

Toxic Culture: Revealing Why Capitalist Ideals Make You Sick

Description

The AutoEthnographer

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Authorâ??s Memo

Iâ??m Laura, a self-reflexive Anthropologist. In this four-part series, Iâ??ll take you back through my journey from the beginning. To explore how the conditioning of the Western environment I was born into served in disconnecting me from my own inner authenticity. Leaving me feeling lost and trapped in the perils of capitalist mentality. Chasing the ideals of what society wanted me to become. Iâ??ll then reveal how I overcame my mental health challenges and reconnected with my true self. Discovering the benefits of holistic therapies and shamanic healing. With the aim of highlighting the importance of maintaining your connection to your true self and your intuition. An empowered inner authenticity that supersedes the pressures faced by twenty-first century generations â?? striving for an unattainable false perfect â??selfâ??.


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Mental Health Challenges

â??*The doctor will see you now*â?•

My legs began to shake as I struggled to pull myself up from the chair. When I walked into the examination room, I was met by two Doctors dressed in white coats with clip boards. I could feel my heart pounding as they both stared at me blanky. I was so nervous that I couldnâ??t make sense of anything they were saying. One of the doctors eventually gave me a questionnaire to fill. He then instructed me to stand on a large set of scales. I remember closing my eyes and holding onto the bar as I stepped onto them. Both doctors hurried over to record my weight and reassuringly nodded to each other whilst looking at their notes. Then I heard the wordsâ?¦ â??*You have anorexia nervosaâ?•.*

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The official diagnosis came during my second year of university. Ultimately, the unrealistic demands of maintaining a false perfect self drove me to the point of despair. Where I couldnâ??t sleep, focus or even socialise. At the time I felt scared â?? I knew what I was doing to my body wasnâ??t healthy. But I didnâ??t know any other way to function. Weighed down by the pressure to constantly push myself to be the bestâ?¦ And gripped by the overwhelming fear of failure. When my family intervened and made an appointment with the doctor, I felt exposed. As though I had done something wrong. Being defined by a mental health label only reinforced my belief that I wasnâ??t â??normalâ??.

The Failures of Western Medicine

I was later referred to a specialist ward to be treated as an outpatient for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. During a period of 18 months, my therapist attempted to cognitively coach me into having a positive attitude towards eating. Instructing me to keep a food diary to meticulously record my food and drink intake. Both of which only exaggerated my perfectionism and self-criticism. I was also put on a course of anti-depressants, which made me feel even more detached from my emotions. Alongside of attending a series of assertiveness exercises that further encouraged a competitive mindset.

These Western treatments individualised my mental health challenges, as opposed to placing them into a wider relational societal framing. Furthermore, my sessions were clinical and lacked empathy. The therapist viewed me as a set of symptoms rather than connecting with me as a person. This made me feel so helpless and frustrated. I started to believe that it was all my fault â?? I was responsible for developing anorexia. By the end of the treatment, my symptoms had become even worse. But I decided to pretend to my family and friends that was I better. Through fear of being viewed as a failure for not being able to recover in time.

Return to the â??Normâ??: Girl Boss Feminism and Instagram Culture

When I got home, I was desperate to regain a sense of power in my life. I became drawn to the notion of â??girl boss feminismâ?? â?? a Western ideal of a privileged lifestyle. Believing that a high-status job and working my way up the corporate ladder would help me feel important â?? worthy. So, I retrained in accounting, my second algorithmic choice from the careers test I previously took. This led to a six-year career in the finance industry. Where I was subject to a gruelling probation period that resulted in an increased surveillance of work. My boss would berate me if I made any mistakes and my co-workers gossiped behind my back. This exacerbated my perfectionism and feelings of isolation. Keeping me in a state of constant anxiety.

On top of my toxic work culture, I also struggled with the toxic â??culture of Instagramâ?? in my personal life. Both of which had increased the demands of external validation. The pressure to gain â??likesâ?? and â??followersâ?? forced me to appear more â??interestingâ??, â??glamorousâ?? and â??beautifulâ?? â?? just to compete for attention. Where I started to associate myself with all the latest trends and movements. Continually adjusting my appearance and interests. I would spend ages crafting new content and trying to get the perfect selfie. Succumbing to recommended filters that prompted me to erase apparent â??imperfectionsâ??. This only reinforced the belief that I wasnâ??t skinny enough or pretty enough.

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The Fragilities of a False Perfect Self

Overtime, I managed to master a â??perfectâ?? appearance. Accumulating a respectable social media following and securing an impressive higher position in my corporate career. However, the promotion I had been working hard on for almost 6 months fell through. I felt devastated because I had pushed myself to meet impeccable work standards. All in the hope that I would be given this promotion. I even boasted the news to all my friends and family. This coincided with a stream of unseen photos being uploaded and tagged to my social media profile. Unfiltered images from my nights out partying that were incredibly unflattering. Followed by an onslaught of negative comments berating my physical appearance.

I felt completely humiliated and embarrassed. My fragile sense of self-worth was shattered. Propelling me into a deep state of depression. I tried so hard to be the best; following societal expectations and conforming with a Western privileged lifestyle. Ideals that were supposed to make me feel like I was good enough. But none of it worked â?? I still felt worthless. My job was making me miserable, anxious and stressed out. While the pressures of social media had left me battling body dysmorphia and an unstable sense of identity. I was also still struggling to manage my eating disorder. A multitude of mental health challenges that drove me to write the email in the opening paragraph. I just wanted to give up â?? I had nothing left to give anymore.

-The capitalist game was up. I needed a way out.

Credits

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