

Vaccine for Anxiety-19
by Henry Valdez

The pain in my chest twists, tightening my lungs and muscle fibers that run directly from my brain and radiate throughout my body. It's an interwoven anxiety superhighway connecting thoughts with physical pain with lack of breath and vision—such an incredible creation designed in 1986 on the day I was born. A baby with the ability to bring physical discomfort to himself with just his mind. Is that normal, or am I somewhat superhuman?

I haven't felt normal in a while, but that has become the "new normal." We see the term splattered across headlines and regurgitated by television talking heads trying to force-feed me a new reality I reject. Not in any destructive manner, I'm still going to stay home and wear my mask, but the idea of living in an anxious state on the lip of a pit of depression isn't the "new normal" I wish to accept. I want to hold out to the idea that we can get back to the normal we had before. I distance myself from the negative destruction waiting outside my window. The world is a mess right now, or at least that's how it looks from social media posts and Apple news notification.

In a way, I am safe quarantining in my bedroom, not from the virus but this "new normal" of accepting death and undervaluing people's lives. Right now, someone is saying, "someone's someone died of COVID-19 yesterday, but the hell with them, it's not me. It's their fault they had underlying health conditions in the first place." That's how people feel right now like nothing is wrong. It's safe to quarantine from such people so I pull my sheets over my face to protect myself from the droplets of the inhumane.

Historians will cite 2020 as the decline of America, but America died in the back of a Sandy Hook Elementary classroom. That's when our "new normal" of being inhumane felt normal. We've grown accustomed to thumbing past dead bodies, such discomfort to feel for anyone besides ourselves.

I'm not an exception to the rule; all I feel is sorry for myself. Anxiety has gotten the best of me in 2020. I struggle to breathe as the pain in my chest tightens with every keystroke. I've allowed the outside world to creep into my chest and slowly dismantle my body from the inside. But isn't that the virus? The external threat slowly grips your lungs, tightening your chest, making it laborious to breathe. You lose vision until, ultimately, the darkness of the world gives away to the darkness of death. I can't help but think my virus isn't COVID-19 but the anxiety born inside me. I'm not sure how to socially distance from myself. I guess I'll join the vaccine waiting room, sitting with the others facing mental health challenges and hoping to get a vaccine for my feelings in 2020.