

Tangible Delusions

Illusions tangibles

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I am a patient of the Forensic System. I believe this system is a thousand times better than the traditional route of incarceration. To be honest, all forms of incarceration should be like this place. That is to say: a more rehabilitative-focused approach would be more effective than the current alternatives. This is coming from a person who has been through the Provincial jail system as well as the federal jail system. There is a lot of good here in this system. I feel safe and I am fed well. I don't have to fear for my life everyday, as I did in jail. I've been here for a little while and navigating through the system, was a little hard at first.

Trying to get out was my main objective. At first, getting better was not my goal. Eventually, understanding how my mental health affected all areas of my life (past and future), I learned insight about where I went wrong and how I handled myself. The challenge was that I need to form new habits and detach from old ones, which I still struggle with.

At first, I felt that being here sucked. I didn't like the people and I wanted to go home (even though I would have been homeless). I was aiming to be good long enough so I could get out and go back to using drugs. And I did.

It wasn't until I returned back to the forensic hospital that I actually started to apply what I learned. The problem with this place, is the definition of decompensation, delusion and risk. There is such a big grey area for all these factors.

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I find it's possible to use drugs and not decompensate. I also believe delusions should be studied – not just medicated. It's confusing for me, to live in this government-funded, Catholic-run hospital, that claims to care about my mind, body and soul. In reality, it seems as if what they say and do are two different things. I believe that if you don't eat and sleep or use drugs, you're more susceptible, to these "so-called" delusions. But to African and Native/Indigenous people, it's a spirit walk. The delusions reoccur in all of these patients – so, could there be truth behind them? We believe in a God we cannot prove exists, yet if we talk about it – and feel He's talking to us, or seeing signs – it's a form of grandiosity. If you believe something extraordinary or different – it's always delusion. If you feel too happy or too sad – you're hypomanic or depressed. We live in a constant state of distress, and are expected to feel okay.

We are constantly asked if "you want to hurt yourself" and it slowly takes its toll on you, as a patient. You become callous and just respond with automatic answers – whether you feel that way or not. Numb to the experience; that is what this makes me - and us, as I have talked with others who feel the same. And that's just it - we feel the same.

Tangential. This describes moving from topic to topic. Circumstantial. This describes discussions all around a topic. Hyperactive/Hypomanic often involves both these problems but they do not necessarily mean someone needs to be medicated. Maybe it's the way they think – or its evolution. It's sad to think that these big words, meant to heal, are used to confuse us and put us down. It hurts despite, like I said, what they think or say. The drugs we're given cause us to "not feel" the dopamine we're trying to receive. We then overcompensate, trying to feel the experience we are having. I feel, basically – extremely numb. This song describes the things I've experienced:

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When the delusions become as real
As the pain, we conceal
Please don't ask me:
"How do you feel?"
If you're not ready to accept and respect
Anything and everything we REVEAL
What would you do in this life
If everyone you knew that looks like you
Was captured and forced to do
Whatever the master man told them to;
I would get confused.
NIGGER! You're less than us, omg
What was said to us
Don't overthink it
Don't think it's over
Freedom is a state of mind
And anything can be taken back
Back up – left, right
Cheat codes in plain sight
Airplane game
If you know what I'm sayin' (know what I'm saying?)
I wish I could take flight
We sober and still lit
We leave the bet bruised and bettered
I need a doctor - "Nurse! Get the first aid kit..."
"There's no time. We can't save him."

This is a song about waking up, while imprisoned, expected to "be okay" in a hospital, in a civilization that ignores racism - and white privilege thrives - black males die young. Black women are single mothers, often angry at their situation. We are asked: "How do

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you feel?"; "Do you feel like harming anyone?"; "Do you feel like killing yourself?". With these repetitive questions it starts to make you second guess yourself. "I didn't feel that way, until you asked me a thousand times." My perspective is different because I'm a black male who also suffers from substance use disorder. Some of that was never chosen by me - it was chosen for me. Due to the ongoing issues I face, "freedom is a state" where I escape the torment, by hiding inside myself. I may be physically locked up, but I choose to be mentally free, unlike others who allow themselves to be trapped, letting the system determine who they are. It's all about how your mental status is unfixable, but medication is the magic cure. They're not really trying to save me; they're trying to save society from me, when people in my culture have been turned to the monster, they want to avoid. The "N-word" is something I have struggled with my whole life, trying to understand what it means, and why we are called that. I performed this song at the Black History Month (Southwest Centre), to express exactly how I actually feel about my life here. Ignorance. Racism. Hatred. All dismissed and discredited, because I am a patient here. "Perceived Racism" is what I'm told. This lived experience. Even though I let it roll off my back, and act like it doesn't bother me, it still hurts and affects how I function during the day – and through the future. This means that I am affected by what happens to me, despite what they say or think. Racism - and systemic racism in Canada - is a real thing.

Although this is better than jail – it's still incarceration. This is no end date. No release date. You can't just sleep and do your time that way. The meter of progress, remains undefined. No matter how many times around the circle, you always come to the same spot. It's a revolving door but we're chained to it, and there's no way to remove the collar. No way to get better – and no end to the serving of your time.

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Miniscule charges for lifetime sentences. And the only way out is next to impossible: maintaining sobriety – and sanity. We play games children wouldn't like to play. We do crafts, like we're in kindergarten. We are not given rehabilitation – just expectations. High functioning people, though we are more likely to succeed – we are also, always, considered a higher risk. And the risk is neverending...

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