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 Global Haiku
 Dr. Brooks
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Reflection on Jake Orlowitz's *Haiku for Mental Health*

In November of 2019, Jake Orlowitz released a blog post on medium.com titled *Haikus for Mental Health* containing Haiku pulled directly from his book, *Welcome to the Circle*. The Haiku in this aptly named post were focused on the topic of mental health and disorders, and broken down by category: depression, borderline, anxiety, OCD, trauma and more. While reading Jake Orlowitz's haiku, I enjoyed the journey of each mental health struggle. He began with the misery, intrusive thoughts, and pain, and ended with encouragement or acceptance that things will be okay in time. I found myself going on my own healing journey after each section I read. It is evident that Jake used his, or a friend's, personal experiences and direct thoughts while writing these Haiku. I believe that the unedited way he transcribes the thoughts is what makes these journeys so compelling. Too often, mental health is presented with a veil or romanticized story, but Orlowitz doesn't do that at all.

To start the healing journey of each mental health struggle or disorder that Orlowitz addresses, he approaches the material without a filter. He writes in a sort of stream-of-consciousness manner, and reading these sections are like seeing your intrusive thoughts transcribed in real time. Some of these haiku are about the emotional side, and the burden of mental health, while others are more simply direct quotes of what goes on in that person's mind.

Depression

My journey is stalled.
 I muddle through every day.
 Stuck in misery.

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 2

This haiku about Depression is an excellent example of what I meant in saying some of Orlowitz's haiku are more about the burden or emotional struggles with mental health. I think this haiku perfectly captures the weight of depression. His word choices in particular stick out to me. The use of the word "stalled" as opposed to "stopped" is so important, because while this person's life may be feeling stopped, it isn't yet; they are still alive even if that isn't what they wish in the moment. Additionally, the words "muddle" and "stuck" were wonderful choices to provide the slow pacing and weighted feeling that comes with having depression. Finally, the use of periods after each line is powerful. It breaks up the flow and makes moving on to each line a harder task, just as it would feel going from one activity to the next while depressed.

Borderline

RAGE RAGE RAGE RAGE RAGE —
 LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE —
 TEARS TEARS TEARS TEARS.

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 3

In contrast to the previous haiku, this one about borderline personality disorder is a great example of Jake Orlowitz's haiku that are more a direct quote of the intrusive thoughts within the person's mind. This one stuck out to me because of the use of volume and repetition. For starters, this is the only haiku in the blog post that utilizes all-caps. Then to build off of that, the repetition is not the same for each word, making it

more fitting to what borderline is like. We start with “RAGE,” the trait that borderline is most known for. “RAGE”, however, is not the most used word in this haiku, “LOVE” is. This is such an important distinction because while people with BPD are known to have outbursts and breakdowns, they are often the result of the individual feeling over or under loved, especially by whoever is their present FP (favorite person). Finally, I appreciate that “LOVE” is in the middle of “RAGE” and “TEARS” because people with BPD have a lot of love to give, it just comes hand in hand with breakdowns and outbursts along the way.

Anxiety

Oh, what have I wrought?
What kind of world's so fragile
That needs my fixing?

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 5

The sense of questioning in this haiku is what drew me in. Questioning is such a staple of Anxiety and this haiku captured that very well. I also think this haiku is interesting because it is almost a combination of the two types of haiku I said he wrote; it is both capturing the burden but also a translation of intrusive thoughts. The use of the word “wrought” is so powerful. It would have been easy to simply say, ‘what have I done’ but the word “wrought” carries so much weight and takes more effort to actually speak allowed. It’s interesting because I almost get a sense of overthinking even in choosing that word, which is probably a manifestation of my own anxiety. Also, the final question in a way blames the world itself, which is an interesting thought to me. So many times, people with anxiety are hard on themselves for feeling anxious, but when things are pushed even beyond that point, it is easier to blame everyone and everything around you rather than deal with the state of your own mind. I love that Orlowitz found a way to hint at that idea.

OCD

“I’m gay! I am gay!
I’m a wretched pedophile!
I’m a murderer!”

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 6

This haiku is another example of a direct quote of intrusive thought, which is fitting for OCD. Compulsive thinking is the biggest factor of OCD, and I appreciate that Orlowitz focused on this and not on the cleanliness stereotype that we hear so often. The use of quotations stood out to me, because the way OCD thoughts work is that it is almost another voice your head, it’s a voice and a thought you have no control over. The use of quotation marks helps to capture that feeling of hearing something you didn’t say within your own mind. Additionally, the escalation of thoughts here is so important. As a gay woman with OCD, the “I’m gay” thought is pretty common and not bothersome, but the escalation usually happens when I feel like a predator if I catch myself staring at a woman and my mind will then convince me that I am a stalker or a creep, when I most certainly am not. The jump from “gay” to “pedophile” to “murderer” seems extreme but it is so truthful. I can tell this must have been someone’s genuine experience, because this is the side of OCD we do not hear about often.

After revealing the struggle of each mental health struggle or disorder, Jake Orlowitz finds a way to leave readers (and in turn, those who are dealing with their own mental health) with a more uplifting sentiment. Many of the Haiku on these topics were centered on reassurance or affirmations. Reading these hit home for me every time, regardless of the mental health topic it was written for or if I myself struggle with that particular issue. I found myself relating many of these uplifting haiku to one another. This in itself I believe serves as a nice reminder that while we are all on different journeys, we are striving for the same goals and

deserve the same love. It is amazing that Orlowitz was able to create this effect multiple times without re-using the same exact topic or situation once.

It was not your fault.
Your now is safer than then.
Find your protectors.

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 7

Be kind to yourself.
The whole world is not your fault
Try to trust it now.

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 5

The first haiku above is from the Trauma section of the blog, and the latter from the Anxiety section. I paired these haiku together not only because PTSD and Anxiety often intertwine, but also because the use of the phrase “not your fault” in both haiku stuck out to me. The statement “not your fault” is the overall message of both these haiku, so the difference comes from the specific circumstance as well as the structure of the haiku itself. The first haiku is about the past, as to be expected of a PTSD haiku, but the structure stands out to me. The use of a period after each line makes each sentence sound more like an affirmation than a message to someone else. This person is reminding themselves of each statement, and Orlowitz was able to capture that in the simple use of punctuation. The second haiku is broken up differently, and the sentence structure in this case reads more like someone telling the individual this. In my mind I imagine someone being comforted by a trusted friend after a panic attack, and this is what the friend is telling them to help calm down. It is so cool how Orlowitz’s attention to detail in these two haiku can make the exact same message read completely different.

You are suffering
But you can hold together:
Find your true center.

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 3

Only your brain’s stuck.
Break the cycle that tortures.
You deserve freedom.

Jake Orlowitz, *Haikus for Mental Health*, Section 6

I paired the above haiku because I wanted to see how Orlowitz approached the hope and recovery standpoint for both borderline and OCD. These mental health disorders both deal with intrusive thinking as well as the associated breakdowns that come with it. There are no shared words or phrases like the previous match-up, however the structure is the same and the final messages are very similar. These two haiku were both written in the affirmation style, like the PTSD haiku previously, and they both follow the same message structure: ‘this is what’s happening,’ ‘but this is what you can do,’ and ‘this is what you deserve.’ This shared message thread is really beautiful to me. Regardless of different words and different specific situations, both of these haiku manage to acknowledge the situation, suggestion an action that can be taken, and finally assure the individual that they are deserving of some form of self-love. The first haiku decided that love was peace in finding “your true center” which I think is so important for BPD. With borderline, the individuals life becomes so centered on another person, so the reminder that it is okay to find peace and focus on yourself is crucial. With the OCD one, the message of freedom is very powerful. Individuals with OCD often feel trapped in their own lives, so I love that Orlowitz focused on this message. Overall with this pairing, I

love the idea that the two individuals might be helping each other and reading the affirmations to one another, as the messages are so similar and equally powerful.

The selected haiku in Jake Orlowitz's blog, *Haikus for Mental Health*, tell a beautiful story and properly capture the journey of mental health recovery. Beginning with the misery, intrusive thoughts, and pain, Orlowitz uses attention to detail in his word choice and sentence structure to properly show the struggle or the intrusive thinking of mental health, and occasionally both at the same time. To end each section, Orlowitz focuses more on encouragement or acceptance that things will be okay in time. The way he writes allows readers to follow along on the healing journey within each mental health disorder. It is evident that Jake is experienced in mental health, or at least knows people who are, as the direct thoughts, explanations, and affirmations were so clear and relatable from start to finish. After reading, I am sure I was correct in saying that the unedited and detailed way he transcribes each and every thought is what makes these journeys so compelling. His stream-of-consciousness writing was super easy to follow, while encompassing the heightened emotion of particular moments. The unfiltered approach of Orlowitz's writing ensure that we weren't left with just another mental health stereotype, but true stories that hit home whether you struggle with the same mental health issue or not.

Works Cited

Orlowitz, Jake. "Haikus for Mental Health." *Medium*, 13 Nov. 2019, medium.com/the-j-curve/haikus-for-mental-health-6c88af3a2239.