

Initially my research was supposed to serve one purpose; to provide me with facts about hysteria, mental illness treatment, and COVID-19. As I continued to sift through information, I started to read stories of people who have suffered due to the pandemic, whether that be doctors and nurses working overtime, people who had lost their jobs, or people who had lost loved ones. My experience of losing time at Oxbow did play a role in empathizing with the people who are experiencing loss. The scale of the losses are drastically different, but the feeling is similar.

During the brainstorm stages, I played with the idea of trying to hold on to lost time, and I was actually listening to a song's lyrics that illustrated the image of something falling through fingers. I was able to use sugar as the sand inside the hourglass to give more dimension and the nine panels gave me the space to create a larger painting. First, I drew the hands because it was the part of the painting I was absolutely set on from the beginning. Normally I have a hard time creating a specific plan for a piece because as I work, my ideas change a lot; this project was no different. I had an initial image in my head, but I was hesitant to execute it, so I mulled over it while I did my research and I kept revising.

I found that as my project evolved, so did my outlook on our current situation. After my grief had worn off, I was able to step back and understand that I would not have wanted to share this experience with any other people than OS42. This was an experience that was not a default expectation in my high school career, so I smile at the fact that I even had the time that we did. I used the bright colors in the hands to loosely symbolize hope and eventual acceptance. I am grateful for the friends I have made and the life-clarifying experiences I had during those two wonderful months.

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Trapped and Losing Time

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Losing time and potential experiences can lead to loss of hope and excitement. Not knowing where our lives will be in a few months is frankly terrifying. With millions of confirmed coronavirus cases around the world, none of our futures are certain. A study conducted in China has shown that the people, especially children, who fear the possibility of falling ill are more likely to show depressive symptoms. Depression and anxiety levels among teenagers and children have also skyrocketed as social media has become mainstream among these age groups. The use of social media can be more likely to make you feel isolated and alone, which can increase rates of depression or anxiety. The use of isolation as a treatment was actually in practice during the Victorian era in order to control women diagnosed with hysteria. This not only did not cure the patients, but would worsen their conditions or lead to the development of mental illness. As we live through self-quarantine and isolation, it is important to take care of yourself and others, for feeling isolated and alone can be destructive to and damaging to one's mental state.

As I have sifted through the various materials I have available for research, I came across a TED Talk that jumped out to me. It talks strictly about how social media affects productivity and the overall cognitive functions of the brain. The speaker, Cal Newport, dives into how he views social media and why he has never had it. He says, "the more you use social media the more likely you are to feel lonely or isolated. The constant exposure to your friends' carefully curated positive portrayals of their life can lead you to feel inadequate, can increase rates of depression, [...] and have actual cognitive consequences, one of them being the pervasive background hum of anxiety." His statements about how the rise of technology has a clear correlation to the rise in anxiety is apparent in how much various anxiety disorders affect the world's population today. An article published by Medical News Today states, "anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S.," affecting around 40 million adults — almost 1 in 5 people. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) say that almost 300 million people have an anxiety disorder" (Tim Newman, Anxiety in the West: Is it on the rise?, Medical News Today). Anxiety as a term, along with others to describe mental illness, is constantly thrown around as a way to bring humor into it. Mental illness is such a prominent factor of a large portion of our society, yet the surrounding stigma prevents conversation about it.

In the centuries before our present day, mental illness has been treated and thought of almost as a criminal offense. Women, especially, were put into mental institutions for reasons like disobedience, postpartum depression, and anxiety. The following source describes how these signs of mental illness were treated in Victorian England. "Victorian women could be placed in institutions due to these conditions, which doctors often labeled "hysteria," and once there, [...] Women had few, or no, rights, and disobedience was often met with severe punishment" (History of Mental Health Treatment, Foundations Recovery Network, Dual Diagnosis.org). Isolation, asylums, constraint, and various kinds of physical therapy were used to treat women that were diagnosed with hysteria. (Tricia Hussung, A History of Mental Illness Treatment: Obsolete Practices, Concordia University St. Paul). Isolation is now known to drastically

decrease a person's quality of life and their mental strength, but it was a common treatment for misdiagnosed cases that were seemingly untreatable. The treatment of mental illness and the surrounding stigma has improved drastically, but the conversation about it is still stifled.

Being trapped inside during the COVID-19 epidemic can restrict access to normal daily activities such as: going to the gym, going to school or work, and seeing friends and family. Being unable to have normal social interaction and the lack of resources needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle can drastically affect one's mental health during isolation. The fear of catching the coronavirus has also been linked with higher rates of depressive symptoms. A survey conducted in China with 1784 students showed a correlation between those who were worried about catching the disease and higher levels of anxiety and depression. "The data showed that 22.6% of students reported symptoms of depression, and 18.9% of students had anxiety symptoms. While the majority of respondents, 1,109 children, resided in Huangshi, those who lived in Wuhan had higher CDI-S scores and more symptoms of depression" (Survey: COVID-19 Isolation Increases Pediatric Anxiety, Depression, Contagion Live). Exercise is also a large part of sustaining a physically and mentally healthy lifestyle. "Regular exercise can help prevent or manage health issues like: stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety, many types of cancer, and it can improve overall cognitive function" (7 Great Reasons Why Exercise Matters, Mayo Clinic). Depending on each individual's situation, they may not have the time, money, or resources to get regular exercise. Leading a healthy lifestyle can be extremely difficult without a global pandemic, so being stuck inside with the worries and fears for the future can be detrimental to one's mental health.

After having to leave Oxbow, I was in shock at the fact that our semester was being cut short because of a global pandemic. The awful timing seemed almost comedic. I was angry that the precious time at Oxbow was being taken away, that the place I had been truly happy and free was now dangerous to the students and faculty; I grieved. After having the time to reflect and to come to terms with everything, I started to realize how lucky I am to have a home and a family to come back to. I am extremely grateful to be able to spend this time with my family, that all of my loved ones are safe, and that we have access to the food and resources we need at this time. I am able to go outside to get the exercise I need and I can chat online with my friends no matter how far away they are. I am so thankful to the health care workers that are putting their lives on the line to save ours and the other essential workers who are keeping the world moving. I am scared, but I am not trapped, I am not alone, and I am safe. Many people cannot say the same, so instead of staying angry over the time we lost, I try to celebrate the amazing experience that I shared with some wonderful people.

Citations:

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