



BREAK- ING SILENCE

San Joaquin Delta College Students on Depression
deltabreakthesilence.org

BREAKING SILENCE

San Joaquin Delta College Students on Depression

A Project of the Delta College Communications and Fine Arts Department and Ethnic Media Services

DELTA – BREAKING THE SILENCE

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The following Delta College students participated in the Break the Silence project:

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Cover illustration: "Depression," painting by Vanessa Lerma-Felix

Foreword

In early 2018, students and faculty of the Communications and Fine Arts Department at Delta College partnered with Ethnic Media Services and a consultant-evaluator from Stanford University School of Medicine on a storytelling project to break the silence about depression on campus. Meeting in weekly workshops over an intense 10-week period, the students — who ranged in age from 19 to 60 — developed and conducted a survey of 158 fellow students, worked on multimedia projects to document their own and others' experiences, compiled their own recommendations for the college, and presented a campus forum on May 15 to share their results. This journal is a collection of their work.

The goal of the project is to shed light on depression, anxiety, stress and other mental health care issues that student participants believe — and the survey confirms — remain largely invisible on campus, and for some students are still taboo to discuss publicly. At a time when most community colleges provide limited mental health services or none at all, Break the Silence participants see the project as a model for peer-to-peer messaging that can be replicated on other campuses. The most consistent experience the project participants shared is the anguish of grappling with depression when they feel alone.

Ethnic Media Services, a project of the nonprofit San Francisco Study Center, supports ethnic and youth media programs nationwide. EMS extends our special thanks to Dr. Kathleen Hart, President of Delta College, for welcoming us to the campus; to Professor Adriana Brogger and Department of Communications and Fine Arts faculty for recruiting students to the project and providing valuable advice and support throughout; to Dr. Judith Prochaska of the Stanford Medical School faculty for encouraging the project and assigning Adrienne Lazaro as a consultant to evaluate it as a model for other campuses; and especially to Dr. Sandra Hernandez, CEO, and Catherine Teare, program officer of the California Health Care Foundation, for funding the project.

Our deepest thanks go to the student participants who trusted us with their personal stories, and devoted so much time and thought to the project. That such a talented and dedicated group came together and formed bonds with each other and with us is a testimony to Delta College, its faculty and student body as a center for learning, research and social activism.

— Sandy Close and Jaya Padmanabhan, Ethnic Media Services



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Photo Katelynn Castaneda

For Many Students, Talking About Depression Is Still Taboo

Jaya Padmanabhan and Adrienne Lazaro

FINDINGS

More than **30%** of students say they are not well informed about depression.

MAJOR THEMES

- Need for on-campus support
- Various sources of information
- Stigma
- Need for outreach
- Privacy

“I want to keep it to myself.” Students feel that trust and privacy are concerns when breaking the silence about depression.

“My friend suffers from depression and anxiety and she has turned to me for help and I’ve tried to calm her down, but I didn’t really know what to say,” states a 19-year-old male student of Mexican heritage when asked whether he knew how to help friends or family members deal with depression.

“I just tell them what I would want to hear,” responded another 19-year-old biracial female.

In an informal survey of 158 San Joaquin Delta College students, ranging in age from 16 to 49, 60% said that they were depressed or have experienced depression and anxiety. Sixty-eight percent said that they knew of a close family member or friend who had gone through depression, and 79% believe that depression is a serious health issue at Delta College.

More than half the respondents said that there needs to be more conversation on

campus about depression, whether by trained counselors, psychiatrists, speakers or educators, through workshops, classes, motivational speeches, seminars, other events and clubs. The most frequently cited desired resource was for counseling on campus, including group counseling.

Many students who report having experienced mental health issues are not aware of resources at Delta or nearby, and believe that the school should provide more services, information and resources to students.

Sixty-seven percent of the students surveyed could not name a single on-campus resource available to them.

Asked how comfortable they felt approaching a friend about whether they were depressed or needed help, students’ responses ranged from “not really, they should get professional help,” and “don’t have a clue,” to “yes, want to be there for them.”

“My little sister is bipolar and I’m her support. I drop everything to help her any time she needs me. I keep her on track with meds and



“Campus Loneliness”
Photo Katelynn Casteneda

RESPONDENTS

91.9%

stated a need for more services

79.7%

consider mental illness a serious problem at Delta

60.1%

say they have a problem with depression or anxiety

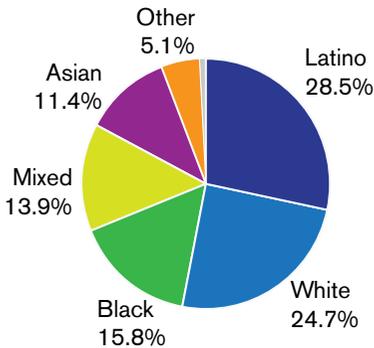
41%

are reluctant to talk about depression

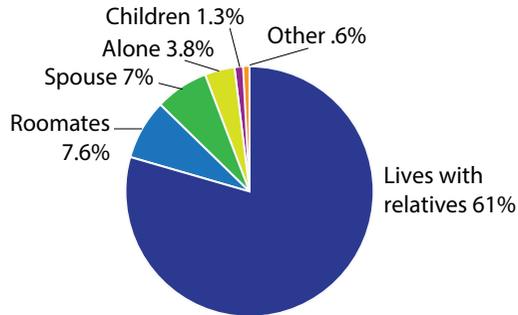
SURVEY RESPONDENTS

ETHNICITY

Declined to state 0.6%

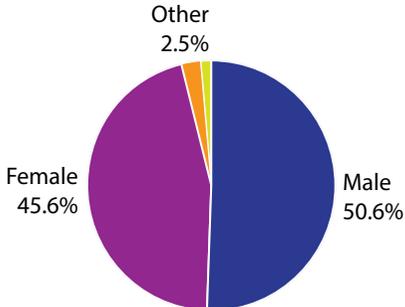


LIVING SITUATION



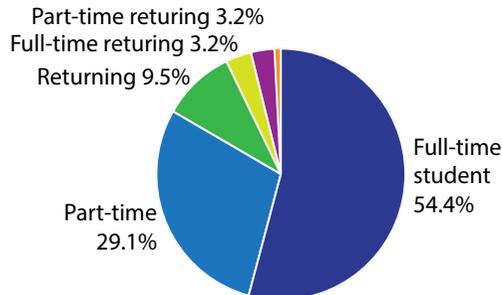
GENDER

Declined to state 1.3%

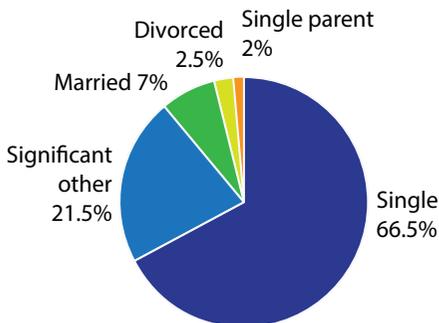


STUDENT STATUS

Declined to state .06%

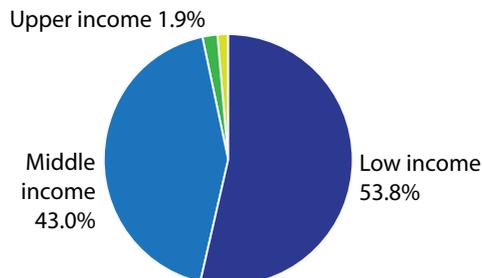


RELATIONSHIP STATUS



INCOME LEVEL

Declined to state 1.3%



Sources:
A student-led Break the Silence survey

talk to her daily,” responded a 36-year-old.

“I told them it was in their head,” wrote a 20-year-old female who is studying journalism.

Triggers of Depression

A 19-year-old Caucasian female student said her first experience of depression was in second grade. Many others had encountered some form of depression or anxiety in high school.

Often, painful events in their lives triggered these episodes.

“When my house was put up for auction,” said a 27-year-old student studying business at Delta.

A 23-year-old female said that after she lost her grandma to cancer, she found herself falling into depression more often. She surrounds herself with her loved ones as a coping strategy.

College and stress over graduation have led to thoughts of suicide, said a 26-year-old woman studying to become a preschool teacher.

Sharing their own experiences with depression is uncomfortable, said 41% of the students. Several fear that people may not understand if they reveal their own depression or anxiety.

Twenty-seven said that privacy was an over-riding concern. Eight said that they feared their family would find out, and eight others said that they had no one to talk to.

“No one wants to think they have a problem or illness,” stated a 23-year-old female.

“If people could relate and help guide you to other resources” it could help, admitted a 25-year-old, but there has to be trust and lack of judgment in that relationship.

Sources and Resources

The Internet, media, friends and family were the primary sources of information about depression among the respondents.

Research and health professionals are the least frequently cited sources of information

about mental health. Thirty-one respondents stated they had no sources of information.

Reaching Out

Many students recommend activities in expressive arts, like writing poetry, listening to music, working on graphic design or watching YouTube videos, when experiencing depression.

Others reach out to family members, friends, significant others or health professionals.

One student turned to his dad for help and advice when he felt depressed. “He had really good advice and we became a lot closer afterward,” said this 20-year-old white male who is studying electron microscopy.

Over a third of the surveyed students consider themselves “not well-informed” about depression, with 31 stating that they had no source of information on depression. Of those who feel knowledgeable about the issue, 59 cited the Internet as the primary source of information.

The need for someone to talk to was a consistent theme. Students mentioned the isolation they felt when just walking around with no place to congregate and the cafeteria closing early. Many recommended a physical space, such as a “resting room” or “somewhere where people can talk” to offset the isolation. □

“If people could relate and help guide you to other resources, it could help.”

DEPRESSION IN CALIFORNIA HIGHER EDUCATION

The demand for college mental health services is growing, according to CalMatters.

The number of students seeking counseling on campuses nationwide grew **five** times faster than enrollment between 2009-2015

(calmatters.org). California community colleges have a ratio of **1 counselor to every 7,000 students** systemwide, compared to **1 counselor to every**

1,100 students at University of California campuses. A bill in the California

Legislature proposes **1 to 1,500 as the standard**. In a 2016 survey of

students at 10 California community colleges, **more than half** said they felt overwhelming anxiety at some point in the past year, **39%** said they had been so

depressed it was difficult to function, and **1**

in 10 seriously considered suicide.

“Campus Loneliness”
Photo Katelynn Casteneda

Feeling Anxious? Sometimes It Makes Me Do My Best

Dawn L. Basnett

A new interest — photography — has helped Dawn start to overcome debilitating anxiety.

I have been dealing with anxiety for as long as I can remember. My first memory of anxiety is when I was 5 years old. We'd just moved to a new town, in the desert, and there was nothing but dirt. I went outside to play. Then I heard it. The sound of laughter. I peeked around the corner of our house and there they were: kids riding their tricycles in the street, smiling and laughing. Oh, how I wanted to be a part of that scene, to have fun, to make friends with them. But, as much as I wanted to run out there, I couldn't. My legs wouldn't move, they were stuck, paralyzed by fear.

Not much has changed since then as far as my desire to make friends and my inability to do so. In a way, I feel trapped between desire and reality. In reality I'm more of a loner and have, for the most part, been able to embrace this fact. Sure, I can say hello, introduce myself, even have a simple conversation, but to be free in being myself, to allow another person into my odd world, to know who I am, well, it just doesn't seem to be in the cards. At times the loneliness and sadness overwhelm me and I wonder why I have no friends. Am I weird? Is there something wrong with me?

While my anxiety has been quite debilitating throughout my life, I also have found that same anxious energy has been motivating at times. I realize this is an oxymoron but, nonetheless, it's factual. When it comes to academics, it seems I'm capable of harnessing the anxiety to my advantage. While I still get the exact same feelings of anxiety — the pounding heart, the sweaty palms, lightheadedness, lump in my throat, and negative thoughts of how I can't do this and should just turn and run — I don't run. I put one foot in front of the other and get it done. I have a high grade point

average because I am able to do this. Every job I've ever had, I have excelled at.

"Yes, I think that anxiety can be both debilitating and motivating," Brianna, a fellow student, agreed. "Once, when I had to write an essay for one of my classes. I did research starting from the second week of my 16-week semester. Near the end of the semester, I tried to use my research to formulate my final essay. But every time I tried to sit down and write, I would think about how I wasn't going to be able to write the essay in a way that I could feel proud about the final product."

Brianna experienced what she called "anxiety-induced paralysis." Luckily, she was able to channel that same anxiety in a direction that benefited her.

"My anxiety for meeting deadlines pushed me to finish the paper, to be polished and completed in only three weeks while juggling my other commitments," Brianna said.

Cynthia Teeple, a psychologist, told me that if she had to guess, maybe 30% of her patients suffer from anxiety. "Almost all the patients who complete our Anxiety classes and consistently practice the anxiety-reducing skills, significantly reduce their anxiety and increase their coping," she said.

The anxiety I experience goes far beyond the realms of building intimate relationships. My boyfriend and I spoke on the telephone for six weeks before finally meeting. Thereafter, we saw each other every other weekend for over a year. Eventually, we began to cohabitate, which has had ups and downs. I feel fortunate that he is supportive of me and understands my anxiety.

In social gatherings, I'd still rather be in a corner with my back to the wall just observing other interactions. The moment I move from that comfort zone I am overwhelmed by all the movement around me. I can't hear, I can't think. All the external stimuli are too much. My fear

“Am I weird? is there something wrong with me?”



of dogs, heights, water, bees and the dark has also limited me on the activities I will partake in.

However, last year I took my first photography class and found my passion. A few months ago, my boyfriend's friend asked if I would take pictures of his band's CD release party. I don't even like going to the shows for obvious reasons. But I agreed. What I discovered while I took the pictures of the band performing was that I didn't feel any anxiety. It was as though I was someone else, looking through another's eyes.

As I took the photos of the band on the stage I imagined myself as a confident, world-renowned photographer. What would they do? How would they get the shots? When I'm behind the camera the rest of the world disappears. It's kind of like how the parched lands of the desert soak up the rains and its soul is restored. Perhaps being on the other side of the lens has provided me with an escape. A way to be social without being social. □



Battling Anxiety: Tips from a Psychologist

Techniques and ideas for keeping anxiety at bay. Practice them every day, especially when you're not anxious. You want them to come naturally when you do feel anxious.

- Learn square breathing, which, along with other anti-anxiety skills, are available online at <http://tinyurl.com/y9buq6vz>.
- Get enough sleep.
- Eat nutritious food.
- Exercise: Walk at least 20 minutes a day.
- Learn how to relax, especially at night. When alone with your thoughts, there's a tendency to worry.
- Nurture an attitude of gratitude to dispel negative thoughts and judgments as they arrive.
- Stay in just-the-facts present. Try not to imagine disaster solutions or project out into the future.

Top
"Depression Eyes"
Digital illustration Dawn
L. Basnett

Dawn L. Basnett
Photo Katelynn Castaneda

Breaking Silence with a Friend

A Mother Shares the Story of Her Son's Mental Illness

Ianthe Chase



Ianthe Chase
Photo Dawn L. Basnett

For a long time, Ianthe Chase's friend, who's her age, told Ianthe nothing about her struggle with a schizophrenic son. Now she wants to tell the story and find the solace that comes from speaking out. This is an excerpt. Read the full interview at deltabreakthesilence.org.

How old are your children?

My son is 37, my older daughter is 38 and my younger daughter is 23.

How old was your son when you noticed that there was something different?

I'm going to say he was 15. I saw that he wasn't doing well in school. Also, he wasn't grasping concepts.

What did the depression look like?

Sometimes anger, sometimes sadness. Sometimes, he just didn't want to get out of bed.

How did he get along with your other children?

As they got older, maybe there was a little strife between my oldest daughter and him. Even today, their relationship is a bit strained. I don't know if it's because of his illness.

Is he good at describing their relationship?

A little. He thinks she doesn't like him.

Does he have a reason?

He never gives a reason.

Did you seek a mental health specialist when he first became ill?

I tried but it was hard to get him to go.

How did you go about finding someone?

With mental health, when your child is under 18, you get a social worker, a psychologist and a psychiatrist.

So, who did you call first?

First I called a mental health facility, and their response was basically, "If you can get him down here, we can help him." They had some really good people. But, in the end, one day I walked into his room and he said, "I want to kill myself, I want to kill myself." He had a belt, and he had a plan. He meant it. He was just so depressed. So I did what I had to do: I got him into a facility in Modesto.

An in-home care facility?

No, a psychiatric hospital where he stayed for maybe about a week so that they could diagnose him.

How did he do in the facility?

Not good, not good, not good at all. He thought nothing was wrong with him, and honestly, I, too, thought the doctors were wrong.

Was he on any kind of medication at that point?

Nothing. No medication, and as I talked to more psychiatrists and psychologists they came up with the diagnosis of schizophrenia.

What did that mean to you?

I did not know. I said, "Now you're wrong, you're wrong." That was my first reaction. You are wrong, check this again. This can't be right. I didn't know anything about it.

Do you know what they do to diagnose schizophrenia?

I asked myself that later on. From what I gather, it's a test and there are certain questions, certain long-term behaviors.

At what point do you feel you were informed, that you knew a little bit about depression and schizophrenia?

When he got a very good social worker who guided us through the process. He was going to need social security, and he guided us through that. He guided us through what schizophrenia and depression were for a young person with these disorders. He also explained that there was much help out there for young people under 18 — they could go to a school of their choice that dealt with people with those illnesses.

How did your son interact with your husband in the years leading up to the diagnosis?

There were problems — a lot of anger with him.

Did it affect your marriage?

It was very difficult because there was no single answer. We didn't know how to react, what to do when he wasn't med-compliant but needed the meds. Initially, I was in total denial, like this is not happening. For the first 10 years, I felt no, this is just not right, this is the wrong diagnosis, he doesn't have this problem.

What did you think was going on?

I don't know. I think denial was my coping mechanism. I knew, though, that I couldn't stay there.

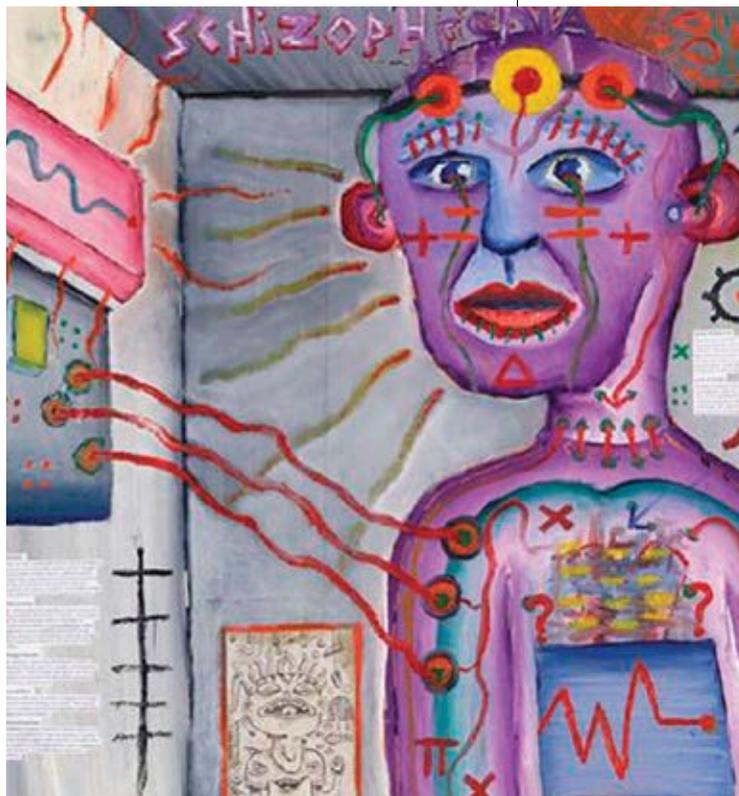
Do you know what kind of meds he was on?

Initially it was for depression, schizophrenia.

Does your son use any substances?

No, surprisingly. Because often people with mental health issues use alcohol or drugs. He doesn't smoke weed, doesn't smoke cigarettes, and he doesn't drink alcohol.

After 18, when he was out of the home and had lived in a couple of facilities, when do you think it dawned on him that he needed to pay attention and focus? Has he come to



that realization yet?

I would say from the age of 17 — when I went to his room and he was suicidal — it took him about 10 years to realize that when he was off his medication he always felt worse.

So, you were both on the same timeframe.

Ten years later, you both came to the same conclusion: This is something you have to work on, and are you working on it together?
Yes.

Is he still very much a part of the family?

Yes, I'd say that denial is someplace you could go, but you can't live there. Not just that, but you have to love your child no matter what or who they are. But it's hard. Like I said, it's like a death.

"Self Portrait"
Acrylic collage by
Craig Finn, a
schizophrenia patient,
Creative Commons

“So many girls liked my son. He was handsome and tall. Girls still like him. But when the mental illness started to get worse, that part of his life was just put to the side.”

A part of him?

The person you thought he was going to be. Maybe you thought he was going to go to college. He’s no longer that person.

Did he learn how to read later than your other two children?

No, he learned to read pretty much on time, but his math skills were questionable.

Does he have any other type of disabilities, dyslexia, for example, or learning disabilities?

No, he’s been tested for all of that.

How does your son’s schizophrenia manifest itself?

He hears voices. He can’t turn them off but the medication helps a little.

Does he regularly go to a psychiatrist? Does he have a group that he goes to?

Before he got sick physically this year, he was doing really good, living on his own, seeing a psychiatrist. But his flu turned into pneumonia, and he had to have surgery. They couldn’t give him his medicines because he was incubated. So boom, he was dropped off his meds. We’re trying to get them back up, but he’s still not there.

How does your religion play into this?

We are Muslim we practice Islam. Overall in the big scheme of the religion, it’s not talked about.

Is it talked about in the Muslim community?

Not really. It’s just not addressed and I’ve been wanting to address it, within the community, not just because of my son but because it’s like there’s a belief that this doesn’t happen in our

community. This doesn’t happen to our race. It happens to anyone and everyone no matter your socio-economic background, no matter your race or religion.

Has he had a girlfriend or a job?

The first girlfriend that I know about was in Arizona, and he actually went there on his own to visit her. I talked to her and to her mother on the phone. She was so pretty.

How did they meet?

It was in the 1980s on a telephone chat line. I still have a picture of her, and, you know, he still talks about her today. That was 20 years ago. As his mental illness got worse, the relationship fell apart. So many girls liked my son. He was handsome and tall. Girls still like him. But when the mental illness started to get worse, that part of his life was just put to the side. He did have a job, at Psychiatric Health Facility in the front, after he went through the Martin Gipson Center and the Wellness Center and he loved it.

In light of what’s happening in society with people with mental illness and the authority of the police, do you have any fears for your son? Has he ever been violent?

There were times when he would get really, really angry with my husband and me. But he’s never had any interaction with the police — I have talked to him about it and told him what to do in case he does.

Thank you so much for taking the step. Your sitting here with me and talking about this is going to help because people will listen and say, “This resonates with me.” It’s courageous that you’re doing this. I knew you had the words. □

Our Mom's Battle With Depression

What My Sister and I Never Knew

Tyler Jimenez

A son writes about how his mother fell into depression after a tough divorce and how she learned to cope.

Depression is never easy to talk about, with friends or even family. Depression is something people would rather not bring up. Not speaking up or telling others about depression is something I know all too well.

I do not suffer from depression but know several close family members — my mother and stepsister — who do. Both went through depression, and it affected them in different ways.

Before I was born my mother went through a rough divorce with my stepsister's father. After my mom divorced, she had to move out of their home and was forced to raise my sister alone in a tiny apartment in Ripon. Life was not easy for my mom or my sister.

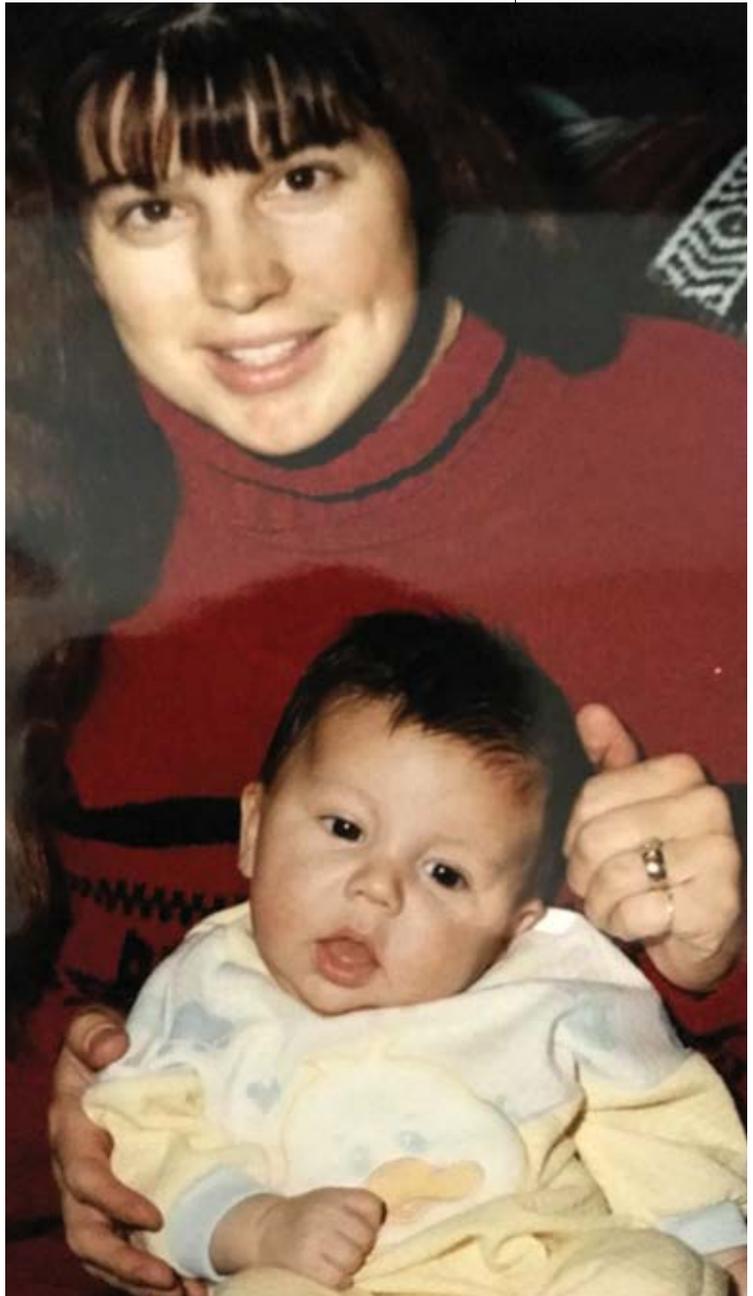
Mom was, to say the least, frustrated. She blamed herself for things she didn't have full control over.

My mother believed that she could and should have made her relationship work. That she could have had a home for my sister instead of an apartment no bigger than a storage unit. These things kept weighing on my mother to the point my sister began to feel it, though at the time she was only in preschool. She didn't fully understand why my mother was acting the way she did.

My mother eventually sought help after some convincing from my father who she married when my sister was about six years old. But, no matter how many people she saw, or how many different treatments she underwent, nothing seemed to help.

At some point, my mom stopped going to see doctors and the therapist. None could help her deal with her symptoms. She decided not to spend the time or money.

Nothing changed for at least a few months.



Tyler's mother with
Tyler as a baby
Family photo



“Problems from this perfect girl slowly began to surface. My sister was constantly — if not every day — sick in some way. Some days she would totally skip sleeping and then avoid people.”

“Fixing Windows,
Mending Minds”
Photo Miya Hosaka,
Tyler’s sister

One day, one of the windows in my mother’s apartment got shattered by her. She hit it accidentally while moving a chair. To get it repaired was a bit pricey. But she didn’t want to leave it broken. So mom decided to learn how to fix it. A person at work taught her how to switch out glass. (This was before the internet had ASK.com). After a few days and a few failures, my mother put in a new window.

More importantly, with that success, my mother discovered a new feeling about herself. She felt proud and she felt accomplished. It was the first time in so long that my mom felt good.

So she decided to do more work around the house. She started off small, painting rooms, rewiring some lights. That kind of thing. Then she moved to bigger projects like tearing out tile to put in carpet.

Her work on the house continued to feed her sense of pride and accomplishment. It wasn’t a way for my mother to cope with her depression. Rather, it was her way of overcoming it. This was exactly what she needed: to

overcome her own demons.

However, while my mother was discovering her own treatment, unbeknownst to her, her daughter began to experience depression.

My Sister Blamed Herself

After the divorce, my sister saw my mother go through depression and didn’t understand why she changed. Why she always seemed angry or didn’t want to talk to her own child as much. A feeling in my sister grew and developed. She felt she wasn’t good enough for my mother, and the reason my mother was always upset was because of her.

It wasn’t that way at all, but my mother never told my sister what she was going through. As a young girl, my sister tried to figure it out herself. She arrived at her own conclusions: that she wasn’t what my mother wanted.

That’s when my sister changed. She started putting all her effort into school and helping my mother, as a way to prove her worth. But my mother thought — since she had started working hard around the house — that my sister was doing well at home and at school. Far from it, though my mother couldn’t have known. But she never asked.

Years later, when my sister was in high school and I was in third grade, I’d always thought of my sister as a straight-A student, physically strong, talented and my parents couldn’t have been prouder of her.

But problems from this perfect girl slowly began to surface. My sister was constantly — if not every day — sick in some way. Some days she would totally skip sleeping and then avoid people. My parents tried to take my sister to a doctor, but she wouldn’t budge. All they could do was watch as my sister slowly got more and more fragile.

It wasn’t until my sister’s first year of col-

lege that she finally snapped. She dropped out of college. To my parents' shock, she attempted suicide. She survived only because my father was home that day.

She was taken to the hospital where, after tests, they diagnosed her as depressive and put her on suicide watch. My sister was silent during the first few weeks she was out of the hospital. I can't imagine what was going through her head. When my sister turned 19, she moved out of our house and lived in an apartment.

Life didn't get easier for her. She went through tough jobs with horrible schedules. Three bad relationships and two divorces. My parents always checked up on her to see how she was doing. She was just living, going to work, then home, repeat.

Things Turn Around

My sister is 29 and only now am I seeing things turn around for her. She has a good job, a nice home, but, more importantly, she is discovering that feeling my mother had when she began to heal.

Last year our family went to Tahoe and she came with us. There she and my father hiked up a mountain trail. I don't know what she saw or felt that day. But since then she has been hiking on trails every week. This summer she plans on going on a multi- mountain hike.

I asked her why she was doing this and what drove her to do it. She told me she wants to find herself. She wants to find what she wants beyond the streets of stone and towers of metal. My sister is looking for peace, and, I believe, that like my mother, she will find it.

It's hard to think of your family undergoing hard times. I never knew about my mother and sister's depression till I was 18. I was surprised and upset that, unaware of my own



sister's pain, I gave her a hard time some days when we lived together.

I wanted to tell their story for those who don't want to speak up and for those who have done everything under the sun, yet still can't find inner solace. This is something that you can conquer, that you can beat. □

Tyler Jimenez
Photo Dawn L. Basnett

Beware the Rabbit Holes of the Internet

A Former Addict's Warning

David Powell



“Addiction”
Photo Taylor Wick

Battling addiction most of his life, David found relief on the anonymous platforms of the Internet, only to realize they turned his pain outward into anger and hate.

I have always had an addictive personality, as far back as I can remember. My father called it an obsessive personality, and my mother suspected it was a light case of autism or Aspergers. At times, I wondered if I really was lightweight autistic but have since abandoned the idea. It was a crutch for years.

Psychiatrists never seemed to know what was wrong with me. I've been formally diagnosed as being bipolar, having ADD, and, as an edgy teenager, having a borderline personality disorder.

While I acknowledge that there's some sort of chemical imbalance that could be corrected by the right combination of psychiatric medications, most days I choose to believe I am simply an addict.

One of the earliest manifestations of my addictive personality was when I was first introduced to the Internet as a preteen. My daily life obsessions, such as Goped and paintball, carried over into my online browsing habits, and I would stay up until my parents fell asleep and sneak onto the computer to browse forums such as “Gopednation” and “PBNation” until 4 a.m., even on school nights.

Drugs eventually entered the equation. A harmless bowl session here and there developed into copious amounts of different substances and buying and selling. I dropped out of school to pursue drug addiction full-time.

At 26, with the help of methadone, I stepped away from the needle for a few years, went to college and met the girl of my dreams. I had everything I thought I'd ever want in life, but I had this nagging impulse to destroy everything and go back to hustling to support us. I soon was selling dope again, despite my girlfriend's objections.

I began to slide into one of the most intense depressions I've ever experienced. Like many others with mental illness, I isolated myself to the point where even an online handle was more identification than I wanted to show. This is where anonymous forums come into play.

4Chan — “the hate machine of the Internet” — is one such site. On different message boards, one can interact with others from around the world anonymously. I've never gravitated toward boards for science, math or anime, but toward the edgier boards such as /b/ [and later on /pol/]. Both have been safe havens for my degeneracy. There, people come together from all corners of the globe to shit-post anonymously with other social outcasts they can relate with.

Posts from “politically incorrect” /pol/ found their way into /b/ during the 2016 elections. Some things being said about religions

and ethnicities on /pol/ were unsettling. I didn't believe them and set out to prove them wrong. But when I began to look into the hateful things being said, I found many contained kernels of fact, which made them seem believable.

In the flash of an eye, I had been introduced to the "red pill," an analogy drawn from The Matrix film. In it, the main character can take either the red pill, which will open his eyes to the reality of the universe, or the blue pill that allows him to return to the ignorant bliss he's been living in for his entire life. The meme centered on the idea that conservative ideologies are correct, or "red pill," while liberal thoughts are blissfully ignorant of reality.

I couldn't see this propaganda for what it was. But looking back on it, being introduced to a political ideology allowed me to shift my feelings of worthlessness, shame and failure onto others. After years of being depressed, I was finally angry and had targets for my anger.

I remember a conversation I had with my ex-girlfriend after ranting about some racially charged topic, and she asked, "Where's all this coming from?" I told her that deep down, I hated myself — even in the middle of all the insanity, I would still have a moment or two of clarity. She tried hard to fill the void in me, but my disease wouldn't allow me to let her help. After four years, I gave up. I told her I was toxic, not the kind of man she deserved.

It was during the years I spent on 4chan, particularly /pol/, that I was transformed from your average, run-of-the-mill, depressed drug addict into somebody headed toward a full-on, "come-try-to-take-my-guns, Hitler-did-nothing-wrong" nut job at an alarming speed. If you didn't walk like me, talk like me, think like me, look like me, you weren't welcome in my home. I didn't want you on my street. In my town. My country. I didn't want to breathe the same air as you.

It took turning myself into the county jail to serve time on an old warrant that was the turning point in my story. I had earlier dismissed the idea of unwarranted police brutality, but in jail I was treated as a subhuman by many officers, predominantly white, and treated fairly by fellow inmates, most of whom were not. I stayed off the Internet for a month, reading books instead. On my release, I reintegrated into the real world, interacted with neighbors and friends of all ages, ethnicities, sexual identities, and religions, and eventually returned to sanity.

Today I make a conscious effort to avoid destructive thinking. I still disagree with some cultural practices but don't let it consume me. A big part of being able to let all that go, I think, is being content with myself. I believe it's impossible to truly hate another human being without first hating yourself.

I'm currently enrolled in college full time, employed part time, active in a couple of local 12-step fellowships, and am reuniting with old friends and making new ones.

I try to fill my life with positive things, doing my best not to let substance abuse or Internet addiction get a strangle hold on my life. I fight to maintain my humanity and not let hate for anything or anyone, myself included, consume me. Through the grace of a higher power I choose to call "God," I'm able to place principles before personalities.

For the first time in my adult life, I can say I'm living my life to the best of my ability.

My advice to anyone reading this essay is that if you're the type that seeks out edgy content when in a funk, instead call on your friends and family in times of need — don't allow yourself to get sucked down any rabbit holes that could potentially destroy you. □



"The meme centered on the idea that conservative ideologies are correct, or "red pill," while liberal thoughts are blissfully ignorant of reality."

"The Red Pill"
Photo
Lise Stampfli Torme

Finding My Support System on the Internet

Jason Teixeira



Jason Teixeira
Photo Dawn L. Basnett

Jason found the Internet a haven, especially when he goes through tough times. It provides him a safe space to meet new friends who share his interests and where he can exercise his creativity without judgment.

“The Internet is a waste of time!”

“The people on the other side could be pedophiles or rapists!”

“You can’t trust those people.”

Many of us have heard this often. We’ve heard that the Internet is not a place you can build trusting relationships with other people; it’s not a space where you can be open and honest and where you can find help. I’m not going to totally dismiss those claims. It’s true there are places and sites where you can’t trust the people there. However, the Internet also can be a place where you find friends and connect with them just like you would in person.

I’ve seen both sides of the coin. I’ve seen the most disgusting toxicity online, while some of my best friends communicate with me exclusively through this medium.

People I met on the Internet helped me with my depression. They were there for me through the absolute worst I’ve been through, and they listened to me when no one else would.

Nearly a year ago, I was kicked out of a roleplaying community on the social media website Reddit. This community of like-minded people that I had helped build grew from 30 members to about 100 people who felt the same passions I did. I loved my time there.

But, after a particularly heated incident when I vented my frustrations about a fellow member who had become toxic and manipulative, those in power took offense and turned me into a social pariah. I wasn’t welcome in that community anymore. I was forced to leave the place. I felt devastated to the point that I didn’t want to get out of bed.

However, to my astonishment, a number of members supported me, and even left the old community of their own volition because they wanted to be there for me. With their help, I formed a new community, one that still stands to this day.

“I feel that learning about different people and seeing how many others genuinely care about me, without ever even seeing me in person, has helped me break out of my shell over time and gain a bit more confidence in myself.”

I’m still incredibly close to those individuals. I see them as family and go to them to talk when I feel lonely or down for any reason. And I met them on the Internet!

I asked a few of those individuals questions regarding loneliness and depression. Their experiences somewhat match mine.

Asked whether online friends were closer than those made in real life, Brandon Brewer, a friend out of Louisiana, responded: “Yes and no. Closer than most of my friends back in high school, and even a decent amount more than a lot of the ones from college? Yup. More than my closest friends that I’ve had for about 10+ years? Not so much. Why? Because with few exceptions, the friends I’ve made in real life were a result of being stuck around them for extended periods of time, day after day (i.e. school). The ones I’ve made online were a result of us sharing a common interest, and meeting while pursuing those interests. I think it provides a more solid foundation for a lasting friendship.”

When individuals come together based on a common interest rather than proximity, it makes the connections stronger and grow more quickly. You become closer as friends because that common interest drives you closer, keeping you together.

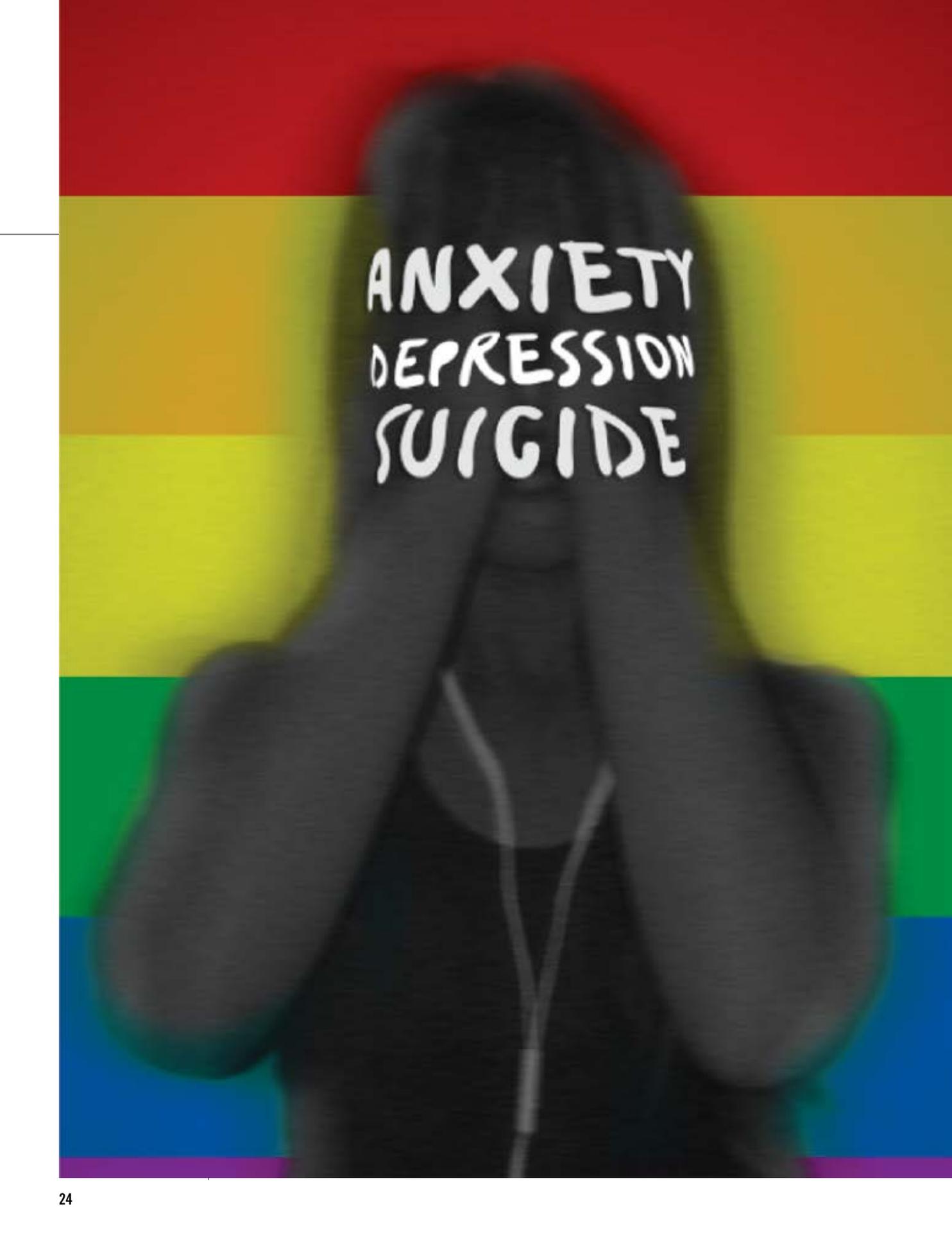
Dylan Sanders, a college student at Hofstra University in New York, told me how his

online experiences helped him open up more in real life and become a little more extroverted: “Of course, I’m still mostly an introvert but back before I started making friends online, I hardly ever talked or joked around with people I didn’t already know; and while it’s still not common for me, I feel that learning about different people and seeing how many others genuinely care about me, without ever even seeing me in person, has helped me break out of my shell over time and gain a bit more confidence in myself.”

I stand with Dylan here — I’ve gained tremendous confidence and have seen myself grow emotionally because of these online friendships.

An online friend from Michigan, Mick P. Hausen, says that he does turn to online friends when he’s depressed and down. “They may not be able to physically help but having someone to listen to my problems or even just a place to escape for a little bit has helped my depression. Having people with shared interests to speak to has been great for me.”

Contrary to those who may deride the Internet, it can be a place to find someone to help you up. I know that without it, I wouldn’t have met many of my finest friends. □

A person is shown from the chest up, with their hands covering their face in a gesture of distress or despair. The person is wearing a dark-colored long-sleeved shirt. The background is a horizontal rainbow flag with stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The words "ANXIETY", "DEPRESSION", and "SUICIDE" are written in white, bold, uppercase letters across the person's hands. The text is arranged in three lines: "ANXIETY" on the top line, "DEPRESSION" on the middle line, and "SUICIDE" on the bottom line.

ANXIETY
DEPRESSION
SUICIDE

After Years on the Street, College Is My Way Out

Heidi Echols

With no “magic answer,” Heidi fights on against extreme odds to deal with multiple challenges.

It began when I was 19 and my mother, Barbara, also bipolar, threw me out of the house. With nowhere to go, I ended up on the streets of San Francisco, scared and alone. That first day, I met Michael who was into getting high. He wanted some money so he got me my first “date.” I continued accepting dates more so I could feed his habit and stay connected to him. Michael got me to try a hit of crack. It fed my loneliness and depression and soon I was addicted.

Living on the street I had many near-death experiences. I had guns and knives pulled on me, I was kidnapped and experienced sexual violence many times. One day, I decided I’d had enough and called my grandparents, Ken and Lynn in Idaho, and, luckily, they sent for me. I rejoined my family, got clean, got a job and an apartment, and I was doing well.

I aspired to be a truck driver and soon realized my dream after moving back to California. But I became depressed when I realized I wasn’t doing well at my job. I was in a relationship at the time with James, always fighting with him, so my mom, Barbara, took me to a doctor who diagnosed me as being bipolar. My relationship with James soon ended because he couldn’t handle the stress of my ups and downs.

One day, driving cross country, I met Ray, another truck driver — we hit it off and he started riding with me. I was still struggling with depression despite the medicines. Sadly, Ray got me started on getting high again, and quickly I was back on a destructive path.

I became suicidal one day behind the wheel, and when I told my doctor, he took me off driving. During this time, I had two apartments and lost them both to my addiction.

At the moment, yes, I’m homeless, and sleeping on a friend’s couch. But I’m hoping the discipline of coming to school will help pull me up so I can get an apartment. My name has come up on the Section 8 waiting list, and if I get approved, I’ll be getting an apartment in the next few months.

I’m not being treated by any psychiatrist, since my Humana insurance is not accepted by my psychiatrist. My primary care doctor doesn’t want to give me my mental health medications, so every day I wake up depressed and experience the pain of my feelings till the moment I fall asleep. And what do I do to escape? I get high, I sell myself, and I take the forks on a road that a “normal” person would not.

School provides me some solace. It gives me something to do with my day and that helps ease the depression a bit. But after I leave the campus, it hits me again, and I go around town and think and think, getting lost in my own head.

I don’t have a magic answer or know how my story will turn out. All I know is that if you are depressed, I sincerely hope you get help. Reach out to someone who can help you help yourself. Don’t follow in my footsteps — this is no life for anyone.

As for me, I won’t quit trying. I will continue to come to school, and I will find a psychiatrist or a doctor to help me, give me medications, and suggest coping techniques. I know I’m a fighter and a survivor. It never gets easier, but somehow, I will manage to deal.

I’m a 46-year-old community college student, struggling with bipolar depression, drug addiction, prostitution and homelessness. This is my fourth attempt at attending college. This time I refuse to give up. □



Heidi Echols
Photo Dawn L. Basnett

Previous page
“Basile”
Digital illustration by
Celine Pham

There Is No Normal in Art

Finding Myself Through Graphic Design

Celine Pham

“Other kids were doing drugs — I escaped inside Adobe Photoshop. In art, you’re judged by your originality, not by society’s norms.”

Before coming out a young woman has trouble fitting into the expectations of society.

Imagine going home every night from school feeling angry, sad, alone and empty. Everywhere you look, strangers, loved ones and peers are being themselves, confident in their own skins. Imagine looking into the mirror and not liking what you see of your own reflection. Others seem comfortable, even proud of who they are. But who are you? How can you be proud of yourself when you don’t know who you are? That was how I felt. That was me, Celine.

But all along I did know deep inside who I was. I couldn’t face it because I was terrified of the reactions and opinions of my loved ones. I let society’s norms control my life and shape me, because I was afraid to admit to myself and the people I love that I am a lesbian.

In my Asian catholic home, same sex marriage was looked down upon. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people were objects of humor, of ridicule, to the straight people around me. My family and friends did

not take LGBTQ people seriously. I did not want to be looked down upon or laughed at. So, I pretended. This made me depressed. I felt alone and empty. I didn’t know anyone from the LGBTQ community who I could talk to. There was no help at my middle school or high school for LGBTQ counseling.

I poured myself into my art, spending hours after school working on graphic design ideas. Other kids were doing drugs — I escaped inside Adobe Photoshop. In art, you’re judged by your originality, not by society’s norms.

I came out in my junior year of high school. My family had a period of adjustment, but now they have accepted who I am. Initially, I felt they believed this was a “phase.” I think they didn’t understand because we’re not the same. It’s different to be a support system for friends, but entirely different when it’s a family member. I understand that.

In college, I had a better sense of who I was. Who was that person staring back at me in the mirror? Did I know that person? I could finally look at that reflection and answer yes to those questions. Today, I try to be strong for others who don’t have a voice because they are also afraid.

I try to be strong for the LGBTQ people who were heartlessly murdered in Orlando, Florida, at the Pulse nightclub shooting. I am afraid that my death may be caused by a LGBTQ hate crime. I don’t feel comfortable using the restrooms at school nor do I feel safe in this society.

I am always cautious of negative comments about how my appearance, even though I know it comes from a lack of knowledge of what it means to be LGBTQ. Sometimes I don’t realize how different I am until someone points it out because being in my own skin now feels so normal. □



"Be Yourself"
Digital illustration
Celine Pham

A Place to Help Ease Anxiety

Celine Pham and Katelynn Castaneda

This is an excerpt of an interview that Celine Pham and Katelynn Castaneda conducted with student Basile Lake at the campus Pride Center.

What is your experience with mental health?

I suffer from anxiety and I was diagnosed with ADHD when I was a kid. And now I'm diagnosed with general anxiety disorder. This is part of my therapy, coming to college and interacting with people, since I pretty much isolated myself from people since I was 17 till now. It's been awhile — I'm 31 now.

Do you feel like there is a supportive community for mental health here on campus?

Yes, in this room — the Pride Center. When I first walked in, it was like one of the first places I didn't feel any anxiety. Normally, when I go anywhere or talk to anybody there's that low-level anxiety or high-level anxiety.

What are some coping skills you use?

Meditation. I count backwards from a really high number by an abstract number like from 1000 to 3. That way, my mind is engaging in something else and I'm not freaking out. Or I'll have music playing at a low level, where I can still hear the person talking but I have something else I'm focusing on as well.

Who do you turn to for help?

My mom and my step mom. And they help to support me, so I'm not freaking out all the time. If I have a freak-out episode, whether it's about something as minor as going to the store or as major as studying for a test, I can talk to them and they can calm me down.

How could Delta help with mental illness or of being LGBTQ?

A licensed therapist on campus to help talk to the students not just for LGBTQ but in general to students. □



Katelynn Castaneda
(top) and Celine Pham
Photos Dawn L. Basnett

Using Humor to Cope

Celine Pham and Katelynn Castaneda

Celine Pham and Katelynn Castaneda interviewed student Sean McKinty at the campus Pride Center (excerpted).

What is your experience with mental health?

I've been mentally ill my whole f-ing life, I have clinical depression and ADHD. The depression pretty much rules my life. Most of the time I skip class because I feel so tired. Once, I stayed in bed for three days.

What type of support do you receive from the LGBTQ community for your mental illness?

I wouldn't say I receive any support. I guess I'm happier here. It's better than being at home.

How do you feel professors treat trans people here on campus?

Like everybody else. I go in and say "Hey, this is my name," and I put my name on the roster in parenthesis. There's no problem. If they say something like "she," I'll correct them and they say, "I'm sorry."

What are some coping skills you use?

Humor, just making fun of myself.

Do you feel that there's help on campus when you need it?

Probably at the counselor's office. I've only been there once.

Is there anything Delta can change to help students with mental health needs?

Resources are not easy to access. You have to ask the counseling staff for those resources. Tell people where they can get help instead of having to search for it. I only know where the resources are because I had a mental breakdown and went to the counselor's office.

That's right, you absolutely shouldn't have to have a mental breakdown to get the help you need.

Make it more available. □

RESOURCES

Compiled by Dawn L. Basnett

24-Hour Suicide Prevention Hotline (800) 273-8255

The Crisis Clinic

1212 N. California St. Stockton, CA 95202

Walk in hours M-F 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Crisis phone — 24-hour response: **(209) 468-8686**

Crisis fax: **(209) 468-2380**

SUPPORT — TALK/TEXT/CHAT LINES

Know the Signs (800) 273-8255

Mental Health America/Text MHA to 741741 (24/7, free)

**National Drug and Alcohol Abuse Hotline
(800) 662-HELP (4357)**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(800) 273-8255 or send text to 838255**

Trevor Project (LGBTQ) (866) 488-7386

Youth Crisis Line (text/talk/chat) (800) 843-5200

**San Joaquin County BHS Consumer Support Warm Line
(209) 468-3585 (24/7)**

San Joaquin County Mental Health Crisis Line (209) 468-8686

The Wellness Center

1109 N. California St. Stockton, CA 95202

(209) 451-3977

Psychcentral.com — online counseling or to find help and resources

Be a Visible and Vocal Ally

Celine Pham and Katelynn Castaneda



Journal illustration on depression
Roman Black

Celine Pham and Katelynn Castaneda conduct an interview with Ricky Gutierrez-Maldonado, the student program specialist at San Joaquin Delta College's Pride Center. He develops student-centered, student-focused programs that meet LGBTQ students' specific needs and experiences.

What does Delta college do to make the campus more communal?

There are events or programs on campus that attempt to mitigate or alleviate feelings of anxiety or depression, but more can be done. Having an actual physical space where students can come and decompress is one important aspect.

A second is creating a sense of community for those who seek it out, like organizing a book club where we are reading from LGBTQ authors. We can do movie nights or game days. These clubs and activities bring people together and create friendships, relationships. Seeing others going through similar things helps to alleviate those feelings of being alone that can contribute to anxiety or depression. I believe it's important to create that sense of community and that visibility on campus.

Third is to have a student support service center, maybe even a mental health service center. We don't have a health center on campus, either.

Last, it would be nice to have some sort of student hub, like a union, where all the student support services are located — like have the Pride Center next to foster youth services and veterans' services. Then a student can go to one space and see all the services available for them.

[Katelynn notes that the community college in Sacramento has a health center where you can at least get free condoms to be safe.]

Yeah, it's sort of unusual for a community college our size to not have a health center. Especially with the health disparities that exist here in San Joaquin County.

I know some people think that goes beyond the scope of what a community college should do. Delta's not a social services agency. But when health and mental health issues are affecting academic performance, it's in the community college's best interests to address them. Even if it can't provide a health center, then build strong relationships with services in the community. □

“The LGBTQ community population nationally has higher rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide.”

If a student who comes into your office seems stressed out, what service do you help to provide?

It depends on the specific situation. If it's a crisis, I'd make sure the student is getting connected to a crisis counselor or a crisis intervention service. If it's not a crisis, I usually call counseling, make a referral or email a counselor to check for available appointments. I've also walked students down to the counseling office, even if it wasn't a crisis.

In your work here with the LGBTQ community, do you see a lot of depression or mental illness?

Yes. The LGBTQ community population nationally has higher rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide, all caused by outside stressors. A lot of people read that as: “Oh, higher rates in the LGBTQ, so there is something wrong with being LGBTQ.”

But it's not that — it's all the other things like unaccepting parents, friends who cast you

aside, feeling like you don't belong somewhere. Especially if you are LGBTQ and low income — then it can be even worse.

What can we do to make sure your voice is heard?

In my trainings, I talk about being a visible and a vocal ally. Being vocal just means mentioning LGBTQ concerns, so when there are discussions about mental health, we can say, “Okay, maybe we can talk about specific populations, like the LGBTQ community.” Those students may have unique experiences that affect their mental health service needs. We also have to be vocal with staff of community mental health services, making sure they've been trained in LGBTQ issues or concerns and that they don't have any biases. Then we simply have to let students know that that resource is there.

Like you said, Celine, you didn't even know the Pride Center existed. If we have an LGBTQ-awareness campaign, show up and say, “I'm here and making a commitment to be an ally to this community.” □



Ricky
Gutierrez-Maldonado
Photo Katelynn Castaneda

Out of Depression Came Hope and Light

TV Star of “Buried Life” Still Struggles with Coping

Mikael Honzell

Ben Nemtin
Photo Boo Gunnarson

MTV celebrity Ben Nemtin talks about his demons, based on a radio interview by Carmen Cruz and Mikael Honzell. Listen to the podcast on deltabreakthesilence.org

It's easy to feel discouraged when things don't go as planned. This can cause one to perceive things differently, see life as black and white. Even people who seem to have things figured out on the outside struggle on the inside.

Ben Nemtin, co-founder of the MTV series “Buried Life,” has dealt with depression on and off throughout his life.

“I had this crippling depression in college,” he said. “It forced me to drop out of college. I was immobilized. But out of that darkness came hope and this light, which ended up being this project with two friends and manifesting itself in this journey.”

Not long after Nemtin dropped out, he headed toward a direction that would change his life: a television series on MTV called *Buried Life*, in which Nemtin and his friends cross seemingly impossible things off their bucket list, like playing basketball with former President Barack Obama and crashing the Playboy Mansion.

On “Buried Life,” Nemtin talked about his depression and tried to help others. “When we did the TV show, I wanted to do a story on helping someone overcome something related to mental illness. We didn't know what it was going to be, but we ended up finding a girl in Rochester, Minnesota,” Nemtin said.

The girl was a cutter living in a town where there was hardly any talk of mental health. She wanted to change that.

“She [Lexi] cut herself, and she was working through it, but she didn't have anyone to talk to. She didn't feel she could talk about it in her small town,” Nemtin said. “I told Lexi that



I struggled with depression growing up. And I knew, not what it was like to struggle with self-injury, but what it was like to struggle with your demons. And I knew I had to do that in order to connect with her and to help her get the courage to talk about it, because, when people you're surrounded with are opening up and being vulnerable, you feel like you can be vulnerable.”

Nemtin said talking about mental health makes people realize that depression and anxiety aren't isolated issues.

“I've talked with people who you never would've thought struggled with something, and, as soon as I say it, they say, 'Oh, yeah me too,’” said Nemtin. “People who are hugely successful, charismatic, seem to have it all together. No one has it all together, right?”

It's common for one to experience depression a few times in their life. In cases when

depression is not attributed to an external source, like a break-up or losing a job or losing a loved one — an external source — it can lead to feelings that life has no meaning or purpose.

“A lot of people feel anxious and have feelings of depression because they’re not doing their true purpose, they’re not doing their unique ability or doing what they feel really fills them up,” said Nemtin. “Because how could you feel happy when you’re doing something that you don’t believe in? You work, you know, so much, you spend so much of your time in life working, more so than anything else that you’re going to do. Well, you might as well like it, or else you’re setting yourself up for mental failure.”

Depression doesn’t care whether one has friends and family or is alone, or whether they’re rich or poor. This daunting feeling can affect anyone, and it can be dealt with. But it’s unlikely to ever go away for good. Nemtin, for example, has done things he never thought possible, like having a television show and crossing outrageous things off his bucket list.

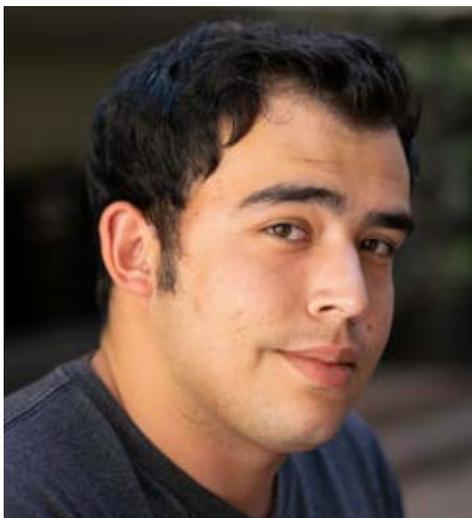
Yet the depression he experienced back in college still makes itself known, he said. “I got hit with depression the beginning of last

“She cut herself, and she was working through it, but she didn’t have anyone to talk to, she didn’t feel she could talk about it in her small town.”

year, the beginning of 2017. Like I said before, nobody is perfect. No one has it figured out. If they say they have, they’re lying. I definitely go through ups and downs. I went through this down period and I had to change my life. I literally had to change what I was doing, and that’s hard.”

Nemtin said people get stuck in tough places because it’s hard to alter their lives, leaving behind what they’re comfortable with. He made the effort to change his life again, and now is speaking out about depression to shed more light on the dark topic.

“You can learn from your struggles, you can hope that you come out of it, and ultimately you start to realize that what you think are your greatest weaknesses are actually your greatest strengths,” he said. □



Mikael Honzell (left)
and Carmen Cruz
Photos Dawn L. Basnett

The Unwanted Roommate

Dawn L. Basnett



Photo Essay by
Dawn L. Basnett

Dawn Basnett writes about how she came to terms with her demons.

I have a roommate named Dawn. She is extremely ruthless and I can't stand it. As a matter of fact, I can't stand her. But she does live with me and there isn't much I can do about it. She's always there, always spying on

me, and thinks it's perfectly acceptable to put her 2¢ into everything I do or say.

Don't get me wrong — sometimes she's quite helpful, but that's rare. Here's the kicker: This lady doesn't pay rent, utilities or even her fair share of the grocery bill. "Tell her to move out," you might say, a simple and obvious solution, but not so simple when you consider that she lives in my mind.

No, I don't have split personality disorder and she has the same exact voice as me. Only hers is bathed in negativity. Our names and living space are the only things we have in common.

Dawn's been my roommate my whole life, recording every negative thing that's ever happened to me, using them at the most inconvenient times, meticulously stacking up and cluttering my mind with these "not-so-happy" memories of mine.

I have a blouse I really love and felt absolutely beautiful every time I wore it — until the day someone thought I was pregnant. I was horrified. The person apologized immediately and said it must be the blouse. I never wore it again. Every time I consider wearing it, Dawn brings up that memory and pipes right in, "You've gained at least 10 pounds since you last wore it. You'll for sure look pregnant now." Thanks for the reminder, Dawn.

I had a stroke in 2010 and still suffer from vertigo and bump into walls occasionally while walking. It took me a long time to be able to drive again and can only do it around town or on some country roads. The freeway is a nightmare: Dawn constantly says I'm a danger and will kill myself or someone else.

For the longest time, Dawn and I lived as she dictated. One fine day, I got sick and tired of listening to her advice and admonitions and allowing her to control my life.

I started seeing a therapist eight months ago. Finding the right therapist can be a chore. With one therapist, we just didn't click. I'd



often catch her often looking over my shoulder at the clock. I understood she had other clients to see, but this was my time and felt I deserved her full attention.

Thanks to my Kaiser insurance, I now have a therapist who truly seems to care. I see her about once a month. She remembers what I tell her, offers viable, realistic advice, and hasn't once gazed over my shoulder at the clock or, if she does, is subtle about it. We do a lot of role playing, which puts me into hypothetical situations while maintaining a safety net. She's taught me breathing techniques for when I'm feeling anxious, listens attentively, and has an amazing ability to gently guide me toward facts and reality, instead of allowing the other Dawn to continue leading me astray.

I've come to realize that Dawn is just a scared little girl. And while I can't get rid of her, I can be the adult in the relationship. My therapist pointed out that certain events trigger negative thoughts that then usher in negative



I FOUND
MY VOICE!!!

feelings. We've been working on sticking to the facts. Dawn may want to tell me one thing, but I've learned to tell her she's feeding me nothing but lies and I refuse to listen to them anymore.

Though she's still the unwanted roommate, she may prove useful in our journey together: Since she's so darn good at organizing events and memories, I'm currently cross-training her so she can search out all of my life's "happy memories," of which there are plenty.

She does have days when she struggles. I know because of how long it takes her to find those elusive, happy memories. I assume they're hiding in the attic of her storage room, undoubtedly behind something very difficult to get around. I'm optimistic: It's just a learning curve, something we all experience. □

“I’ve come to realize that Dawn is just a scared little girl. And while I can’t get rid of her, I can be the adult in the relationship.”

Student Recommendations

Making Campus a More Supportive Environment

HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH DEPRESSION—WHAT DELTA CAN DO



“The Shake”
Photo Taylor Wicks

Set up a campus hotline for students who need someone to meet and talk with them then and there.

IANTHE CHASE

Establish scheduled weekly group meetings on campus where students can share their experiences and what they’re doing to cope with mental illness.

KATELYNN CASTANEDA

Bring in mental health experts to visit every class to raise awareness about how to diagnose and treat mental health problems.

CELINE PHAM

Have trained counselors available at regular hours who are open and supportive, and make sure people on campus know how to contact them so they can use them.

JASON TEIXEIRA

Invite motivational speakers to talk at campuswide events at the beginning of each semester and maybe in the middle of the semester to raise awareness that depression doesn’t have to defeat you.

TOMAS MEDINA

Be more pro-active in reaching out to students, and organize events that get them together so they have something to look forward to. There’s nothing to look forward to on campus.

MIKAEL HONZELL

Let it be known where a student struggling with depression but scared to tell anyone can go to talk to counselors. It would help to have someone to talk to about why I feel so bad every day, why it’s hard some mornings to face the world.

HEIDI ECHOLS

There’s no place for people to congregate after they close the cafeteria at 2 p.m. Keep the café open for longer periods of time. For a lot of people, it’s a place to hang out.

TYLER JIMENEZ

Set up a booth during Club Rush week each semester with a staff member from the counseling department who can answer questions and inform students of resources on and off the campus.

DAWN L. BASNETT

Offer tutoring workshops on what students can do if they feel depressed, anxious or stressed out — these can provide coping skills as well as resources on and off the campus.

DAWN L. BASNETT

Offer trauma-informed training for the staff at Delta, which can help build awareness of what students are experiencing outside the classroom. It’s an investment worth having because it bridges the gap between staff and students.

CARMEN CRUZ

Have a mental health therapist and life coaches on campus.

CARMEN CRUZ

Set up tables and benches by the new science and math building so people can congregate and have somewhere to “kick it” other than the Danner cafeteria, which closes early.

DAVID POWELL

Following page
“Campus Loneliness”
Photo Katelynn Castaneda

