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The Inner Works

Darkroom photo

Like all my work, I hope when someone looks at my photos they see something that I didn't see subjectively. While this isn't the best mindset for others to understand my work the way I pictured it, it is the most productive way for new ideas to form. Through conversations we can truly understand parts of the photos that neither parties considered which will always lead me to think of new ways to create art.

So while this project's focus is our fears and traumas and how to deal with them, the goal of the project was to make it impossible to figure it out. These are just some beautiful pictures of balloons.



Rafael R. M.

The Oxbow School

OS47

I: Writers note

One of many driving forces in how we experience the world is our reactions to fear and trauma. The most comfortable reaction to facing fear and trauma is to run from it so by understanding more deeply how our brain conjures our emotions, we can better understand the steps you can take to break free of the hold these fears have on us.

II: Intro

Like many others, I have enjoyed the sights of balloons since I was a child. Since I've blossomed as a photographer I've tried to find meaning in the normal and mundane things in life. This is no different for balloons, anytime I saw them in public in alleyways or floating around in the sky I would think to take a picture. Regardless of finding that meaning in the mundane, Balloons are also aesthetically pleasing so I've always wanted to do a balloon photo project.

My theme for this project is Balloons in their entirety and using them as a symbol for trauma and fear and how they play roles in our lives.

When I think of balloons I really only think of parties and Pennywise. But that idea was only the beginning because Pennywise¹, the antagonist of the Steven King's novel IT, was a dancing clown who held a red balloon and enjoyed the fear of children. Throughout the story Pennywise is seen with his red balloon scaring and killing the kids of Derry Maine. I realized that balloons are something that many people are actually afraid of, so balloons aren't just used for happy parties and dances, they also evoke fear.

Another main idea that inspired me to research fear and trauma was the fact that balloons are always temporary, they will eventually shrink and become something you throw away. Like

¹ Wiki. "It (Creature)." *Stephen King Wiki*, [https://stephenking.fandom.com/wiki/It_\(Creature\)](https://stephenking.fandom.com/wiki/It_(Creature)).

many people experiencing fear and trauma, balloons are something people hold on to that doesn't last forever. Like a deflated balloon, fear and trauma can eventually shrink and become something that you throw away. This collection is speaking for fear and trauma through balloons, listen carefully.

III: Understanding fear and trauma

Our world is perceived through our brain and how every piece of it works in conjunction with another. The part of the brain that is responsible for feeling trauma and fear is the limbic system. The limbic system is a complex section of the brain with many interconnected parts including the amygdala, hippocampus, thalamus, hypothalamus, etc. While all are very important to how we are as humans, when it comes to fear and trauma the most important parts are the amygdala and the hippocampus. The amygdala is the part of the brain that creates the fight, flight, or freeze response when encountering danger. When this occurs, parts of the brain and body that are not useful for survival are turned off. This is where the hippocampus- where memory is stored- is important because it is turned off which is why it is harder to remember traumatic experiences. By forming an understanding of how trauma occurs in our brain we can further figure out how to deal with it.

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Fear and trauma are most easily connected in the mental health condition known as PTSD. Authors Ryan G Parsons and Kerry J Ressler go into great detail about the connection between fear and trauma in the brain. For example, the learning of environmental contextual cues occurs

² Mambrol, Nasrullah. "Trauma Studies." *Literary Theory and Criticism*, 15 July 2020, <https://literariness.org/2018/12/19/trauma-studies/>.

during “fear conditioning,” an experiment scientists did on mice to understand what happens in the brain.³ “Although contextual fear conditioning also depends on the amygdala, it requires the dorsal hippocampus, which is not normally involved in fear conditioning to discrete cues.”⁴

IV: Globophobia

Globophobia is the irrational fear of balloons. Though in most cases this phobia manifests as anxiety on the tactility and appearance of balloons, in some people globophobia includes a fear of balloons popping or, specifically, the sound of a balloon popping. There is a wide range of how globophobia affects other people but in many cases the fear will develop when the person is a child, irrationally scared of something that can't hurt them. Usually a person will grow out of this phobia but in other cases the child will start to avoid balloons all together as they grow up. “For example, they may avoid attending birthday parties and other celebrations, such as anniversaries, and may refuse to attend places popular with children.” This can have negative impacts on social life and how one acts in relationships with friends or family. Avoidance behaviors often have a “paradoxical effect”, meaning that although a globophobe tries to avoid balloons to help them manage their phobia, it actually has the opposite effect and instead reinforces the phobia and will cause more severe symptoms in the future. People with this phobia may experience a reaction even when not faced with an actual balloon. Some experience symptoms when they think about balloons. Through sight, smell, hearing and touch people can experience fear. ⁵

³ Martin, Elizabeth I, et al. “The Neurobiology of Anxiety Disorders: Brain Imaging, Genetics, and Psychoneuroendocrinology.” *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Sept. 2009, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3684250/>.

⁴ Michalowski, Jennifer. “How Does the Brain Process Fear?” *Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory*, 1 Dec. 2020, <https://www.cshl.edu/how-does-the-brain-process-fear/>.

⁵ Murphy, Nicole. “What Is Globophobia?” *CPD Online College*, 21 Sept. 2022, <https://cpdonline.co.uk/knowledge-base/mental->

V: Connecting and Conquering

While Globophobia is an irrational fear, it can be related to and occur in conjunction with other phobias that are more danger enticing or “rational phobias”, including: Phonophobia: An extreme fear of loud noises. Heliophobia: An extreme fear of helium. Barophobia: An extreme fear of gravity. Casadastraphobia: An extreme fear of falling into the sky. Linonophobia: An extreme fear of string. Coulrophobia: An extreme fear of clowns. Lastihophobia: An extreme fear of elastic bands. Casadastraphobia for example, is not an irrational fear, you will die if you fall from the sky; but that childhood fear has stunted someone's personal growth, not allowing them to go where they want when they want due to this irrational fear.

About 7.5% of the population will show signs of having this phobia so it is important to know what you can do if you feel like you have globophobia. There are many ways to deal with phobias but first you must learn about your phobia. Learning about your phobia will help you understand what you're going through better, allowing you to grow. Another great tactic is the fear ladder, a way to organize your triggers from least severe to most severe. In the case of balloons, a fear ladder might look like this: – 1 = Somebody popping a balloon near you. – 2 = Blowing up a balloon. – 3 = Holding a balloon. – 4 = Being in the same room as an inflated balloon. – 5 = Being in the same room as a deflated balloon. – 6 = Watching a video of a balloon popping. Once you have created a fear ladder, you can confront your fears one at a time, starting at the bottom of the ladder. This can help you to build up tolerance of your triggers and gradually reduce your fear of balloons. Another way to grow is to avoid negative depictions of balloons. There are significantly

health/globophobia/#:~:text=Globophobia%20is%20an%20extreme%2C%20overwhelming,sound%20of%20a%20balloon%20popping.

more positive depictions of balloons in films, TV shows and books, compared to negative ones but it is the negative depictions that have a lasting effect. Negative depictions can validate your thoughts, increasing your fear or anxiety responses and worsen your phobia. Avoid negative depictions to prevent your phobia from escalating. Through actively working to conquer your fear, it is possible to lose the phobia. ⁶

Flooding, an exposure therapy technique allowing people with phobias and anxiety to face their fears, is also a great way to get over your fear. While it may not be enjoyable, flooding is a sure way to face your fear. By exposing the subject to what he feared, balloons in this case, the scientist popped hundreds of balloons for three consecutive one day sessions. Afterwards, the subject was able to stop avoiding balloons and felt no distress around them. Flooding proves to the subject that their fear is irrational and through exposure, can conquer said phobia. ⁷

So say you do conquer your fears, what is on the other side? We've already discussed how phobias like globophobia can lead to negative social connecting skills so conquering your phobias will lead to a more positive social life. Ken Coleman speaks on conquering your fears as "It's exhilarating. You experience a rush of emotions that quickly overwhelms you. You stand astonished, because now you have proof that you have what it takes to do the thing you were afraid to do." The act of conquering your fear proves to you that you can do anything and that the only

⁶ Murphy, Nicole. "What Is Globophobia?" *CPD Online College*, 21 Sept. 2022, <https://cpdonline.co.uk/knowledge-base/mental-health/globophobia/#:~:text=Globophobia%20is%20an%20extreme%2C%20overwhelming,sound%20of%20a%20balloon%20popping>.

⁷ Panel Daniel Houlihan Person Cynthia Schwartz Raymond Miltenberger Dixie Heuton, Author links open overlay, et al. "The Rapid Treatment of a Young Man's Balloon (Noise) Phobia Using in Vivo Flooding." *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, Pergamon, 4 June 2002, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/000579169390026S>.

thing possibly holding you back is your own intrusive thoughts. Besting your fears allows you to crack open from your shell and live.⁸

⁸ Coleman, Ken. "Three Emotions You Experience When Conquering Fear." *Ramsey Solutions*, Ramsey Solutions, 2 Feb. 2022, <https://www.ramseysolutions.com/personal-growth/conquering-fear>.

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