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The Search for Security and Resilience

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019

The Trauma of COVID-19 Resurgence in the United States

We're feeling betrayed after our bargain with reality fell through.

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Source: Nick Romanov/Unsplash

The United States is heading towards a turbulent and uncertain autumn.

Until last month, the conventional wisdom among Trump Administration officials was that after a steep recession in the spring—

driven by lockdowns to get the coronavirus under control—the U.S. economy would rebound in the late summer and fall as the virus receded.

Inherent in this conventional wisdom was a semi-conscious collective bargain: *If everyone agrees to stay home and make tremendous sacrifices*—if essential workers shoulder addi-

the autumn, it should be over.

Of course, not everyone abided by this collective bargain. Lockdowns in the United States were porous at best, as some governors delayed implementing stay-at-home orders, and many individuals refused to comply with public health directives once enacted. [Many observers](#) have explored how these choices contribute to the virus's resurgence now.

The Semi-Conscious Collective Bargain

Failure to suppress a resurgence of coronavirus infections is now threatening to choke the nascent economic recovery and push the country back into recession. Collectively, we face the possibility of closed schools, renewed lockdowns, empty stadiums and theaters, and uncertainty about financial support for unemployed workers and struggling businesses.

In other words, the semi-conscious collective bargain fell through.

Our collective bargain around COVID-19 is a *mind-made stressor*, mostly created by the thinking brain. However, just because many people believed in this collective bargain doesn't mean that reality is obligated to uphold it.

The Gap Between Expectations and Reality—and the Betrayal It Can Create

As I discuss in [Widen the Window](#), whenever there's a misalignment between reality and our thinking brain's thoughts, opinions, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and prefer

agenda. The distress we experience with the thinking brain’s agenda usually lies in the gap between reality *as it actually is* and the “reality” that our thinking brain expects, believes, and prefers. ([An earlier post](#) describes the basics about the thinking brain and survival brain.)

Right now, we’re collectively experiencing the distress that happens when one of these gaps has been revealed. We *expected* that the economy would rebound before federal aid to unemployed workers and struggling businesses expired, but it hasn’t. We *expected* that our kids would be back in school full-time in the fall, but most will not. We *expected* that health care workers and other essential employees would only have to bear additional risks and stress for a short period, but the crowded hospitals and delays in testing suggest otherwise.

THE BASICS

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One of the best clues that our thinking brains are struggling with reality is when we have a thought involving “should...” — such as “infections should be under control by now,” or “I shouldn’t have to be homeschooling my children again this fall.”

When a “should” thought arises in the mind, it’s a clue that the thinking brain is ignoring or denying some aspect of our



Source: Anthony Tran/Unsplash

Unfortunately, the survival brain feels *threatened* when our thoughts and behavior diverge too widely from present-moment reality. In response, the survival brain amps up our stress arousal. Thus, not surprisingly, many American survival brains are feeling angry, disappointed, and anxious right now. Other American survival brains may be feeling misled af-

ter listening to leaders and news media that said COVID-19 was no big deal. Since not everyone has experienced the virus in the same way, differences in perceptions about the virus can *also* feel threatening to survival brains.

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 ESSENTIAL READS



Can an Over-the-Counter Nasal Spray Prevent COVID and Colds?



What Disabled People's Stories Show About Interdependence

With our semi-conscious collective bargain having fallen through—exposing the gap between our expectations and reality that was always there—we're also feeling *betrayed*. Betrayal often occurs when the thinking brain's agenda is

In fact, while many Americans bought into the semi-conscious collective bargain, others did not. Believing that the sacrifices we made to try to mitigate the virus were undermined by the actions of others who did not make such sacrifices can also fuel feelings of powerless and betrayal—and trauma.

Navigating the Gap Skillfully

So, what can we do?

To be clear, it's not a problem if the thinking brain has an agenda that isn't aligned with present-moment reality. Just as when the survival brain generates stress arousal and emotions, it becomes a problem *only when we unconsciously let our decisions and choices be driven by these things*. That's when we struggle with reality.

Whenever we feel betrayed and traumatized when reality lets us down, the first thing to do is acknowledge our true feelings—without trying to dismiss, devalue, or compartmentalize them.

Then, we need to allow into our awareness reality's *whole* picture—and any internal responses that this brings up for us. It's only after we allow all of this into awareness that we can choose how best to respond. Our most appropriate choice always takes into account all of these inputs, not just the thinking brain's agenda.



Using the example of our
abortive collective bargain



Source: Pop Zebra/Unsplash

need to notice our anger, disappointment, and anxiety and allow these emotional waves to move through us. Then, we need to notice the hard constraints of the ongoing public health emergency—and the collective requirement to get the virus un-

der control before we can hope to resume life as usual. We need to notice these limits and make our peace with them for now.

Once we take the whole picture into account—including any emotions about this disappointing situation—we can access the empowered stance of agency. While we may not be able to do everything that we expected, wanted, or preferred, we can still choose how to respond in light of reality's current constraints.

One of the most important inputs to our decision-making is our bodily sensations because the body is the best doorway into recognizing our truth in this moment. By recognizing and acting on the survival brain's cues—bodily sensations and emotions—it helps us to calm our survival brain. When we check in with our bodily sensations and emotions, it can help us to access our innate wisdom about the best choice for us to make right now.

More importantly, through this process, we regain our sense

Although we can never control the world around us, we always have the choice to work skillfully with what's arising in our own minds and bodies.

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