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FROM THE DIRECTOR

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I was thinking lately about the nature of "mental illness," and what Thomas Szasz said about it. In his view, as in most of ours, it has to do with unconventional, inconvenient, or disturbing personal conduct and emotional distress, not real illness of the body. This means the term would be about one's desire to act in certain ways when immersed in the throes of living, not the ability to do so. Nothing prevents choosing a certain course of action except our lack of desire, or unwillingness, to choose.

It might be intensely difficult and emotionally painful to: stop drinking, change eating habits, get out of bed, or disobey commanding voices. But nothing prevents those things from happening except for the person's lack of desire in the moment it counts. When the person is about to order another drink, being offered a favorite food, hiding in bed from a cruel day, or hearing voices relentlessly demanding grim action, nothing is removing the person's ability to do otherwise. We can certainly be compassionate and easily understand how painfully difficult it would be for them to act, given their personal histories and contexts, but in these and other similar situations, the person never actually loses the ability to choose one way or another.

A woman who has a real bodily defect, for instance who is a paraplegic, cannot walk without prosthetic devices, no matter how much she desires to walk. Likewise, a boy who has cancer cannot eliminate it and live cancer free without medical assistance, despite his willingness to do so. These are true disabilities and these people are unable to correct or eliminate the defects without some type of chemical, mechanical, or radiological intervention targeted specifically on that defect. It is the defect that prevents.

If you say the "defects" of alcoholism, bulimia, depression, or psychosis prevent a person from acting, then you are falling prey to the myth. There is no mental illness that causes one's desire to change, or that somehow directly intercedes between that person's desire and an action. Instead, the lack of desire is the problem. But it isn't an illness and it isn't a comment on moral failings. Working with a person in order to foster a change can work. But it isn't because our work with them cures an illness or otherwise removes an impediment that had earlier prevented them from action. In short, the therapeutic process helps them see the world differently in such a way that they are willing to take the risk of choosing differently. They always retain the ability to act.

Now I realize with these words I am challenging the concept of "mental disability." But if "mental illness" is a fiction, then "mental disability" is also one. Further, I think it is important to challenge this sister fiction of mental illness even though it might mean jeopardizing financial assistance to those diagnosed with DSM fictions.

I have been working with a young man who has been wearing an Asperger's diagnostic identity for years. His biggest challenge is not his reluctance to change ingrained routines or confront discomfort in face-to-face social situations. Rather, it is the diagnostic label that has stuck, altering not only what others think but also what he thinks of himself and his abilities.

Despite my encouragement to take risks and experiment with behavioral changes to pull himself out of this socially constructed myth, he is applying for disability. He'll eventually be approved, I'm sure, considering his documented multi-year diagnostic history. I wish there was some other system to support him in the process of shedding his fictitious disability

without labeling him with the very fiction he is trying to shed. But there isn't. So, he has decided to take advantage of the system. While it will provide him with some funds for him to function in the short term, it will surely seal his fate and perpetuate his personal myth of mental illness.

Announcements

~ISEPP Membership Renewal and New Member Drive!



I want to remind all of you to make sure you [renew your ISEPP membership](#) as soon as possible. Many of you have not yet renewed and I know most of you receiving this newsletter are not yet members. Remember that membership runs from January through December each calendar year. If you are not sure you are paid up for

2018, or you have any questions about the benefits of membership, contact our Membership Committee Chair, Robert Sliclen, at 201-664-2566 or sliclen@optonline.net. It only takes few moments, so don't miss out on remaining or becoming an active ISEPP member by [renewing or joining now!](#)

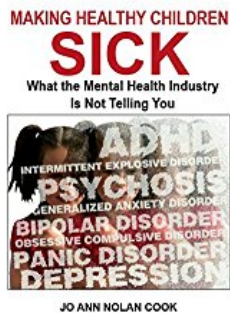
~Yoga for Mental Health Course

One of ISEPP's members, Kelli Foulkrod, M.S., is launching a 7-week online yoga for mental health course that is a great adjunct to psychotherapy or for anyone struggling with sadness and fear. In the comfort of your own home you will work with mind, body, and spirit and learn how different



body parts are related to stress and tension. You will also benefit from leaning Yoga *nidra*, a deeply relaxing form of meditation. You can find out more about this course and Kelli's other work

at: <https://vimeo.com/245566354>, <https://organicmentalhealthcenter.com>, and https://vimeo.com/user75622151/vod_pages.



~What the Mental Health Industry Is Not Telling You

Another one of ISEPP's members, Jo Ann Cook, M.S.W., recently came out with a book that chronicles the harm done to children in the name of the mental health industry. [*Making Healthy Children Sick: What the Mental Health Industry Is Not Telling You*](#) is a wake-up

call for all of us who deeply care about the well-being of our most vulnerable children and believe that our medical clinics and schools should protect, not harm children in their care. This is an important read!

~Online Forum for People Who See, Hear, or Sense Things Others Don't

Akiko Hart, the Chair of the [United Kingdom network of the International Society for Psychological and Social Approaches to Psychosis](#), announced they have launched a new online forum for people who experience extreme states and their parents and family members. It is called Voice Collective. You can read more about it at [Mad in America](#). Please spread the word far and wide. Those interested can join at <https://t.co/3oQGtfmyg7>.



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