

Physically Distant, Connected by Care

towards collective resilience and strength during the
Covid-19 pandemic

May 1st 2020

Power Makes us Sick (PMS) is a feminist collective focusing on autonomous health care practices and networks. PMS seeks to understand the ways that our mental, physical, and social health is impacted by imbalances in and abuses of power. We can see that mobility, forced or otherwise, is an increasingly common aspect of life in the anthropocene. PMS is motivated to develop free tools of solidarity, resistance, and sabotage that respond to these conditions and are informed by a deep concern for planetary well-being.

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PMS is open to collaboration, accomplices, memes, your health-related report backs, folks who want to distribute or translate our content, requests for support that come from communities, suggestions for clinics, nurses, and friends to visit and lots of other things too.

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See our website for more information: www.p-m-s.life

introduction

“Is it possible to have collective practices that actually help the health of populations, including large-scale behaviour modifications, without a parallel expansion of forms of coercion and surveillance?”

This is a moment when folks are scared and anxious, faced with growing isolation and precarity; within these conditions PMS is hearing a spectrum of thoughts that we'd like to air out and speak towards, centering our work on autonomous healthcare; grounding some recent events in our conversations of what it means to care and be there for one another (even from a physical distance) in the time of Sars-2 Covid-19.

Confronted with a seemingly uncontrollable illness, people are scared. Many will automatically agree to measures put in place for their “safety” by the state, of which we've seen many examples across the world in the past few months. But those in power will only ever concede enough to allow them to maintain their control. As demands like universal basic income and expanded paid sick days become Serious Policy Proposals worldwide, it is important to keep in mind that this is mostly a strategy to keep the economy going and to calm people so they don't realize the deeper disease of the system and become restless and angry with this situation neoliberal capitalism is shoving us into.

A quick sketch of things we have noticed: borders have been closed by many governments worldwide. In the case of Europe's borders this is coming at a very convenient time when Greece was already violently persecuting migrants coming to Lesbos from Turkey who opened their borders 3 weeks ago. Refugees are getting turned away even more radically at borders all over the world. Many governments are calling on military/martial law to enforce quarantine, such as in Italy, Spain, France and within US. The possibility of data collection for surveillance purposes is internationally discussed as possible measurement against contagion with Covid-19. Strict curfews are being enforced by military, police and even drones. In a time when large gatherings are dangerous and in many places now banned, police and military might be the only force legally permitted to gather. This is what authoritarianism looks like — not care.

Abundant resources will be invested into police and military because of this crisis. In the US, billionaires, Wall Street and the economists knew a recession was coming, now they can shift the blame from their unethical practices and greed to the virus. Big pharma and the securitization industry will make ludicrous profits in the months ahead. Amazon is profiting incredibly over this crisis — taking over the sales and distribution of basically everything, 100.000 jobs have already been added to the company, while Whole Foods (owned by Amazon) employees are

having panic attacks over the enforced 12 hour shifts days in a row without sick leave or pay in sight. Amazon workers are striking against arbitrary job cuts instead of the company providing them with proper preventative protection like masks and gloves at the workplace. After quarantine set in, the work of caring for children in many cases moved from the paid industry (nursery, babysitters) to the unpaid one, elderly self-isolating people and pandemic patients need to be looked after. Because of the existing structure of the workforce and its naturalized (in)visibilities this falls more heavily on women and might have a long-lasting effect on gender equality.

Unsurprisingly, we also witness the stratification of privilege and class within this quarantine: while everyone else is struggling to figure out how we'll survive the coming months, people who can comfortably work from home, with the assurance that all this will blow over and their jobs will still be there, are sharing self-care routines and strategies for increasing at-home productivity. The need for collective care rather than individualised capitalist self-care and wellness culture is more obvious than ever!

From within our extended networks we've seen opinions floating around that we'd also like to address. Some are finding it tempting to say we, humans, deserve this for how we've treated the planet and each other. Others want to express relief at what they see as a regressive, conservative older generation being hit the hardest.

As disabled and chronically ill people, as queer people sharing communities with those who've survived the aids crisis, as those trying to learn from elders in our movements while they are still here to share what they know, we know the dangers of conceptualizing illness as punishment, as something that befalls the dirty, irresponsible, or simply put the 'bad'. The most vulnerable and precarious among us, the homeless, those in prison, in detention centres and refugee camps, are going to be hit the hardest and have the least support. It is also crucial to support those with health conditions that are not immediately life-threatening who are getting overlooked now that hospitals are already over capacity treating the virus.

Maybe you can escape to the mountains and watch the world burn. We're here because for us, not caring for one another is simply not an option.

How can we do everything to not let people who are at high risk get sick while simultaneously being critical of how governments are handling this situation? How can we conceptualize physical distancing that doesn't actually amount to the 'social distancing' that they always already want from us. There are inevitably going to be many times when our definition of a necessary outing conflicts with that of a government imposing a quarantine, shelter-in-place, etc. upon us. We will all have to take risks. It is probably well past time to rethink how

we conceptualize safety. It is also time to think about our immediate relations, and what their level of risk and each one's responsibility around them is. How can we balance these risks? How can we make sure that the risks we take are those we willingly bring upon ourselves, and that we aren't playing around with the health of countless friends and strangers?

Mutual aid is a term that's getting thrown around a lot right now even by politicians, but in its true meaning it's self-organised people power, and in crisis it works. There have been amazing and super hopeful examples of mutual aid we've seen over the past couple of weeks springing up. We also look to our comrades in Greece who showed us in 2008 and beyond, that crisis brought solidarity around housing, health, food and migration. The government won't do many of the things you, your neighbours and loved ones need right now so we have to do them for each other.

We are in solidarity with the demands for a rent strike on April 1st, May 1st and hopefully forever; in response we urge you to connect to others who are organising around efforts to call for rent strikes, labor and prison strikes, free access to public health infrastructure for all. In an emergency situation it can be hard to keep perspective and contextualize information, but it is urgent to address the longterm structural issues entwined with the scarcity of agency against Covid-19 today.

Who is responsible for privatization and demounting the public health care system in the past decades? What about the industrialist and extractivist mindset behind ongoing abundant human assault on wildlife that results in loss of habitat and ultimately leads to the transformation of benign animal microbes into deadly human pathogens because of increased intimate contact of humans with wild species? How do we choose to react right now, to a crisis scenario that paints a possible future scenario of an ever more atomized, disciplined, dematerialized, hyperproductive and individualized society? Where are our social antibodies to ensure this state of emergency and epidemic of isolation is not going to translate into everyday reality afterwards?

(The opening quote is from "Against Agamben: Is a Democratic Biopolitics Possible?" by Panagiotis Sotiris in Viewpoint Magazine, March 2020.)

Half-Assed Disabled Prepper Tips for Preparing for a Coronavirus Quarantine

March 9, 2020, edited March 10, 2020

By Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha

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This document is written by and to disabled folks about how to quarantine from Covid-19. It was made in mid March at the acknowledged beginning of the pandemic in the US. The document is written from the perspective of “being in survivalist/ prepper communities as sick, disabled, poor, Black and brown, queer and trans people.” Piepzna-Samarasinha breaks needs down into sections on Food, Health Supplies, Water, Fuel, and Mutual Aid. Advice is practical and thorough. We see this as a invaluable resource since it includes specific needs and the intersections of marginalized identities who are the hardest hit during the pandemic and among the most vulnerable.

We wanted to pull some quotes from this document so you get a taste of whats included. If you want to read more follow the link: <https://tinyurl.com/half-asseddisabledprepper>

I joke that I am a “half-assed prepper.” I grew up with a mom who intensively gardened for food and taught me how. As an abused kid, I was fascinated by the idea of running away from my family and living in the woods, and studied a lot of hiking, camping, wildfoods and survival manuals towards that end. Then I read Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower at 21 and, like many, was inspired by the main character Lauren Olamina’s creation of a “survival bag” with money, food, a map and meds to survive the destruction of her community, as a wake up call to get ready for potential political, ecological and other disasters.

It’s important for me to say this: Most people don’t learn about survival from being in “survivalist/ prepper” communities. As sick, disabled, poor, Black and brown, queer and trans people (to name a few), we already know a hell of a lot about surviving. Over the past two decades, I’ve learned a lot about survival in ways many people do- from being poor and sick and having to make food stretch and grow, shoplift and forage my food, to being a sick and disabled hiker and camper figuring out what works for my body in terms of gear and food prep. From studying herbal medicine as a chronically ill person and learning to make my own so I could afford it and could share with friends, to learning skills from friends who live rurally and low electricity. Most recently, I’ve learned from sick and disabled mutual aid in the face of wildfires, snow, power cut offs and now, COVID-19/ coronavirus. And yes, more than once in a while I read prepper blogs and filter out the Christian fundamentalist content to get intel.

...Prevention is often better and more accessible than cure. Right now, there is no vaccine or magic pill for COVID. One of the best ways to prep for COVID, and one of the only things we have access to right now, is to take care of your existing health/disability/ chronic health needs. So if you have asthma, COPD, diabetes, manage it as well as you can. And get sleep, go for a walk if that is accessible for you (or do another form of body mindfulness that feels good), draw, watch something calming on tv, cook, wash your hands, rest, stretch, read and talk with friends, take breaks from talking about it. All of these are things that can lower your stress level which will help your immune system. Again, immune boosting practices are not a magic bullet or a cure or a surefire way of preventing the acquiring of coronavirus. However, they are practices that we have some control over in a time when much is out of our hands, that can restore a feeling of agency, calmness and centeredness.

...Let's take care of ourselves and each other and get through this! Some prep is better than no prep! Share resources, remember that your ancestors survived some shit, and you already have survival skills you can build on.

How to Quarantine with Care

The co-authored pad HOW TO QUARANTINE WITH CARE started in Berlin through personal networks mid March 2020 and intended to help navigate the present situation with Sars 2 Covid-19.

(Full pad: [\[link\]](#))

What choices do humans make when the instinctual fear-based reaction might be self-preservation? How can we relieve our anxiety to be kind and mindful with ourselves and the people around us, how to stay connected with our bodyminds, how to reach out to people with mental or physical health conditions, folks in prison, homeless persons or people for whom home is not a safe place. More than ever the current state of things visibilizes how crucial it is to share what we have, comfort ourselves and others, support and listen to each other, build resilience through practicing loving care and collective solidarity. Strengthen the bonds with others. We are vulnerable and depend on one another. Get organized together against: the persecution of migrants, increased attempts for broad surveillance measurements, the willfull oversight of the most vulnerable in our communities, and further repressive actions all over the world- while being responsible about physical distancing! Fear is contagious too, and to heal the sickness of extractivist capitalism, action beyond individualistic self-care will have to be taken with devotion, desire and passion.

Stay in touch with your body-mind

The sensation of anxiety activates our nervous system, which can trigger fight, flight or freeze responses. Try to slow down and focus on body sensations. Here are some exercises that can help with that.

Setting a Pranayama Breathing Ritual: Anulom Vilom Pranayama is very easy to do. First of all, close your eyes and sit in Padmasana and rest your hands on your knees. Close the right nostril with the right thumb. Inhale slowly through the left nostril, inhale the oxygen as much as you can, this will fill your lungs with air. Remove your thumb from your right nostril, as you remove your thumb from right nostril just exhale. When you exhale use your middle finger to close your left nostril then inhale with your right nostril and remove thumb from the right nostril then exhale. (You can do this three times with resting in between, breathing in and out 12 times each set and increasing the length of the breathing each set.)

Focusing on our surroundings can be a helpful tool to talk to our nervous system and reassure that the present is safe and secure. This practice is also good if experiencing dissociation, and gently reconnecting to surroundings.

Centering practice to orient: count 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste. Repeat as often as needed.

Choose a song a day and dance to it, alone or together.

Shake all or parts of your body (it can release stress hormones that are stored in the body). Can be as small as just your hands and move all the way to the entire body—whatever feels right to you.

If experiencing chronic pain flare, or freeze response: this can be our body signaling us to literally stop moving as a response. Epsom salt baths, or just warmth in general, can help with this. Hot water bottle, hot tea, hot bath. Focusing on slow movements to not overstimulate the system, such as opening and closing the plans slowly, are good to move through.

Breath box exercise: five counts inhale, hold for five counts, exhale for five counts, hold for five counts. Do this for a few minutes. You can increase the counts depending on what's comfortable.

Hold a warm object, cuddle with a hot water bottle, animal, or safe person in your circle.

Find a way to expand your energy center. Sing. Hum. Scream into a pillow.

Reading pools

- Webtoon (app): great for horror or romance manga and comics
- Varia on abandoning corporate tech solutions, 'non-extractive' tools and digital conviviality and social closeness: [[link](#)]
- Rewriting the Rules: zines and other activist tools
- Sci-hub: tearing down paywalls on research papers
- Redvoice: collection of texts and talks about anarchism and black struggle
- Library Genesis: sci fi, scientific, nonfiction—legally gray, but hey!

Rituals

Set a time every day when you stop reading the news, or talking with people about the pandemic.

Journaling three things you are grateful for every day. it can help to set a regular time to do this.

Flow of consciousness practice: take a few minutes every day to let words spill out of your pen. You can use it to edit later, or just as a relief for built-up word-knots.

Get dressed in an outfit every day—it helps to give a sense of purpose to the day.

Ask yourself each evening:

1. When and how have I enriched the world? Where did I contribute to something today with my words or actions?
2. How has the world enriched me today? What were joyful moments? Did I experience something with my senses? Who did something that made me feel good?
3. How did I cope with difficulties, pain, and frustration today? Where did I find a positive approach?

(This is deeply inspired by psychologist and Shoa survivor Viktor Frankl.)

Podcasts

- **Decolonize This Place** - talks you can watch
- **It's Going Down** - anarchist podcast
- **Hurry Slowly**
- **The Heart** - personal documentary work about bodies, love, power dynamics, and all of the invisible things in the air between humans
- **How to Survive the End of the World** - learning from the apocalypse with grace, rigor, and curiosity
- **Irresistable** - Healing Justice podcast
- **Bespoken Bones** - ancestors at the crossroads of sex, magick, and science
- **Multiamory** - on unconventional ethical relationships
- **Always Already** - practicing critical care through COVID-19 and beyond—epistemic unruliness
- **Death Panel Podcast** - politics and culture podcast on class war, struggles over healthcare, economic inequality, social justice, and the people, policies, and media narratives that stand in the way.

Things to Do Inside

Structure and plan your day in chunks of time and activities.

Do laughing yoga, watch videos of people laughing and let this inspire you. Fake it till you make it. Strengthens your immune system. It is fun, too. Do not take yourself too seriously and let go of your control for some minutes. If you are not alone you can lie on each other's bellies trying this.

Research sex education you've always been unsure of. Find new kinks.

Actively listen to music.

Mend and alter your clothes.

Learn the words to a song you like and learn to sing it.

Thank those who helped you out once. Show that you remember, say thank you in detail and express care and love.

Write someone a letter telling them about their strengths and what you like about them. Make a present.

Masturbation strengthens your immune system.

Get and Offer Support

If you need support, there are probably numbers for the area in which you live that offer help with situations of domestic violence, children and youth counseling, addiction, or other types of crisis. These hotlines can be found online! Or spread your local help hotlines via social media or as posters for folks in your area who might more likely come across them like that.

Write letters to folks in prison, sign petitions, join strikes.

Support your neighbors and health workers.

For more

Links to healing resources, online film archives, reading recommendations, collective lists, full collection—visit the original document, linked in introduction.

Herbal Support During COVID19

Just some notes and ideas we wanted to share about how we can use plants during this pandemic.

No one has prior experience treating COVID19, so all medical professionals are learning as they go throughout this pandemic. As people working in non-conventional medicine and healing, we can act responsibly in a new and rapidly changing situation by always being upfront about the scope of our knowledge and skill, how we've learned what we know, and what our remedies can and cannot do. We offer what we hope is useful information from our own and others' experience treating flus, respiratory infections, pneumonia, and the stress those cause to the rest of the body. We do not have One Weird Trick Against Coronavirus, and anyone who claims to is probably trying to sell you something. We have heard that using herbs is a bit like eating your veggies: there are no miracle cures, only small ways that we can offer our bodies support that can make us more resilient to health issues we encounter. That said, plants are powerful and have myriad effects on our bodies.

What we can accomplish is limiting the spread of the virus and strategizing ways to survive it when professional medical care is an option of absolute last resort. Basically, plants alone cannot treat a severe case of pneumonia and you'll need to receive conventional medical intervention there. Please do your own research while keeping in mind that folk medicine is often not documented well enough to meet the standards of modern scientific credibility. It's especially important to do research if you have a pre-existing health condition or take medications regularly (SSRIs, Benzos, or heart meds in particular) that could be affected by herbal treatment.

It's not about choosing between conventional and "alternative" medicine. Use every resource at your disposal. Where we are working, in conventional medicine's gaps and failings, among those it leaves behind, that kind of choice is a luxury we don't have. Support your body with herbs. Look, we know we're not going to cure the virus—but when we might not be able to access medical care till we're already close to dying, and many of us already can't or don't want to for a variety of reasons, we're up for trying anything that might help us and those we're caring for feel a little better.

Here's a nice thing we can all do, but especially if we live together with other people. Take some fallen branches of plants with aromatics, or aromatic herbs from around the kitchen, and leave it to boil so that the steam circulates all around the house. It's great if these are aromatic expectorants like thyme, oregano, or eucalyptus. That might be stuff you have in your kitchen, but if you go for a walk, there's probably an abundance of fallen branches you can use plenty

of so you don't have to worry about the supply. Here in the PNW, I like to collect western red cedar and doug fir and add in some citrus peels and boil all that together. Anecdotally, we've heard that Western Red Cedar has been used as a steam by various indigenous peoples in the PNW region for some time; this is my personal favorite. I also found an entire yard waste can full of juniper that someone trimmed and started mixing that in as well. The reason this works so well is that the volatile oils that are dispersed into the air when you boil them are antimicrobial. This means they are antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal and acting on the microbes in the air that they get swirled into. This is great for cleansing the air that you share with others.

Stearns are like a little sauna for your lungs, clearing out mucus and breaking things up. If you like, you can boil the herbs, citrus, or a couple drops of essential oils while covered. The other reason that aromatic herbs are great for respiratory issues, is that we excrete the volatile oils through our respiratory systems and they will act as an antimicrobial on the way out. This is why if you leave garlic in your socks overnight (another old cold season remedy), you will wake up with garlic breath without ever internally consuming the garlic! So, the antimicrobial action is acting on the lungs as they leave your body.

Tough Herbs

Prevention and immunity: astragalus root, echinacea root, marshmallow root, reishi mushroom, schisandra, turkey tail mushroom

Anti-inflammatories: black birch, chamomile, ginger, Japanese knotweed, licorice, marshmallow, meadowsweet, turmeric, willow, wintergreen

Anti-viral: baptisia, barberry, elder, myrrh, Oregon grape root, osha, yarrow

Anxiety and sleep: blue vervain, damiana, oatstraw, passionflower, rose, skullcap, tulsi, valerian, kava kava

Decongestants: yerba mansa, prickly ash, horseradish, beggar ticks, cayenne, yerba santa, gumweed

Demulcent: licorice, marshmallow, slippery elm, irish moss, plantain, fenugreek seed

Liver health: artichoke leaf, dandelion root, milk thistle, schisandra fruit, turmeric, fennel

Respiratory support:

Antitussive (helps control coughing): coltsfoot, thyme, wild cherry

Expectorant (helps bring up phlegm): mullein, osha, hyssop, horehound

Lung support: elecampane

Essential oils: eucalyptus, thyme, rosemary, tea tree

Licorice may elevate blood pressure – to be avoided by those who have high blood pressure.

Some notes to keep in mind:

Drink plenty of fluids! You can add citrus to your water to make it more fun to drink, or perhaps prepare some of the herbs discussed here in a hot tea or a cold infusion.

Different herbs support the immune system in different ways. For example, echinacea activates the immune system by boosting white blood cell production, so it's best taken before symptoms appear, but while you're still well and want to retain that wellness. Reishi mushroom (*Ganoderma* spp.) is an immunomodulator, which means it helps to regulate the immune system's activity, and works best as a tonic. Some people with autoimmune conditions have reported that echinacea and elderberry make their symptoms worse, and HIV+ people should avoid taking echinacea. Here's one herbalist's thoughts on elderberry, emphasizing that no one needs to use an herb they have a bad reaction to: [\[link\]](#)

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) also supports the immune system by stimulating lymph circulation. Since it's a useful topical anti-inflammatory and helps to clean and heal wounds, I've been meaning to try it on my very dry hands too.

Another take on the herbal steam mentioned above: place aromatic herbs in steaming hot water, like you're making a soak or a big cup of tea. Lean over the bowl and drape a towel over your head to hold the steam in, so that your face and the bowl are in a little tent. Breathe in the steam. Perhaps when the water has cooled you will also have a big cup of tea you can drink. Aromatic mints like thyme and peppermint might be nice for this, along with rose or lavender for their calming effects.

Many people report nausea as a covid19 symptom. I would try ginger and chamomile to calm illness-related nausea.

A tea of pine needles helps with clear, deep breathing and has antimicrobial properties.

Know when to suppress or encourage a cough: start with antitussive herbs (like marshmallow, thyme, wild cherry bark) for a dry cough. If it continues for more than 1-2 days, try expectorants (like lobelia, yerba santa) to loosen mucus. A wet cough means the body is trying to expel mucus, and expectorants can speed that process. Lung tonics like elecampane help support the respiratory system through either symptom.

A short PSA on things that are sold in similar-looking bottles:

- A tincture is a liquid herbal extract, usually alcohol based. Some non-alcoholic tinctures are made with vegetable glycerin. Tinctures are taken internally and can be added to water or tea if the taste is too harsh. (Those yellow-orange herbpharm dropper bottles that every organic yuppie grocery has in the vitamin aisle are tinctures, and they work pretty well—remember this next time you're browsing easily concealable items at whole foods.)
- An herbal oil usually means an herbal extract made with an edible oil such as olive or coconut, or a non-concentrated oil extracted from an herb. They're generally safe to ingest but are often made with topical use in mind—that is, applying directly to the skin, either on their own or mixed into a salve.
- Essential oils are the highly concentrated volatile oils of plants. They are not edible and should be diluted before they're used on skin—the standard ratio I have heard is 1-5% of a recipe. Since the distillation process strips away all the other constituents of a plant, essential oils are not a substitute for a tincture or tea and don't have the same benefits. (As someone with fragrance sensitivities, I ask that people be conscientious about where and how they use essential oil diffusers. Some people find them useful and if they work for you, great! My advice right now, when many of our lungs are at particularly high risk, to use aromatic herbs in less concentrated forms to avoid further irritating someone's respiratory system.)

More resources:

Prison Holistic Self-Care and Protection, with an excerpt from The Prisoner's Herbal by Nicole Rose [\[link\]](#)

7Song's notes on covid19: [\[link\]](#) and a more general discussion of colds and flus: [\[link\]](#)

Herbs for Mental Health's materia medica page: [\[link\]](#)

Resource list from the North American Institute of Medical Herbalism: [\[link\]](#)

Immune and Respiratory herbs: A Resource for Tribal Communities during Covid-19: [\[link\]](#)

Grounding Exercise to Help Yourself Settle

This was sent to us by some folks who have a lot of somatics exercises appropriate for different situations. For more resources you can email somatics@riseup.net.

Take as much time as you need.

Place both feet flat on the floor.

Slowly push your toes and heels into the ground.

Lean back into a chair or against a wall.

Notice the chair or the floor under you.

Notice what is holding up your back.

Bring an image to what sort of support you have at your back.

Just be curious for a few moments.

Much of our attention is focused on the front of our body.

Try and settle into the depth of what's holding you up.

Notice if you get a spontaneous settling breath, a sigh.

We spontaneously sigh many times an hour as our nervous system resets and regulates.

Cross your arms over your chest.

Gently tap your shoulders, alternating one side, and then the other.

Take a hand and place it somewhere for support that you might feel tension.

Just allow your hand to make contact, without any judgement and without trying to change anything.

Stay with that awareness of being supported for a moment.

Return to notice your feet on the ground.

Slowly push one foot into the floor, and then the other foot.

Before standing, take a moment to relax your gaze.

Let your neck follow your eyes as they wander to land upon something pleasant in the room where you are.

Take a minute to see what you notice in your body as you take in the object of your choosing.

Remember you can always return to that which your eyes took notice as an anchor and a resource for the future.

Mutual Aid

Is there anything else more important than taking responsibility for one another's care?

Many of us don't have elaborate mutual aid networks where we live, or for some of those with health concerns to deal with, getting involved can feel like a tenuous or non-existent option. To add insult to injury, if you were feeling isolated and distanced from the people around you before it became mandatory, "community" can feel like an abstract, aspirational concept rather than a resource to tap into. It can also feel like we're "doing it wrong" when we face challenges because there's no one there to tell us how to do it the right way.

Mutual aid doesn't necessitate filing a 501c3 or operating through an established group. Not everybody has a clear plan, mutual aid often arises out of need with the determination and trust that you will figure it out. It means getting together with other folks and filling the needs that arise. It is about having each other's backs. There will always be mutual aid, and it is always happening whether or not it becomes visible to us or not, whether or not it is written down in someone's report back or not. There are people out there who are also looking for others to do mutual-aid-stuff with, so find each other.

Mia Mingus's concept of pods and pod mapping is an excellent place to start when conceptualizing communities of care in practice as real networks of people we support and rely on. It developed out of transformative justice work and has been a major inspiration for our accountability model. This resource is written for responding to interpersonal violence and abuse, but the concept lends itself well to many different kinds of care and can easily be used to identify the people in your life you could reach out to for material or emotional support and the people you want to make sure you're checking in on. It has a necessary emphasis on the mutual aspect of care and helps us make sure we're also getting the support we need and not burning ourselves out while trying to offer support to everyone around us.

"Asking people to organize their pod was much more concrete than asking people to organize their 'community'. Once we had the shared language and concept of 'pod,' it allowed transformative justice to be more accessible. Gone were the fantasies of a giant, magical 'community response,' filled with people we only had surface relationships with; and instead we challenged ourselves and others to build solid pods of people through relationship and trust. In doing so, we are pushed to get specific about what those relationships look like and how they are built. It places relationship-building at the very center of transformative justice and community accountability work." [\[link\]](#)

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief has a robust list of collective care resources on their website, including organizing toolkits, health-related skills, information on prison solidarity work and rent strikes, and an up-to-date list of mutual aid projects in north america, as well as some in Europe and elsewhere. You can find it at [\[link\]](#).

It's Going Down also compiles a list of ongoing mutual aid projects and relevant resources at [\[link\]](#).

A directory of Indigenous-led mutual aid collectives and relief projects can be found at [\[link\]](#).

Session 2: An Inventory of Tools from Radical Communities

an excerpt from our syllabus on autonomous emotional support

We've recently released an extensive syllabus created during the Pirate Care: Collective Syllabus Writing Retreat, 25-29 November 2019, in Croatia. With recommended reading on topics such as "An inventory of tools from radical communities", "Antipsychiatry, Mad Pride, and a History of Survivor Led Organising", "Psychiatry and Control: collaboration with the State, the Border, the Prison" among others. We feel there are many resources within this syllabus, which include best practice guides, first-hand reports, histories, some theory, and models, to learn from and apply during this time. All the readings are downloadable on the Pirate Care website, along with some introductions and discussion questions for the topics, so it could be well-suited to a virtual reading group, independent study, or to inform strengthening your own emotional support networks. In this zine, we are including the topic 'An Inventory of Tools From Radical Communities', which is one of several found online. Enjoy!

The full topic can be found at: [\[link\]](#)

Subsession 1: Activist burnout; trauma within radical movements

When resisting forces of domination (from the state, capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, the border, etc.) you will be met with repressive forms of violence. Sometimes that comes in the form of physical attacks and real violence, sometimes it comes in the form of psychological warfare. In this session, we want to look at some of the implications of this repressive strategy and some of the ways people have come up with for combating it or thriving despite it.

Recommended Reading

Power Makes Us Sick, 2018. 'Basics of Emotional Support'. This brief pamphlet was developed by PMS in order to be circulated to individuals involved in a land struggle in France. It compiles from a variety of other sources we'd accumulated with some of our own additions and alterations to them, focusing on offering straightforward suggestions for helping one another deal with collective trauma.

Occupy Mental Health Project, 2012. 'Mindful occupation: Rising up without burning out'. Mindful Occupation, pages 39-56. This pamphlet is a great overview that was set up following from the Occupy Movement. In particular, the section on Emotional Support makes some concrete suggestions for how to build a holistic model for emotional support within the context of a large movement.

The Institute for Precarious Consciousness (Plan C & CrimethInc.), 2014. 'We Are All Very Anxious: Six Theses on Anxiety and Why It is Effectively Preventing Militancy, and One Possible Strategy for Overcoming It'. "In contemporary capitalism, the dominant reactive affect is anxiety."

Nicole Rose, 2019. 'Overcoming Burnout, Part 4 – How do I get out of this mess? The Solidarity Apothecary. Part of a series of blog posts by Nicole Rose (UK-based abolitionist, permaculturist, herbalist, educator and ex-prisoner). The blog is available via her website the Solidarity Apothecary, and archived on [\[link\]](#). It is also available as an e-book [\[link\]](#).

reclaiming "victim" and embracing unhealthy coping – a presentation by emi koyama (emi@eminism.org) for harm reduction conference, november 16, 2012. this powerpoint tackles the "overwhelming positivity and compulsory optimism/hopefulness of the trauma recovery industry" - including what gets marked as unhealthy coping strategies, and self harm. [\[link\]](#)

Further Reading

Activist Trauma Support Group, 2016. 'Activist Trauma and Recovery'. Another handout developed by the UK group Activist Trauma which details some of the simple best practices for dealing with trauma in our communities. Much of this material here is borrowed in handouts by PMS and Out of Action. [\[link\]](#)

Jasmine Gibson, 2015. 'Psychosis and State Repression'. www.maskmagazine.com. counter-insurgency and psychological warfare. [\[link\]](#)

[\[link\]](#). A reader from Out of Action in Germany on confronting violence in radical movements, inside and outside of actions. This group holds monthly support groups and offers support in action. This guide is a handout of some of their best practices. Also similar to the handout from PMS and Activist Trauma Support.

Gwynnie B. Hale, 2015. 'CPTSD Allostatic Load and Giving No F*cks'. CPTSD is really common in radical communities, for a variety of reasons. What is it and what can we do about it? How is it approached from the Western medical model, and how can it be approached through herbalism? [\[link\]](#)

Discussion

In what ways does state repression manifest as psychological warfare? What are some concrete and documented examples of this that you are aware of? What are the intended impacts of this and how might we work to combat it?

The experience of trauma itself does not lead to longterm expression of PTSD symptoms in every case. What are some factors (of the individual, their situation, the event, the follow up from the event, etc.) that might make the experience of

trauma more harmful? What are some of the most important things to keep in mind as trauma pass through our world?

Subsession 2: Two perspectives on accountability

Accountability is an ever-elusive principle that we constantly aspire to develop and understand within ourselves and our communities. Why is it so hard? Here we have summarized some of the ongoing conversation around it by presenting two ways accountability can be conceptualized.

First is the view that seems common in activist, anarchist, queer, feminist communities. Accountability that is seen as a response to harm, something often invoked as a process for negotiating that of accountability as something that's primarily invoked when one person harms another, often in the form of abuse and sexual violence. Second is accountability as an ongoing practice of community care, which may open up some new possibilities and directions.

Accountability as a reaction to harm

Accountability as a reaction to harm: the accountability process, the conceptualization of accountability as something that can be demanded and taken, the uncomfortable similarities between these negotiations and the carceral system, and the failed processes that only magnify harm.

Anonymous. 'What about the rapists?: Anarchist approaches to crime & justice'. Dysphoria 5. A collection of articles about various anarchist responses to abuse and interpersonal violence, including transformative justice in practice, an analysis of accountability processes, and reports from those who've chosen instead to directly confront rapists. [\[link\]](#)

Punk, 2013. 'Betrayal: A critical analysis of rape culture in anarchist subcultures'. Words to Fire Press. This zine looks at the ways rape culture persists in anarchist scenes and how accountability processes often fail to confront abuse in any meaningful way. [\[link\]](#)

Anonymous, 2012. 'The Broken Teapot'. The Anarchist Library. particularly the intro and "Safety is an Illusion". A collection of writings on disillusionment with the concept of accountability as it's expressed, expected, and practiced in radical scenes. This can be a difficult piece and I include it here not because I agree with all its contents or approaches, but because it's important to get at the visceral disappointment and rage that many feel over the failure of "accountability" as it's typically been implemented. [\[link\]](#)

"The typical proposal for responding to rape, the community accountability process, is based on a transparent lie. There are no activist communities, only the desire for communities, or the convenient fiction of communities. A community is a material web that binds people

together, for better and for worse, in interdependence. If its members move away every couple years because the next place seems cooler, it is not a community. If it is easier to kick someone out than to go through a difficult series of conversations with them, it is not a community. Among the societies that had real communities, exile was the most extreme sanction possible, tantamount to killing them. On many levels, losing the community and all the relationships it involved was the same as dying. Let's not kid ourselves: we don't have communities."

Accountability as a harm reduction

Accountability as harm reduction*: removed from a model that implicitly positions accountability as punishment, we can start to see it for what it already is, the building material of our personal relationships, and the fabric of the care we have for those close to us. The task of addressing harm is never easy, but perhaps when we're approaching it from a foundation of practicing accountability as care for one another, it can be less devastating.

"The Secret Joy of Accountability: Self-accountability as a Building Block for Change" by Shannon Perez-Darby, from *The Revolution Starts At Home*

"So often, people jump to an external definition of accountability that is about other people assuming responsibility for their actions rather than imagining accountability as an internal process where each of us examines our own behaviors and choices so that we can better reconcile those choices with our own values. I define (self) accountability as a process of taking responsibility for your choices and the consequences of those choices."

What is harm reduction? In the context of substance use, here's the Harm Reduction Coalition's definition:

"Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs." [\[link\]](#)

Power Makes Us Sick. 'What is the Accountability Model?' in *Introduction to the Accountability Model*. 2018. An experimental model for supporting and taking care of one another's mental, physical, and social health that involves developing small groups to work together to research options, identify and build community resources around healthcare, and implement support that those seeking and offering care are fully aware of and consenting to. It can be adapted in a holistic sense, or as a transitional step towards caring for one another independent from state and capital.

Discussion

Choose a principle of harm reduction, either from the list linked above or your own experience. How can it be applied to mental health and emotional support? What might that look like in practice?

What are some conditions that need to be met for accountability to be put into practice?

Think about your own interpersonal relationships: what are a few ways you practice accountability that aren't a reaction to harm?