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A Study in Transparency

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RACHEL WILSON

a study in transparency

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RACHEL WILSON

a study in transparency

INTRODUCTION

(OR, AS AN ARTIST WOULD SAY, ABSTRACT)

In a generation that feels more lost than ever, we need transparency in order to feel less alone. We need to see others, and we need to truly see ourselves. This is my way of being seen, and in turn, helping others to feel seen and understood. When I was in middle school I began to record my daily life and thoughts in journals, which evolved to help me cope as I grew up.

In putting these pages on display, I'm presenting myself. That's Rachel Wilson. I'm a writer, a designer, an artist, maybe a song writer. Maybe a lot of things. I'm not really sure yet, but now more than ever, I realize that's okay, and I'm sure I'll figure it out.

PROCESS

Early ideas for this project included a notes-esque platform for secret thoughts, an anecdotal critique on higher education, and the mingled concepts of process and progress.

My sponsor, Dave Flynn, and I grabbed coffee and brainstormed over lunch several times throughout these months of preparation.

6/24/21

Meeting w/ Dave

- Journal as process book
- Scan & enlarge for wall
- Have book @ end?
- Journal giveaways?
- It IS about

PROCESS

This book doesn't have to be pretty

✓ Show
- Physical display
- Narrative

Assess, scan, enlarge

Design & production ← Sept 30

1 month for display
Email gallery again

Stop journaling
Mid-October?
End Sept?

- Abstract / Artist statement
- Book
Thesis / narrative
Bibliography

Talk to Markus.

Scans

The following is a selection of my journaling from XX/XX/XX to XX/XX/XX.

I selected these to tell my story.

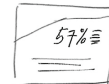
Printer for full size photos and designs

- Mirror
- Stand w/ notebook & pen
Spiral
- Hang photos behind plexiglass - tape & staple notes
- Vinyl title & statistics on wall

frustrate

August 3

So I got a free piece of 3x3 table top glass, when I took it out of my car IT BROKE :
but its ok it looks like



Mirror paint

Thick letters
- vinyl -
(Clear glass)

stats of college students feeling...

- broken
- burdensome
- sad
- stressed
- anxious
- dull
- frustrated
- confused
- overwhelmed

Email Annie

- Project Gallery dimensions
- Reservation confirmation

Double check Hours dates

"Nothing good comes from
STRESS"

What if you put yourself on the wall too?

EARLY JOURNALS: SELECTIONS

I began to journal frequently in 2015. By my late teenage years, topics got deeper. The following selections are from 2017–2020.

4/4/17

I find myself awake at night
I'm just thinking in black and white
and the voices (that) I hear
(are) just repeat(ing) all my fears
I can't see the light

barely ten minutes in bed and I'm already
scrolling through the list of things I should've said.
Like I miss you, ~~I wish you~~, I'm sorry.
the black folds around me and all my thoughts
turn navy blue and my motives are put on
trial along with everything I've kept on file
a pile of burning ideas, pieces of me I
wish I'd never let go of, I'm not sure of
~~what's~~ what would be left if my mess was
laid bare.

Everyone is so nice and I'm just not good
anymore, I've lost what I'm here for, is it
just me or am I alone in the dark or

Dated April 4, 2017.

Younger Rachel used to have insomnia, or so she called it, staying up long past her parents and siblings to draw, read, and write. This was her creative outlet away from everyone else. Being alone was her getaway.

I HATE the way I think, how I love girls, which
is wrong and which I can never have, I hate
that this is a struggle, I hate that it's wrong,
I hate that I have to deal with this. It's
exhausting and exhilarating and beyond my
reach and it's tearing me apart, wearing me
down. Why am I like this, why am I the
way I am?? I've accepted it as part of me
but I don't know if I should have because
now all it causes me is pain.

Dated January 29, 2018.

Growing up LGBT in a religious home is usually not an easy or enviable path.

<u>GOALS.</u>	
<u>WANTS.</u>	
money →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Save money - Work hard @ CFA. - Get raise. Get promotion. - Possibly, new job. where? - SCHXMATICA. - Internship.
health →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planet Fitness. Gym. - Eat right. - Plants & fresh air.
Beauty →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clear skin - confidence
Love →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you. - Comfortable alone. the rest will come.

Dated December 23, 2019.

Keeping track of what I wanted and how I was going to work towards those goals.

October 3

Why keep feelings private?

- Scared to lose control.
- They could exploit my feelings
- Know what hurts & makes me happy, and leave
- Know what makes me tick, and use it against me.

Why are people shitty?

- Because they're hurt.
- Behaviors are result of being hurt; a protection.

What are they trying to accomplish?

- Something about how they were hurt affects how they will hurt

What if... we didn't keep feelings private?

What if we could know they were safe?

We wouldn't be hurt. We could help heal & help each other with our feelings. Know the other person & be understood & seen.

Dated October 3, 2020.

I'd been hurt enough to know that some people are more reserved than others, maybe for good reason, and I wanted to know what was up with that. I like to get to the bottom of things and I use my journals to do so.

12/16/20

4:39 pm.

its dark out & I've been low all day. extremely low.

low energy, low mentality, low involvement

- not present

emotionally I am feeling some very, very bad things... Why?

So, so bad.

so scary. no idea why.

I've never felt this way in my life!

this can't be good. I am scaring myself.

not healthy, I don't care if I die,

I know I don't want to live for DAMN

sure,

very bad feelings. All of them.

Chasidi said I was glazed over it. I'm

afraid fori will write this off like my parents would. I feel like I'll need to

convince you that I'm not okay.

Why would I pretend to not be okay but I feel like I'm faking it?

This was one of the first times I became truly and sincerely worried about my mental health. It was the worst I had ever felt mentally and emotionally.

1/20/21

Peace is something we as a species have lost, born anxious & fearful,

peace, stillness, calm, & silence eludes us and it is when we are calm that we are truly filled w/ an (un)conditional joy.

resting in quiet,

when you find this, identify it.

hold onto it.

it is truth, goodness, it is something to

CHASE

its very similar to sadness! a deep stillness of grief, a silent, persistent pain.

Deconstruction.

THE JOURNAL: SELECTIONS

For this project specifically, I bought a little blank sketchbook at Walmart. I wrote as often as I could.

Singer-songwriter inspirations: Tyler Joseph, Paul Jason Klein, and Mac Miller

In a way, this project is my way of fulfilling this dream, albeit a little outside the box.

Feb 11 2021

I often think I was a singer songwriter, a famous one, in another life

sharing personal feelings & emotions
-specifically ones that catch attention,
that others are drawn to

AND having thousands of fans who love
the vulnerability. they think they know
you! But they don't. But they do...?

That's a lot of weight to carry, and to perform
those songs live, the way music moves
emotions, it takes a unique person to handle
it. the only problem is I don't
write songs...

Noticing how a winter of hard depression
left me feeling as spring arrived and my
work in therapy began to show.

3.11.21

I went to a yoga class today and it was
way too hard. I had to stop too many
times. I felt weak and sad and empty.
It made me think maybe I am not
healthy.

I want to get better.

The sun helps. and I can see my
progress. My confidence is better, my
emotions are more stable, it's time to
put more energy into my body and
its needs again. ♡

5/8/21

She told me she's in love with me and I did a hard thing and told her I'm not yet. Which isn't crazy for me to not feel it yet but felt weird telling her. I'm glad I did so we can be on the same page. It feels easy with her. Healthy. Like it will last a long time.

During this project I began a new romantic relationship unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was honest, exciting, romantic, healthy, and so hard.

She met my family, and grandparents. This month we are going to FL with her family. Even her sister said they'll love me.

5/11

Last night I got drunk with her and had a meltdown. Anxiety was so high, I cried and needed her to hold me and she told me to focus on her voice and her touch. I didn't realize how worked up I'd gotten.

Insecurity, low self esteem, it's a big issue, crying, so much emotions, so bad, it's a big deal for me. I know I'm in tune with myself or whatever, but sometimes fulfilling my own needs is a lot on me. I can't imagine asking someone else to take some of it, why would I put them through the burden I deal with constantly?

Mental illness is hard. Still, the night after, I'm a blob, in an effort to recover. I need some Benadryl.

Being in a healthy relationship and being mentally ill at the same time was also a new combo for me. But there was always patience.

6-21-21

Lately my life has been lists, stress, things to do, things to buy, things to tell my therapist.

Lists work for me. Dopamine. Control. Reassurance. Focus.

I switched meds to 2010ft because I had a panic attack for the first time in a long time on Celexa. So far, so good.

I'm also losing weight steadily w/o trying. That is ~~not good~~.

These are not problems we normally talk about with our peers. Maybe we need to more.

"You've spent a lot of formative years with the weight of others on your back, now you're putting your own weight on. Don't do that."

—Dave Flynn, June 22, 2021.

August 17

I'm in NJ with the cousins for a couple days for a refresh before senior year starts. I'm terrified about starting school, terrified about this project, terrified that after this I have to be 100%.

Senior year then that's it. That is so scary.

Today I got high and went to a garden center. Keep in mind I am in suburban New Jersey. I can't buy too much but I want everything but I don't have money but I have to drive 7 hours on Thursday.

They had everything, I mean everything. Cactuses, succulents, strings of everything, all the hoya's, monsteras, ferns, it was heaven and I was high and it was humid and I had such a good time.

I wish I had much longer to do this, figure out the project's direction, work more magic. But, this project is a process and it will be okay.

Senior year scared me more than I anticipated it would. I took a break at the end of summer and went to visit family.

Nothing will ever be perfect..

FEBRUARY 2021



OCTOBER 2021



Both photographs taken by Dale Dong.

I tried not to dress or look a certain way for either, but the differences over time are evident.

RESEARCH

66% OF COLLEGE STUDENTS FEEL ISOLATED.

ONLY 40% OF DIAGNOSED COLLEGE STUDENTS ACTUALLY RECEIVE HELP FOR THEIR MENTAL ILLNESS.

"Anxiety, Depression Reached Record Levels among College Students Last Fall." University of Michigan School of Public Health, University of Michigan, 25 Feb. 2021, <https://sph.umich.edu/news/2021posts/anxiety-depression-reached-record-levels-among-college-students-fall-2020.html>.

75% OF COLLEGE STUDENTS DRINK ALCOHOL.

Bayba, Michael. "College Students Drug Use Statistics." Addiction Group, 18 Nov. 2021, <https://www.addictiongroup.org/addiction/college-drug-abuse-statistics/>.

47% OF COLLEGE STUDENTS REPORT HAVING SYMPTOMS OF MAJOR DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY.

"College Students and Depression." Mayo Clinic Health System, 7 Sept. 2021, <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/college-students-and-depression/>.

70K OF OHIO TEENS ARE LGBTQ.

Conron, Keith J. "LGBT Youth Population in the United States." Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 9 Nov. 2020, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-youth-pop-us/>.

ONLY 17% OF LGBTQ ADULTS SAY RELIGION IS IMPORTANT TO THEM.

DeSilver, Drew, and Cary Funk. "For Religious LGBT Adults, More Commitment Sometimes Brings More Conflict." Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/20/for-religious-lgbt-adults-more-commitment-sometimes-brings-more-conflict/>.

70% OF TEENS THINK ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE A MAJOR PROBLEM AMONG THEIR PEERS.

Horowitz, Juliana Menasce, and Nikki Graf. "Most U.S. Teens See Anxiety, Depression as Major Problems." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/>.

RESEARCH

40% OF LGBTQ ADULTS HAVE EXPERIENCED REJECTION FROM SOMEONE CLOSE TO THEM.

"LGBTQI." National Alliance on Mental Illness, <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/LGBTQI/>.

70% OF AMERICANS SUPPORT SAME SEX MARRIAGE.

McCarthy, Justin. "Record-High 70% in U.S. Support Same-Sex Marriage." Gallup News, Gallup, 8 June 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/350486/record-high-support-same-sex-marriage.aspx>.

44% OF COLLEGE AGE YOUNG ADULTS HAVE TRIED RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA.

NIDA. "Marijuana use at historic high among college-aged adults in 2020." National Institute on Drug Abuse, 8 Sep. 2021, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/news-events/news-releases/2021/09/marijuana-use-at-historic-high-among-college-aged-adults-in-2020>.

8-10 YEARS IS THE AVERAGE GAP BETWEEN MENTAL ILLNESS ONSET AND INTERVENTION.

"Teens and College Students." Anxiety and Depression Association of America, <https://adaa.org/find-help/by-demographics/teens-college-students>.

72% OF LGBTQ YOUTH REPORTED SYMPTOMS OF GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS. 62% OF LGBTQ YOUTH REPORTED SYMPTOMS OF MAJOR DEPRESSION IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS.

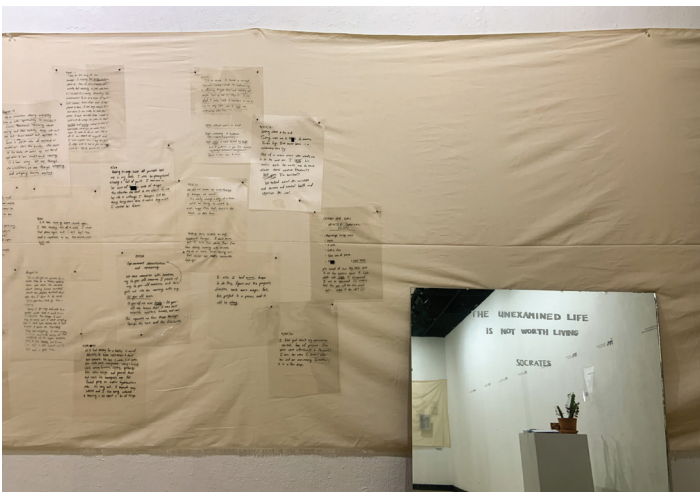
"The Trevor Project National Survey 2021." The Trevor Project, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/>.

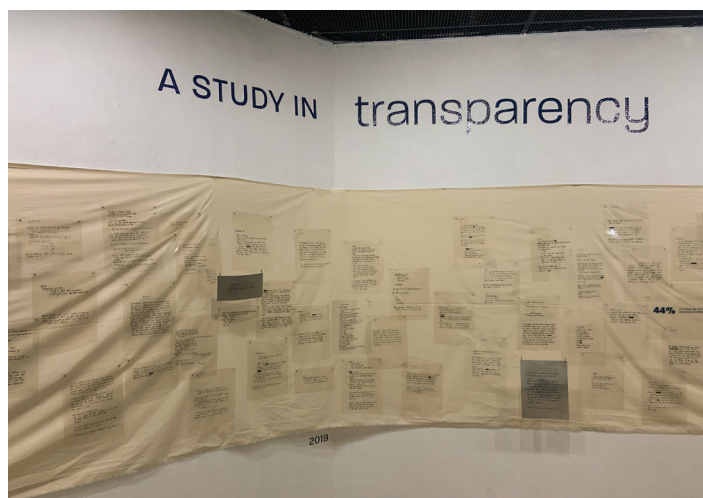
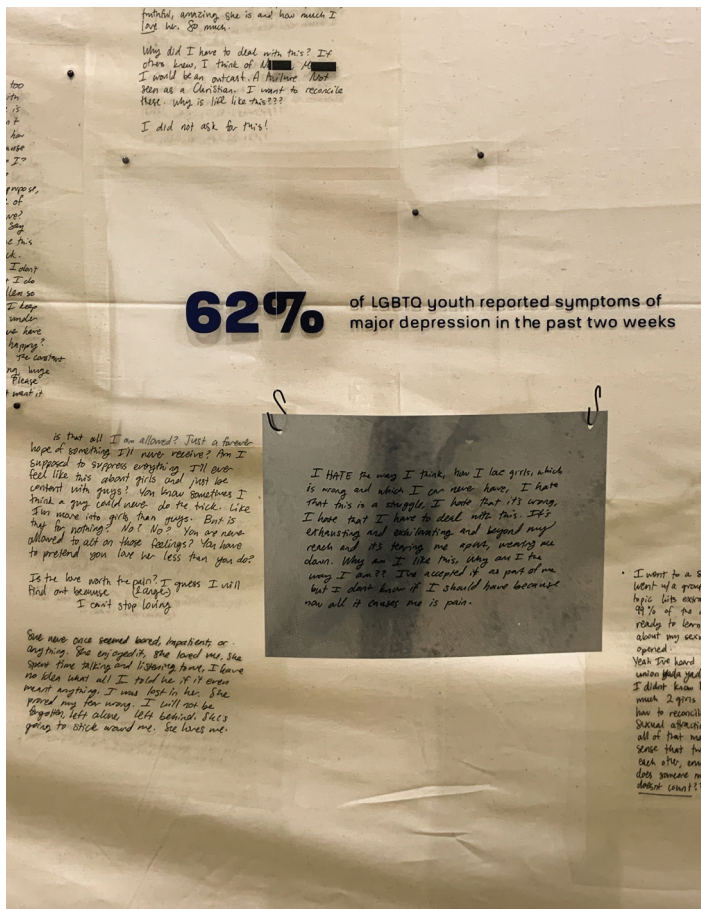
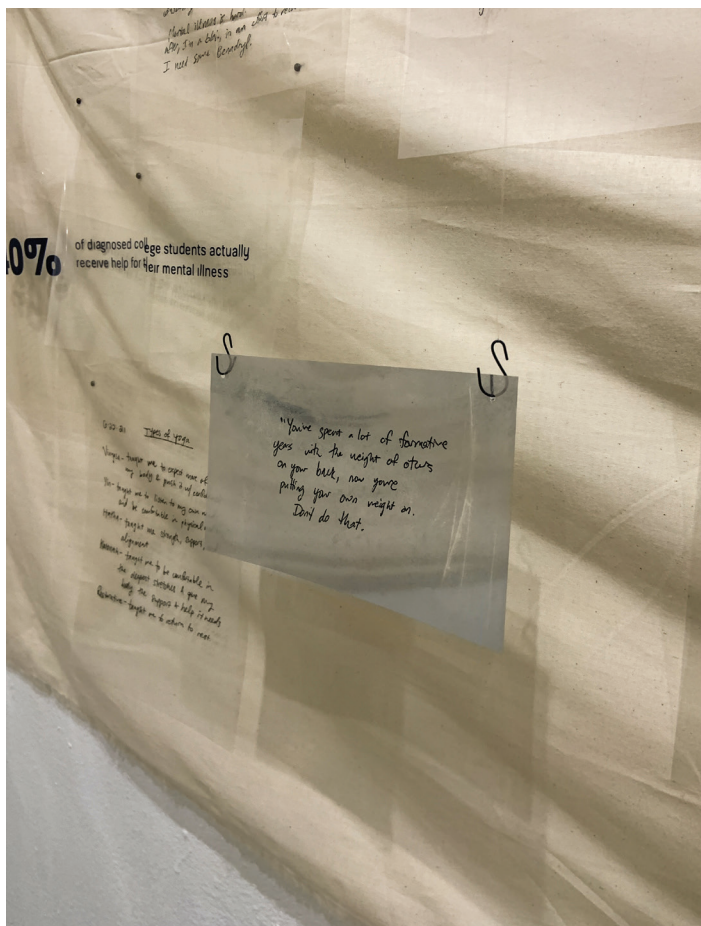
DOCUMENTATION

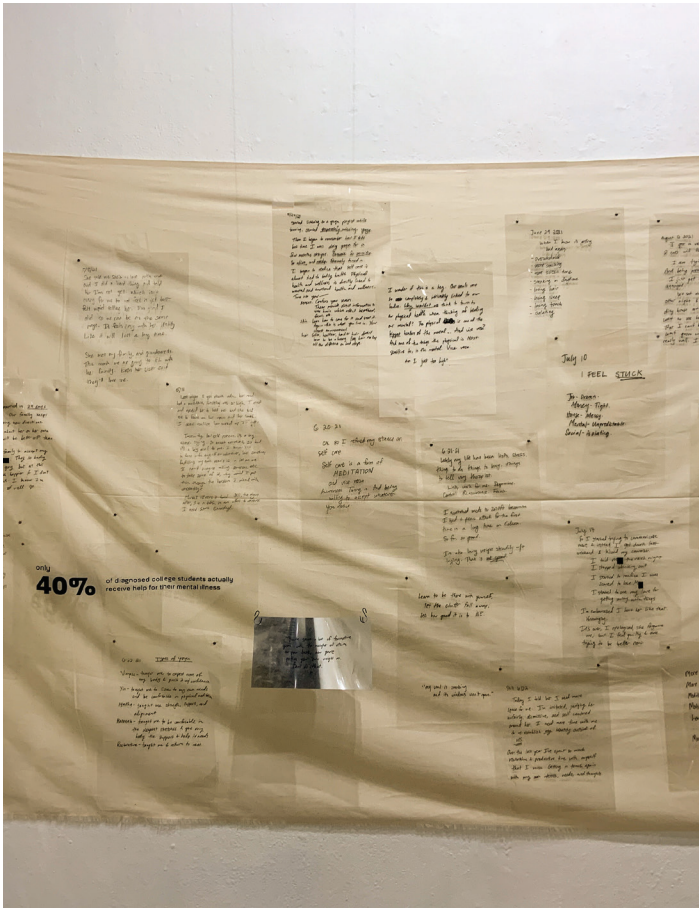
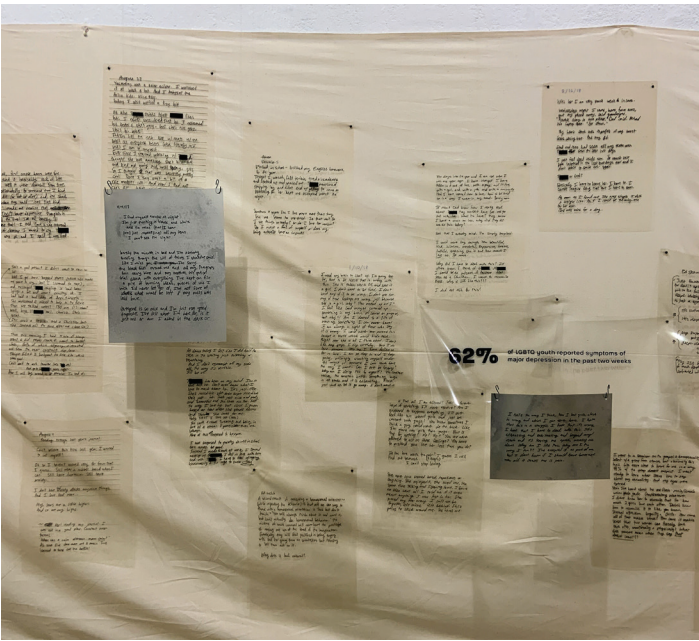
A Study in Transparency was shown in the Projects Gallery at the Emily Davis Gallery from November 13–22. Its first visitors were my family.

I did write a letter to my parents to read afterwards. I think they liked it.









FEEDBACK

"I keep thinking about your installation. It makes me sad to think it'll disappear... I think it's brave and important. You could really help others. Congratulations again on finding yourself, and sharing your journey, and winning at life."

"Your honors project has really inspired me. Beautiful work."

"I was so overwhelmed with feelings about your senior project that I couldn't put my thoughts together. You are one amazing courageous, brave and strong woman—AND you are only 21! It took me much longer to come to some of the insights that you have. Transparency is such a beautiful title. You really bared yourself (metaphorically, of course) with those raw, unedited feelings. I sure hope lots of Akron students take the time to view this exhibition. It will speak to so many of them, and hopefully help them to face their own inner demons. I hope your therapist will make the visit. Really, really beautifully done."

"I wanted to first applaud you on the vulnerability it took to post all those journal entries for the world and especially for your family to see. That took immense bravery. I wanted to thank you for giving me the chance to read those. I genuinely feel like I can be a better more understanding person having a look into some of the battles you've faced."

SPONSORS AND READERS

"It was my great pleasure to work with Rachel on her Honors Research Project, A study in Transparency.

She started the process months ahead of time, brainstormed, sought council from myself, faculty, her peers, suppliers, friends and health care professionals to discover and refine her direction.

Her goal was to express herself as a designer, but she was determined to create something honest and of lasting value for the community.

I believe that Rachel achieved and surpassed the scope of this project and that it has had great impact on her and all of us.

We are all grateful."
David Flynn

"I felt Rachel's project evidenced mature, thoughtful research and was professionally presented in the gallery. I witnessed the audience (both her peers and members of the public) drawn in by the display and then held for longer than usual while they absorbed the content. There is a strength in the openness of this work that is undeniable. It was a pleasure to work with Rachel on this project - she was self sufficient and open to feedback and made very smart edits and decisions. All details of an excellent exhibition were considered making this an extremely successful project."

Arnold Tunstall

"The overall narrative that you put forth was extremely impactful. The topic was something that it not often spoken of in public form and I feel that you reflected what you set out to achieve. The application of the transparencies and the large image of yourself put you viewers in the room with you, adding to a feeling of common ground while giving them the ability to reflect on themselves with your writing. This was such a successful show that demonstrated your deep dedication to research and the end goal of engaging your viewer."

Brittyn DeWerth

REFLECTION

Laying years of life out in a visual way is not an opportunity many get. It was an incredible blessing to design and curate this experience for myself. Creating this was like having a vision and it allowed me to deeply appreciate my own growth.

Creating something vulnerable is one thing. Displaying it is another. My fears were lessened, however, as viewers expressed understanding and thoughtfulness.

I still haven't fully processed everything this project allowed me to learn and experience. Creating a gallery display was challenging and let me test the limits of my ambition. Communicating hard things with my parents that they hadn't known before brought new emotions to our relationships. My sisters later told me that they were grateful for and inspired by the look into my teen years. I'm floored by the many positive reactions from people who are also chasing authenticity and transparency.

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