

US AND THEM
THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF LGBTQ
DISCRIMINATION IN A PANDEMIC



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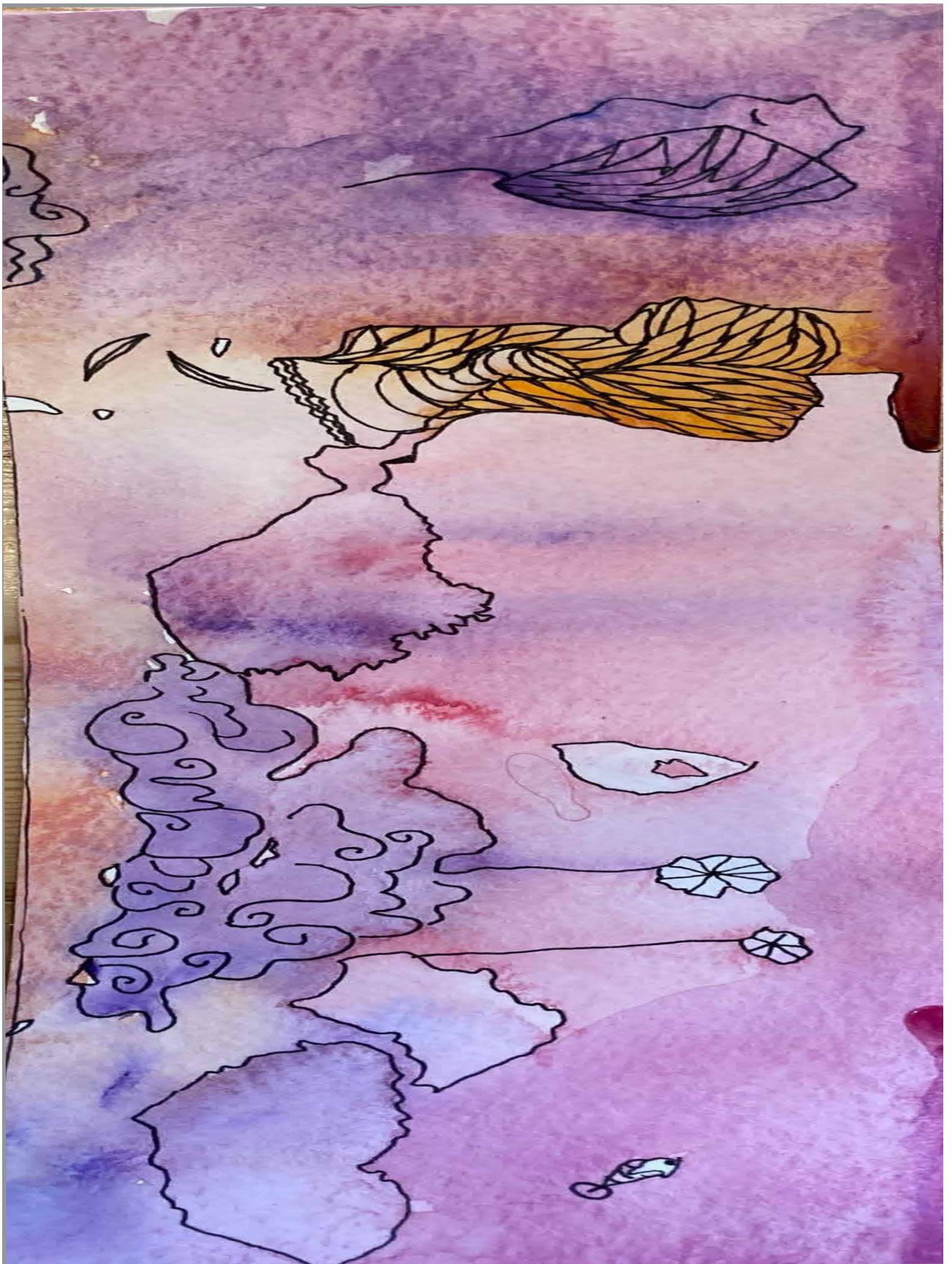
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DEPRESSION

Coping with social isolation has been very difficult for everyone, but especially for the LGBTQ community as equity in healthcare is an on going problem. This community is particularly at risk due to health and economic factors like fear of being stigmatized.



HOMOSEXUALITY LABELED AS AN ILLNESS

The American Psychiatric Association defined being gay as a mental illness up until 1973. This diagnosis was used as a weapon against LGBTQ rights. At this time one could be fired from their job or denied citizenship for being gay. It was even forbidden for gay people to practice psychiatry. Those diagnosed as gay had to undergo psychoanalysis and be “cured”. Methods of curing someone of homosexuality included electric shock therapy and sterilizing women. This treatment was done with no scientific basis, and doctors were essentially just enforcing social norms. Scientific research was never conducted on LGBTQ people who weren’t already being treated for another mental illness. This obstructs the research so there is no chance for accurate data. Even those who practiced psychiatry who were gay were held back by their own internalized homophobia. This changed after LGBTQ activists came together and refused to be labelled. They had learned from the civil rights movement and the feminist movement. sickness label was a heavy burden that could not be ignored in the movement for LGBTQ equality. Removing being gay from the American Psychiatric Association of mental illnesses was a pivotal moment for LGBTQ equality. Without this win progress towards equality was difficult. There were demonstrations at psychiatric annual meetings. Activism was key to bringing about this important monument of change for the LGBTQ community. The activists rejected the idea that they need to be cured of their desire. They wanted the stigma of insanity to be removed from the definition of being homosexual. Some call this the most important moment in gay liberation history. Were it not for the legacy of activism, this liberation of the Queer community would not have happened.



ANXIETY

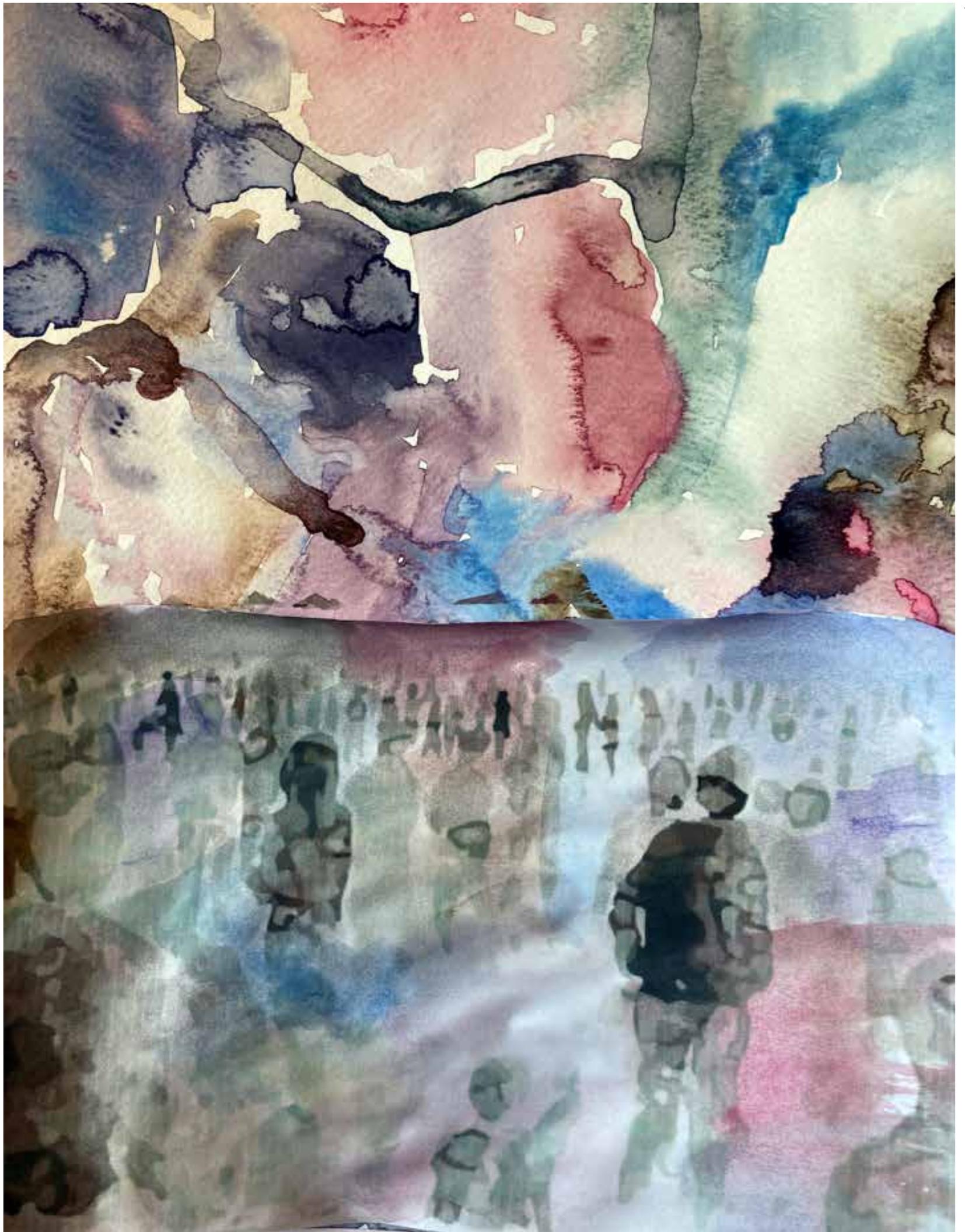
The queer communities have experienced increased anxiety since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. Studies have found even those who have not experienced anxiety before who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or transgendered have felt rising anxiety since the start of COVID.



ALIENATION

Capitalism's atomizing powers systematically and permanently cripple a class of people. Mental illness is often made worse due to the free market system that does not support mental health programs. Karl Marx's theory of alienation describes the social estrangement of people from aspects of their human nature as a consequence of living in a society of social classes. The worker loses the ability to determine the course of their life when deprived of the right to see themselves as the director of their own actions. Through the free market system we are alienated through our labor. "The history of humanity is the history of alienation and the transcendence of this alienation. Illness is neither a part of, nor the form, of alienation but rather is the alienation, but subjectively as the experienced conditions of physical and psychological needs of the individual." (Marx, 5).

The priority of society must undoubtedly be changed to where the highest goal is the person and not the profit.



STIGMA

There is a history of discrimination in mental health services available, further isolating marginalized communities. This also results in stigmas surrounding mental illness. The definition of stigma is “a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person”. (Oxford Languages) Both having a mental illness and being gay lesbian bisexual or transgender have stigma attached. This intersection doubles the amount of stigma this marginalized group of people face. Receiving help for their mental health is very difficult. This is related to stigma that still exists today. LGBTQ individuals are twice as likely to be vulnerable towards mental illness like anxiety and depression. The stigma that encompasses mental illnesses can make people wary of seeking help. Some examples of people not seeking mental health care due to stigma are 10% delayed care or didn't get it due to discrimination and treatment with less respect from their mental health care providers. Stigma needs to be alleviated by normalizing talking about mental illness. This way people can accept their identity without complications



Mental Health As A Problem Of Society

“I had a staff member of high ranking in treatment ask me if lesbians really do hate gay men, and telling me anecdotes about other gay people they met who didn't like lesbians. it was really uncomfortable and uncalled for.”

There is a history of discrimination in mental health services available, further isolating marginalized communities. This also results in stigmas surrounding mental illness. Mental illness is often made worse due to the free market system that does not support mental health programs. The priority of society must undoubtedly be changed to where the highest goal is the person and not the profit.

Coping with social isolation has been very difficult for everyone, but especially for

the LGBTQ community as equity in healthcare is an ongoing problem. This

community is particularly at risk due to health and economic factors like fear of

being stigmatized. The definition of stigma is “a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person”. (Oxford Languages) Both having a mental illness and being gay lesbian bisexual or transgender have stigma attached. This intersection doubles the amount of stigma this marginalized

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seeking help. Some examples of people not seeking mental health care due to stigma are 10% delayed care or didn't get it due to discrimination and treatment with less respect from their mental health care providers. This information is taken from the interviews I conducted, where I interviewed five people in the

LGBTQIA community with mental health problems. I have conducted interviews with LGBTQIA youth and their experiences within the mental health care system. This is one anecdote of poorer mental healthcare service than usual because of LGBTQ identity. “I had a staff member of high ranking in treatment

ask me if lesbians really do hate gay men, and telling me anecdotes about other gay people they met who didn't like lesbians. it was really uncomfortable and uncalled for.” The following are other responses to questions in interviews. Do you feel you are treated with less respect than others in treatment?

“sometimes i do feel this way because of the uncomfortable dialogues i feel obligated to be a part of when providers or staff ask me intrusive questions.”

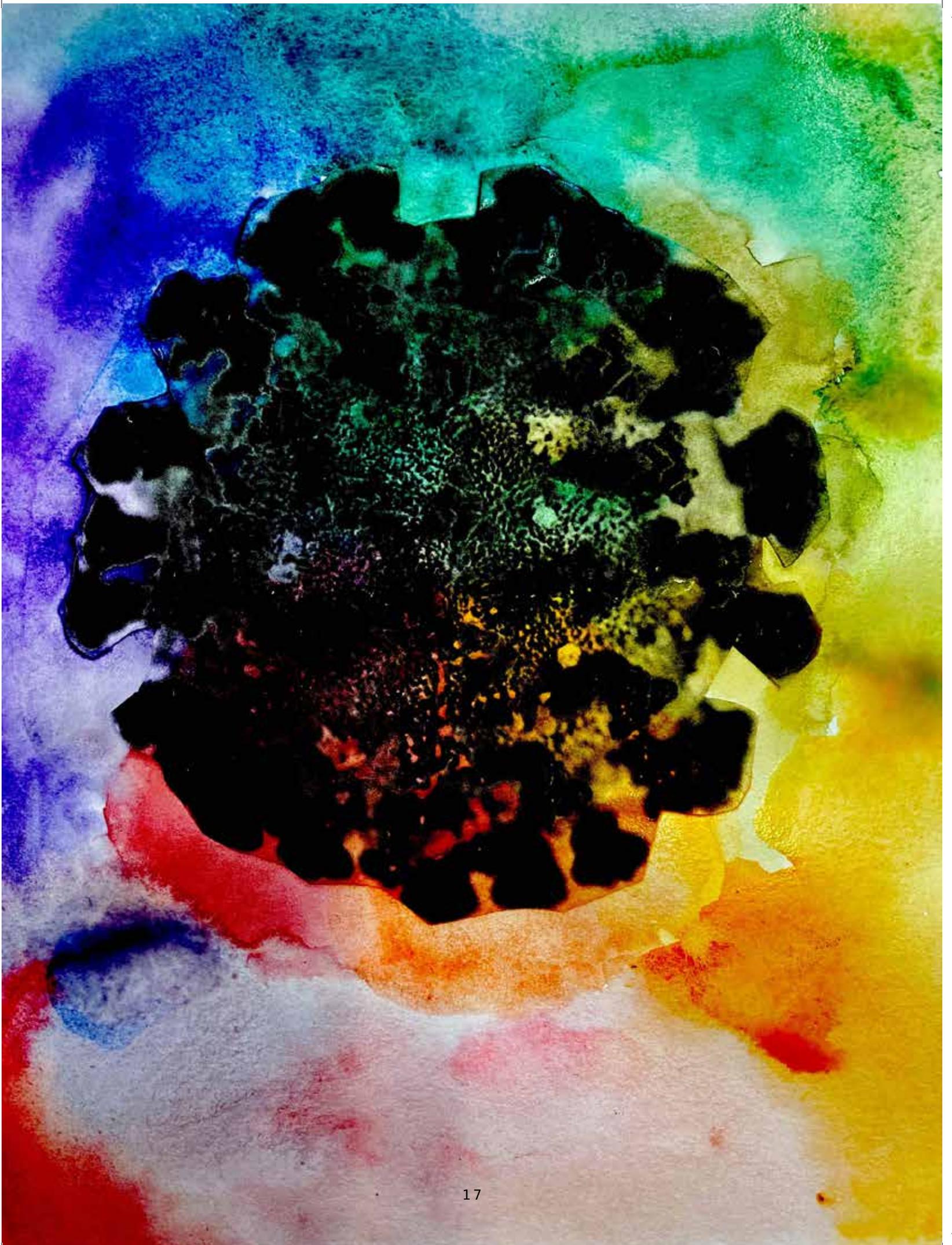
“i have felt very anxious and depressed during covid and had to receive inpatient and outpatient treatment.”

Has being part of a lgbtq community elevated your mood/made it easier to cope during COVID? “in some ways yes bc i have a good peer support system of other lgbtq people.”



LGBTQ IS AT A GREATER RISK FROM COVID

Long standing health and social inequities have put minority groups and demographics of racial and ethnic minorities as well as class minorities at an increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID 19. The rate of COVID death in native non Hispanic persons is 2.4 times the rate of white non Hispanic persons. The rate of African American people dying is 1.9 times the rate of white people dying. The rate of Hispanic or Latinos dying is 2.3 times the rate of white people dying. (CDC.gov) Many in this group share similar experiences. Historically, these marginalized groups of people have been prevented from having fair chances for economic, physical, and emotional health. They are unable to access quality health care.



Activism

LGBTQ has a strong legacy of activism rooted in the Stonewall riots as the pivotal moment for social change. The Stonewall riots were caused by police raids on gay bars, and the uprising of the LGBTQIA community in response. This event was a key component in the gay liberation movement. The American Psychiatric Association defined being gay as a mental illness up until 1973. (Drescher) This diagnosis was used as a weapon against LGBTQ rights. At this time one could be fired from their job or denied citizenship for being gay. It was even forbidden for gay people to practice psychiatry. (Drescher) Those diagnosed as gay had to undergo psychoanalysis and be “cured”. Methods of curing someone of homosexuality included electric shock therapy and sterilizing women. This treatment was done with no scientific basis, and doctors were essentially just enforcing social norms. (unerased) Scientific research was never conducted on LGBTQ people who weren’t already being treated for another mental illness. This obstructs the research so there is no chance for accurate data. Even those who practiced psychiatry who were gay were held back by their own internalized homophobia. This changed after LGBTQ activists came together and refused to be labelled. They had learned from the civil rights movement and the feminist movement, and were a part of both of these movements. Sickness label was a heavy burden that could not be ignored in the movement for LGBTQ equality. Removing being gay from the American Psychiatric Association of mental illnesses was a pivotal moment for LGBTQ equality. Without this win progress towards equality was difficult. There were demonstrations at psychiatric annual meetings. Activism was key to bringing about this important monument of change for the LGBTQ community. The activists rejected the idea that they need to be cured of their desire. They wanted the stigma of insanity to be removed from the definition of being homosexual. Some call this the most important moment in gay liberation history. (PBS) Were it not for the legacy of activism, this liberation of the Queer community would not have happened.



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