

Mental Health, Room for Interpretation and Growth.

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It doesn't matter where I go or what I do, at some point the theme of mental health comes to my mind, so, for my exhibition I would like to try to depict mental health but in a slightly different way. Artists that I would like to be visually including in this exhibition would range from the well-known Walt Disney and Company to freelance artist Toby Allen. A musician that I will be including, and views I will be sharing, is that of Corey Taylor. Philosophies that I would be focusing on are: positive outlooks and the idea of pushing through. "Sometimes you have to more than a survivor. Sometimes you have to move on" (Taylor, 2011).

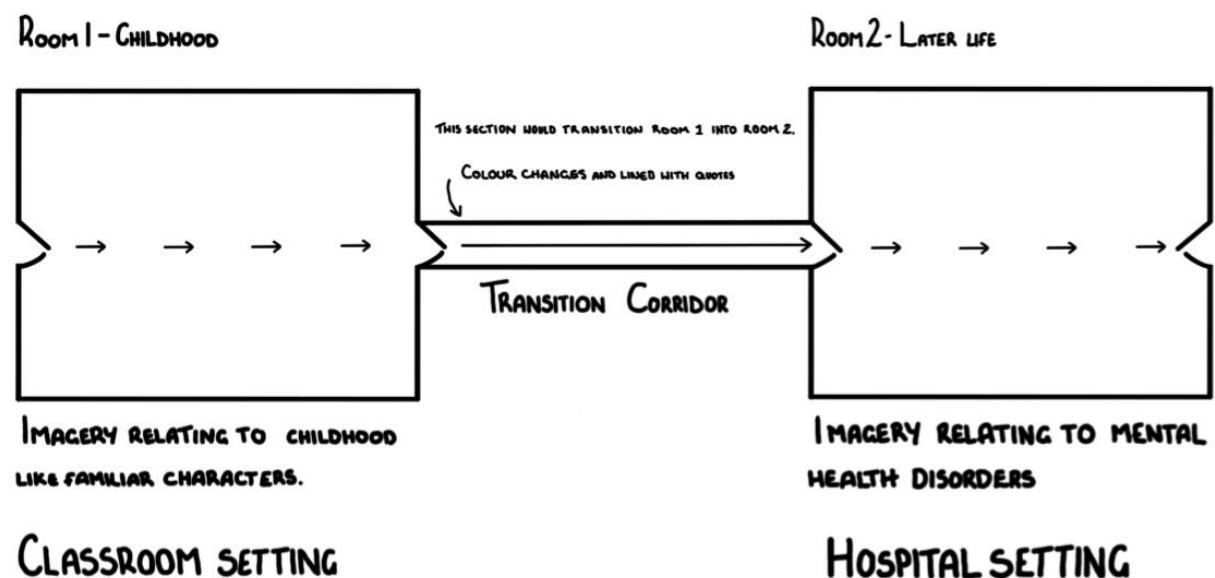


Figure 1

Room 1, childhood (as seen in figure 1). This room would include familiar characters from A.A Milnes' Winnie-the-Pooh and friends, as well as iconic characters such as Mickey Mouse. I set Room 1 to be like this because it is the beginning, just as childhood is the beginning where we start to learn and develop. The room would look like a primary school classroom, with bright, joyous colours, children's drawings, small furniture with faint nursery rhymes and songs playing in the background. The aim would be to make this room

inviting and familiar to young children and nostalgic for older people as they could look back at happy memories of childhood. I chose these sets of characters because their aim has been to provide fun stories for children and teach lessons in enjoyable ways. For example, the tales of the lovable Winnie-the-Pooh are “full of comic moments as well as silly versus” (Lownes, 2018) but it has also been credited for its “notable insights into human behaviour” (Lownes, 2018) with its “endearing and complex characters” (Lownes, 2018), character personalities that line up with different mental illnesses from Anxiety to OCD. Something you would understand as a child but later you would see the resemblance. For example, I always noticed just how gloomy Eeyore was and now, I can see how he links with depression and as a child I always knew this in some way.

Moving on from that room, you would have to walk through a corridor. This corridor would transition Room 1 into Room 2. From bright, cheerful colours with faint childhood songs, into a whiter, bleaker end with life quotes about choices dotted on the walls. The background music would begin to drastically change. Still faint in the background, the music would change to Slipknot. Lyrics from this band’s songs would also be included in the quotes on the wall.

Room 2, the Hospital. Hospitals are a place where things come to an end or take their first breath of life. It is battleground where your weapons are professionals with equipment and knowledge, and your will to survive. I chose to use a hospital setting for these reasons and because artworks are commonly hung around the building as it has been proven to help with patients’ recovery. TATE, quoted from Florence Nightingale’s book, *Notes on Nursing*: “variety of form and brilliancy of colour in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery” (Roberts 2018) as they brighten the room and bring a little joy. This room would otherwise be all white with a singular bed, a side table and chair; the 4 artworks hanging from the walls and Slipknot playing faintly in the background. These artworks would be a small selection of mental illness inspired monsters by Toby Allen. At first, they may not seem out of place because of artworks being common in hospitals however, on closer inspection, you would see what they represent.

Slipknot’s lead singer, Corey Taylor, has suffered from depression as well as past abuse. In his music, he sings about the internal battle with his demons, hence why I included him. He sat down on the TV show *Therapist* to speak about his troubling past; “It’s about showing people that it’s OK, for lack of better term, to be fucked up. You can get help”. (Taylor, 2017).

Not only that but their song lyrics would be put in places like the clipboard where a patients' information is kept on the end of the bed, or a piece of paper on the bed. These would be found in these locations to provide a little subtlety and to allow viewers to interact with the surrounds. Putting themselves in the mind of the patient or family or a doctor.

Both of these may at first glance appear very negative and depressing, the points that they try to convey about fighting and not being afraid to seek help are powerful messages, if you choose to see the positive message they hold. I recommend anyone to listen to the lyrics of Slipknot's songs and try and see the meanings behind them.



Figure 2

In Room 1 characters such as the Disney icon and his friends would be displayed around the room. I chose this selection of characters for their familiarity and background. Mickey was first introduced to the world in 1928 and became a Disney classic and icon 92 years later. Mickey would not even exist if Universal did not take the rights to Walt Disney's original character Oswald the Rabbit because the character well at the time. "Universal offered to keep Disney if he took a lower salary, but he refused." (Suddath 2008) and with that Disney and his loyal animator Ubbe Eert "Ub" Iwerks when off and quickly made Oswald replacement, Mickey Mouse. Old or new, almost everyone knows, at one point Disney claimed "that Mickey had a 98% awareness rate among children between ages 3-11 worldwide" (Suddath, 2008) which just goes to show how much of an icon his character is especially for children and even now is heavily included in Disney's merchandise and branding, keeping him a familiar face for children even today.

The mission of The Walt Disney Company is to entertain,

inform and inspire people around the globe through the power of unparalleled storytelling, reflecting the iconic brands, creative minds and innovative technologies that make ours the world's premier entertainment company

- The Walt Disney Company
(2019)

Mickey became a very important character for many as the following year would include The Great Depression then eventually The Second World War and the Cold War. Mickey “served a valuable purpose by bringing generations of children and adults through difficult times of depression, and years of war” (C.S 2010) creating a fun, familiar face for older generations as well as children. Great grandparents, grandparents or parents would be able to reflect on their childhood or memories with their children revolving around this character.



Figure 3

Winnie- the- Pooh is a classic and favourite of children with these lovable friends, who work together to solve “all kinds of sticky situations” (Lowne, 2018) they face and support one another. Pooh and his friends not only go on little adventures but the personalities of these characters and how they’ve been associated with mental illness could help show children that it’s nothing to be ashamed of; that there will always be someone that they can turn to, without being depressing or serious. In fact, the popularity of these characters “lay in the characters’ relatability.” (Salter, 2017) James Campbell said, “Everyone knew an ‘Eeyore’ or a ‘Tigger’,” ... “Readers could recognise these characteristics in themselves or their friends.” (Salters, 2017). The timing of its release is also an important factor to why Winnie- the- Pooh became so popular as Britain was still feeling the effects of The Great War and not only did these stories provide an escape for children but adults too. “It was the innocence of an imagined world that adults – still traumatised by war – were as keen to escape into as the children they read it to.” (Salters, 2017). Winnie- the- Pooh, like Mickey Mouse, would provide a chance for the older generations to reflect of the memory of their childhood or bringing their children up with the character.



Figure 4

Toby Allen, a freelance artist, started a series of illustrations back in 2013 depicting mental illnesses as little monsters. In an interview with Inali Laureate in 2014 for Mind Your Mind, he explains why:

The project originated from imagining my own anxieties as monsters and finding it to be cathartic and healing process to draw them. It made them feel weaker and I was able to look at my own anxiety in a comical way.

- Toby Allen (Laureate, 2014)

On his website ‘ZestyDoesThings’ his description of the project now is “The project aims to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and aims to educate about lesser well-known conditions” (Allen, 2019)

In figure 4 you can see four examples of his artworks. He “intentionally made them cutesy” as the projects’ intentions “was not to scare people, that it provided a way for people to “aim their angst towards” (Allen, 2014). “I think if I made them too horrible or scary, they might appear less manageable and children might find them too scary.” (Allen, 2014). Similarly, to how characters from Winnie- the- Pooh have strong similarities to different mental illness traits, Toby Allen’s little monsters solely represent these disorders as something you can fight and beat.

In looking at his works, it makes me think about a couple of quotes by Corey Taylor, “Live your life, no matter what it is” and “I may never let go of my wrath, my anger, but I will always have the last laugh” (Taylor, 2011). These little monsters, these mental illnesses shouldn’t stop you from living your life, they may always be around but you can have the last laugh, not these monsters.

I want visitors to walk away with a mix of nostalgic and meaningful memories and topic of conversation and perspective on mental health.

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- Figure 1: Belongs to Zara Cousins.
- Figure 2: Disney (u.d) *Mickey Mouse and Friends* Available at: <https://disney.co.uk/mickey-mouse>
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- Figure 3: Disney Clips (u.d) *Winnie- the- Pooh Mixed Group Clip Art* Available at: <https://www.disneyclips.com/images/pooh-friends1.html>
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