

BETWEEN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE TRAUMA: WHAT CAN TRAUMA FROM THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR REVEAL ABOUT CONTEMPORARY MENTAL ILLNESS IN AMERICA?

Erin Solomons

University for the Creative Arts

Body of Proposal

My research aims to visually investigate how quantitative evidence of America's historical trauma can be reinterpreted to bring attention to the important role of interpersonal dysfunctions in contemporary mental illness in America. With historical or personal trauma, a predominant, yet skewed, narrative can develop from the trauma to make it seem resolved. However, this discounts the messy nature of people's emotions that spill into reality, when trauma breaks the boundary between the self and reality. The parameters for this study are why the emotional pain, from dehumanizing trauma, is devalued as a result of the tradition of scientific classification used to define trauma.

The intent of my research is to create more intensive visual representations about the connective potential of violated emotional boundaries. This led me to select the protected and unprotected battlefield, from the Battle of the Wilderness, as my Civil War case study. Also, BPD as my contemporary mental illness case study is chosen because of its symptoms based around the lack of emotional boundaries. The purpose of the comparison between the similarities of Civil War soldiers' letters and published experiences of Borderline Personality Disorder is to show how two contextually different kinds of occurrences lead to like-minded feelings and ways of coping, despite the era. This unconventional approach towards the utility of trauma in people's lives can further open up taboos about suffering with the effects of being dehumanized.

My project focuses on chemistry's dual role as a creditable material in the scientific realm, and a container used to instill moral valuations. The series will have a photographic core that is secondary to the physical attributes of the materials used, and chemical processes performed. Half of my methodology is based in the production of this practical work, but also informs the connections of references and narrative within my dissertation.

Keywords: trauma, mental illness, landscape photography, bodily fluids, American Civil War, Borderline Personality Disorder