

One time I took a free 'mental health first aid' course that was mostly very rudimentary, but one of the really key things that they taught us, that I had never really thought of before, is that when people reach out for attention, even on the internet, it is because they are seeking help and support. Something that many people don't even feel like they have access to. And while we often scoff of these people for being 'attention seeking' or just being dramatic, I see this reactionary response as something truly problematic. One of the ways in which we can work on radical preventive (mental) health care , is recognizing that **we need to stop trivializing peoples experience with suicidal ideation.**

What should be engrained is that when people are 'seeking attention' its that people reach out *for a reason*. Which is that they are looking for people and things to help keep themselves from drowning (be it self harm, substance abuse, suicidal ideation). What is so saddening about the regular articles that will float around about (queer) teenagers killing themselves and seeing the facebook statuses of my friends (including myself) that pop up

expressing remorse, is that the system can't help queer kids stay alive, but fuck, we can. And

these conversations cant just exist once someone is already dead. We can help each other stay

alive if we let each other. We can help each other stay alive if we start having these

conversations not just when something or someone is in crisis but on a regular basis. I really

believe that help and support from our (chosen) family,friends, (and from within) are the only

things we can even remotely rely on to keep us alive in this horrible world.

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