

The Leadership Project



presents

Shifting the Narrative on Mental Health: An intersectional inquiry on corruption, causality, community and recovery

**Hart House – 7 Hart House Circle, University of Toronto
Thursday, May 31, 2018**

Conference Foreword

The conference will focus on ‘shifting the narrative’ from the psychiatric disease model to the relational/recovery model, and on the ideological and macro-economic forces that are stacked against that eventuality. The disease model is the dominant narrative throughout Western society by way of economic power and scientific hyperbole, and not because its veracity is proven. Its authority depends on its capacity to sell itself irrespective of the actual public health outcomes, and it has sold itself very well. Whereas twenty years since its articulation, the recovery narrative still has not seen itself adequately represented or well understood in the media, policy or public discourse. The recovery approach brings a far more compassionate and effective response to all forms of distress, and at its best, is conjoined with love, wellness, psychological support, self-determination, rights and community development. All good things, so why can’t the recovery approach catch a break in terms of recognition and proportional funding?

To get at some of the questions relating to bio-medical primacy and recovery marginality, our esteemed guests will work loosely within a framework of intersectional inquiry to show the complexity and full extent of the problem. They will show how oppressive systems and institutions are mutually reinforcing, with particular emphasis on the collusion between psychiatry and Big Pharma. They will address how “biomedicalism and neoliberalism mutually reinforce individualistic understandings of social problems and blunt the scholarship and activism that point to the complex interactions between the biological and the social in mental health.” They will look to the roots of ‘mental illness,’ locating part of the problem in advanced capitalism, and a history of racism, colonialism and patriarchy. They will critique the disease model for its distortion of socio-economic issues within racialized communities whereby distress and unrest become somehow medicalized (and criminalized). They will show that trauma is indelibly intergenerational unless the chain of exploitation, exclusion and internalized oppression is broken. And, they will discuss how racism is enmeshed in culture, and how it is expressed or not meaningfully addressed within the alternatives/recovery movement.

Troubling, yes, but our guests have a lot to share in terms of hope, vitality and commitment. Their research, stories and reflections show that recovery needs to be embedded within the broad movement for social change. They will assert that resistance and speaking truth to power is crucial for personal recovery and decolonizing the mind. They will show how communities are a source of healing through a shared sense of purpose and the vital sense of belonging, and that community reclamation is essential for justice and reconciliation. Ultimately, they will show that we are all connected, that this is not about ‘us and them’; it is about moving forward together, with compassion, in solidarity, in order for all of us to thrive and find our joy in the shared human adventure.

Acknowledgements:

Conference planners: Brian McKinnon and Heinz Klein

Grateful acknowledgement to the following for providing ideas, encouragement and feedback: Dr. Peter Stastny, Robert Whitaker, Dr Philip Thomas, China Mills, Roland Chrisjohn, Adele Rosenbloom, Pallavi Valabhji, Lucy Costa, Virginia Dineen, Aisling D’Arcy, Michelle Azubuikie, and Carmen Carrasco

The **Leadership Project** is a small group of worker/activists that is primarily focused on organizing innovative and provocative conference events as a way of promoting a recovery vision for Ontario and Canada. The Leadership Project extends special thanks to **Alternatives**, as the mother ship steering us through our recovery education journeys.

Presentation Descriptions and Presenter Biographies (In order of appearance)



Robert Whitaker **Psychiatry Under the Influence: Institutional Corruption, Social Injury, and Prescriptions for Reform**

In a democratic society, we expect that institutions that serve a public interest will adhere to ethical and legal standards. However, 'economies of influence' may corrupt an institution and lead it astray, which has proven to be the case with American psychiatry during the past 35 years. Under the influence of pharmaceutical money and guild interests, the American Psychiatric Association has told to the American public a narrative that promoted those economic interests and yet was belied by its own science. It told of disorders that were caused by chemical imbalances in the brain, when research hadn't shown that to be so; it exaggerated the safety and efficacy of a second generation of psychiatric drugs; it hid poor long-term results with those medications; and it expanded the boundaries of psychiatric diagnoses in ways that helped build larger markets for these medications. As a result of this institutional corruption, American society has organized itself around a 'false narrative,' which has caused great social injury. Any prescription for reform will require finding ways to neutralize those corrupting influences.

Bio: Robert Whitaker is the author of five books, three of which tell of the history of psychiatry: *Mad in America*; *Anatomy of an Epidemic*; and in collaboration with Lisa Cosgrove, *Psychiatry Under the Influence*. Prior to writing books, he worked as the science and medical reporter at the *Albany Times Union* newspaper in New York for a number of years. He is also the publisher of a mental health webzine, madinamerica.com.



Dr. Marina Morrow **Recovering Social Justice: Resistance in Neoliberal Times**

Biomedicalism and neoliberalism mutually reinforce individualistic understandings of social problems and blunt the scholarship and activism that point to the complex interactions between the biological and the social in mental health. In this talk, I explore the ways that neoliberalism, as a set of practices that increase the role of the free market and reconfigure the welfare state has deepened inequities and engendered policy reforms and discursive practices in mental health that, when coupled with biomedicalism, have had deleterious effects on mental health care and social supports. Neoliberalism as a form of governmentality is reconfiguring subject formation and increasingly "responsibilizing" individuals in the name of "recovery" to assume the roles and risks of the state, while governments retreat from addressing systemic intersecting forms of oppression. These developments call for new forms of social activism. Here, I explore a more socially just approach for naming and responding to mental distress - that of combining the frameworks of intersectionality and Mad studies. In the face of the power invested in biomedicine, I suggest that an intersectional Mad studies approach holds the best potential for producing liberatory knowledge, social change, and social justice in mental health.

Bio: Marina Morrow is Professor and Chair of the School of Health Policy and Management at York University. In her work, Marina is interested in better understanding the social, political and institutional processes through which health and mental health policies and practices are developed and how social and health inequities are sustained or attenuated for different populations. Her most recent edited book (with Dr. Halinka Malcoe) is *Critical Inquiries for Social Justice in Mental Health* U of T Press, 2017.



Dr. Jayasree Kalathil

Beyond Performative Diversity: Reflections on ‘Race’, Recovery and ‘Alternatives to Psychiatry’

It was when I moved to England from India fifteen years ago that I became a ‘BME’ (‘black and minority ethnic’) person. Since then, I have been, sometimes frontally and sometimes marginally, involved in discourses critical of the bio-medical narratives of madness and distress and in finding new ways of understanding and working with distress and recovery, broadly understood as ‘alternatives to psychiatry’. As one of a handful of survivor researchers from racialised minority backgrounds with an interest in the intersections of ‘being mad’ with other social identities and related systems of oppression, this new identity marked me as eligible for entry into these forums of knowledge production in which I was soon performing the task that Sara Ahmed has termed “embodying diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with colour” (*On being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, 2012).

My presentation will look back at this engagement to tease out: 1) Why critical progressive ‘alternatives to psychiatry’ have largely remained outside the reach of those most affected by psychiatric and societal racism; 2) the processes of racialization within ‘alternative’ spaces that preserve and perpetuate white privilege as a structural, spatial and embodied form of racism that continue to invalidate or marginalise the experiences of and knowledge produced by people from minority ethnic communities; and 3) what ‘alternatives’ might mean from the perspectives of mental health user/survivors from racialized groups with examples from our collective political work in the UK.

Bio: Dr Jayasree Kalathil is an independent researcher, writer and psychiatric survivor activist based in London. She runs the virtual collective, Survivor Research, which focuses on making the experiences, activism and advocacy of mental health service users/survivors from racialized groups an integral part of the knowledge about mental health and madness and the policies and practices within mental health services. She is currently engaged in a project that seeks to record the history of the black and minority ethnic mental health user/survivor movement in the UK.



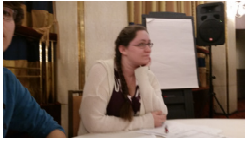
Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD, Hon AIA

The social, physical and economic fracture of the urban ecosystem can be addressed, using tools of community organizing and urbanism.

Abstract: The US city has been subjected to decades of upheaval from serial forced displacement and deindustrialization. These processes caused a one-two punch of social and economic disruption which left communities disconnected from one another and within themselves. The social, physical and economic fracture of the urban ecosystem can be addressed, using tools of community organizing and urbanism. This presentation will describe an urban restoration curriculum developed by a consortium of community organizations.

Bio: Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD, Hon AIA, is a professor of urban policy and health at The New School. Prior to joining The New School in 2016, she worked for 26 years as a research psychiatrist at New York State Psychiatric Institute and was a professor of clinical psychiatry and public health at Columbia University. She has conducted research on AIDS and other epidemics of poor communities, with a special interest in the relationship between the collapse of communities and decline in health. From her research, she has published numerous articles, book chapters, and monographs. She has also written: *The House of Joshua: Meditations on Family and Place*; *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do About It*; and *Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America’s Sorted-Out Cities*. A second edition of

Homeboy Came to Orange: A Story of People's Power, which she helped her father, Ernest Thompson, write, will be released in May 2018 by New Village Press.



**Shaunessy M. McKay and
Clinton Debogorski**
**The Enemy Who Lives in Our Heads:
Native Peoples and Submission
to Canada's Therapeutic State**



When confronted by the facts of its continuous policy of genocide aimed at the various indigenous populations within its recognized borders, Canada has been (almost) unimpeded in selling - to itself, to the world, and to its victims - a monotonous repetition on the themes of Native backwardness, Native deficiency, and Native pathology. In recent years this continuous feedback-loop has been repeated and buttressed - thoughtlessly, collusively, or both - by sycophants who claim a race-based identification and affiliation with, first, indigenous peoples and, second, our imputed "mental health needs." The authors contest the philosophical, empirical, and moral legitimacy of this vilification and misdirection, whatever its source, using the results both of our recently released book ***Dying to Please You: Indigenous Suicide in Contemporary Canada*** and of our forthcoming work on Canadian racism against Native Peoples, ***"... and Indians, too." Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian Form of Racism.*** The psychiatrization of indigenous issues, we find, is no foundation upon which to base any response to Native issues in Canada, and its outcome is neither personal gratification nor justice. Rather, it is the "friendly face" of an ongoing genocide.

Bio: Shaunessy M. McKay is a Mi'kmaq woman from Eel Ground First Nation in New Brunswick. She holds a bachelor degree in English Literature and an honours in Native Studies from St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and is currently adding an honours in philosophy there. She is a single mother and home-schools her son, Tyler. She is, with Roland Chrisjohn, co-author of *Dying to Please You: Indigenous Suicide in Contemporary Canada*, and is at work with Roland on their next book, *'...and Indians, too: Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian Form of Racism*, which they are hoping to complete by the end of summer, 2018.

Bio: Clinton Debogorski "I'm a PhD Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Toronto from Northern Alberta and (mostly) Denendeh ("the Northwest Territories"). My dissertation, *Dialectic of Canadian Enlightenment: Genocidal Culture and the Camp Capitalist State*, is a critique of the customs and institutions of settler nation-statist, corporate, military power. I am mainly interested in exposing the ways the ideology that supports these customs and institutions--which I argue are multiply genocidal at their core--continues to distort and mutilate the everyday lives of both settlers and Indigenous peoples under global state capitalism."



Dr. Liam MacGabhann
**Systemic Consciousness, Family Constellations and
Transgenerational Community Belonging**

Living in an expanding world imprinting the notion of 'I' individualism as having displaced the 'we' of collectivism, it is easy to perceive fading community identity and the systemic effects on personal wellness. Without delving into romantic stories of traditional communities living and speaking only as 'we', there are sufficient anthropological and sociological accounts of such living by this reality in both global traditional and contemporary society. In the mental health arena many of the shifts in power and self-determination have come about through a sense of collective belonging, through collective action, and through approaches to change that incorporate subject to subject ('we' and 'us', as opposed to 'I' and 'them'). Conversely, while governmental discourse frequently espouses collective/participative/collaborative approaches to addressing societal concerns, 'individualistic' forces often ensure that the discourse does not translate into social reality.

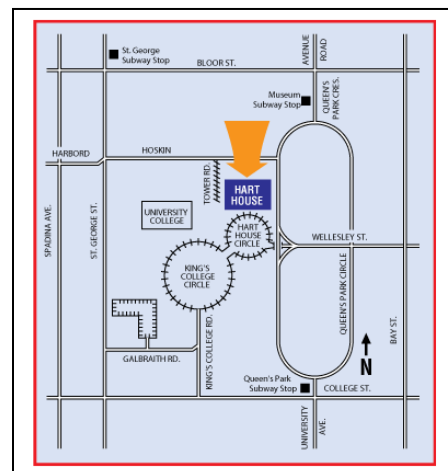
In considering the power of community connectedness and belonging, I will outline Systemic Family Constellations (a modality that emerged from traditional indigenous healing systems and was integrated into contemporary healing) as an explanatory framework for systemic connectivity with great potential for shifting the paradigm in how we understand distress and wellness as a community phenomenon. As the biological, physical and social sciences are rediscovering, there are existing anomalies from the past in our present, and systemic family constellations offers important insight towards experiencing these anomalies as trans-generational community consciousness.

Bio: Dr Liam MacGabhann - I work in the School of Nursing and Human Sciences at Dublin City University as an associate professor in mental health practice and a community activist. Along with a wide group of colleagues, my main program of research and development focuses on *'Transforming Dialogues in Mental Health Communities'*. Much of this work centers around people reconciling their own experiences, perceptions and practices with other people/groups associated with mental health and using different approaches to improve these at individual, group, organizational and community level. Examples of relevant areas include: where people have extraordinary beliefs and experiences; where people are disenfranchised by society and community; and in the area of trauma and responses to traumatic events. Approaches include cooperative learning, participative action, open dialogue and systemic family constellations work.

Feeling frustrated with the limitations of traditional therapeutic work, and having explored various alternative approaches (reiki, tai chi, shamanism, mindfulness and body work) to helping people work through significant life challenges, it was perhaps inevitable that I would end up embracing constellations work as an all-encompassing holistic approach to healing. This work unfolds what is and what has been in a clear and uncomplicated way for people experiencing serious physical, emotional and systemic problems in life. Deep immediate understanding and healing with clear impact on our family/community systems is the hallmark of this work, and the reason why I embrace it wholeheartedly.

Conference Schedule and Conference Location

- 9:00 Opening Remarks
- 9:15 Robert Whitaker
- 10:00 Dr. Marina Morrow
- 10:40 Break
- 11:00 Dr. Jayasree Kalathil
- 11:40 Panel (moderated by Lucy Costa)
- 12:15 Lunch
- 1:15 Dr. Mindy Fullilove
- 2:00 Shaunessy McKay and Clinton Debogorski
- 2:40 Break
- 3:00 Dr. Liam MacGabhann
- 3:40 Panel (moderated by Lucy Costa)
- 4:30 Adjournment



Conference Registration Information

Conference registration charge - \$160 (Registration includes lunch, refreshments)

Registration is done through **Eventbrite**.

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/shifting-the-narrative-on-mental-health-tickets-42748686472>

If you are not using a credit card, or are seeking a subsidy (**\$50** note : limited number of subsidized spots), we will accept a cheque (payable to **Alternatives**) or cash. Please mail or deliver payment to:
Alternatives, 1245 Danforth Ave, Toronto, M4J 1M8.

If you have a dietary request please send an email indicating vegan, vegetarian, halal, kosher, etc.

Contact: Brian McKinnon [416-285-7996](tel:416-285-7996), ex. 227 or email bmckinnon@alternativestoronto.org

(**Note:** for email correspondence regarding the conference, please specify **May 31 conference** in subject window).