A Study in Transparency

Rachel Wilson
rvw11@uakron.edu

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RACHEL WILSON

a study in transparency

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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.
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.
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 repeating 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, yes, I'm sorry.
the black folds around me and all my memories
turn navy blue and my thoughts 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 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.


Growing up LGBT in a religious home is usually not an easy or enviable path.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wants</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>money</td>
<td>- Save money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Work hard @ CFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Get raise, get promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Possibly, move to new job, where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health</td>
<td>- Planet fitness gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Eat right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Plants &amp; fresh air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beauty</td>
<td>- Clear skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>- You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Comfortable alone, the rest will come</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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
- They could hurt me
- They could make me happy, and leave
- They could make me sick, and use it against me

Why are people shitty?
- Because they 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
  - Help each other with our feelings
  - Know the other person & be understood


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 GANW
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?

1/2018

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

in very similar h.
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.

April 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 these songs live, the way music moves emotions, it takes a unique person to handle it. The only problem is I don’t write songs...

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

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.

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 worried up I'd gotten.

Insecurity, low self esteem, it's a big issue, crying, so much emotion, so bad, it's a big deal to 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 Zoloft because I had a panic attack for the first time in a long time on Celsax. So far, so good.

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

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


These are not problems we normally talk about with our peers. Maybe we need to more.
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 teen turns 17 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 hoyas, monstera, ferns, it was heaven and I was high. 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.
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.
66% OF COLLEGE STUDENTS FEEL ISOLATED. ONLY 40% OF DIAGNOSED COLLEGE STUDENTS ACTUALLY RECEIVE HELP FOR THEIR MENTAL ILLNESS.


75% OF COLLEGE STUDENTS DRINK ALCOHOL.


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


70K OF OHIO TEENS ARE LGBTQ.


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


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

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

70% OF AMERICANS SUPPORT SAME SEX MARRIAGE.

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

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

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.
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.
62% of LGBTQ youth reported symptoms of major depression in the past two weeks

62% of diagnosed college students actually receive help for mental health

"I hate the way I feel, like I hate you. And I'm angry too. I just want to be alone. I want to die. It's all I want. I don't want to be here. I just want to be gone. I just want to die."

"I wish I could just do away with all the hateful things I said. I wish I could be someone else. I wish I could..."
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.

TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ANONYMOUS ONLINE COLLECTIVE JOURNAL, PLEASE VISIT TRANSPARENCYPROJ.COM