

Book Review

Kernan, Luke (ed). *Unquiet Minds: Youth Anthology of Art and Poetry*. Victoria, BC: The Unquiet Minds Project. 2022, 180 pages.

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Unquiet Minds: Youth Anthology of Art and Poetry (2022) is the first book anthology to grapple with mental health activism for youth in British Columbia (and Canada). This timely, inspiring project was inspired by Kay Redfield Jamison's book, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*, which encompasses her traumatic experiences with bipolarity. Founded and edited by Luke Kernan, a PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Victoria, the *Unquiet Minds* anthology encompasses cathartic and heartwarming poems, visual illustrations, and artistic expressions from fifty Canadian youth that charge up and mesmerize readers into a world of bewilderment, quirkiness, shock, and reflection.

This youth-driven book anthology is not an elitist text; rather it celebrates failures and greenness as much as excellence. The editor collected the contributions from two open mics, twenty-two arts-based writing workshops, and a submission callout. The facilitators provided creative youth an appropriate, safe, and meaningful refuge to fearlessly discuss the intersections of their struggles for well-being. As Kernan puts it, "We are all part of a living process, imperfect expressions—so, for a passing moment, allow yourself to revel in that messiness. Our mistakes, our youth, and our most naïve instincts are the fodder and fecundity of our growth. We are brief but bright vessels" (6). Kernan essentializes the value of trusting how one holds themselves, exclusively. He adds, "For it appears that poets, artists, and musicians are living, messy, impractical people, not icons. They flow swiftly into the shadows of process with the expressed power and liberatory impetus of heart by which they may come to figure it all out" (6). Building upon that, the anthology gives youth a

space to express their joy and the messiness of what it means to live with the care of their mental health.

The poems and art pieces of the book anthology truly echo the voices of people dealing with mental health conditions by presenting the unique concerns, opinions, and ideas that youth have around mental health, in their own words. The content is divided into four sections; the first part of the anthology covers visual art submissions. Following that exploration and gallery, the second and most extensive section delves into the thick of poetry, with some added illustrations and visual poems by select individuals. The third section includes selected writing and visual art submissions from the 2017 and 2020 UNQUIET MINDS open mic performers, most of whom were youth. The final section features guest writers from the youth spoken-word poetry workshops who submitted pieces to elicit and enact a broader overview and behind-the-scenes snapshot of the creative energies and mentorship dynamics within *The Unquiet Minds* project.

Since youth had a hand in every part of each section of the anthology, we can describe this production as community-based research (that is, participatory action research) where the goals of the community direct the project, and they have input at every level of the project. Overall, the book anthology privileges the artists' knowledge and experiences, ranging from first-time contributors to poetry-slam champions to award-winning painters to youth poet laureates. For example, Neko Smart (158–161) and James Summer (162–163) are both former Youth Poet Laureates. Grace Neeson's (126–129) art and poetry, Lena Carpenter's (8–12) artworks, and Ricki Lavender's (43–44) poetry deal with the sensorial aspects of self-making, and what it means to be an agent in your own production of subjectivity. The presence of BIPOC contributors complements the struggles of racialized diaspora Canadian youth. In particular, I was drawn to Sanjana Karthik's poem, *Encourage Therapy* (39); in her words,

Despite being okay
Confide in someone today
Like a gym for your mind
Helps tame the voices
Our trepidations bury inside.

The creators of this project successfully illuminate how to move beyond the grittiness of an incursion into the aftermath of a mental health battle, and yet still find something to love about yourself whenever you recognize who you are

in this world. Overall, the book anthology empowers readers dealing with mental health conditions by giving them a publication that helps their practices as creative writers and artists build up a portfolio for future opportunities and funding. It also allows anthropologists to quote them in their academic work, centring the actual voices of the youth in a clinical mental health context and, therefore, further helping issues of epistemic injustice in mental health settings. In that context, as a researcher whose research and pedagogy interests lie at the intersections of digital and feminist anthropology, political economy, and racialized youth and mental health across the gender stream, with a focus on South Asia and South Asian diaspora, *Unquiet Minds* is a true inspiration.

The only limitation of the anthology is that it is available in printed format only. This excludes the possibility of including multimedia and digital artworks from youth. It may also be more accessible to youth themselves if they were able to access a free digital version online, on smartphones and other devices, as they are more likely to consume and share digital content. Regardless, the book anthology complements the anthropological context in that we should be creating valuable and useful resources for our research communities. This book anthology has the potential to be embraced as a future classroom text.