

# Autumn Directive 2020

## Part 1: Nothing and the 'road not taken'

We would like to hear about what you experience as absent or missing from your life. This might be a memory of something you once didn't say or do, something you

have been unable to do or prevented from having, a choice you made to turn down an opportunity, a life event that hasn't happened to you, or something/someone you wish had been present.

You may feel a range of positive or negative emotions about this lost experience: sadness, regret, anger, envy, but also happiness, pride or relief. Please tell us about whatever mixture of feelings come up when you reflect back over your personal experience of 'nothing'. We appreciate that you may find this an emotive theme, so please take your time in responding.

Below are some suggestions about the types of things you could write about. *Please do not write about Covid-19*, which is addressed in Part 2 of this directive, but rather choose something else from your life.

### Your lost experience

Please tell us about **one** thing in your life that you have not done, that hasn't happened, or that you do not have. It can be anything from a small detail to a major life event, as long as it feels important to you.

Please start each part of your Directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number, gender identity, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember *not to identify yourself or other people* inadvertently within your reply. It is best to use initials instead of real names.

Some suggestions include:

- A decision you made not to do, be or participate in something (acts of refusal or rebellion)
- Something that has not happened to you, or that you have not experienced
- A place you didn't see or visit
- An opportunity that you did not pursue (e.g. in your career or relationships)
- Holes, gaps and emptiness – spaces or areas of your life that feel unfulfilled
- A future that has been prevented or foreclosed
- Something or someone that you wish you had in your life
- A person, animal or object that is lost or missing
- Part of yourself or your body that is absent or gone
- Something that was removed, given up or taken away
- An identity, character or quality of personality that you wish you had or could express more easily
- Something you didn't say or don't talk about
- Fateful dodges and lucky escapes

### **Perspectives, thoughts and feelings**

Looking back on this episode of 'nothing', how do you regard it now? What does the missing part look, sound and feel like in your imagination? Does it hold any particular meaning or significance within the story of your life? Was the episode a free choice or something outside your control? Has the lost experience had any lasting impact, affecting other things you have done or not done since, or your relationships with other people? Has your perspective changed over time, as you have gained fresh insights or considered alternative views? Do you ever wonder about how things could have turned out differently and what this would have meant?

## Part 2: Everyday Health and Wellbeing

The challenges of COVID-19 mean that in recent months, there has been a lot of reflection on health and wellbeing in unprecedented circumstances. But what about health and wellbeing in everyday life? We learn about health in many different ways, and it can mean different things to

different people depending on their circumstances. In this Directive, we want to find out what health and wellbeing means to you (and what it meant before COVID-19) but particularly where your ideas about health and wellbeing came from, and what has influenced your own experiences of health and wellbeing in everyday life.

### Health, wellbeing and the healthy body

What does “health” mean to you? What does “wellbeing” mean to you? How do you define these words?

What do you think about when you imagine “a healthy body”? Please share the first five words that come to your mind when you think of this term.

Is there a particular person or image that comes to mind? Please describe, or draw, this person.

### Identity

How do you think that your own experience of health and wellbeing has been influenced by your gender, ethnicity, social class, or sexual orientation? Do you think your experience of health has been influenced by these or other aspects of your identity at all?

### Growing up and learning about health and wellbeing

When and where did you first become aware of “health” or of “wellbeing”?

Please start each part of your Directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number, gender identity, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember *not to identify yourself or other people* inadvertently within your reply. It is best to use initials instead of real names.

Who had responsibility for looking after your health and wellbeing when you were younger?

Do you remember your parents, or other caregivers, talking to you about health? If so, what did they talk to you about? Where did these conversations take place?

Did you receive any education about health in school? And/or did you learn about health and wellbeing in other ways – from friends, magazines, or the internet, for example?

### **Key moments**

As an adolescent, when did you first become aware of bodily changes associated with puberty?

Are there any moments or rituals that you think are particularly important for young women or men? These might include, but are not limited to, first period, voice breaking, buying the first bra, or shaving, for example?

How did you feel about these moments if/when they happened to you?

### **Growing older**

Throughout your life, what if anything, have you done to actively maintain your health both physically and mentally? Has this changed at all over the years? If so, was this due to a particular event in your life?

Where do you get information about health and wellbeing now?

Would you say you are more or less aware of your body now? Why do you think this is?

In future years how do you expect your approach to health and wellbeing to change?

### **Health, wellbeing and appearance**

In your view, how are health and wellbeing related to external appearance?

Have you ever been influenced by popular ideals of beauty or physical appearance?

Do you think your parents were influenced by these kinds of ideals? If so, in what way?

Are there any health or beauty products (excluding medicines) that you couldn't live without? What would be your Desert Island item?

### **Getting ready to leave the house**

Do you remember your mother or father getting ready to go out for work, or for the evening? If so, can you describe their rituals?

What is your own routine when getting ready to go out for work or for socialising? Has this routine changed over time?

---

**Please post your response to: Freepost: RTGU-AYJE-YSSC, The Mass Observation Archive, The Keep, Woollards Way, Brighton, BN1 9BP (please note that the MOA team are currently working from home and unable to respond to directives sent by post) or by email to: moa@sussex.ac.uk. JS/KP Summer Directive/No. 120**