Challenging the Stigma
Mental Health and Wellness in College

An Exhibition of NIU Student Artwork
Juried by Tara Wray

February 1-28, 2019

Founders Memorial Library
Northern Illinois University
Sponsored by

Helping Huskies Thrive: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Program

in collaboration with

Counseling and Consultation Services
Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education
Founders Memorial Library
School of Art and Design
Mental health and wellness are concerns for all people in direct and indirect ways. This exhibition seeks to provide insight into how mental health affects college students. Each of the artworks presented show ways NIU students challenge the stigma of mental health issues on campus. Through the artwork presented, the hope is to the challenge the stigma of mental health issues on campus.

Organized by

Lariss Garcia, Assistant Professor and Art Subject Specialist, University Libraries
Carrie A. Kortegast, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Adult and Higher Education
Jessica Labatte, Assistant Professor, Art
The daily struggles related to mental health issues affect us all. Even if we don’t struggle ourselves, we all know someone who is suffering, and we can all relate to the overwhelming obstacles they face. According to Active Minds (2019), at least 50% of us will battle mental health challenges at some point in our lives. Across the United States, 1 in 5 adults are living with a diagnosed mental illness, and many more undiagnosed individuals are coping with the challenges of living with a mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017). College students are affected too; at least 39% of college students deal with significant mental health struggles (Active Minds, 2019).

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students (Active Minds, 2019). The loss of a friend, family member, or partner to suicide has devastating effects for individuals and, on a university campus, the college community (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, n.d.). We know that death by suicide is preventable, and campus communities can help reduce the risk, increase access to help, and support individuals who are struggling with mental health concerns.

Since 2016, the Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention grant has provided Northern Illinois University’s Helping Huskies Thrive: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Program the opportunity to provide mental health resources and develop suicide prevention strategies on NIU’s campus. Helping Huskies Thrive seeks to increase overall mental health awareness through challenging stigma and creating a healthier and thriving campus community. Helping Huskies Thrive hopes to utilize various forms of campus outreach and events to provide students, faculty and staff with information, strategies, and resources around the crucial topics of suicide and general mental health awareness. By opening up dialogue surrounding these sensitive issues, Helping Huskies Thrive hopes to spread awareness throughout the university.

This exhibit, Challenging the Stigma: Mental Health and Wellness in College, showcases student artwork to demonstrate the impacts of mental health struggles, and the resiliency of those affected by them. We hope this exhibit provides insight into the challenge of mental health concerns, as well as an important reminder that none of us are alone. We can all play a part in supporting one another and lending a helping hand to those who are suffering.
**Helping Huskies Thrive Leadership Team**
Brooke Ruxton, Ph.D., Executive Director, Counseling and Consultation Services
Carrie Kortegast, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Adult and Higher Education
Angela Kaminski, LCSW, Clinical Social Worker and Outreach Coordinator, Counseling and Consultation Services
Suzanne Degges-White, Ph.D., Department Chair, Counseling, Adult, and Higher Education
Alejandro Raskind, Graduate Research Assistant, Helping Huskies Thrive

**Resources:**
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
NIU Counseling and Consultation Services: 1-815-753-1206
Counseling and Consultation Services, 200 Campus Life Building, provides individual counseling, group counseling, crisis response, and referral services to NIU students. If you or someone you know is struggling, please attend an initial consultation during walk in hours Mondays through Fridays from 11am-3:30pm.
About the Juror

Tara Wray is a photographer, writer, and filmmaker based in rural Vermont. In her recently publish book *Too Tired for Sunshine*, Tara Wray confronts depression by documenting the beauty, darkness, and absurdity of everyday life. Drawn from daily life and wanderings, the photos explore loneliness and isolation, as seen through a lens of absurdist dark humor. *Too Tired for Sunshine* puts a fine point on channeling pain into creative expression.

Wray also recently launched the *Too Tired Project*, which aims to help those struggling with depression by offering a platform for collective creative expression. The *Too Tired Project* is a photo initiative and traveling slideshow series that helps people struggling with depression by offering a place for collective creative expression and community. They invite all interested photographers to submit their images as they relate to mental health by tagging #tootiredproject on Instagram. The slideshows are community-based art events that provide people an opportunity to meet, share, and celebrate photography they have made in response to their struggles with mental health issues. Working in collaboration with Open Path Psychotherapy Collective—a non-profit nationwide network of mental health professionals dedicated to providing affordable, in-office mental health care to clients in need—the *Too Tired Project* aims to provide a basic introduction to mental health services in communities where slideshows are held.

Her work has been featured on NPR, Washington Post, VICE, Huff Post, and others, and is held in the permanent collections of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, the George Eastman Museum Library, the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University, and the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame. Born and raised in Kansas, Wray graduated from New York University where she studied documentary filmmaking. She is director of two feature length documentaries: “Manhattan, Kansas” (SXSW 2006; Film Society of Lincoln Center) and Cartoon College (2012).

For more information about Tara and her work please visit her website https://www.tarawray.net/
Briana Anders

Blue Halo, From the Perception series 2018
Archival inkjet print

This series focuses on altered perceptions people experience, especially those caused by mental illnesses such as depression. The idea of viewing life optimistically, is instead clouded and pessimistic. In this interactive series, the audience is encouraged to engage with the objects and photos. The photos are displayed in unusual and contradicting ways to represent the skewed and altered perceptions people experience. Each piece presents common ways people end their life such as by hanging, drinking, and abuse of medication. The idea is that sometimes the people who suffer do accept and reach out for help and others don’t and pay the ultimate sacrifice. I want to make this uncomfortable topic a reality and shock the viewers of the display. I hope to impact people to not only seek out help if they are suffering, but also to be the ones that others can seek as well. By talking about the taboos of society, people can address problems in mental health. Opening conversations about mental illness it makes the subject less taboo and more normalized; therefore, creating effective changes and results.
Christine Rueger
*Dissociation*, 2019
Archival inkjet print

I am small speck of dust in the vast universe.
When I first looked at the poster, I immediately read “Mental Health” and disregard the part that said “Wellness”. I kept thinking about all the negative aspects of mental health instead of what is more important, the positive aspect of mental health. I struggled figuring out what pieces I should submit because my thought process was consumed with all the negative conditions that everyone is confronted with. I realized that I need to stop thinking about all the negative conditions like depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. So I started to think about how wellness can ignite the positivity inside oneself.

The human brain is a powerful machine. Only I can stop all the negativity in my life and start thinking about what is positive and what is healthy to me. The past few weeks I’ve been taking the time to be proactive by practicing yoga. Any type of healthy activity can increase our brains to think positively. Yoga is a great claiming exercise to just relieve stress and relax the mind and body.
This piece represents how someone could have such negative thoughts, while the world around them seems to be positive. I wanted to capture the realism that nobody really knows what a person is experiencing emotionally or going through just by being around them. People are always hiding their true emotions, when they should be talking about their feelings and letting the positive things in.
This picture is from my *Underlying Emotions* series. What I mean by underlying emotions is what lies beneath what we show people. There’s the self we present to others, then the actual self. A lot of times we feel differently than we express. For example, when someone asks, “how are you” most people respond with “good” whether or not that’s true. Through photography, I wanted to capture this idea of hiding our true emotions. With this particular picture, I’m depicting the “reality” of it. Her reflection represents the self we present to others. This is the side of her that other people see. Her expression is emotionless in this image because she doesn’t recognize her own reflection, the self-she’s presenting. Her true emotions are buried deep.
Through my piece I wanted to attempt to keep the meaning slightly ambiguous. I wanted each individual person who looked at the piece to derive their own unique understanding of it. In the beginning process of creating the piece, I knew that I wanted to use pen and create a more graphic type of aesthetic. The thought of a brain in a jar to me makes me think of the thought of depersonalizing from your own mental state and looking at yourself from the outside in, as well as the feeling of isolation and just simply floating and existing that many people who suffer from mental illness commonly feel.
Mental Health is not often depicted in my photographic work but it is a common theme in my life. My roommate struggles with obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, and an addictive personality. I often have a hard time understanding what my roommate goes through on a daily basis. I don’t understand why I can’t sit too close to them on the couch or why they drink a case of sparkling water a day. By photographing some of my roommate’s vulnerable moments, I am using this on-going series as a way to better understand their mental illness and as a way to cope with my own undiagnosed mental health issues.
Getting accustomed to a new school away from home can be quite challenging for some college students. I find that a lot of first-year students— including myself— tend to shut themselves away from the outside world. Even though it’s nice to have some quiet time, I have found that myself and others can easily take that to the extreme, leaving our buildings only to go to classes. Unsurprisingly, being mostly isolated from the outside world for days on end can take a toll on a student’s mental health.
In this piece I wanted to convey the feeling of loneliness a student may feel during their time at college. This type of isolation (or “alienation” referring to the title) can stem from intense anxiety. Speaking from personal experience, I still have an immense feeling of loneliness even when I am in my dorm room with my roommate. There is literally another human in the room with me, yet I still feel lonely. My social anxiety prevents me from making a strong if not, decent relationship with him. This is the case with other people I meet in class, or wait at the bus stop with. I put myself off (or alienate) myself from other people because social interaction terrifies me.

I show this in the piece by having very distressed hatching marks on my side of the room, while the other person’s side is completely fine. The distress comes from the marks not being straight and sometimes patchy and rough. Also, I placed myself on my side inly to make the piece unbalanced, another word I would use to describe my relationship with my roommate and others I talk to.

When people look at this piece, I want them to see student they encounter who may show signs of intense anxiety or social anxiety. I want them to understand who it feels instead of judging them or laughing at them for their circumstance.
Traumatic events are usually thought of as kidnappings, physical assault, and horrible things you’d see in movies or Law and Order SVU. But traumatic events aren’t always as obvious or seen as traumatic by an outsider. Traumatic events can go unknown and unspoken by those involved. Unspoken, and unprocessed because it is either unknown, or because ‘Others have it worse.”

This series is the processing of some of my own traumas. I used experimental techniques to show how the trauma had happened, or how it has affected me today. Such as a childhood being ripped from me, a home being shattered, or experiencing a flashback from feeling unsafe.

This project is partially for my own processing as I exposed part of my photograms by burning items I used to treasure. I found a way to talk about the things I still can’t talk about, and I was able to tear apart an old art piece I made in high school and take a photo of it to include. I was able to write out what was said to me and write what I wish I could have said, while destroying the item for that person. Recently people have discrediting my experience with PTSD, and I wanted to be able to explain how it affected me, and still affects me today.
You are doing amazing! Keep up the good work! - Brian
Rebecca Berndt
*Schizophrenia*, 2019
Photograph

For this picture, I was inspired by learning about these disorders in my psychology class. The red spots highlight the negatives to these disorders.
My breath quickens and my hands start to shake, my thoughts twist and tangle together until they are simply unreadable. My vision blurs and the faces of those who were once my friends are simply blacked out, for I am afraid that whatever I say may offend them in some way and people tell me to just breath but they’re saying that while holding their oxygen tanks. I am surrounded by nothing but my thoughts, those thoughts are however replaced with fears where the simply questions of; “What if?” occupies my every thought. Anxiety, it takes over my mind, it confines me inside my own head.

The quote on the piece states; “The Fear Destroys me.” Anxiety often puts a million different thoughts or situations into your head, making you feel as if your mind is in a million different places at the same time. The red cloud for the person’s head is meant to represent this, as their head is thinking about everything at once and the fear is blinding them. It also represents a different perspective, as anxiety often constricts our words it can very easily make someone seem like a completely different person.
THE FEAR DESTRYS ME
Help is basically about someone calling for help while they are surrounded by negative thoughts and words. It’s advertising a fictitious informative talk/conference for anyone that wants to learn more and wants help with things going on in their lives.

The project was to make a poster bringing awareness and advertising an event about abuse while incorporating organic materials. We were free to choose our own event and area of abuse. I was thinking about bullying from your peers and the negative hurtful things people will say and how that can effect you.
HELP

Amelia Bank

Brought to you by:

Mental Health Association of Phoenix

December 1st, 2019, Altgeld Hall, Room 193, 5pm

Northern Illinois University, Dekalb IL
Kirin Kane

*Productive Anxiety*, 2018
Stoneware, stain, underglaze, glaze

Creative endeavors are uniquely equipped and permitted to discuss portions of the human experience which are elsewhere ignored or negated. I grew up in an affluent and white American suburb while being just as American but neither rich nor white. Because of this dissonance, I internalized a deep sense of estrangement from the narrative I found myself constantly and unwittingly disrupting. I searched for stories that were more like my own and consequently developed an appreciation for art as a platform to represent the diversity of the human experience.

I examine and display my own experiences because I believe they will resonate with and inform others. By dismantling the corrosive components of being ‘other,’ I seek to find commonalities between myself and the people to which I am not immediately similar. I want to prove that the vibrancy of our personal narratives does not diminish our shared humanity; our humanity is instead the culmination of those narratives’ vitality.
Pareidolia is a phenomenon where humans see faces in everything. There is a natural habit humans have of perceiving familiar visual patterns everywhere, regardless of whether they are actually there. The obsession of looking for faces and figures in an abstract image evokes empathy whenever an image of a recognizable other is perceived. Different perspectives of an individual forces a morphed reality. Those who have a direct connection with mental illness can have fluctuations in personality which spontaneously and substantially creates havoc. In this series, I wanted to address the issue of mental health which concerns people directly and indirectly.
My work is shaped by conceptual and material investigations of image and text. Themes to which I am drawn include narratives of apocalypse, existential dread, and the artistic response to our fragile natures as humans. My piece for this show is a response to the poem “In a Dark Time,” published in 1960 by poet Theodore Roethke. Roethke, the son of a German immigrant, was a Midwestern poet who spent his life in Michigan. He suffered from bipolar disorder and was prone to nervous breakdowns, a struggle apparent in much of his creative work.

My visions are typically expressed through postmodern approaches to art-making such as re-appropriation, re-contextualization and intermedia with an emphasis on two-dimensional image-making. Juxtaposing universal questions (Why are we here? What does it mean to suffer, to transcend?) with bright images, enhanced with additional lighting, is an attempt to frame and respond to such questions in a positive manner. I encourage the contemporary viewer to rediscover, reengage, and re-question the role that humans play in the world and the cosmos at large.
Within this piece I try to portray how people may seem happy when they are eating themselves alive. You never get the full story while looking just at someone and you never truly know what they’ve been through. Although someone may seem happy all the time and laughing doesn’t mean their life is perfect because, they cry the same amount and deal with just as much. I put the image fading into black because to me the darkness sometimes takes over you and who you truly are. I also made the image to be smaller because when the issues that you have going on sometimes make you feel so little in the world.
I have been taking photographs for two years, I started taking pictures off of my IPhone and trying to get the same quality as a digital camera, I didn’t get the best quality, although I still tried my best. My work is normally what I am feeling in the moment, although it seems to always be close to home. For this photograph, it is colored picture of myself, its size is 10 by 6.67. This is a photograph of my journey through depression and anxiety. I decided to step out of my comfort zone and take a risk of putting myself out there for the world to view. My goal for this image is not to make the viewer feel bad for me, but to make the viewer feel as if they are in my own head space and feel what I am feeling with their eyes. We all want to be okay.
As a mother there is always a nagging wonder at the back of your mind, a wonder as to who would step in if something should happen to you. Often questions of who would fill in for everyday tasks such as bed time, celebrations or companionship creep into the front of our minds and we find ourselves reflecting on the ones we love and our role in the family. These unanswered questions can be triggered by fear, depression or anxiety, which are not topics that most mothers openly discuss. When I’m Gone uses portraiture and shadows from a mother’s point of view to illustrate the very questions that cause fear and worry sometimes shaping how we live and interact with the ones who matter most to us. The faceless shadows allow the viewer to wonder who is stepping into the shoes of the reflected as well as generate the viewers own reflection on their place in their own family.
I am drawn to art that contains drastic contrast between light and darkness. The battle involving the two creates dramatic images that leaves the true meaning up to the viewer to interpret- and that is what I do with my artwork. I am inspired by tenebrism and the use of monochromatic colors within pieces so I use it most of my work and occasionally add splashes of color. As I progress as an artist, I am finding various elements that I enjoy adding throughout my art as well as ways to express myself through my work.