

THE MENLO BARD

WINTER 2024



MENTAL HEALTH

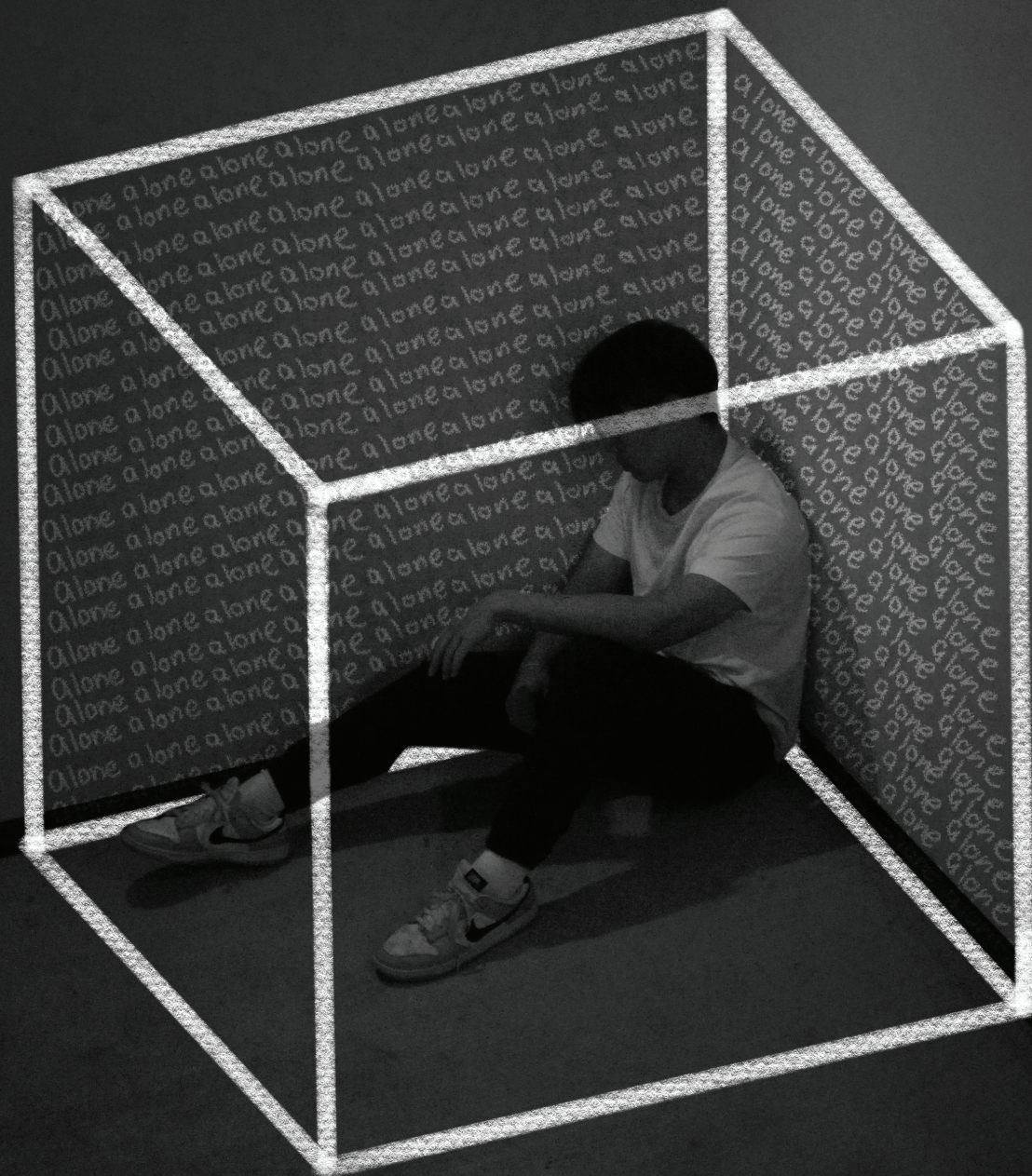
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Stigma around the topic of mental health continues to linger and weigh us down. A fear of judgement prevents us from speaking out about mental health, leaving us isolated and deteriorating the interpersonal bonds that keep us afloat. In silence, we often find ourselves drowning in the same debilitating thoughts we are too terrified to say out loud.

Sometimes, though, all it takes is the assurance that others share your struggles to to keep swimming. While I'm under no impression that this issue of The Bard will present a grand solution to all of a reader's problems, I hope that this issue can raise awareness around mental health and serve as a small raft for the reader. A reminder that we are never alone.

Best,
Andrea Li



ATHLETES & BODY IMAGE

by Amelie Giomi

What is the ideal body type for an athlete? Ask ten different people and you will get ten different answers. Not only do athletes have an expectation to maintain their 'ideal' body to maximize their performance, but they can be influenced by conflicting beauty standards perpetuated by the images of beauty seen in the latest edition of "Vogue" or social media's rising influencers. Does being skinny equate to being strong? Does an athlete need to limit themselves to certain "healthy" foods to maintain their fitness?

These questions rarely have a straightforward answer. As such, it's no surprise that some female and male athletes struggle to balance their bodies' physical looks with their physical performance.

A junior girl notes that as an athlete, she is expected to restrict certain types of foods to constantly maintain her fitness. "Sometimes I don't really get a break," she said. "I should just be able to eat what I want, but it's kind of hard because I get the pressure that I am not performing at my best because I'm too fat or not healthy enough."

She has to force herself to eat before her sport to properly fuel her body and give her energy even if she isn't hungry. However, she is also scared of eating too much and feeling heavy before her sport.

"It's just kind of hard to find a balance that makes everyone happy," she said. "Someone's always going to be complaining that you are eating too much or you are not eating enough." She notes that she feels pressure to have a flat stomach as crop tops are a staple in female fashion.

A junior boy who is on the cross-country team said he focuses a lot on being at a certain weight to perform in his sport, meaning that for him, food is mainly a means

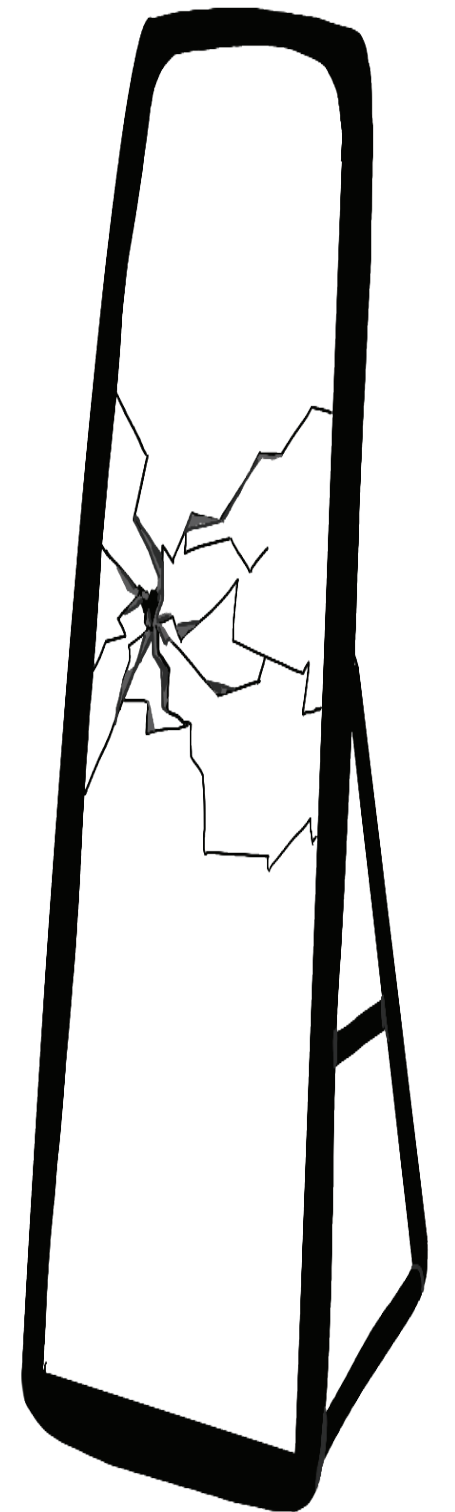
to an end. "I just look at food as a tool to enhance the capabilities of my body," he said. He also tries to limit the amount of unhealthy food he eats without restricting total calories.

Because he believes that he isn't

genetically blessed with the ideal body type for his sport, he also feels that he must be extra vigilant about what he eats to compete at the highest level. "I constantly have to watch what I am eating to make sure that I don't regret it," he said. "If I wasn't [an athlete] I would just eat what I feel like when I feel like it."

Another athlete and junior girl said that her struggles with food and body image interfere with her mental state in her everyday life. "I spend most of my time thinking about how I look in the present moment, thinking about the food

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that I am going to eat, and it can get tiring and it can get pretty distracting,” she said.

Although she isn’t opposed to gaining muscle, eating healthy, and becoming stronger for her sport, she still feels self-conscious about having a more athletic and masculine physique. “I feel very envious of my friends who are smaller and petite and just more cute,” she said.

At times, she has felt lightheaded while playing her sport due to undereating, which has led to decreased athletic performance. Her performance at school can also become compromised if she does not eat enough because she is unable to concentrate.

An athlete and junior girl notes that she often compares herself with other girls who are skinnier than her and struggles to accept her body type. She is conflicted between wanting to have a skinnier body type and making sure she eats enough to fuel her body. “Realistically, [a salad] isn’t enough to fuel your body as an athlete every day and I’m struggling with that,” she said.

She has felt both too big and small for her sports and notes that it has been a struggle to fit the expected size. “I remember when [my coach] said that I just wasn’t big enough to be on the top team yet because I just did not have the muscle mass,” she said. “And now I feel like I am too big for my sport almost.”

At times, she restricts her food intake, which can be harmful. “There have been times in my life where I sort of train my body to not eat as much and it’s definitely unhealthy,” she said.

While senior Scarlett Gamble said she has a comparatively good relationship with her body, she notes that she does feel guilty sometimes after eating certain foods because she is worried it will negatively affect her performance. “I think that I have some sense of like, oh these foods are like, traditionally unhealthy, but I eat a lot generally and I’m okay with that because I know that I need power,” she said.

Gamble, who plays water polo, feels that the stereotypical athletic body type is misleading. “I think there’s definitely a stereotype of what the athlete’s body should look like [...] and it’s very false,” she said. “It’s not like a cookie cutter shape [...] it’s a matter of like, accepting that what is the best version of yourself is not necessarily what the quote-unquote

‘best is for everyone.’”

Gamble is grateful for her body because it is what ultimately allows her to succeed in her sport. “I think that it’s easy to have a complicated relationship with your body,” she said. “I like my body because it’s what allows me to follow my passion in athletics [...] that’s something that I’m really thankful for.”

Sophomore and runner Ariya Kaushek deals with body dysmorphia because of expectations surrounding the ideal runner’s body. “There are all of these terms of a runner’s body. Most people just associate that with someone who is very skinny [...] skinny doesn’t mean faster,” she said.

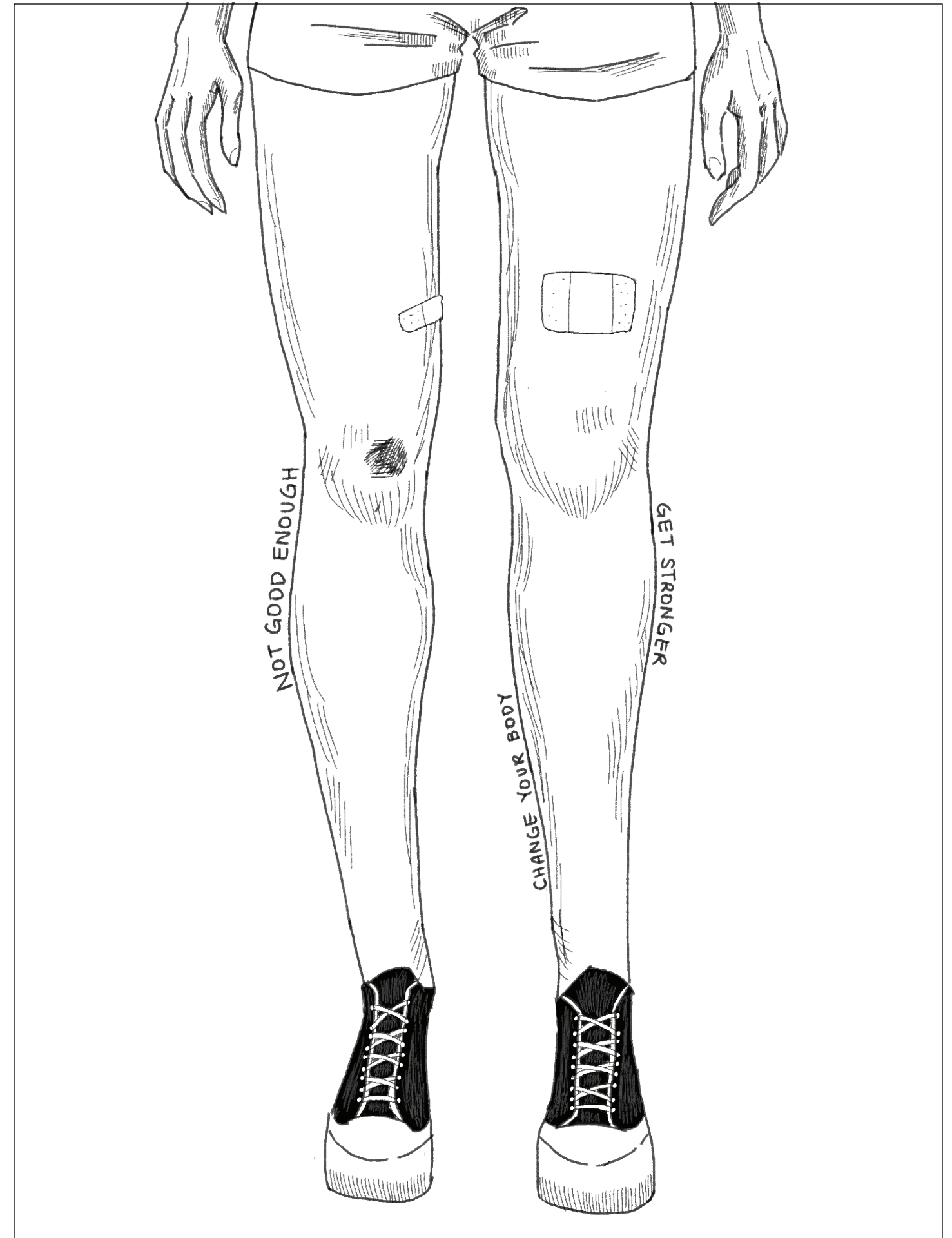
However, running has helped her make sure that she is eating enough. “You have to make sure that you are fueling. And not just fueling, but fueling properly,” Kaushek said. She tries to eat before runs to make sure she has enough energy. Sometimes, Kaushek will compare how she is fueling herself with other runners, which she says can be toxic because everyone fuels differently.

As a runner, Kaushek has to remind herself to constantly eat even if she isn’t hungry because she needs to supply her body properly. “It does make me view food sometimes as a chore, which is good and bad,” she said. “It does make sure that I am fueling properly, but at the same time it is something I have to think about constantly.”

Kaushek notes that running can be a very vulnerable sport that has impacted her self-confidence. “When you are running you are wearing a tank top and tight spandex and you are getting hundreds of photos taken of you, interviews, and photos,” she said. “I do put pressure on myself.”

Kaushek said that the idea of looking toned can be very toxic for athletes and cause them to compare their body types with others. When she switched from volleyball to running, she struggled with her perception of her body because of the differing body type ideals. “Whenever I find myself comparing my body type to any people, I always have to stop myself before going down that spiral,” she said. “But honestly sometimes you just have to let your mind spiral out. As hard as that is to experience, it’s a very natural thing for athletes.”

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MASCULINITY & MENTAL HEALTH

by Natalie Jinbo-Davis



The boys are not alright. The meteoric rise of figures like Andrew Tate forced an examination of masculinity and male mental health. Tate rose to fame with his misogynistic views and offensive attitude, attracting the attention of young boys and men online. While Tate is perhaps the most notable “alpha male” figure, he is not alone in his brash content that has raised concerns across the internet. Underneath the vitriol, men are hurting and looking for figures to

provide guidance.

Although fears of opening up about mental health struggles are common, these fears are especially prevalent among men: nearly one-tenth of men experience depression in their lifetime, less than half of men seek treatment.

These statistics are affirmed by experiences drawn from Menlo’s student body. “[Mental health] is just not really discussed,” an anonymous male Menlo student said on the issue. “It’s your own personal

battle, your own thing to deal with; so, don’t be sharing with the class.” Despite suicide being listed as an epidemic, there is still hesitancy to be more honest about feelings like depression and anxiety. Yet lack of discussion results in serious consequences: according to the National Institute of Mental Health, suicide is the second leading cause of death in men ages 10-14 and 25-34. “I feel like that stigma [around mental health] is just there in general,” said G, a high school senior

at Homestead. “But I think it’s more so probably for men.” G, a transgender male, pointed out the change in attitudes towards sharing emotions before and after he transitioned. “Pre-transition, my friends definitely saw it as a normal thing for me to be open and share.[...]Post transition...there’s kind of a view I’m not supposed to share if something is not going well.”

Upper School Counselor Jake Fauver notes how expressing and naming emotions is associated as feminine, causing men to remain quiet about feelings. “I think that female-identifying students are given more permission to name feelings and to name what specifically they are feeling,” Fauver said. “We buy into that there’s a huge difference between genders, and how people identify versus what lived experience is really like. Most people that come [to counseling] are navigating something with their mental health, whether that be depression anxiety, [or] eating disorder[...] which is not just a male or female thing.”

‘Role models’ like Tate and the idolization of hyper-masculinity among young men online has only encouraged the silence: a psychology study found that men who exhibit “traditional masculinity” were less likely to reach out for mental help. “By bashing women, Andrew Tate has stigmatized women’s emotions [...] basically which are deemed feminine because society deems them invaluable,” G commented.

Luckily, other public male figures have spoken about their own mental health in recent years. Mr. Fauver cites Kevin Love, an accomplished professional basketball player, as a figure opening the discussion. Love talked about anxiety he experienced as a result of athletic pressure and said that speaking up about his issues alleviated some of his stress. For younger men and boys, seeing successful male figures and role models that are willing to talk about their mental health helps to destigmatize the topic and pave the way for more conversations.

Menlo has made efforts to encourage students to be more open about their mental struggles through assemblies; however, these efforts don’t always result in action. “A big part of men’s mental health recently is everyone’s talking about it, but it’s only

talking [...] there isn’t much more beyond that,” the anonymous student commented. Simply raising awareness about mental health isn’t enough to encourage discussions surrounding the topic. Stigma lingers around the subject of mental health, despite heightened awareness. “I think there’s still concern of ‘oh my gosh, what does it mean if I am seeing the counselor?’” said Fauver. One way Fauver hopes to alleviate the issue is at the classroom level: “There’s still work to be done. A piece of that is educating the students themselves on what [mental health] is. Then also helping teachers be first level responders so that students feel comfortable approaching them.”

Mr. Fauver is optimistic that younger generations will be able to write the norms surrounding the topic of mental health. Both Fauver and G highlighted shifting narratives around masculinity as one step towards openness. “For men, [...] your worth is not based on an external perception that everything is okay all the time. [...] There’s often far more strength in asking for help,” Fauver commented. G also noted: “I think there shouldn’t be a societal recognition that strength is a singular thing. [...] Being a man is also being human and it’s human to have [negative] emotions.”

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SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

by Ella Krane

Today, our hands are constantly in motion: our fingers flit across screens as we navigate through numerous social media platforms. These apps, like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, have transformed the way we share and connect, but they also tend to overload our minds with information, impacting both our attention span and mental health.

Of course, social media also offers, social connection and online resources. We are able to speak with friends and family across the world with just a click, as well as have a plethora of information at our fingertips. Yet, the benefits of social media still pale in comparison to its detriments.

Social comparison, envy, and jealousy often afflict social media users. In fact, studies show that nearly 60% of people viewed an online “friend” as having a better life because of what they posted on social media (KSAT): the highlight reels posted online create unrealistic expectations and standards for material things like success, happiness, and beauty. Exposure to these images and videos tend to lead to low self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy. We make ourselves feel bad for our life situation when we analyze totally curated version of someone else’s.

Not only do we envy other people’s lives, but we also envy their looks. Certain groups, such as young girls, may feel the urge to compare themselves to the perfect-looking women they see online, when in reality, these women often edit themselves to enhance their features. According to the United States Congress Joint Economic Committee, “Digital media was consistently associated with a higher likelihood of suicidal and

non-suicidal self-harm and depression among girls, but rarely among boys. [...] 20% of girls exhibited depressive symptoms or engaged in self-harm.” It is very difficult to be content with your own life and your own appearance when you are constantly

spending time searching for the good in other’s lives online.

In addition to feelings of jealousy and fear of missing out, social media is a distraction. Excessive use of social media can lead to addictive behaviors because the reward center in our brain is fueled, and we get a release of dopamine that makes us feel good, so we keep going back to it. As a result, we neglect our responsibilities, procrastinate, and then fall behind.

Additionally, the constant need for online validation is distracting, and ultimately draining. Over 60% of social media users feel worse af-



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ter finding out someone “unfriended” them online (KSAT). We spend way too much time curating posts, looking at other’s posts, and worrying about whether or not our social image is good enough.

Junior Jacqueline Larsen agrees that social media affects her men-

tal health. “Social media affects my mental health because it takes a toll on my well-being when I am constantly scrolling and looking at other people’s lives. Often times I find myself scrolling on social media when I should be doing other things and that makes me even

more stressed,” Larsen said.

Junior Isabella Brosious also agrees that social media can be a distraction: “Social media affects my mental health because it is really distracting, and when I am trying to do my homework, and I’ll find myself spending way too

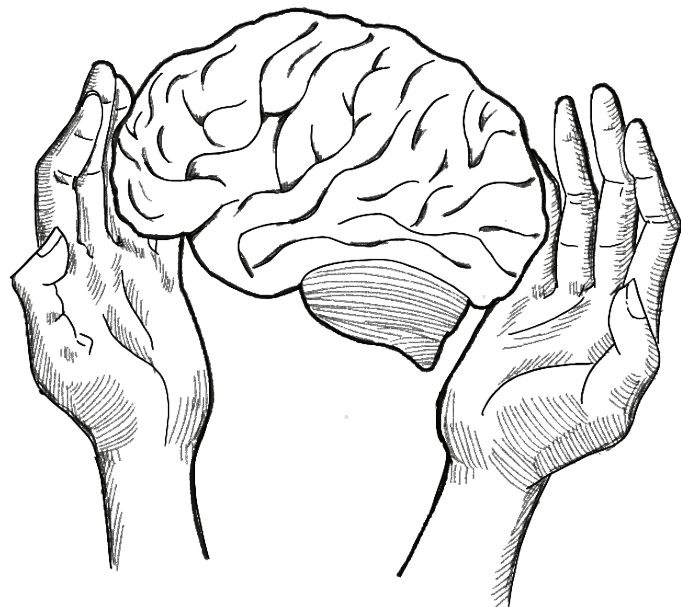
much time on social media,” Brosious said.

As a community, we need to take strides to mitigate the negative impact. Finding a balance between spending time online and spending time in the real world will be necessary going forward.

MENLO & MENTAL HEALTH

by Jacqueline Larsen

Because of the stigma surrounding it, mental health is not something many people talk about. Part of the reason for the lack of discussion surrounding mental health is because it is an entirely internal struggle. If someone breaks a bone, for example, most people can offer support or condolences because the injury is external. But if somebody is struggling with their mental health, it is significantly harder to recognize that and support them. Mental Health at Menlo, previously run by alum Reese Weiden and currently run by senior Alyssa Grosso, is a club that educates, informs, and supports our school about the topic of mental health. Weiden, who was in the club since her freshman year, believes that mental health is an issue that affects the majority of people yet is often hard to recognize. “The greatest barrier is that we don’t realize [that], and we don’t realize that everyone is probably going through something,” Weiden said. To Weiden, open discussions surrounding mental health are a way to solve this issue. “By being vulnerable and talking about [mental health], that is what opens the door to destigmatizing mental health and finding solutions for everyone,” Weiden said.



Many people may view mental health as a weakness, but talking about mental health is necessary in order to seek the support needed. “Reaching out for help is a strength, it is not a sign of weakness, and being vulnerable is so rewarding not only for yourself, but for influencing other people who may be inspired to seek help for themselves,” Weiden said.

Sophomore Ariya Kushneck, now a co-lead of Mental Health at Menlo, also provides her thoughts surrounding mental health. She mentions that the biggest stigma she notices surrounding mental health is the counselor’s office. “They are there for a reason”, she notes, “and are all amazing and qualified people that are here to help.” On the topic of how mental health is handled at Menlo, Kushneck said she “wishes the topic of mental health gets publicized more than just one week a year.” “Mental Health at Menlo is so much more than just the assembly.”

As a junior who balances classes, athletics, and college preparation, Ella Krane states that due to the sheer amount of work and challenge Menlo brings, lots of students still find themselves struggling.”

However, Krane feels that Menlo excels in providing resources and support for your mental health: “[Menlo has] a great set of resources like counselors, and there is a lot of mental health awareness in regards to the assemblies with guest speakers, for example,” Krane said. “Not only students, but Menlo does a good job in educating parents about how to best help your child with mental health.”

On the topic of Menlo counselors, Mr. Fauver is one of them that is a great resource for mental health. “I am here to support the mental health and wellbeing of the student population,” Fauver says. “We are fortunate to have two full time counselors and one part-time counselor, as well as a student-driven club, Mental Health at Menlo, that hosts a mental health assembly every year.”

Mr. Fauver notes that “there is definitely a [mental health] stigma out there, as a lot of people may feel shame or guilt or unclear as to what they are experiencing, and don’t realize that talking through it is helpful.” However, he adds that the stigma has been reduced the last six years he has worked at Menlo, and “you would be surprised to know the amount of people that come through here, not just to talk about mental health struggles.” To conclude, Mr. Fauver suggests to “Ask for help more often than not. The counseling team is here to help out and be a support. It is another spot to just talk through things.”

PERFECTION OVER PROGRESS

by Annika Allison

The pursuit of excellence motivates most students, yet it also has a dark underbelly of despair and hardships. Whether a drive for perfection stems from the coercion of parents, from teachers, or even themselves, students are constantly in a world where not putting 100% of effort into everything is equated to failure. This mindset can foster the idea that perfection is more important than progress.



Perfectionism can present itself differently depending on the individual. Some people can become engrossed with extracurricular activities, or will hyper-focus on their academic achievements. From what I’ve seen, students will oftentimes forgo sleep, social interactions, and even family all for the sake of flawless grades or the perfect college resume. Students hold themselves to unattainable standards and

“Students hold themselves to unattainable standards and become all-consumed by even the smallest errors.

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Perfectionism often damages mental and physical health. I argue that all the hard work students attempt to consistently maintain, will soon fall through, as anxiety, despair, and immeasurable fatigue are always lurking around the corner. Relationships are prone to fail as one’s focus becomes preoccupied with success rather than happiness. Withdrawal from teenage activities becomes the norm, and the fear of failure is an all-consuming factor. It’s hard to recognize what these unattainable standards can do to one’s overall well-being, and while a healthy strive for excellence is never a bad thing, in my eyes I see it as vital that one learns to pace, and prioritizes healthy habits.



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