Compassionate Approaches to Crisis Webinar Series

Art-making as an Alternative Philosophy of Care During Emotional Crisis

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Disclaimer

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Archive

This Webinar will be recorded. The PowerPoint presentation and the audio recording of the teleconference will be posted to the National Empowerment website at: http://www.power2u.org
Questions?

At the end of the webinar, there will be a Q & A session. You are invited to ask questions at any time through the “question” function. Questions will be taken in the order they are received. You are also welcome to make comments using the “chat” function.
Karin Jervert is an artist, author, and psychiatric survivor. Writing and art-making have been passed down to her through two generations of women artists, along with a respect for the artist’s powerful role in society and for the creative force itself. She strongly believes, telling our stories is a revolutionary act, one that reinforces the immeasurable value of each our lives and moves us towards collective justice. Karin currently is the Arts Editor at Mad in America Foundation. Her art work and writing includes essays, graphic narratives and poetry and explores self empowerment, empathy, identity, normalization of suffering and the power of creative expression to transform trauma. Her study of Buddhism and improvisational comedy find their way into her work as well. You can find her work at https://www.something-wonderful.net
What we will cover:

How to treat all selves as artists.
(dropping the cultural baggage of “artist” and “art”)

Life as art - believing that our own and other’s lives occur on the larger “canvas” of our lives.

Valuing **ALL** expressions as equal and meaningful.

Creating space for the flow of expression: Understanding materials and meaning, Understanding and equalizing all abilities, Understanding safe expression.

Obstacles to expression:

*Discussion*: What are the potential repercussions of expressing ourselves? Fear, judgement, shame and paralysis, anger, sadness and oppression.

Reflecting on what we value - How to take this way of being into the world
Main Assumptions:

ALL people are creative

ALL people are artists
(in that they are taking in and interpreting input then creating meaning through expression.)

Art is Powerful and Empowering
(on an individual and societal level)

Empowerment can lead to healing
Understanding the Power of Art
For the individual in distress
and for society as a whole
Legend has it that it was on or near the Ponte Vecchio that Dante, a beloved author of books like The Divine Comedy encountered Beatrice, when they were both young adults. She died soon after their meeting, possibly carried off by the plague. Her death affected Dante deeply and she appears in much of his writing. In 1295 (shortly after her death), he published La Vita Nuova, a set of love poems he’d been working on for a decade. The last sonnet abruptly ends at the time of her death.

650 years later during World War II. As the Allies advanced up the Italian peninsula in pursuit of the Germans, the German army swiftly destroyed anything that could aid the Allies, including any bridges crossing the Arno river. But no one wanted to destroy Dante and Beatrice’s bridge. The story goes that the Germans made radio contact with the Allies, offering to leave the Ponte Vecchio intact if the Allies would not use it. The promise was kept on both sides.

Image Description:
This is a photo of the famous Ponte Vecchio bridge in Italy. A bridge spans a small river with colorful structures, houses, across it in tan, yellow and orange built on it.
How to treat all selves as artists

Dropping the cultural baggage of the word “Artist” and “Art”

Seeing everything as art

Seeing selves in crisis as artists

Receiving with care, compassion and acceptance our own and other’s expression as a path to healing
LIFE AS ART - Believing our own
and other’s lives occur on a “canvas”

Our life as a canvas
(speech, movement, possessions, dress, actions,
personal spaces, how we arrange, plan and execute our lives)

Trying to express myself on 9/11/2001 with salt and pepper shakers.
Valuing *ALL* expressions as equal and meaningful without judgement

Expanding our compassion towards receiving all expressions without judgment

Prioritizing the intention of holding and exploring expressions
Creating space for the flow of expression

Understanding safety:
What is an unsafe expression?
Asking ourselves who is threatened in this moment?

Understanding materials and meaning:
Facilitating matching feeling with material

Understanding and equalizing all abilities:
“Ability is culturally defined” creativity and readiness to adapt to limitations.
Obstacles to expression

Question (short discussion):
What are the potential repercussions of expressing ourselves?
Fear

Creating clarity around frightening consequences

Honoring individual reality of potential pain in expressing who we are and what we believe

Creating a context of low consequence
One day this kid will get larger. One day this kid will come to know something that causes a sensation equivalent to the separation of the earth from its axis. One day this kid will reach a point where he senses a division that isn’t mathematical. One day this kid will feel something stir in his heart and throat and mouth. One day this kid will find something in his mind and body and soul that makes him hungry. One day this kid will do something that causes men who wear the uniforms of priests and rabbis, men who inhabit certain stone buildings, to call for his death. One day politicians will enact legislation against this kid. One day families will give false information to their children and each child will pass that information down generationally to their families and that information will be designed to make existence intolerable for this kid. One day this kid will begin to experience all this activity in his environment and that activity and information will compel him to commit suicide or submit to danger in hopes of being murdered or submit to silence and invisibility. Or one day this kid will talk. When he begins to talk, men who develop a fear of this kid will attempt to silence him with strangling, fists, prison, suffocation, rape, intimidation, drugging, ropes, guns, laws, menace, roving gangs, bottles, knives, religion, decapitation, and immolation by fire. Doctors will pronounce this kid curable as if his brain were a virus. This kid will lose his constitutional rights against the government’s invasion of his privacy. This kid will be faced with electro-shock, drugs, and conditioning therapies in laboratories tended by psychologists and research scientists. He will be subject to loss of home, civil rights, jobs, and all conceivable freedoms. All this will begin to happen in one or two years when he discovers he desires to place his naked body on the naked body of another boy.
Untitled (One Day This Kid...) by David Wojnarowicz 1990

The subject pictured in this photo-text collageUntitled (One Day, This Kid) is David Wojnarowicz himself as child, his toothy grin and neat hair and dress evoking an all-American school snapshot from the 1950s. Surrounding this image of prepubescent innocence, however, are texts forecasting the artist’s future as a homosexual who is persecuted by his family, church, school, government, and the legal and medical communities. - Text description from the Whitney

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Print Committee © The Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York
Judgement

Accessing our reactive judgements
Who is defining beauty and healing?

Me?
My Culture?
My upbringing?
My Job?
My Identity/Role?
My Fear?
Shame

Art as a container for subjectively shameful feelings/thoughts

Transforming shame through empowerment/acceptance

(What a culture is ashamed of changes with the momentum of those expressing openly)
SHONA MCANDREW

CHEYENNE, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 56 x 46 in, 142.2 x 116.8 cm

Image Description: A female person of color sitting on the edge of a bathtub, rubbing her feet, with a painting on the wall of a lounging, white woman.
Fear of Mistakes and Paralysis

Encouraging play against powerlessness
“Turning the Tables”

Adapting to limitations
Observe by Benjamin Tran

Statement: I make nothing impressive when I am full of thoughts, or if I have a plan, or if I am afraid to take a risk. Art teaches me openness, and to see the value in taking risks. It also teaches me that I can mend my own mistakes, no matter how bad it initially appears. Everything is dynamic and can be transformed into beauty. This applies to everything beyond a drawing.

Image description:
An irregular shape formed with many designs made with black marker.
Anger, sadness and Oppression

Obstacles of powerlessness:
Changing the narrative

Discovering empowerment, creating a creative shift, and enacting change through art-making
Left: Public statue of Edward Colston.
Right: A public statue of a black female protester with her arm raised.

A Surge of Power (Jen Reid) 2020 is a 2020 black resin sculpture, sculpted by Marc Quinn and modelled on Jen Reid; both Quinn and Reid are credited as artists. It depicts Reid, a black female protester, raising her arm in a Black Power salute. It was erected surreptitiously in the city centre of Bristol, England, in the early morning of 15 July 2020. It was placed on the empty plinth from which a 19th-century statue of Edward Colston, who had been involved in the Atlantic slave trade, had been toppled, defaced and pushed into the city’s harbour by George Floyd protesters the previous month. The statue was removed by Bristol City Council the day after it was installed.
Letting Our Lives Reflecting What We Value - How to take this way of being into world

Breathe, and let others breathe into being and expressing themselves

Notice how you best express yourself, notice how the people around you express and succeed in communicating with you.

Experiment with new ways of communicating

Reality as a value system: We create our worlds through what we value.

If we commit to valuing humanness, compassion, nonjudgement, diversity and creativity - we can make changes in our own and our community’s lives.