



Pathologize
This!

a mental health zine

This zine is a compilation of work on people's experiences with, and resistance to, mental health problems and its stigmas. We compiled it over copious amounts of tea, between procrastinating our student obligations, and with lots of inadequate photocopying skills in Montreal during the autumn of 2008. We'd like to send out a huuge thank you to all those brave and wonderful enough to share their work and lives in this zine. Those who wish are welcome to reproduce what's in here but please respect the original material. And hey, perhaps, if we generate enough interest this zine will only be the first of many editions. So send us your thoughts, questions, or more submissions to mentalhealthzine@gmail.com

Thanks for reading!

Sometimes reading about sensitive topics like this can be kind of difficult and may be triggering so be kind and patient with yourself while reading this- take breaks, eat yummy foods, talk to somebody or curl up with your kitty if it starts getting rough.

Not just an angry brown girl..

There was no one to talk to about mental illness. I never understood why going to school was so scary for me. I never knew how to explain the way I was.

My parents could never understand why I would do so badly in school. I put so much time in and nothing ever came out. I wanted to do so well so badly, to make my parents proud. All my parents ever wanted was for me to get a good education and to do something with my life. They came here to make a better life for us, we were already so different—they didn't want their daughter to be "dumb" too.

Being a racialized girl, I never fit in. As much as I tried, I always knew that no one ever understood who I was. After eighteen years, I finally started to find the people that made me feel whole. I found activism that made realize that I wasn't alone. I took women studies because it made me feel like people cared. I found a community where I could talk about my race, culture and sexuality freely.

Then the problems came, who could I talk to about my OCD? Who do I talk to about my severe anxiety issues? I am already an angry brown girl in a racist fucking world, how the fuck do I tell everyone that I'm crazy too?

Mental illness has been so pronounced in my family—depression, schizophrenia, and now this. How do I tell my family that they have to deal with another family member with a mental illness? How do I tell them that I can't sleep at night, I can't eat, and that I cry and hyperventilate before every class that requires a participation grade?

It hurts when people joke about how crazy I am. Because I am crazy, and making a joke about my "edginess" and anxiety is not really a joke at all, it's my life.

"Mealtime" - Aviva S.

she saw my scale when I was putting my clothes
away.

I guess she was surprised.
because she asked me about it,
she just thought I wasn't
that

kind
of
girl.

—
the kind that
feels this gnawing
fundamental discomfort at
The
Dinner
Table.

tension
that hovers over the dishes and sure it
smells delicious but the
knot in my stomach...
shit.

my finger twists a curl
over and over and over.
pull my knees
to my chest.

i've been anxious since
yesterday,
cut out lunch to
compensate.

—
breathe in.

—
no, no you
go
first.
really,
please!

i want to see
how
much
you take.

[I am so, so sorry for watching.]

i can only touch the
serving spoon
twice.

small talk goes like this:
how'd you make it?....
[read: tell me there's no
oil fat nuts potatoes white carbs...?]
...fuck
i should have helped cook

wait wait wait
don't be
ingenuine.

you're watching me too.
i can tell.

...whatever.

hey
is
it
over?
you put your spoon down
a while ago.

breathe out.

fuck you
for this lovely meal.
did you enjoy it?

Nothing ever happened. The societal scripts we've learned to perfect. Socializing us into smiling faces, yes please, and we don't talk about that. Of course not. Not someone we know. Not me. Not you.

Keeping survivors at the margins allows for silenced victims at the centre.

It's not because sexual abuse is rare; it is precisely because it's common that silence is so key to its maintenance.

People deny our experiences.
Condemn. Minimize. Avoid.
We're supposed to speak up, only nobody's there to listen.

Where is the space for us to finally just be who we are?
A place where who I am and what I've experienced isn't defined for me by others.

Sanctioning me to freakishness.
Blocking the burdens of lifting from my shoulders. Keep the shame in me. Keep the shame of me.

My voice is my power. When my small fists don't pack a swing, the police

don't protect, and community turns its head. All I have is my inner strength to stand up. To keep yapping along, even when it feels like I'm standing all alone. Even when all the backs are turned. Because even with their backs turned, I know they can still hear me.

Every once and a while someone comes up to me and says "me too". Breaking the stigma. Gives someone else permission to stand too. Gives someone else permission to feel a little less alone. Gives myself permission to feel a little less alone.

And those of us who never talk. The five years when I was almost completely silent. There is strength in giving ourselves that protection too. Giving ourselves that patience, that space and time to heal.

If we only listened. Maybe if we really listened and cared we'd start to see what people, millions of us, are going through. Maybe if as a community we showed a little more trust and respect it'd be safe for people to overcome the silence if they choose to. Then maybe we'd demand change. Maybe all of us, survivors and allies, could stand up, speak out, make the change happen.

As youth, we often define ourselves by our musical tastes. Music is deeply tied to various subcultures so that a love of punk, hip-hop, or pop seems to reveal deep truths about our souls. It didn't used to be this way—back before there were so many genres, entire generations could be defined by bands like the Beatles or artists like Michael Jackson. Now that there's a type of music for everyone, no artist will ever achieve that universal level of popularity. When we ask our friends who their favourite bands or artists are, their responses don't always clarify things. The upside of this is that there appears to be a defining artist for every person. And this is where I reveal who that artist is for me. For the past four years, I have slid on ice, sat by the canal, studied, boarded the metro, and sipped tea to the lulling and lyrical tunes of Elliott Smith.

As a mental health advocate, this can be problematic. Elliott Smith, aside from being one of the most respected artists of the nineties (which was the heyday of alternative rock!), the songwriter most often compared to the Beatles, and a musician known for being generous, funny and open to collaboration suffered from a number of mental health issues. As a child, he was abused by his stepfather. Diagnosed with ADHD and depression, he self-medicated with various substances and was known to be an alcoholic and a heroin addict. Finally, in 2003 at the age of 34, he died of a self-inflicted stab wound. So the question most rational people ask me is "Why is this man your role model?" and, more importantly, "How can you encourage people to listen to his music if you're a mental health advocate?"

The answers to these questions are complicated. It's easy to say that he is an example of what happens when mental illness is not addressed and dealt with, but that's untrue. Though he had a traumatic past, he was an honours student in High School. He was supported by a vast network of friends and collaborators, was in and out of some of the best rehab centers for most of his adult life and he died at a time when he was clean, sober and in the midst of recording a new album. Upon his death, his blood still contained traces of the anti-depressants and ADHD medications that he used to cope with his conditions. He was very forthright about his mental health problems. He addressed them both in his songs and his interviews, and he had many fans who loved him very much. Advocacy and treatment did not save him.

So we're back at square one. I firmly believe that listening to Elliott Smith music has a therapeutic effect on mental illness, but the man who devoted his life to writing these songs eventually killed himself. The songs didn't work on him. The most I can say is that I hope I'm honouring his profound talent by understanding him based not on how he died or even how he lived but the remarkably insightful and honest songs he left behind. Universally, one of the biggest problems that those of us with mental illness face is our inability to talk about our problems. Many of us are afraid that we will be judged negatively if we admit that we are struggling. This is known as stigma. To add to that, though, I believe that there are other reasons for our silence. Having been through cognitive behavioural therapy, I can tell you how I

was told to treat my problems. I was told to keep a log. I had to write down every time a bad, grotesque thought entered my mind. I had to specify in writing exactly what the thought was and how I addressed it. The problem becomes how to define a thought. To me, a "thought" was something concrete such as "Oh, I had better take out my money if I want to pay for this coffee" or "I wonder how Jeff is doing." What I was experiencing were not thoughts, they were torments, inclinations, urges, images, and layers of hellish judgement and condemnation. Neither words nor chicken-scratch images would have done these emotions justice.

This is why music can be such a wonderful tool for people suffering from mental health problems. The chords and notes are primitive languages that extend beyond words. They have an amazing power to express the inexpressible. Combined with an honest and forthright lyric, a simple chord has the power to knock me flat. There are, therefore, two aspects to my enjoyment of Elliott Smith. In one sense, I can profoundly relate to lyrics such as "At a party he was waiting/ Looking kind of spooky and withdrawn/Like he could be underwater/The mighty mother with her hundred arms." I have spent about half of my social life at parties where I can't even begin to belong. It starts to feel like drowning. But remove the frank lyrics and we are still left with something relatable. Elliott Smith was fond of layering, particularly in his later career. He would record himself singing the same thing twice and juxtapose the two recordings so that the voice in the song assumed an eerie, whispery, haunting quality. The next layer would be him playing the various instrumentals. Hearing human emotions expressed in such a complex way can lead to intimate understanding that simple conversation will never provide. This is part

of the reason why people respond well to things such as touch, medication, meditation, crying, music, and art. Talk therapy is excellent, but it's not always enough.

To me, listening to Elliott Smith is like listening to someone who knows my brain very well. Because of this, even though many people find his music depressing and emotionally draining, I find that it can relax me like nothing else. His songs are a warm blanket. Some friends of mine have worried that his music has prevented me from moving on. What they don't understand is that it would have been impossible to move on without him. I'm not a neurologist, but I'd be very interested in seeing a scan of my brain while listening to Elliott Smith. I'm certain the brain waves would be doing all kinds of groovy things.

If you're at all interested, I'd suggest giving Elliott Smith a try. My introduction to him was 1998's "XO" album, his first major studio work. Most fans agree that "XO" is a good place to start because it contains some of his best songs. If Elliott isn't your thing, that's OK, but what I hope you take away from this is how beneficial music can be for those suffering from mental health problems. I think everyone needs an artist who knows the inner landscape of their brains.

Rape, police, and break-down

Some personal notes

By: kam h.

- i. It ends up going down like this: he enters the house in the middle of the night while my mum is sleeping on the couch cuz she's scared shitless and doesn't wanna leave me alone. He gets into a fight with my roommate who tells him to Get The Fuck Out Of Our House after he calls her a Dyke Bitch. There's a police chase and he's caught and arrested and spends the night in jail and gets charged with sexual assault and criminal harassment. I'm drunk at the neighbour's house and I miss all of it. Some might call this Foreshadowing.
- ii. But wait. It starts before that. Maybe it starts when he wants to go for breakfast in the morning. He says he'll pay for it and I really don't know what to say because I guess I'm scared. Or shocked. I say yes but I invite all my roommates to go cuz I figure they would be a good distraction. We eat and all I can think about is his breath, and his faint body odour, and his hand on my thigh. He tells me he doesn't actually have any money so I end up paying for his breakfast which later makes me feel sick and hate myself. After, I tell my roommates I don't wanna see him again and to just say I'm not home if he calls or stops by. I guess they figure it was a one-night stand thing.
- iii. One of my roommates tells me he had come by the house at 1:30am when we were all sleeping. She woke up and told him to go away cuz it was late and Yes I was there, but No he couldn't talk to me cuz I was sleeping so maybe he should try again at a more appropriate hour. He calls and my other roommate tells him I wasn't home. He begins stopping by clandestinely and leaving letters for me saying that I'm evil and manipulative but that he loves

me, or could love me. They don't make any sense. They scare me and I begin to have panic attacks. Like, what if he shows up with a weapon or what if he overpowers me and holds me captive or tries to rape me again? One time he stops by and I accidentally answered the door when I'm home alone. I wish there was some kind of anti-o manual on what to do when the guy who raped you last week begins stalking you and writing sick sexual love letters about all the dirty things he wants to do with you and how much he hates you and shows up at your door with sex toys when you're home alone. He needs help but I can't give it to him.

No one even knows he raped me.

- iv. Finally I tell my mum and she takes me to get an exam so that I can begin to heal. My ass is still bleeding and I still haven't cried about it all yet.
- v. My bed feels dirty all the time and I can't sleep in it. I start dating my ex-boyfriend again mostly so that I can sleep in his bed. He puts on my clothes when it's a really bad day and let's me cry and scream and be really fucked up and he says things like "if I ever see that Dick, I will kill him for you." And then he fucks me good and hard. We don't make love and I like that cuz it's easier to deal with. It's all really cool and so I fall in love with him again.
- vi. I get kicked out of the rape crisis counselling volunteer training i was taking. I cry and tell them I'm sorry and that I had been really enthusiastic to work with them and I didn't mean to fuck everything up.
- vii. People start saying things to me like: "we are sexually connected! My boyfriend fucked that girl A. who fucked P. who fucked you!" in really peppy tones like it's some kind of awesome spiritual connection or something.

P. is the guy who raped me.

- viii. Where are all my friends? Where is the community? I can't tell if I keep pushing them away cuz intimacy scares me or if 'community' is bullshit. It's probably a combination of both. I have long talks with people about community support instead of police assistance—using the protection of organized, politicized communities rather than relying on the state. When is it ok to go to the police? Where is the community when you need them?
- ix. Summer Love: so many drunk nights that it all turns into one epic story. I feel like a hero. I dress slutty. I go skinny-dipping in the river and steal passionate kisses under the shade and lose my shoes and ride my bike barefoot. Eventually my ex, who let me fall apart, tells me I'm a disgusting slut. He says can't deal with my past. I dump that fucker and feel proud for it. I can say No now. I start fucking someone else and we get drunk and have sex under the stars and fall in some kind of weird desperate love spell. He's a drunk. So am I, so it works. He loses it and punches me. He asks to borrow money for crack the same day. It falls apart again. I tell my roommates to Fuck Off, Don't Talk to Me. I cry all my tears out and all I have left is a steady numbness and lots of booze to make me feel something again. I feel so cliché. I am so cliché. I stop saying No again.
- x. No one understands the racial-gendered dynamic of what happened/ what's happening. I go to counselling and I don't know what to say. I don't know how to make sense of it and this white counsellor can't help me. She just stares at me blankly. This white town can't handle my bullshit and I move to montreal where I spend most of my time alone having one-person dance parties, watching reality tv on Youtube, and writing essays on dyke porn and skin disease.
- xi. The phone rings one day. It's the cops. They've been trying to reach me for a while now but I keep avoiding

their calls cuz I'm scared I did something wrong without even knowing it and they want to arrest me or something. This time, I answer.

"P. has been charged. He has to do community service and maintain a distance of 100 metres from you at all times" the cop says, very matter-of-factly. I hadn't heard anything about he trial in months.
"Does he live in Peterborough?"
"I can't answer that."

- xii. I move back to Toronto. I break up with my ex-boyfriend again. I started seeing him again when I was in montreal. Maybe to make the loneliness a little less intense. One night he goes apeshit and starts screaming at me and I tell him to leave me alone and go home and someone calls the cops on us. When they get there I tell them that nothing's wrong. I don't know what to say. I already called the cops on him once and I feel like it's betrayal to rat him out. He's violent and I break up with him by never answering his emails or picking up his phone calls.
- xiii. I start dating again. And maybe I fall in love.

questions to answer

she is posed at the check-out
for phones (telus)

-which is fine-

but before it was another check-out- that time, for eye
shadows (twelve in all):
“baby-girl”, “sweet pearl”, “undone”, “alive” etcetera
etcetera.

then brave red
lipstick hurt (eight),
then high heeled boots (only 2 pair,
leather both with copper buckles).
in a purse- (the one she wears now), ,
there is something in a translucent bottle that reads
“Absolute Vodka”. aunty says
it’s water but i know it’s not.

when she wants to buy some i feel a heaving feeling
in the deep of my stomach:

aunty, let’s (let us!) go home with your new phone,
with your new shadows, high heeled books with
buckles.

in the parenthesis, i say: I love you, iloveyou. Don’t do
it don’t do it anymore.

iloveyou iloveyou. Feel
now (/?)

Better Please

later that day (or week or month) is the babysitter,
also aunty, blanked out on the sofa strewn across pale
blue sky blue melted iced out ocean. her body is

almost translucent like the clear clear water in the bottle which never contained water.

because it wasn't water, the liquid never quenched aunty- never quenching like the anxiety drugs mom later took *too liberally*, like the time she convulsed with a nervous euphoria for 50 minutes or 6 hours. I still can't tell.

please, can you tell me...

what is your name?

mary-anne

what is my name?

no answer

do you know where we are?

the bed(room?)

what is the date?

it's too late. IT'S TOO (she convulses some more)

LATE.

it has been 15 years since the couch with aunty all strewn out, and here i am at twenty seeing you numb out the pain and cope in the way you know best.

if i tell "you" (please!) not to "end it", am i saying that i want your pain to live here instead?

This is an interview with my mom, about her experiences as someone who has experienced chronic pain, a severe loss of mobility, and depression. She lives in a rural BC town where there is only one medical clinic. After being unable to receive any care, diagnosis, or pain management in her town, she has finally resorted to making considerable financial sacrifices to seek private care in the United States.

Can you explain how your mental health history has affected the quality of treatment you've received for physical health problem?

Immediately after my last mental health crisis I started developing symptoms that were similar to arthritis. It was immediately assumed that what I was dealing with was a sequel to the mental health crisis, instead of a physical condition. The first normal line of diagnosis was skipped right over because of the timing. It took six months to get lab tests most patients would have had within six or eight weeks. It took eighteen months to get a referral to a rheumatologist. When I arrived at the rheumatologist, I saw the referral letter from my family doctor. The letter had three words on it: history of depression. There was no reference to the fact that my joints were visibly swollen and no longer functioning, and I'd had to quit two jobs.

Can you talk about how your physical disability affects your mental health?

It will be three years in January and I still don't

have a diagnosis, I want something to call my situation, even if the diagnosis turns out be tentative. You can't fight something you can't identify, and I feel that in order to have the fulfilling life, I have to take responsibility for my health and fight to improve my circumstances.

It is true that when I'm in psychological distress, my pain levels increase. In an effort to communicate thoroughly with my family doctor that, I told him that, and my credibility with him plummeted. Even though it's recognized that people with chronic pain will have escalations of pain in times of stress. When I finally saw the rheumatologist, she gave me a tentative diagnosis of psoriatic arthritis. When I saw her again three months later, I hadn't responded well to the analgesics she had prescribed. Her manner became unscientific at this point. When I asked her what I had, she said "a little of this, and a little of that." Now I tell people that I have psoriatic arthritis because it's too embarrassing to tell people that I have "a little of this and a little of that". I also had to fight to get a medical marijuana prescription because of my history of depression.

Both sets of medical professionals know that I have a background in nursing, but the caregivers (using that term loosely) who knew of my psychiatric history, assumed I was not able to handle complex information. They can be condescending, and they go out of their way to

use small words. I wonder if someone without a mental health history would have to endure that?

How do you think your situation would be different if you couldn't afford to travel to get private healthcare?

You have to be affluent to get effective care. You have to be able to travel. If I was pursuing care anywhere else in BC, my mental health history would follow me. I'm now very cautious, very guarded. With free services available to people who can't afford private care, you can't get the same level of confidentiality. You're at their mercy and aren't guaranteed any credibility.

Would you describe what you have experienced as oppression based on a set of disabilities, or as discrimination?

I would describe it as oppression based on a disability, or a set of disabilities. I don't know if I would say discrimination, because I think if I fought hard enough, I could get really good diagnostics. I'm so exhausted that I don't feel like fighting to that level. Now I just feel that my family doctor is a pet with a prescription pad.

Are there any aspects of your situation that make you feel hopeful about the future?

Once I can get a diagnosis, I will feel hopeful about my situation.

Anxiety

Every day when I wake up, I begin a new battle with a demon that plagues me and taunts me into submission. It cannot be seen or heard, but lives inside of me, struggling to gain control. The clinical term is 'anxiety,' but inside my head, it takes on a more mystical, sinister facet, and plays the Moriarty to my Sherlock Holmes. My nemesis is a part of me, and thus preys upon me with the calculated knowledge of a psychopathic genius. The circular logic of self-doubt spirals around my head until I feel drunk and dizzy with the disorienting weight of uncertainty, and this is almost too much to bear.

For most people, anxiety is an obstacle to overcome when faced with a large presentation to make or an event to plan. But for the many who struggle silently with anxiety disorders, it simply becomes a way of life. I can barely remember a day when I woke up without that familiar welling of panic inside my chest. Adapting my way of living to my anxiety disorder has dictated my life, and threatens to similarly control my future.

For me, it is this promise of a better future that fuels my fight to survive. The insidious thing about anxiety is that the more that you seek to evade it, the stronger its hold becomes. Thus, we become warriors, and mundane tasks become a battling ground for a fight between will and emotion. A war waged on mind over matter, if you will.

My mind is in a state of constant warfare and turmoil. On a good day, I celebrate life and anticipate an eventual victory. On a bad day, I sit shackled to the ground and unable to fly. My anxiety manifests itself in a torrent of frantic obsessions, without rhyme or reason, and relentless in their pursuit. I will fixate upon an issue, and

analyze and doubt and beat myself senseless with it for hundreds of hours. I will watch movies and carry on conversations, and attend class on autopilot. Entire days will go by where I barely remember what happened in the outside world, because my entire being was focused on the obsession at hand, calculating and determining and puzzling over something that cannot be resolved. I tell myself that I will just think about it for another five minutes, and if I haven't come up with a solution, then I will give myself a rest. But that rest never comes. I never find a solution that calms me, and I gradually work myself into a frenzy, plagued with self-doubt and perceived signs that the universe is against me.

Sometimes this anxiety seems mystical, and I feel as if I am cursed. Other times I resign myself to the notion that this is my cross to bear, and that I must learn to adapt my life to it. The times when I am strongest and happiest, I am defiant and aggressive. I scream in the face of my oppressor and rage against my prison: My life belongs to me, fuck off! Yes, anger has a place, and when channeled correctly, even a dignified strength that shouts out for justice. Indeed, it is on those days when I cannot be silenced that I feel the most free. But, unfortunately, these days are too few, and are overshadowed by the senseless, cold and aching nights.

Sometimes I will stare into the mirror for hours, picking at my eyes. Oddly enough, this is often the one thing that will calm me. My eyes are often red and irritated: Infected from being touched too much. They itch and they burn, but still I can not

stop. Another desperate attempt to find peace of mind. I will also ask for reassurance, over and over, until nobody will listen to me anymore. But the answer is never enough. Are they lying? Are they just being kind? The doubt creeps back in, and I swallow the urge to ask again. Sometimes I feel better for a few precious moments, but then the obsessing starts again. No response is enough to calm my doubts. I am needy, and I know it. I worry about my desperate need for affection, but my attempts to smother it only result in an empty aching. I seek comfort from outside sources, because I can not give it to myself. I reach out desperately, but no amount of hugs and kind words can reach me in the prison of my mind. I am alone, and it is dark.

I sit in the darkness of my room at night, overcome with fears and doubts. I try to stop the constant repeating of my mind. I try breathing exercises, but they make me feel dizzy. Maybe they help a bit. I hum to myself, lullabies and hymns, and try to calm myself. It's okay baby, I will keep you safe. I think of a therapist I once saw who told me I was addicted to the romance of madness. I think she must have been crazy. In reality, there is nothing poetic about mental illness: It is weight gain and unwashed hair and maggots in the sink. I desperately cling to my old friend Bear: His calm, kindly eyes always listening. My faithful companion, always unassuming and quietly listening. We have grown up together. I rest my head on the yellowed fur of his matted head, and try to slow my breathing. In a few hours the sun will come up. It will be better then.

the dishes this evening

washing the dishes this evening and placing them away in the cupboard where they belong, didn't hear that voice inside my head squirming. *What do you think you're doing?!*- *doinitWRONG, doingitWRONG*. came home from feminist class all ready to wash the dishes, clean up the mess that living my own life makes for the house-family. i know, i know.

Cling!– a little bird-chime on the shelf, sound of mug smiling, ringing and the bowl

big blue bowl makes a squeak as it hits the mug that just got sat down there.

someone put down the mug. Each mug, shortly after one, after one after the other and one (and) one gets arriving safely and if one/it all breaks I don't care even very much.

You're doing it wrong, doinitWRONG.

i didn't feel the still-building icicle of your glare circling around to pierce my back, soft white back- after dropping off. One brief break and the cracks of/in me

feel

shiver-cold.

falling asleep last night was a dream. yes it was moontime, i dreamed like the moon in her sleep to herself, waking up at the end of the cycle that pulls in and out like tides. the pulling happens always at the moment that is perfect.

in the orange auburn(T) kitchen in the house where i grew up, it used to be that as i washed the dishes even more as i put them in drawers and on shelves and in cupboards away, (away!)

my senses would tense up. eyebrows flare. torch-fire slitting at my eyes. i- yes, me- could not always discern much, but always this: there
Is

someone in (my) space and (my) time
itching eczema into this (my?) skin.

it

hurts.

Sometimes it's really difficult for me to talk.

To open up.

I'm frightened of what others will think of me.

I want to be strong. I don't want to be the weak, tragic, lost, little girl to nobody.

But others do judge me.

I am never the same person to them once they know about what I have been through and continue to go through.

But it's their mistake when they think I'm tragic.

I'm no warrior. I'm weak as shit most of the time. But my ability to function in school, as an activist, in social settings, in relationships is not a marker of how I feel inside.

I still struggle. I struggle a whole lot.

I can just manage it real well.

So you would never know. Most people usually tell me that they would never have guessed that I have mental health problems.

And they say it like I'm supposed to take that as a compliment.

Congratulations! I am assumed to be someone who I'm not on the basis that I don't fit the myriad of discriminatory stereotypes people with mental health problems are supposed to encompass.

My disability is acceptable insofar as I can pass as able-bodied.

This gives me all sorts of privilege and all sorts of invisible barriers.

And I'm rewarded by society every time I keep quiet about it.

But what they never tell you is that you don't have to be strong all the time. That none of us really are. And that what they told us 'strong' means was actually just a load of bullshit anyway.

When I'm at my strongest is when I have enough courage to show my more vulnerable sides.

That's the toughest. That's when I'm jumping hurdles.

To let people in, to let people see how I feel when I'm so low.

Even when I know what I feel isn't rational, or sounds silly, or is really sad and painful.

I don't want to drag anyone down, I don't want to be the flag which reminds people of all the hardships in the world.

But the struggle's there.

It's just a part of me that as I'm weaving my way through the pathways of life I'm growing better and better at triumphing.

I don't know that I'll ever 'recover'.

That's not really my goal.

I just want to be better at being ok with all my insecurities, fuck ups and my quirks and have enough sense to laugh at myself and be patient with myself and know that I'm lucky enough to have wonderful people in my life who really care about me.

But you look fine...

