



## EDITORIAL: PSYCHOTHERAPY AS COMMODITY

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Schools are increasingly becoming crisis centers. We have lost a million citizens to Covid, and rising. Children and adolescents are suffering with a two year loss of social development, those hundreds of daily in-person micro-encounters that define who we are. Pediatric emergency rooms are filling up with suicidal teens. Families are struggling with guilt over grandparents who died alone in a hospital bed. The right to have freedom over our own bodies is under attack. The Florida Board of Health is sending threatening letters to therapists warning them not to treat families with trans kids under 18. Teachers, nurses, and doctors are either leaving their professions, or taking extended leaves of absence. For every newly licensed psychotherapist, we lose three to attrition, burnout, low wages, and vicarious trauma.

At the same time, stock markets have done well, states coffers are filled to overflowing, and profit margins for many companies have skyrocketed.

It may be time to see psychotherapy as a commodity. Therapists themselves do not see their profession as anything else but a sacrifice, a Sisyphean attempt at helping others, without registering the cost to themselves of continuing to roll a rock uphill without any societal support. After completing graduate school, therapists are required to work for unbelievably low wages for two years until they become eligible for licensure. Faced with a lack of resources, suicidal children, according to a recent Boston Globe article, spend up to 8 days in a bare hospital room, waiting for treatment, given food and water and little else.

What happens when a commodity becomes scarce? If it is a vital service, like psychotherapy, people die. If it is a lack of access to abortion, women die, especially women of color. If a commodity is scarce, then systems fail, and need to be rebuilt, at great cost. A new perspective is warranted, both by the development of a professional guild of psychotherapists that is visible to a community, and a rebuilding of community mental health in which therapists are respected and paid according to their levels of education and years of service.

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Here are specifics:

*Mental health services need to be prioritized, and provided with substantial resources.* School systems are not structured to provide crisis intervention and residential psychological care, and will fail as a system under that burden

*Therapists need to be paid a professional wage commensurate with their impact on the mental health of a community.* No more years of internship in which workers are devalued and paid so little that they cannot afford to continue in the profession. We lose more therapists during the two years after graduate school and before state licensure than at any other time.

*Psychotherapy as a business, service, and commodity must provide healthy working conditions.* This means ongoing clinical supervision throughout the career of a therapist, significant training and education after graduate school and through the first 20 years of a therapist's career, and professional wages, akin to that of lawyers, nurses, and teachers.

Psychotherapy as a commodity is not difficult to understand. A systematic improvement of mental health services at all levels needs to begin. Now.