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Who Am I: Farmington Honors Journal, Volume 5, Spring 2023

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Honors Journal

Edited by Madisyn Smith

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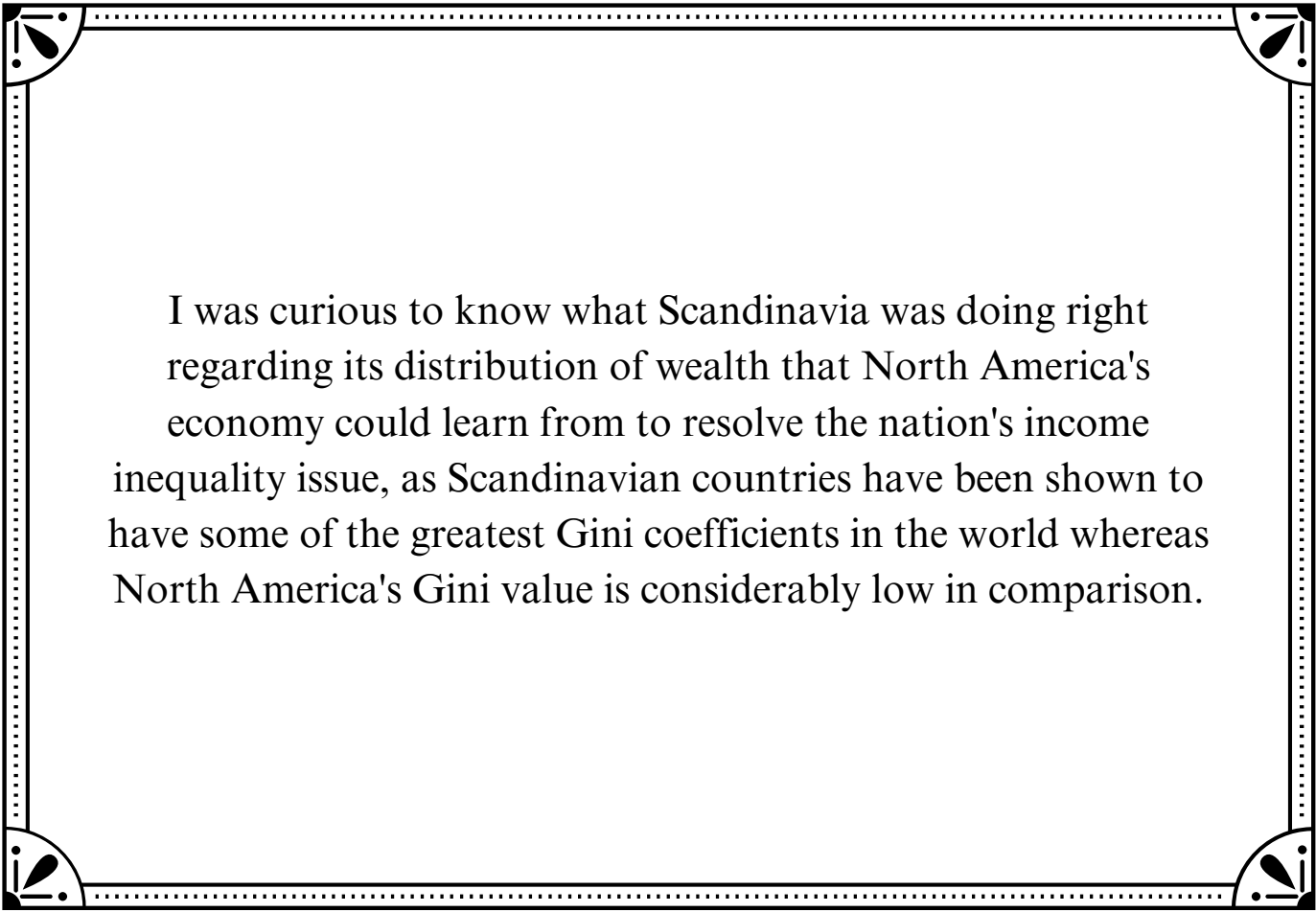
Foreword

Hello everyone,

Thank you for taking the time to look at the work of some of the wonderful students here at the University of Maine at Farmington. These pieces showcase both personal works, as well as works for specific classes. There was a recurring theme of identity throughout many of the submissions seen here in this journal, so to play off of last year's *Why Am I?*, the 2023 Honors Journal brings you *Who I Am*. I hope you enjoy these pieces as much as I have.

Sincerely,

Madisyn Smith



I was curious to know what Scandinavia was doing right regarding its distribution of wealth that North America's economy could learn from to resolve the nation's income inequality issue, as Scandinavian countries have been shown to have some of the greatest Gini coefficients in the world whereas North America's Gini value is considerably low in comparison.

According to the World Bank, Gini coefficients - an indicator of income inequality for a given nation - tend to vary from region to region. Of particular interest are the dramatic differences between North American nations and Scandinavian nations. Regarding North America, the United States was recognized to have a Gini value of about 41.5 in 2019, indicating great inequality. Mexico appears to have one of the highest values, ranking 45.4 in 2020. The three Caribbean nations in which wealth appears to be distributed the most unequally are Honduras and Costa Rica which both have values of 48.2 in 2019, and Panama which scored 49.8 in 2019. Canada seems to be faring the best, with a Gini value of 33.3 in 2017. By combining these six countries' Gini coefficients to find the mean, the resulting Gini value for North America appears to be 44.4, indicating great income inequality overall. Among all of Scandinavia, Sweden has the greatest inequality, ranking 29.3 in 2019. Denmark, Finland, and Norway all scored the same value that same year with 27.7 each. Iceland scored 26.1, appearing to have the least inequality among the entire Scandinavian region. Scandinavia's mean Gini value is approximately 27.7. All Scandinavian countries appear to have less income inequality than North American countries, with the latter's mean being about 46.32% greater than the former's. The Sustainable Development Report states that the long-term objective that developed and developing countries must meet is 27.5 or below, The Scandinavian mean is closer to the objective value than the North American mean, showing that Scandinavian countries appear to have been more successful at reaching this value than North American countries. However, the lack of consistency between when international data are updated is an obstacle in the discussion, compiling data from three different years into the same report. A country's inequality may contribute to its inability to update its data for the World Bank in a timely manner, though.

So what is North America doing wrong, and what is Scandinavia doing right? It generally depends on how a region's economy is structured and how impartially a region's society is organized. In the United States, "The top 10 percent of Americans held nearly 70% of U.S. wealth" in 2021 (Siripurapu, 2022). Income taxes have been experiencing a decline, increasing the wealthy Americans' share of profits in comparison to other employees. For instance, the

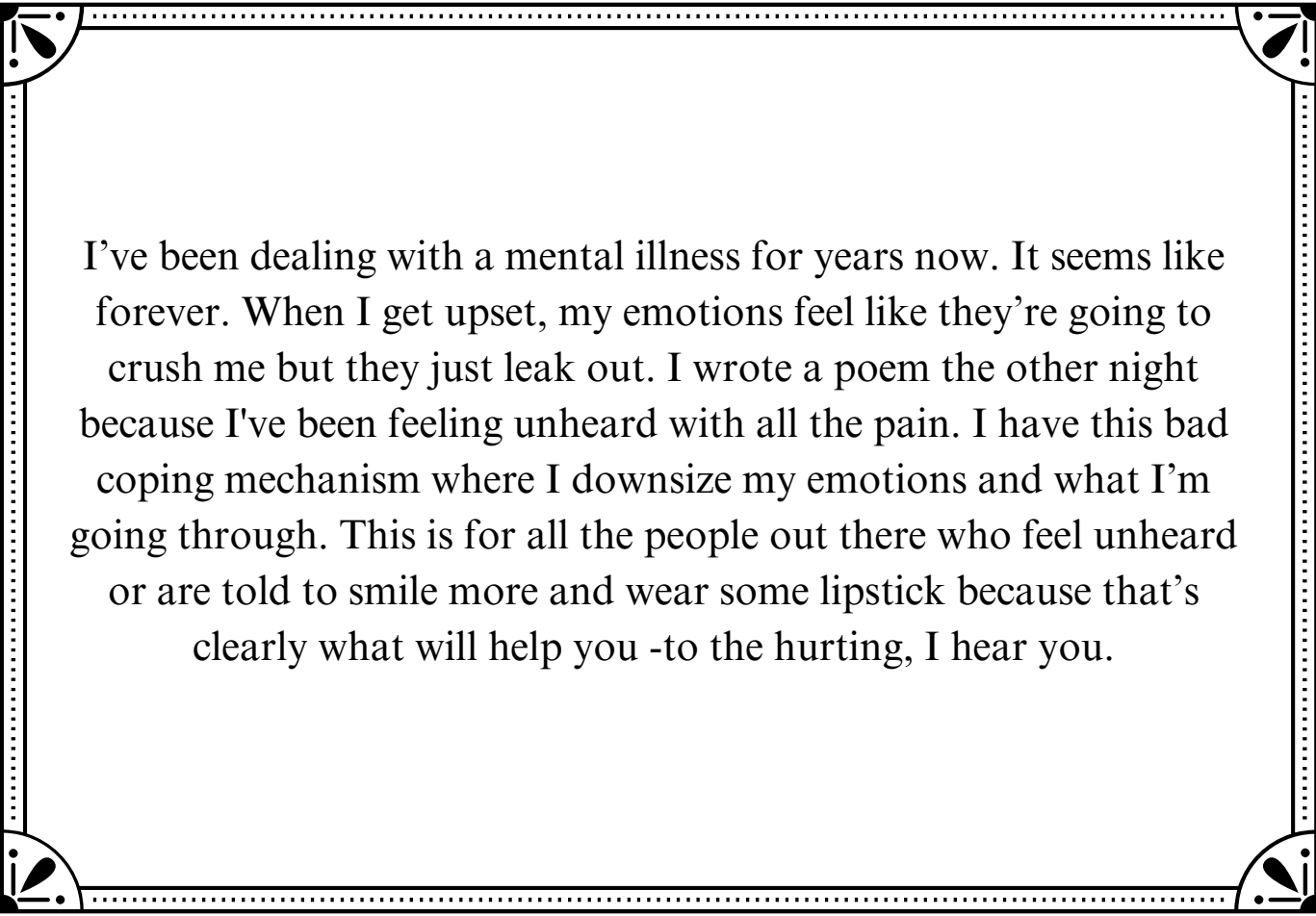
capital gains tax, the tax enforced upon a company's stocks, has hovered around 25% since 2014. Education is another factor, as less education has been linked to lower incomes and rates of unemployment, whereas higher degrees of education have been linked to greater monetary gains and rates of lucrative employment. The minimum wage of a job appears to reflect that job's perceived skill level, leading workers to complain that they are not getting paid enough for their effort. There is a persisting lack of trust in democracy to reduce inequality, given how much influence wealthy people can have on political campaigns. Additionally, wealth is unequally distributed among men and women, and white families and black families, reflecting a long history of systemic racism and misogyny from the early Twentieth Century that the United States has yet to fully recover from.

Scandinavia wasn't always as equal as it is today. It was an early Twentieth Century social movement organized by the Norwegians who peacefully protested their governments to recognize and resolve the issues of hunger, poverty, crime, and unemployment brought on by the wealth gap at the time. In Scandinavia, the main strategy preventing an unequal distribution of wealth is progressive taxation enforced upon families of different social classes. A progressive tax creates a more robust social security system to reduce poverty and alleviate anxiety associated with retirement. There are laws that protect corporate property, given the market-based economies Scandinavian nations have. Since the Norwegians' initial protests, trust in the local government appears to have increased given how Scandinavian society practices egalitarianism, ensuring everyone is treated fairly. Men and women of different ethnicities and cultures are given equal treatment and opportunity in the workplace. Regarding media, the top four countries ranked to have the best freedom of press were all Scandinavian countries. Additionally, there is a distinct lack of corruption within the political structures of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The overall quality of life appears to be more than pleasant. In fact, "Norway was ranked as the happiest country in the world in 2017" by the World Happiness Report, "followed immediately by Denmark and Iceland," putting three Scandinavian nations in the top three (Hodgson, 2018).

Income inequality has a direct effect on a country's ability to practice sustainable

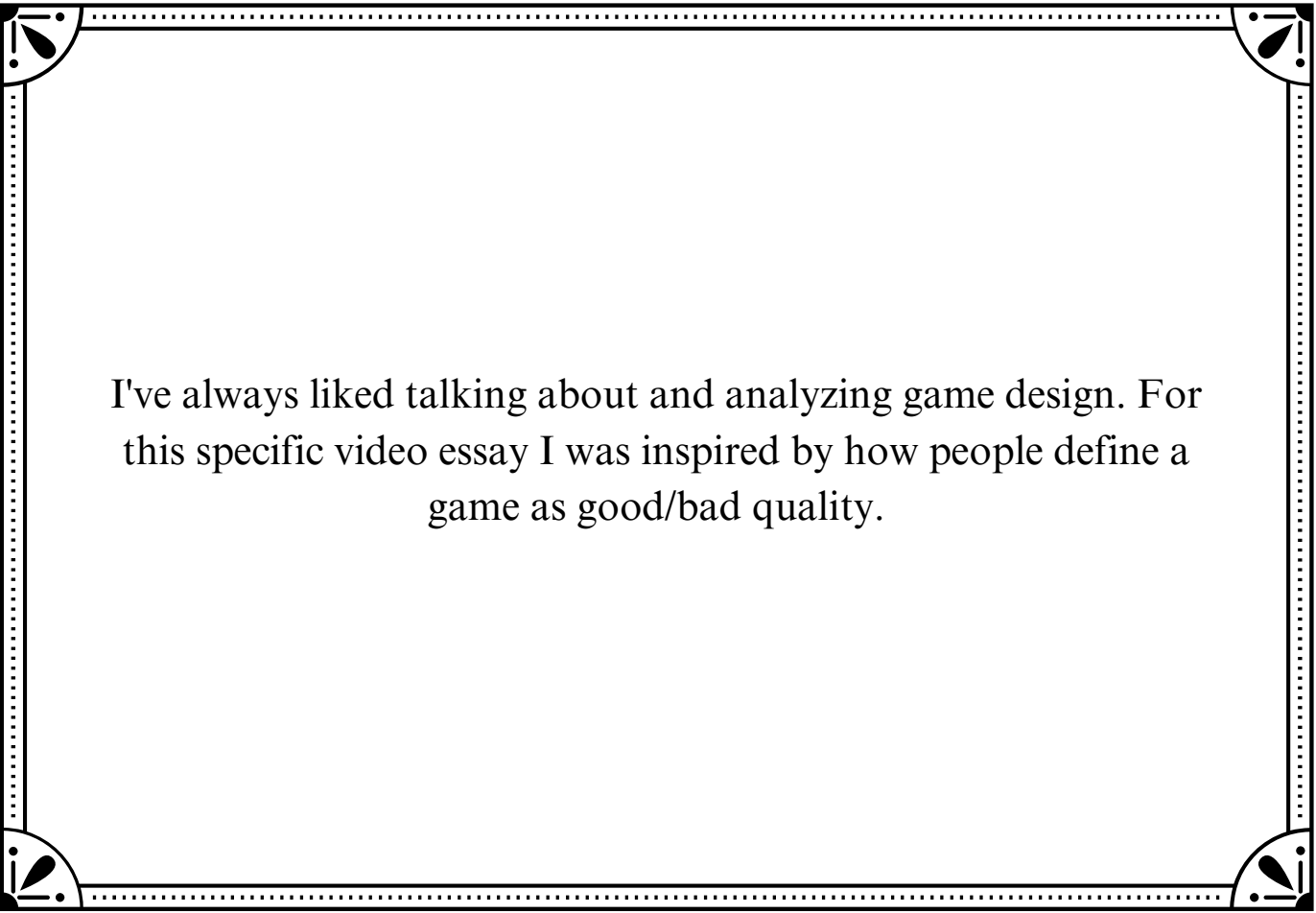
development, as the rich and the poor share different effects. For starters, rich people generally have different consumption patterns than poor people, consuming a greater amount of goods at a quicker rate than necessary. A psychological factor to this phenomenon is called status anxiety, meaning the rich will do whatever they can to stay rich, regardless if their actions are environmentally friendly or not. Their consumption patterns influence the global economic structure; as “Much of what is produced in developing countries;” like grains, fruits, nuts, and tobacco; “is for the consumption of those in more affluent countries” (Jani, 2017). While poor families in Africa are already struggling to support themselves, their role in the global economy means they are obligated to prioritize the needs of the countries they export to over their own needs. The desire to maintain status may contribute to the rich’s motivation to endorse political campaigns that would greatly benefit them and their prosperity. Because their consumption habits are so excessive, the rich generally contribute more to climate change than the poor, exacerbating a problem that has been shown to disproportionately affect communities based on income inequality. As more greenhouse gas emissions accumulate in the atmosphere, natural disasters become more common. This poses a significant threat to poorer communities who are unfortunately more vulnerable to the inimical effects of catastrophic, climate-induced events like floods, droughts, and wildfires. The infrastructure of poor people’s houses is weaker and more susceptible to damage than the houses of rich people which are more sturdy and well-protected. Despite owning more than the poor, the poor actually have more to lose in the event of a natural disaster. In the context of comparing North American inequality to Scandinavian inequality, this suggests that the greater the difference between the amount of wealth distributed between the top 1 percent and bottom 50 percent of citizens, the greater the conflict between the two groups of a given country will be. The more united a nation is and the more trust a nation has in their government, the more likely they will be willing to cooperate with each other. As the Norwegians proved a decade ago, it is possible for a largely unequal society to become considerably more equal over time. Scandinavian countries like Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have been celebrated as some of the most sustainable countries in the world, while North American countries like the United States, Mexico, and Panama have a long way to go.

Scandinavia's mean Gini value of 27.7 is closer to satisfying the long-term Sustainable Development Goal of 27.5. However, there is not much optimism that North America can reach the same goal by 2030. Countries like the United States are just too politically polarized to develop efficient methods that benefit every American. To meet the long-term objective by 2030, North America would need to decrease its current combined Gini coefficient of 44.4 by roughly 2.1 each year starting in 2022. However, that may simply be too great for North America to satisfy the income inequality SDG in eight years with how social conflict may impede progress on sustainable development.



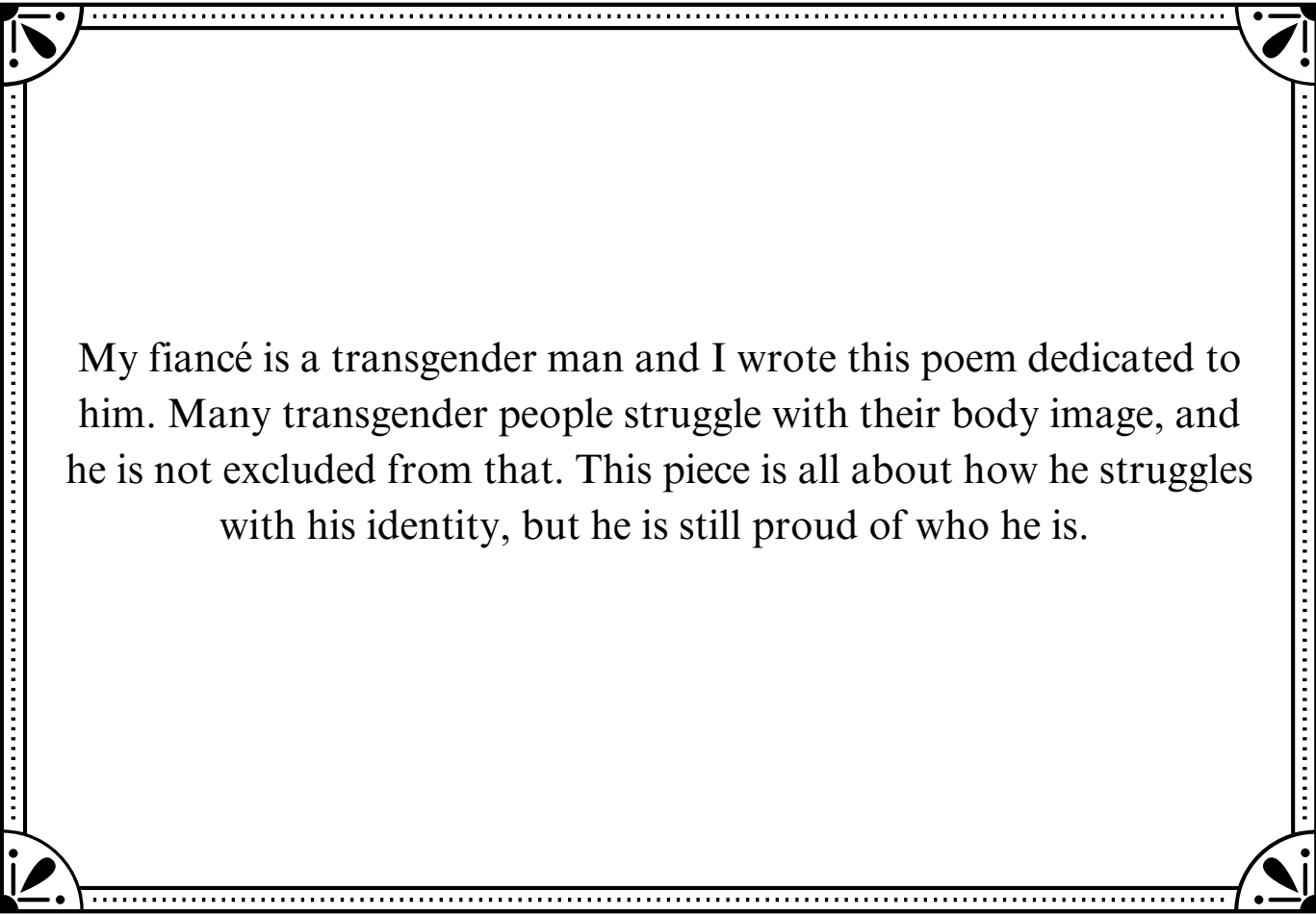
I've been dealing with a mental illness for years now. It seems like forever. When I get upset, my emotions feel like they're going to crush me but they just leak out. I wrote a poem the other night because I've been feeling unheard with all the pain. I have this bad coping mechanism where I downsize my emotions and what I'm going through. This is for all the people out there who feel unheard or are told to smile more and wear some lipstick because that's clearly what will help you -to the hurting, I hear you.

I'm tired; withered away with exhaustion.
I speak with words, clear as day.
I put on lipstick to hide my cracked lips.
Mascara and eye liner to protect what's left.
I'm slipping though.
My eye liner isn't perfect you see, it hasn't been for awhile.
My mascara is dried out.
So what now?
I speak with words; words seeming to be translucent through the tip of my tongue, my teeth, my lips.
Can you hear me?
My mascaras dried up.
My lipstick has crumbled.
My eyeliner isn't consistent with it's stroke.
You tell me, buy more lipstick, new mascara, different eyeliner and all new techniques with applying.
Applying for what though?
You've heard what I said; listened to the words spoken.
I'm tired though, and you haven't grasped the concept yet.
My words are little buckets of non-alphabetical lined letters.
With spaces.
Spaces you over looked, because reading and listening as quick as you can gets you far.
Right?
My mascara is gone
My eyeliner is smudged and smeared and seamlessly slacking.
My lipstick is fragmented into crumbled pieces.
I'm tired; bones breaking, spine slipping.
We part ways now.
You've finished my cluttered confused confession.
You've listened, and that's all.



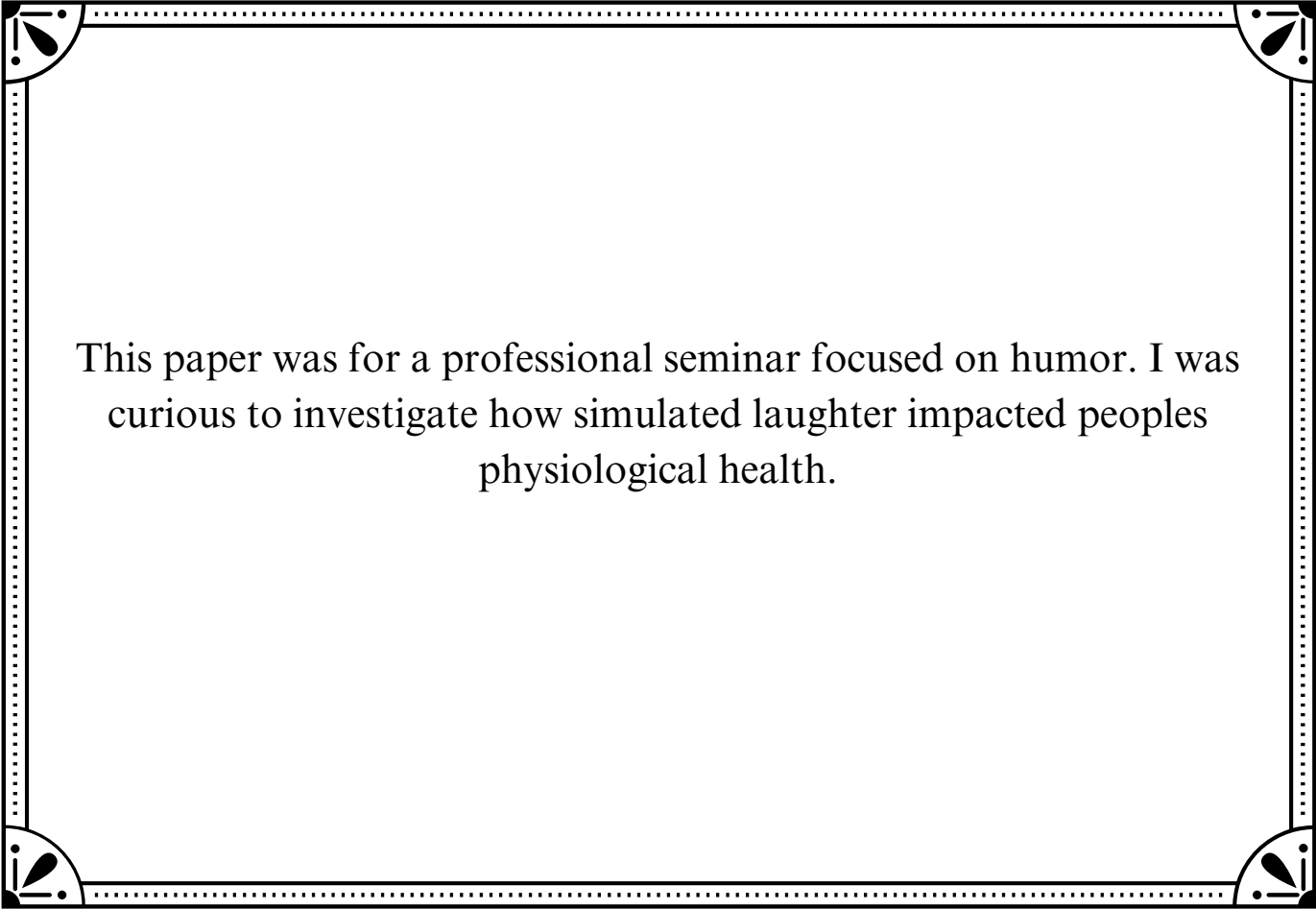
I've always liked talking about and analyzing game design. For this specific video essay I was inspired by how people define a game as good/bad quality.





My fiancé is a transgender man and I wrote this poem dedicated to him. Many transgender people struggle with their body image, and he is not excluded from that. This piece is all about how he struggles with his identity, but he is still proud of who he is.

There is a *Student* very confident and proud,
Going to school and facing such a crowd.
His body doesn't define him, breasts too round,
Hips too big, body too curvy, he was bound.
He is more than his body, never was a female.
His skin, so soft and smooth, never to be frail.
Eyes deep of meaning, lips full of love.
Tattoos with importance, scars to get rid of.
He's often alone, drawing elaborate pieces,
The colder the weather, the more this increases.
Casting out a line, and then losing his poles,
Going out in nature, and taking long strolls.
Intelligent, loyal, attractive, romantic,
Kind, helpful, strong, daring, sarcastic.
This student has the biggest heart you'll ever see,
Soon he'll be able to get away, and be free.
He doesn't have the best attributes,
And sometimes he is the reason for many disputes.
However, he almost, always puts up a fight,
For anything he believes in and thinks is right.
He doesn't give into anyone and always tries
His best, but sometimes he slips up and lies.
He isn't perfect at anything, just like many,
But as for his love? There is always plenty.



This paper was for a professional seminar focused on humor. I was curious to investigate how simulated laughter impacted peoples physiological health.

Abstract

This archival research analysis of the literature focuses on the impact of simulated laughter and corresponding interventions on psychological and physical health and overall well-being. A collection of 11 different peer-reviewed articles were examined and results, as well as common techniques, are presented. While many studies have small sample sizes and may lack generalizability, the research shows strong consistency. The literature supports that simulated laughter programs show promising results as an adjunctive form of alternative treatment when individuals are faced with the difficulties and setbacks of traditional medical and psychological treatments.

Keywords: Simulated laughter, laughter therapy, laughter yoga, alternative treatment.

Let's start with a warm-up, "haha, hahoo, heehaw, heehoo, meehoo, meehee, meehaa, seehaa, seemoo" (Mora-Ripoll, 2017, p. 3). Now let's get a little more into it, pretend to sneeze and then start laughing, "ah, aaah, aaaaaah, ha ha ha haaaa" (Mora-Ripoll, 2017, p.4). Now to close up our exercise let's sit down and get into a comfortable position for a short meditation. Remain completely silent and keep your eyes closed. After a little bit, let the laughter in your body come out freely. If you have no laughter to let out, then create simulated laughter. While this may initially feel like an absurd exercise and you may be questioning why anyone would choose to start self-inducing laughter, studies have shown that simulated laughter even if ingenuine can improve mood (Heo et al., 2016), reduce anxiety (Tanaka et al., 2018; Yim, 2016), decrease the amount of cortisol release (Meier et al., 2021), improve sleep (Ghodsbin et al., 2015; Yazdani et al., 2014), improve depression and life satisfaction (Greene et al., 2017; Shahidi et al., 2010), and improve general health (Ghodsbin et al, 2015; Yazdani et al, 2014).

Since many programs aimed at promoting psychological and physical well-being are often costly, invasive, and demanding (Mora-Ripoll, 2017; Yim, 2016), alternative treatments that are more appealing in these realms, but are as effective as traditional treatment are often sought after. One type of program that could fit this criterion is laughter therapy. Since laughter is a universal experience (Greene et al., 2017; Meier et al., 2021) it comes with great accessibility and affordability. Laughter therapy is a broad category that includes programs that use laughter as a main or adjunctive means to improve well-being (Mora-Ripoll, 2017; Yim, 2016). Laughter therapy often focuses on two types of laughter: simulated laughter and spontaneous laughter (Meier et al., 2021; Mora-Ripoll, 2017). Simulated laughter is the process in which an individual self-induces laughter not related to positive affect or humor, while spontaneous laughter is an uncontrollable response to external stimuli (Meier et al, 2021; Mora-Ripoll, 2011; Mora-Ripoll, 2017; Yim, 2016). As laid out by Mora-Ripoll (2017), laughter therapy usually takes form in three steps: "opening and warm-up; experiencing positive emotions, humor and laughter; [and] recovery, closure, and evaluation" (p. 2). It consists of a large variety of techniques, including laughter sounds, gymnastics, icebreakers, emotional wellness, playful behaviors, and a countless number of others. Specific exercises include, "[g]reeting laughter: greet everybody the way you normally greet

(e.g., shake hands) and replace words with laughter” (p.2); “[e]levator laughter: stand all in a clump as if in a crowded elevator and laugh” (p.2); and “[h]ead on belly laughter: have each participant put their head on the abdomen of the person behind them. When all are in position invite them to try and bounce the head on their abdomen laughing” (p. 2). While these exercises may appear to be rather uncomfortable or embarrassing, many studies have shown the beneficial impacts they have on physiological well-being (Ghodsbin et al., 2015; Green, et al., 2016; Heo, et al, 2016).

In a research study conducted by Greene et al. (2017) with the purpose of increasing physical activity engagement and overall health of older adults, 27 older adult participants were engaged in a laughter-based exercise program for 45 minutes twice a week for six weeks. The program included 8-10 laughter exercises as well as aerobic and strength-building activities. Measures on subjective and objective health, as well as self-efficacy ratings, were taken pre- and post-participation. Green and colleagues found significant improvements in mental health, aerobic endurance, and exercise related self-efficacy. A similar study conducted by Ghodsbin et al. (2015) recruited 72 community-residing older adult participants who engaged in a laughter therapy program. After six weeks Green and colleagues found a significant difference in somatic symptoms, general health, insomnia, and anxiety. Furthermore, a study by Heo and colleagues (2016) found improved health-related quality of life and elevated mood among hemodialysis patients following a four-week simulated laughter program. These studies all indicate significant effects on both mental and physical health with the primary component being simulated laughter. Thus, laughter therapy seems to be an effective main or adjunct treatment for improving overall well-being.

Another important form of laughter therapy that has been gaining attention in recent years is laughter yoga. Laughter yoga combines simulated laughter with traditional yogic techniques (Shahidi et al., 2010; Tanaka et al., 2018; Yazdani et al., 2014). Laughter yoga was first suggested by Madan Kataria in 1995 (Meier et al., 2021; Shahidi et al., 2010; Yazdani et al., 2014). The process of laughter yoga is very similar to that of laughter therapies, where the initiation of laughter is self-induced and usually becomes genuine throughout the exercise (Yazdani et al., 2014).

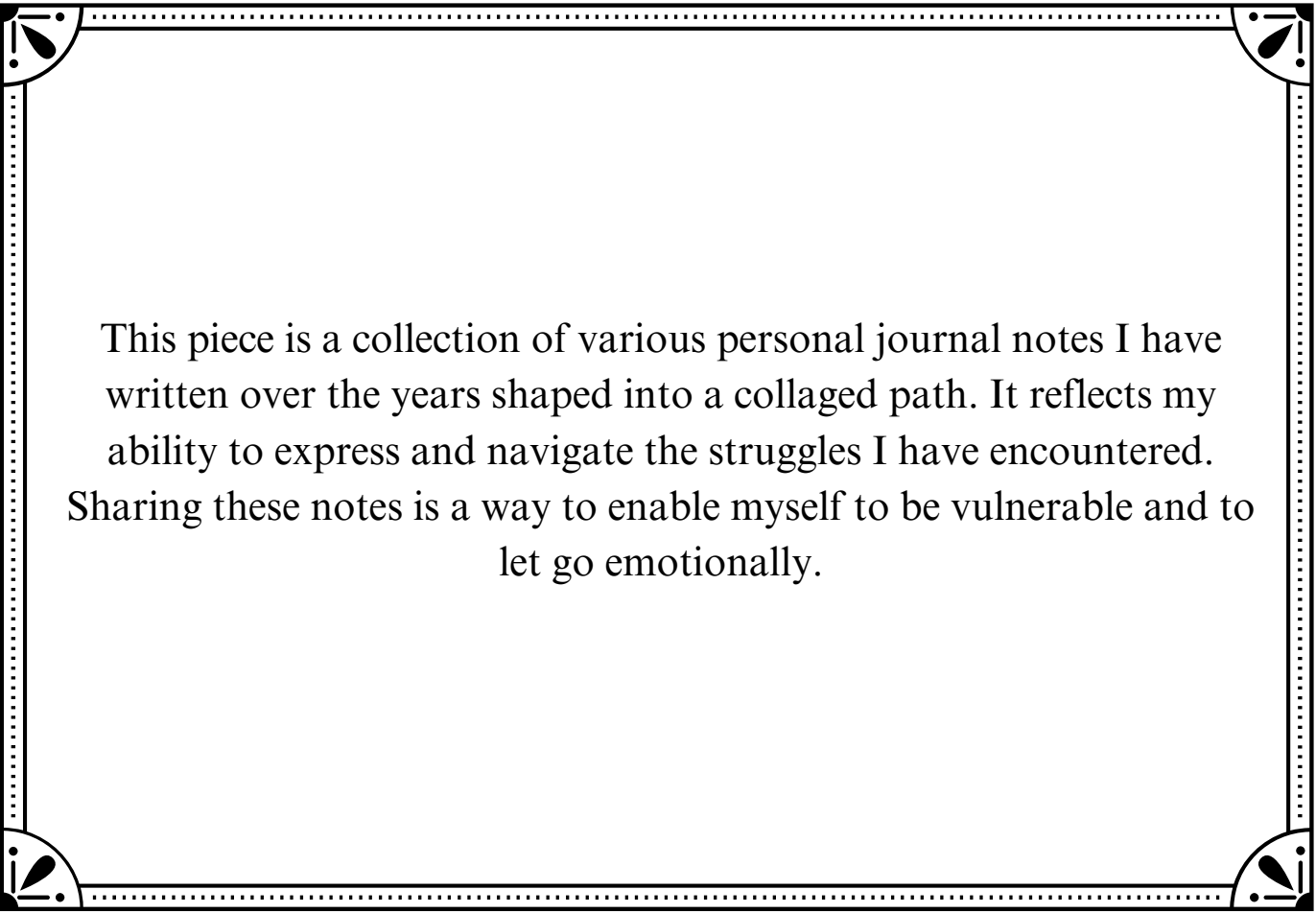
Laughter yoga focuses on the deep inhalation and exhalation from the diaphragm that is required from laughter, specifically homing in on interspersed breathing techniques between simulated laughter exercises (Yazdani et al., 2014). Much of the literature suggests that laughter yoga decreases cortisol release (Meier et al., 2021), lowers depression (Shahidi et al., 2010; Yazdani et al., 2014) and anxiety (Yazdani et al., 2014), increases life satisfaction (Shahidi et al., 2010), and improves psychological and physical well-being (Tanaka et al., 2018).

Meier and colleagues (2021) investigated if the effects of a single 30-minute session of laughter yoga would have a beneficial impact on cortisol levels and general well-being in healthy individuals between the age of 18 and 34 ($M = 23.77$). They used three conditions: a control group that received no intervention; a group that engaged in relaxation breathing techniques; and a group that engaged in laughter yoga. They found evidence to support that while neither the control group nor the relaxed breathing condition showed a decrease in cortisol response, the laughter yoga participants did. Similarly, Tanaka et al. (2018) replicated Meier and colleagues' findings of a decreased level of cortisol release within the demographic of older adults residing in Japan. Another study on laughter yoga conducted by Yazdani et al. (2014) investigated if laughter yoga could benefit the general well-being of nursing students. Two one-hour sessions were held a week for four weeks, and a control group that received no intervention was used as a baseline. Yazdani and colleagues found that general well-being increased significantly in the participants that engaged in the laughter yoga program compared to the control group. In addition, their study suggests that anxiety and sleep disorder symptoms, such as insomnia, decreased. It seems apparent that laughter yoga is another beneficial alternative main or adjunct treatment to improve mental and physical health.

While the studies conducted are promising in their results, Martin (2002) suggests that most of the studies in the literature have sample sizes that are too small for generalizability or use methods of measurement that are not sufficient in proving a causation, nor even a correlation to laughter being an effective intervention. While laughter still needs further research on its effects physiologically, and small sample sizes are a common limitation to many of these studies, Martin's claims hold little strength when considering the more recent studies that have come a decade after his rebuttal to laughter intervention research. Recent literature has found almost consistent results

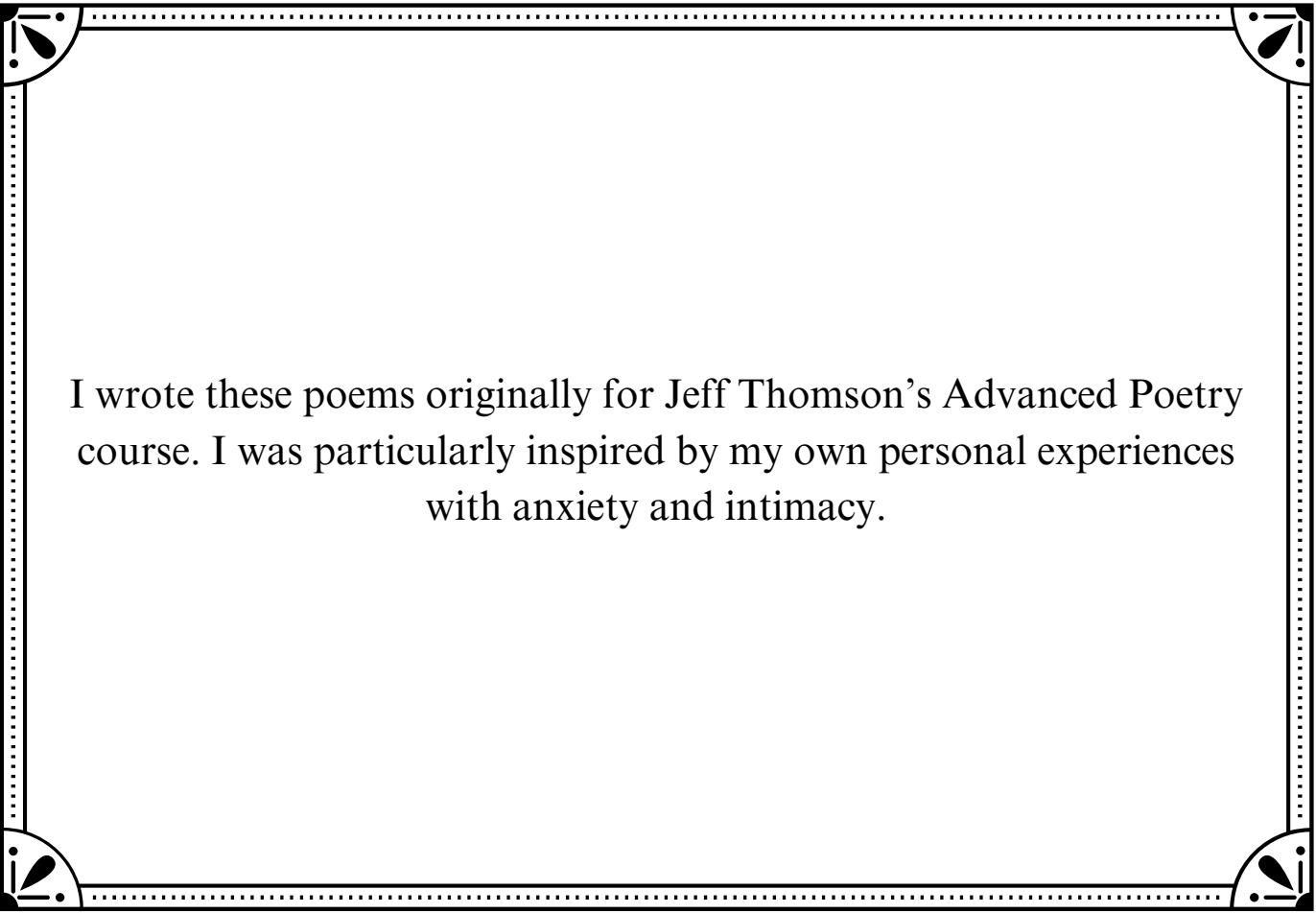
in studies across the globe concerning laughter therapy and laughter yoga programs. It is still important to consider that while these results are promising in nature, they still struggle to become generalizable. However, this is also a cause of the lack of literature found on these topics (Mora-Ripoll, 2011; Mora-Ripoll, 2017; Shahidi et al., 2010).

The effects observed and recorded from various research studies concerning simulated laughter inventions show a clear positive direction between engagement and general well-being and overall health. It seems that this cost-effective, easily accessible, and non-invasive treatment, that can even be conducted in one's own home could serve as a strong supplement to psychological and physical health for individuals looking for alternative treatment when faced with traditional options. Remember, something as simple as reciting this tongue twister three times in a row could turn your struggle into a chuckle: "I wish to wash my Irish wristwatch" (Spatola, 2012, para. 1).



This piece is a collection of various personal journal notes I have written over the years shaped into a collaged path. It reflects my ability to express and navigate the struggles I have encountered. Sharing these notes is a way to enable myself to be vulnerable and to let go emotionally.





I wrote these poems originally for Jeff Thomson’s Advanced Poetry course. I was particularly inspired by my own personal experiences with anxiety and intimacy.

My breath catches in my throat, I will myself to breathe.
My whole body feels as if I have missed the bus,
exhausted from chasing some unreachable thing.

My mind is constantly asking whether I left the oven on,
or the lights or the iron or forgot to lock the door.
My whole body feels as if I have missed the bus.

If I try really hard, I try to pinpoint when this all began
Fingers clammy and cold and shaking, legs bobbing like buoys in the sea,
My whole body feels as if I have missed the bus.

Try to think of good things. Think of laughter and lollipops and ice skating with my dad, but
deep down I know the lollipops are all sour apple and my skates gave me blisters. And again,
My whole body feels as if I have missed the bus,

Knees hit shag carpet, hands beside them on the floor. I try to count each piece of thread
Count the tears falling in between the fibers. 1, 2, 3, 4. Tears. Start again. The sweating on
my forehead ceases, the breathing slows. Physical exhaustion takes over and
My whole body feels as if I have missed the bus.

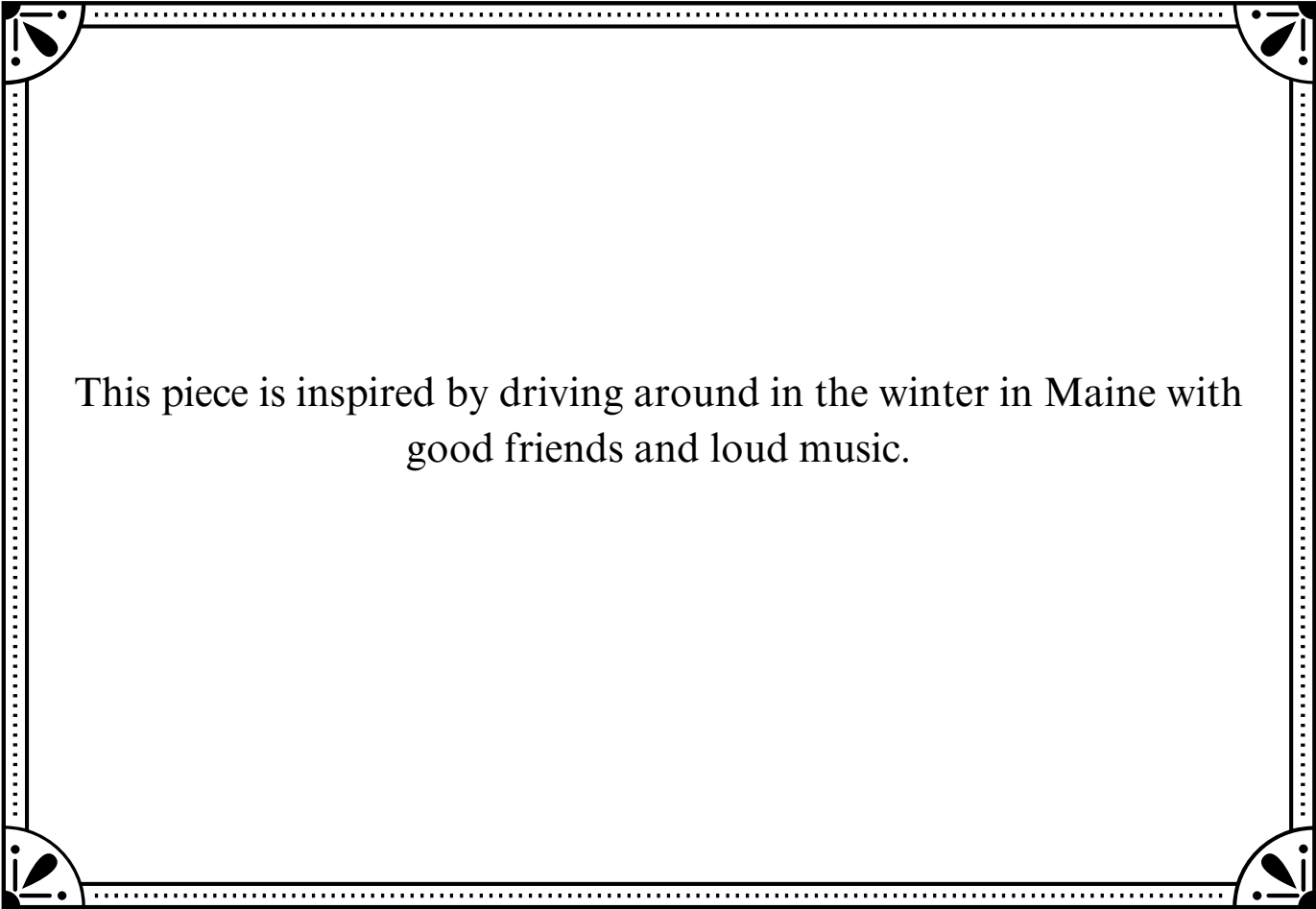
Inside of a bar with graffitied walls, below where God placed the moon, above the corner of Bleeker and Elm Streets, my baby dances. The constellations, gather in anticipation just to watch her shake off the day. My baby even captivates the sky.

On the earth below, she is dancing. I Watch, transfixed, and if I wasn't rooted to the ground I'd probably float away. My love, shimmying and shimmering, gold dusted in her minidress. The rain outside can only hope to be as melodic as her laugh as she twirls and drops to the dirty dance floor, gracefully falling like a star who the heavens gave the night off. She's a light turned on,

my baby, who sings along to the music, the lyrics escape out onto the roof-top. She belongs here in this rowdy bar, with the sticky floor and half full vodka cranberries, the bodies entangled together like weeds in this room bathed in artificial night.

I love this dancing girl, with candied sour apple eyes and cheeks flushed, the boys tripping over their mold colored shoes just to be near her frame, so soft, so strong like the wind's longful sighing.

I will take her home before the night gives way to dawn's fuzzy slippers, silky pink bathrobe and morning breath, full of sighing. Grey and tattooed with sleep. Gently snoring in our bed, as the dark gives way to light.



The setting sun illuminates the snow covered fields. A black sports car races down the long back roads that weave through them. Two college girls fill the car with their pop punk music, singing along loudly.

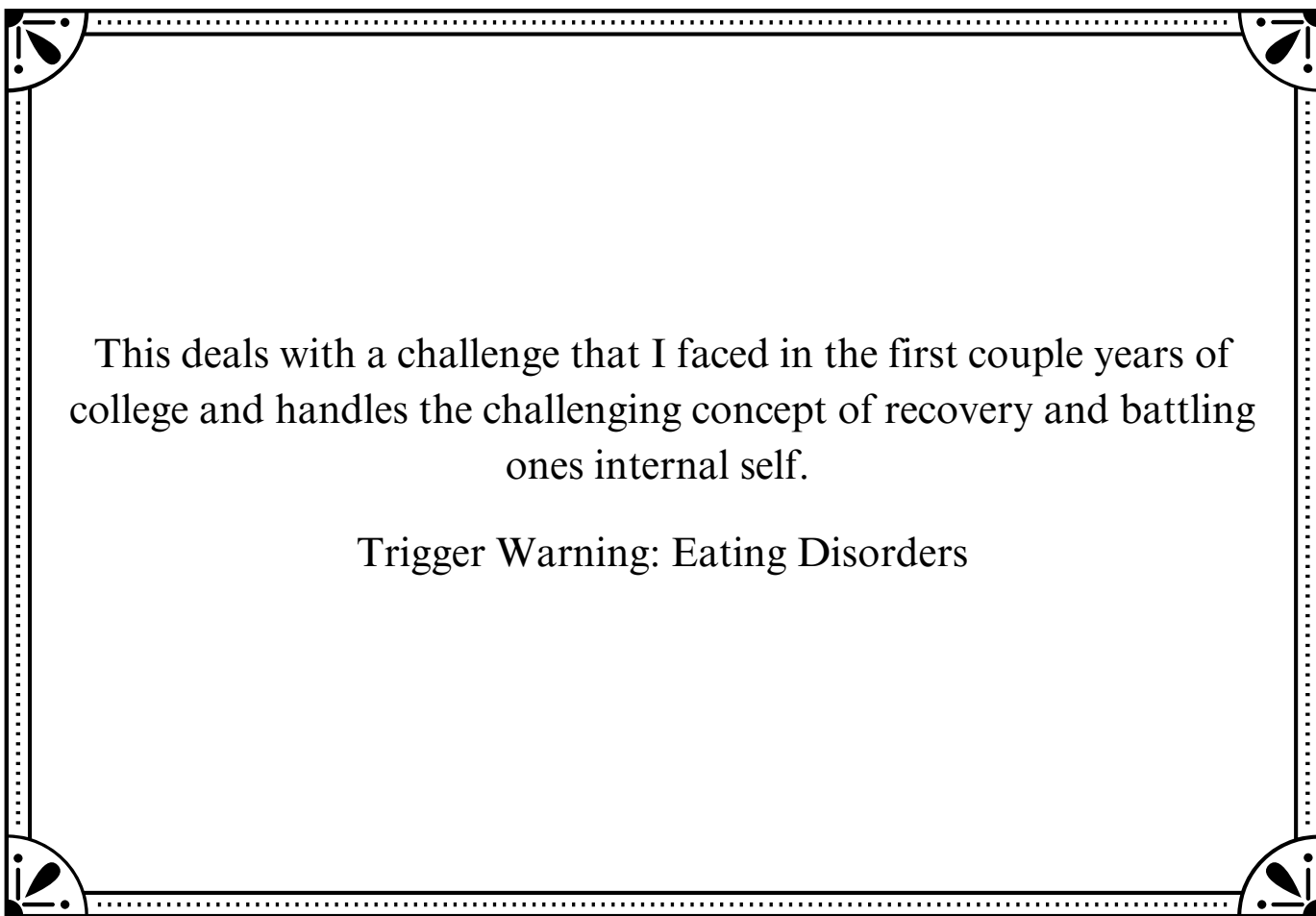
“Oh my god, turn that shit up!” The driver says. The other girl reaches over to the center console and cranks the music even higher. The bass vibrates through the car and the girls feel it in their feet through their “going-out” boots.

Chance, the driver, convinced her boyfriend Todd that it was her friend Lily’s birthday, and they needed to take his fancy sports car to dinner. But it’s not Lily’s birthday and they are not going out to dinner. Chance is waiting to receive a text about a party. If she receives no such text by ten o’clock, she’s going to find them a bar instead, one that won’t look too closely at their fake IDs.

The car is getting warm, so Chance rolls down their windows a little, and the freezing winter air streams in. It whips Chance’s brown hair around her face while Lily’s short pink bob stays put in her tightly woven braids. The wind bites at their exposed skin. Their tightfitting, revealing outfits do nothing to keep them warm, so their energy has to do all the work.

Lily watches her friend drive. She is mesmerized by the way her long hair moves around her, how she sways with the music behind the wheel, and how she sings. Chance’s singing allows Lily to sing louder. Chance’s confidence makes Lily feel bolder. If they had another few days together, Lily would probably realize she has developed a crush on her friend. If they had another few weeks together, Chance would probably pick up on it too and use it as a reason to break up with her boyfriend.

Chance glances over at her friend and smiles. Then the right tire catches on a patch of ice and the car is in the air.



But, what would it do to me
My stomach lets out a crying plea
My brain entangled with thoughts of food
These thoughts put a hitch in my mood

I wish I could just not think
About how many calories are in my drink
I wish I never gained that weight
Because now, I can't even think straight
The little voice in my head tells me that food will make me fat
But my stomach cries for me to get it food, and stat

Watching my waist shrink and the scale number drop
I constantly think about types of food I could swap
Low calorie this, no sugar that
I'll do whatever it takes to make my stomach flat

I've forgotten what normal food tastes like
For long ago, I told it "take a hike"

Feeling alone in this downward spiral
Only finding comfort in TikTok creators that went viral
They help me see I'm not alone
Other people have gone through it too, even if they're just on my phon

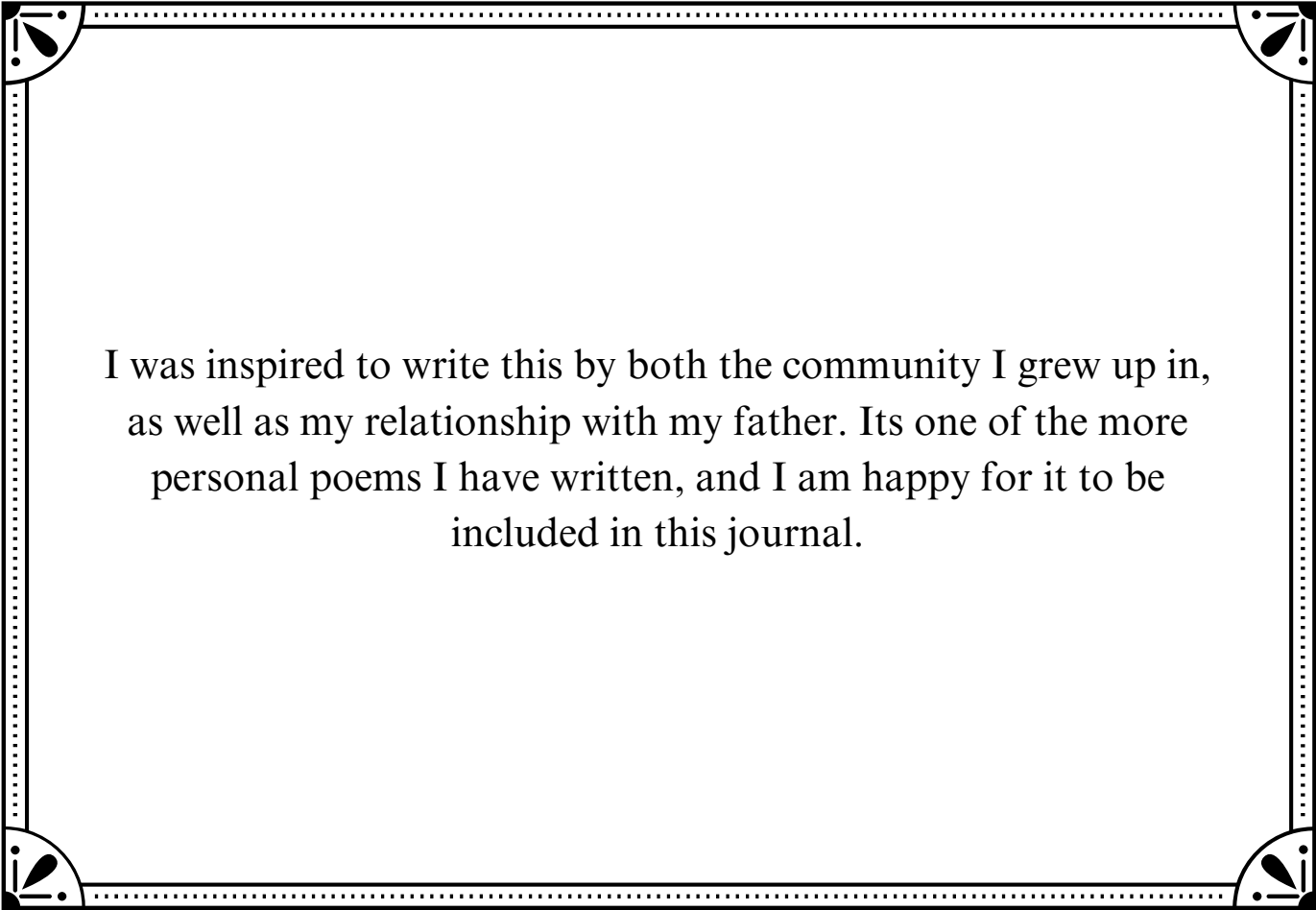
I push myself to still lift weights
And play my sport, and go on dates
Eating at a restaurant I always worry
What's the lowest calorie option and I have to hurry
If I take too long examining nutrition facts
Someone will catch on to my Eating Disorder acts

So I will hide it away, and keep it to myself
Looking at the recipe books on my shelf
Hoping one day I will recover
So I can cook what I want without my thought that always hover
Because eating only 800 calories a day
Makes my real personality trail away

I dream of the day I can eat a cookie or two
And not have to tell my thoughts to shoo

One day that'll happen and I can't wait

But for now, I still think about what's on my plate



I was inspired to write this by both the community I grew up in, as well as my relationship with my father. Its one of the more personal poems I have written, and I am happy for it to be included in this journal.

When tryouts come,
pick the players
that can swing the farthest,
the ones that you'd wish
were your son,
then equip them
in the finest uniforms
so that the school can see
how much each one
is worth.

Watch them throw the ball
back and forth,
dive for catches,
and scrape their knees like
toddlers that have suddenly grown up.

Stay on the field
until night falls so that
by the time you get home,
your own children are already in bed,
while the ones you've just coached
are in the back seat
as their real parents
curse your name
on their drive home.

When game day is finally here,
stand next to third base –
the one farthest away from the stands

Where your wife watches –
so that you have the optimal position
to yell at the umpire.

Spit and spat
about how Chris Landry did
make it to second base
until finally you are suspended
for the rest of the game.
Then wait in your office
until the twenty-two year old assistant coach,
who just so happens to be
the same age as
your oldest son, fetches you
to proclaim that
your team has won.

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