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# Are We Done Yet?

Emma Jaber, Arts & Entertainment Editor

I am so tired—to an extent I can't even articulate well enough to make sense of, or ask for help during. No longer curable with a 15-minute power nap, my general sense of malaise is echoed by the young people surrounding me. No one has it in them anymore, it seems.

When I finally exhume myself out of bed every morning, which takes far longer now that it's our second pandemic winter, just the slight act of keeping my body upright is sometimes all I have the capacity for in a day.

Days are flying at a distant speed. Due dates are dodged, completed under pressure as they creep closer, all while I clock in and out of work at my usual hours. The days might be flying, but the hours creep forward at a glacial pace. They feel so long. I cannot focus on anything substantial for more than 30 minutes without an abrupt, progress-derailing two-hour mental break before I can even begin to think about starting another task. This "break" isn't even restful. No, it's filled with a criminal amount of scrolling, sending my nervous system into overdrive. Based on the framework of my days, reliably punctuated by these long and useless chunks of time, one can only assume how little I can get done in a day.

This is not meant to scare, I assure you. But I am meaning to sound an alarm that I think is long overdue.

These are just the incredibly real, palpable ways pandemic fatigue has applied itself to my mounting feelings of loss throughout the pandemic. This little slice of fatigue is sadly not my own, as I share it with what feels like the majority of college students.

You may have heard a colleague offer a "stay healthy" or "make sure to take care of yourself" this week, probably at the end of a Zoom the moment before your eyes shrivel up and fall on your crumb-covered keyboard. Or, it's at your essential service job, that you're still working in a pandemic, as you can never stop working if you want to remain housed. Because naturally, in a global pandemic, that is not considered your right. Or it's on Twitter, scripted by a literal celebrity making sure to check in on you out of the goodness of their rich, rich heart. These sentiments are compounding all around us.

And yet, everyone is tired.

I'm curious how much longer we can talk about pandemic fatigue without changing any of our collective expectations and deliverables. Our capacity on both the collective and individual levels is diminished, but I don't feel the expectations we have of each other reflect this at all. Perhaps interpersonally, we can commiserate with our peers, but institutionally, not much in my life has gotten any easier. I have heard too many of my classmates, coworkers and friends go on about these same feelings—and still nothing changes. My professors, too—I feel so bad for them. My feelings creep towards guilt when there's a silence that echoes through the online classroom when no one answers a question and the cameras all stay dark. It's a horrible, deafening silence, but I, as you might have gathered thus far, am too tired to unmute or be the only floating face on a darkened screen. I know this is not what they want either.



When are we going to realize that the capacity we had for productive outputs two years ago is forever gone? Do we mourn the hustle-and-grind versions of our previous selves? How do we move on, and why is no one allowing the rest that keeps being preached into this void? The answers, in most ways, like most issues, boil down to capitalism, but I don't have enough time or eloquence to tackle that beast.

In the second half of our winter quarter, as classes have returned to in-person instruction at Seattle University, a glimmer of hope calls from the distance. But now, I've finally come down with COVID-19. Thankfully a mild case; I can't help but wonder what people who've had it worse than I have had to mitigate personally and professionally. If I was tired before, COVID sucked out a week's worth of work ethic that I will have to make up for.

I feel I sit on the privileged end of things as I write this piece, and could almost invalidate my feelings because I've survived a pandemic and can still afford to attend university.

I am trying to take care of myself, but when the baseline for emotional resilience has been completely axed by three massive loss events in the past year and a half, so many of us are existing farther in survival mode than you might even think.

I spoke with Senior Instructor of Psychology and the co-lead for Washington State's Behavioral Health Strike Team Kira Mauseth a few weeks ago about her work with pandemic fatigue. She outlined these three major loss events for me. First, the initial lockdown, the one where we all abruptly got sent home from our new lives at college and started making whipped coffee and sibling-studded TikToks; the second being the onset of the delta variant just as we may have warmed up to the idea of a "new normal," which we thought we might've barely peaked at a nearing end to the pandemic. The third is the everlasting omicron variant, prolonging any end that was never actually in sight.

Mauseth explained that at every onset of a new loss event, our operating emotional baseline is significantly lesser than that of the event prior. So after three events consecutively, we are nearing no emotional capacity. The societal effects of these lowering emotional states are palpable. They can be seen in increased public violence, the hostile way people treat strangers and service workers and are reflected in relationship tensions we may have interpersonally.

This, frankly, is not breaking news. You can feel the effects in your community. It is more frustrating that there is an awareness coupled with these examples of mounting fatigue that fall to the wayside of an "it is what it is" philosophy. All this, still nothing changes.

I guess I have no real solution to pose here. My opinion is mostly steeped in my own disbelief that we are operating in a survival mindset and have been for quite a while, even if blindly. It certainly isn't sustainable, but I would like to urge anyone in a position of authority in your workplace or school setting to tangibly reassess what you're expecting from those who follow your directives. Sure, everyone loves to hear that they're being heard, but follow-up action to these pleasantries has never felt more needed than it does right now. How can I believe that I'm being heard when, largely, the reflections of my qualms are met with the same expectations as before the pandemic?

Perhaps we must find more direct—maybe more clever—ways to express that we are all just trying to get by. Collectively addressing our grief might be a good step in the right direction. We will be living with the effects of COVID-19 for the rest of our lives, so we may as well reassess our expectations so as to not unnecessarily disappoint ourselves and our communities. We can't take much more of that. Finally, I'm very proud of you if you have produced or completed anything in the past two years that really took all you had left. I hope you're getting recognized for meeting any requirement in these \*shudders\* unprecedented times.