

What to expect

- What is mental illness?
- What is the landscape of mental illness in academia?
- Why is mental illness an important issue in academia?
- How have I been affected by mental illness?
- How can we make academia (1) a more supportive place for people with mental illness, and (2) less triggering of mental illness?

What to expect

- My professional training is in astronomy. I am not a medical or psychological professional.
- I will speak about my personal experience. I do this to help normalize mental illness. My experience may have been or be different than another person's experience.
- The content discussed here may be triggering for those who have experienced or are experiencing mental health issues. Please take care of your own needs and feel free to leave at any time.

Mental illness is...

- a health condition involving changes in person's thinking, feeling, behavior and/or mood, which may also affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day.
- not the result of one event. Research suggests multiple, linked causes like genetics, environment, and lifestyle.
- common. In a given year, 1 in 5 adults in the US (43.8 million people) experience some form of mental illness, with 1 in 25 (9.8 million people) experiencing serious mental illness.
- treatable. The vast majority of individuals with mental illness continue to function in their daily lives. It is a medical condition just like heart disease or diabetes.

What is the landscape of mental illness in academia?



Faculty
/staff

Graduate

Undergraduate

What is the landscape of mental illness in academia?



- Rate of mental illness among college students is on the rise
- Almost 1/3 of college students report having felt so depressed that they had trouble functioning
- Compared to older adults, the 18-24 year old age group shows the lowest rate of help-seeking
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students — more than half of college students have had suicidal thoughts and 1 in 10 consider attempting suicide

What is the landscape of mental illness in academia?

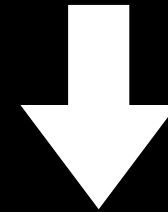


- Pioneering studies from graduate students at UCB shed light on issue of mental health in grad students
 - 2005 study - 10% of graduate students contemplated suicide, >50% reported feeling depressed a lot of the time
 - 2015 study - 47% of PhD students reported being depressed, highest rate among arts & humanities (64%), followed by STEM (~45%)
- More recent Levecque et al. (2017) in *Research Policy*
 - 1 in 2 PhD students experience psychological distress, 1 in 3 at risk for common psychiatric disorder
 - Prevalence of mental health problems higher in PhD students than in highly educated general population, employees, and other higher education students

What is the landscape of mental illness in academia?

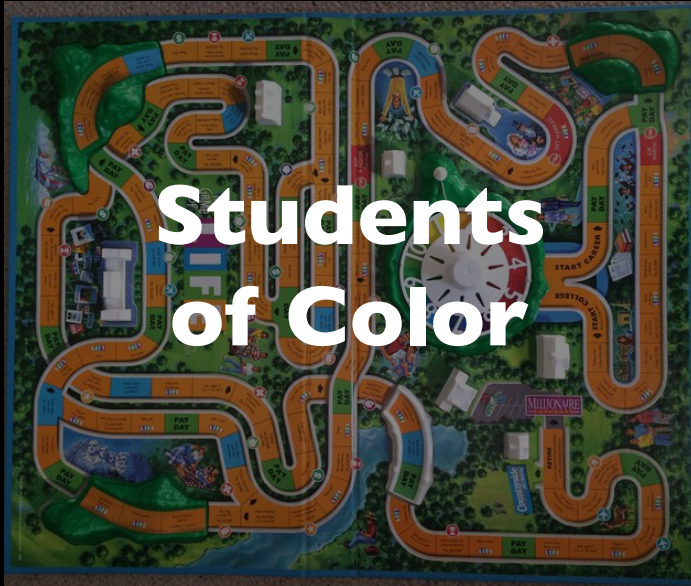


- This is attributed in part to: career prospects, overall health, living conditions, academic engagement, social support, financial confidence, academic progress and preparation, sleep, feeling valued and included, advisor relationship



- Uncertainty about the future, high workload, impostor syndrome, competition, pass-or-fall out milestones, hard to feel sense of progress
- “If you can’t stand the heat, you shouldn’t be here” attitude

What is the landscape of mental illness in academia?



- Perceived or actual discrimination can make it hard for students of color to engage with campus in the way that white peers do
- College campuses haven't shielded from societal racism, and at times exacerbate it
- Academic environments often also condone microaggressions and stereotyping
- “Weathering the cumulative effects of living in a society characterized by white dominance and privilege produces a kind of physical and mental wear-and-tear that contributes to a host of psychological and physical ailments,” - *Ebony McGee, Assistant Professor of Diversity and Urban Schooling at Vanderbilt*

What is the landscape of mental illness in academia?



- Rate of mental illness in academic staff has been reported as 3-4x higher than the general population
- This is attributed in part to heavy workloads, a culture of long hours, conflicting management demands, and high standards of success
- Academics don't like being told what to do, and internalized values are hard to shake
- From a 2017 study, 70% of college and university faculty had no or limited familiarity with mental-health related accommodations they can seek in working conditions

Why is mental illness an important issue in academia?

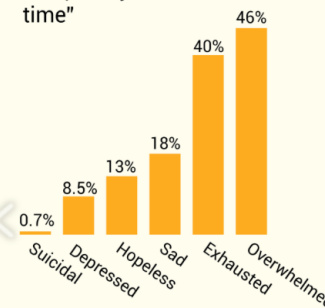
- It's a serious health risk.
- Balanced, happy people are more productive, creative, collaborative, and better at pursuing long-term goals
- Positive thinking associated with curiosity, interest, and synthetic thinking. Depression associated with loss of interest, difficulty remembering details and concentrating, and worse
- Work constitutes major source of scientific advancement
- How will universities be financially productive?
- Frequency of these issues should not scare students away from PhD, but should be prepared for psychological challenges as well as intellectual ones

Under pressure:

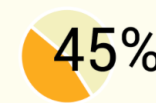
Report on graduate student mental health at UC Berkeley

Stress, anxiety, and depression are the most common reasons graduate students seek mental health services

Percentage of graduate students expressing the following emotions "frequently" or "all the time"

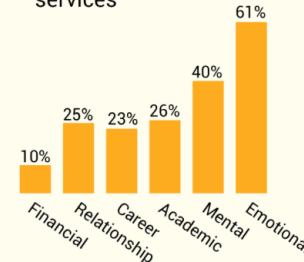


Women are up to **2X** as likely as men to report these stressors



45% of graduate students report having an emotional or stress related problem over the past year

Percentage of graduate students citing the following reasons for seeking mental health services



50% of self-reported suicide attempts are made by **STEM** graduate students

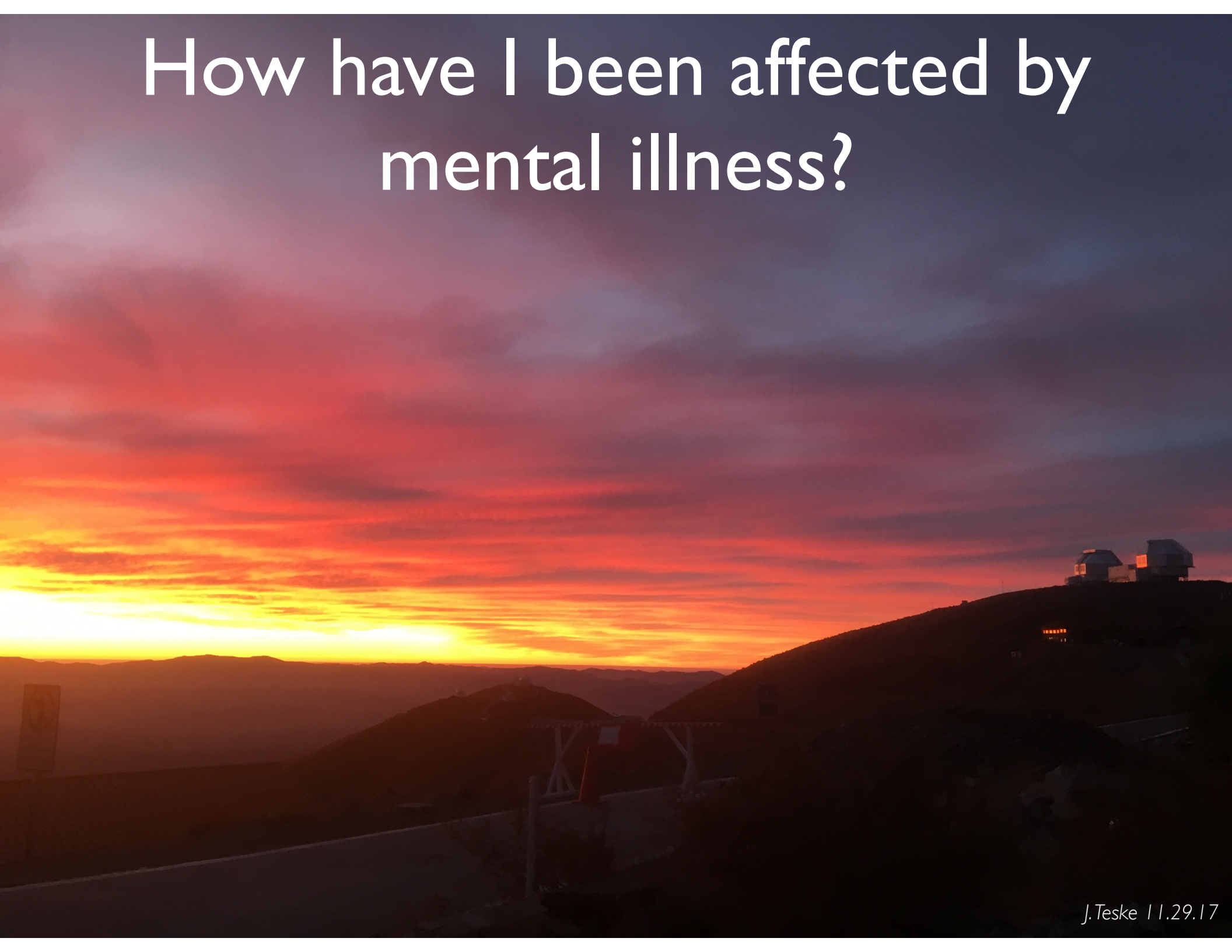


In 2012, Campus Psychological Services say a **record increase** in graduate students seeking mental health support

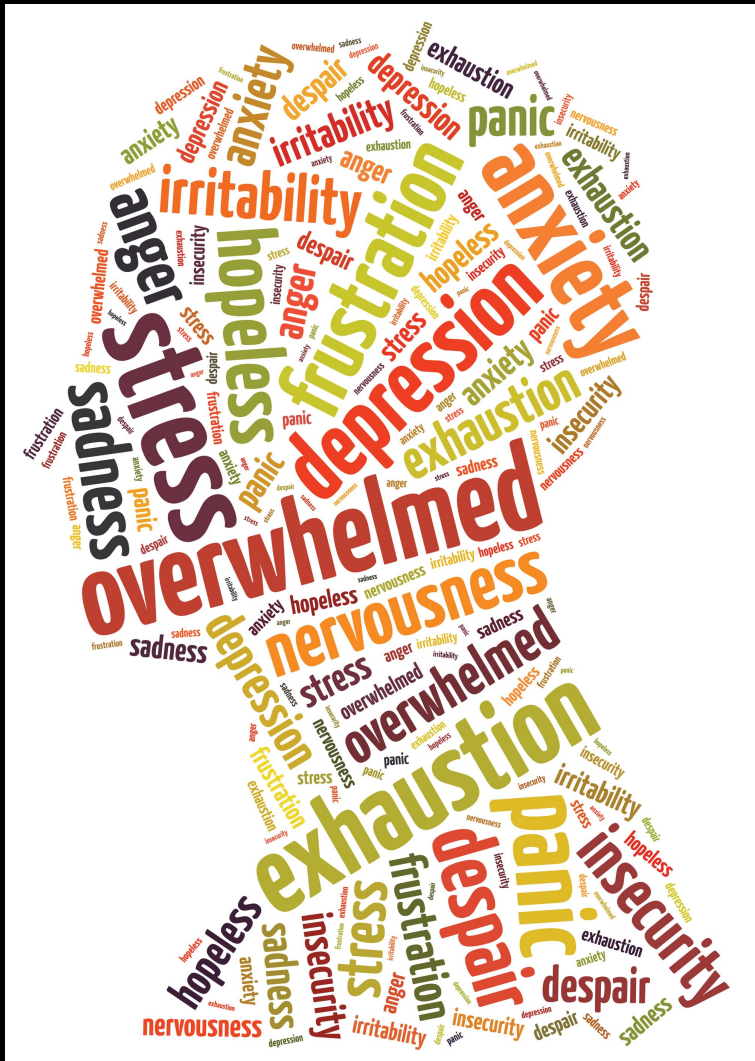
Holly Williams. Data from CSF/ASUC/GA 2012 graduate student survey and uhs.berkeley.edu.

J. Teske | 1.29.17

How have I been affected by mental illness?



How can we make academia a more supportive place for people with mental illness?

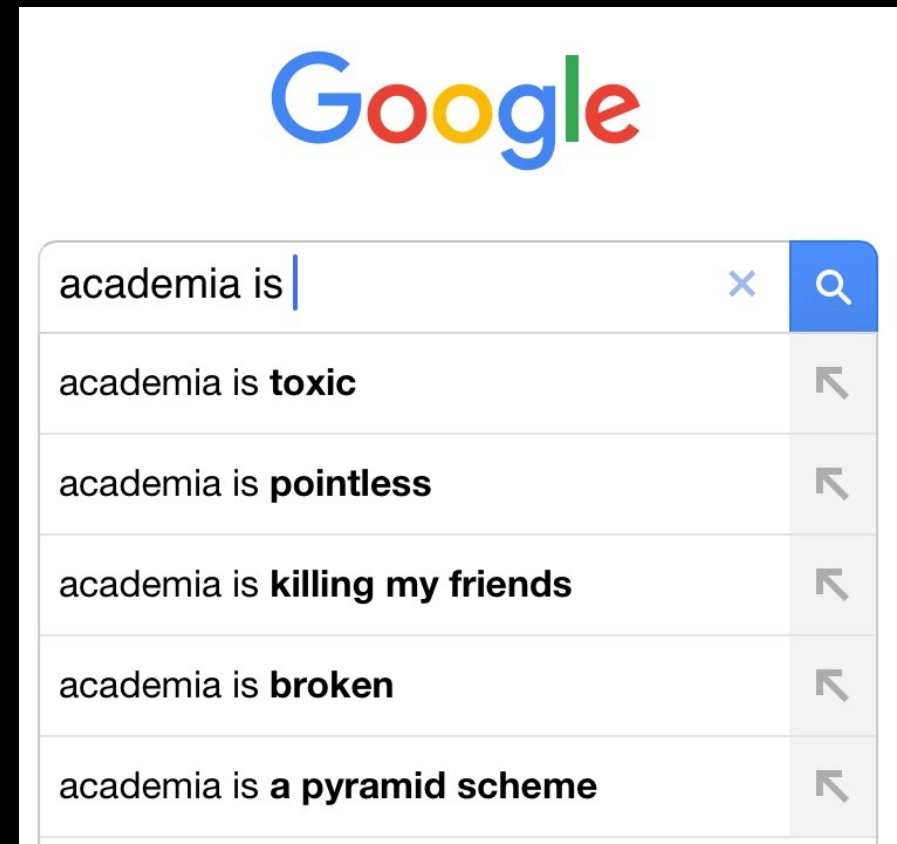


- Talk about it, and encourage others to ask for help
- Make professional help and resources available and obvious
- Train supervisors, professors, advisors, other students to recognize warning signs, and how to appropriately respond
- Ask people what they need and want

credit: concept: Holly Williams; design: tagxedo.com;
source for words: csfasuclga 2012
graduate student survey and uhs.berkeley.edu

How can we make academia less triggering of mental illness?

- Move away from tunnel-vision scientist caricature, try to set good work-life balance example for students
- Be upfront with students about career options, help develop sense of direction, give constructive (and positive) feedback often
- Educate ourselves about issues of racism faced by students and faculty/staff of color, practice allyship



Resources

- Active Minds - nonprofit that empowers students to speak openly about mental health to educate others and encourage help-seeking (local chapter)
- Academic Mental Health Collective - online resource for graduate students who struggle with mental illness, run by current or former graduate students
- UMich CAPS
 - groups, lunches, workshops
 - counseling, psychiatric support
 - crisis services
 - screenings
 - culturally competent services
- A dozen student-run mental health groups



Mental illness is more common
in academia, and we need to
treat it like the real risk to
scientific progress that it is.

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Citations at www.activeminds.org and www.nami.org