

Using Experiential Knowledge: The Affirmation Model, Outsider Art and Arthur Schopenhauer

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Outside In/Stuckist Artist

As a reliable compass for orienting yourself in life nothing is more useful than to accustom yourself to regarding this world as a place of atonement, a sort of penal colony. When you have done this you will order your expectations of life according to the nature of things and no longer regard the calamities, sufferings, torments and miseries of life as something irregular and not to be expected but will find them entirely in order, well knowing that each of us is being punished for his existence and each in his own particular way. This outlook will enable us to view the so-called imperfections of the majority of men without surprise and certainly without indignation.

(Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The Suffering of the World')

Normalcy:

appears as a principle underpinning social organisation during the struggle of emerging modern societies during the 19th Century to find ways of controlling rapidly growing amounts of information, products, processes, and human movement that accompanied industrialisation

a way of relating which describes ways in which people think about themselves in relation to others around them

measures itself against those it has excluded

needs abnormalcy in order to recognise itself

(Titchkosky, 2003; Garland-Thomson, 2009)

Ferguson (2006)

appropriate dress, appearance, polite modes of eating and drinking, acceptable means of coughing, sneezing, urination and defecation, the proper restraint in gesture and forms of interaction, and the provision and protection of personal space all featured in the new corporeal pedagogy

Bourgeois individualism:

the dreary, ludicrous repetition of individuals who are curiously similar in their ways of being themselves and of keeping themselves to themselves, in their speech, their gestures, their everyday habits.

Lefebvre (2008:15)

Being normal involves a process of learning to want to act in the ways that society requires one to act

(Fromm, 2001)

The market economy advances alienation by pushing us towards conformity

Schmitt (2003:107)

Strategic image presentation

(Lodziak, 2004)

Laing (1990)

the alienation underlying normalcy usually passes unnoticed because the 'normally' alienated person, acting more or less like everyone else, is taken to be sane.

Existential Dread

the dread people experience in the face of the knowledge that they have to make decisions to matter

the illusory reassurance many find instead by opting to be part of a 'They', whose ready-made assumptions and ideas stultify the need for independent thought

people may feel an underlying horror that their lives will amount to nothing, but in the meantime, they continue to watch crap TV or fiddle with their mobiles

Sartre (1993) Heidegger (2010)

**Anxiety, depression, unhappiness and fear:
not 'illnesses' but rational responses to life
circumstances**

David Smail (2018)

Shit-Life Syndrome

cycles of poverty and neglect amid wider affluence

drudge work, minimum wage, minimal job security

entrapment in poor neighbourhoods

inadequate social housing, scant income support, contingent access to healthcare

survival struggles command all intellectual and emotional resources

finding meaning in life is close to impossible

(Hutton, 2018)

What causes people distress is not so much their own mistakes, inadequacies and illnesses as the powers and influences that bear down upon them from the world beyond their skin

David Smail (2018)

YET THIS IS CALLED 'ILLNESS' AND MEDICALISED

(through, for example, CBT)

Suffering is a form of knowledge

It tells us what is wrong with our world

David Smail (2018)

Disability: regarded as 'useless difference'

(Michalko, 2002)

The Affirmation Model

Impairment: physical, sensory, emotional and intellectual difference, divergent from culturally valued norms of embodiment, to be expected and respected on its own terms in a diverse society

Disability: you are disabled if on a 'substantial' or 'long term' basis you have had to deal with other people's oppressive expectations and assumptions about people with impairments, and have on that basis found your life made difficult and your opportunities for equal participation restricted

(Cameron, 2024)

Suffering is the path of consciousness, and by it living beings arrive at the possession of self-consciousness... For to possess consciousness of oneself, to possess personality, is to know oneself and feel oneself distinct from other beings, and this feeling of distinction is only reached through an act of collision, through suffering more or less severe, through the sense of one's own limits.

Miguel de Unamuno (1954)

'Suffering'

a word not generally favoured because of the way it is often lazily used in medical model discourse to describe the experience of having an impairment

impairment effects can cause inconvenience, discomfort or pain, and require to be lived with, thought about and dealt with (Thomas, 1999)

experiences of being marginalised and excluded, of having to be perpetually aware that one is regarded by other people as a problem, represent another form of suffering

The experience of oppression that living with impairment (physical, emotional, sensory, intellectual) in a disabling society involves leads to a heightened awareness of its absurdity and ridiculousness

Meanwhile, the normals get on on with their mediocre lives, upholding what is there already because it's what they are expected to do

But neither being exactly happy nor exactly changing very much

**‘Family, Picking Noses’
(Cameron, 2021)**



**Mother and Daughter
Living Shitty, Pointless
Lives**

(Cameron, 2024)



**‘Daddy, What’s That
Awful Smell?’**

(Cameron, 2024)



Charles and Diana Picking Noses

(Cameron, 2023)



**King Charles, Picking
His Arse Like a Monkey**

(Cameron, 2025)



Social Worker, Picking Nose

(Cameron, 2023)



The 'experts' will not change the world... They will simply make a satisfactory living helping people to adjust to it; the world will only change when ordinary people realize what is making them unhappy, and do something about it.

David Smail (2018)

‘Functionaries of the ideology of normality’

(Cameron, 2026)

Compassion, not normality

(as Schopenhauer said)

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