

ATTIC SALT

2023

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noun (Latin, Sal Atticum)

1. Graceful, piercing, Athenian wit.
2. An interdisciplinary journal which accepts submissions in any genre, format, or medium—essays, original research, creative writing, videos, artwork, etc.—from the entire LMU community and the Honors programs of AJCU institutions nationwide.

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This year, as I prepared to give the introductory presentation for *Attic Salt* to the new staff, I faced the question often posed when I mention the journal: What is *Attic Salt*? The short answer, that it's an interdisciplinary journal showcasing exemplary undergraduate student work, only scratches the surface. Over the years, *Attic Salt* has evolved and grown to encompass a vast array of types of pieces, with every year proving that there are endless ways to express one's interests. Not only does the journal provide every student from LMU a chance to publish and showcase their work, but the opportunity is also extended to students from Honors Programs at fellow AJCU institutions. We aim to provide a comprehensive and diverse presentation of students and their individuality as they express it through their research, artwork, creative writing, poetry, photography, and much more.

As the journal, along with the rest of the world, continues to recover from the effects of the prior two COVID-impacted years, we must all take the time to examine the new world we are emerging into. We have all lived through a global pandemic that has drastically impacted each and every individual on this planet. This effect is apparent in the pieces included in the journal this year, as many of the works seek to find a sense of self in relation to the ever-changing world around us, especially as global current events only seem to be heightening the divisions among us. The desire to create a place in the the world, both in terms of a sense of self-identity and in terms of developing a connection and relationship with one's surroundings, seems stronger than ever. From a painting expressing the feeling of being out of place to a short written piece about the experience of being a woman to a photo multimedia project about using tattoos as forms of self-expression, the works we present in this edition reveal the explorations we embark on to find a sense of place.

I sincerely appreciate the many people who contributed to the creation of this journal, and would especially like to thank Dr. Alexandra Neel, our faculty advisor, along with the Assistant Editors who helped edit the journal. Thank you to my fantastic staff of editors, who put in many hours of reviewing and editing to ensure our journal reflected the best student work. I would also like to thank the LMU Honors Program, Dr. Trevor Zink, Dr. John Dionisio, Nubia Valenzuela, and Dr. Andrew Dilts for their continued support. Without the invaluable design contributions of Dr. Garland Kirkpatrick and publication designer Shae Silva, we could not have published this journal. And of course, without the submissions from our authors, there would be no work to display. My deepest gratitude is to the *Attic Salt* staff, whose hard work has made all of this possible.

I hope that you find some way to identify with these pieces, but at the very least, I hope you enjoy them.

Nelea (Tori) Fong

Editor-in-Chief



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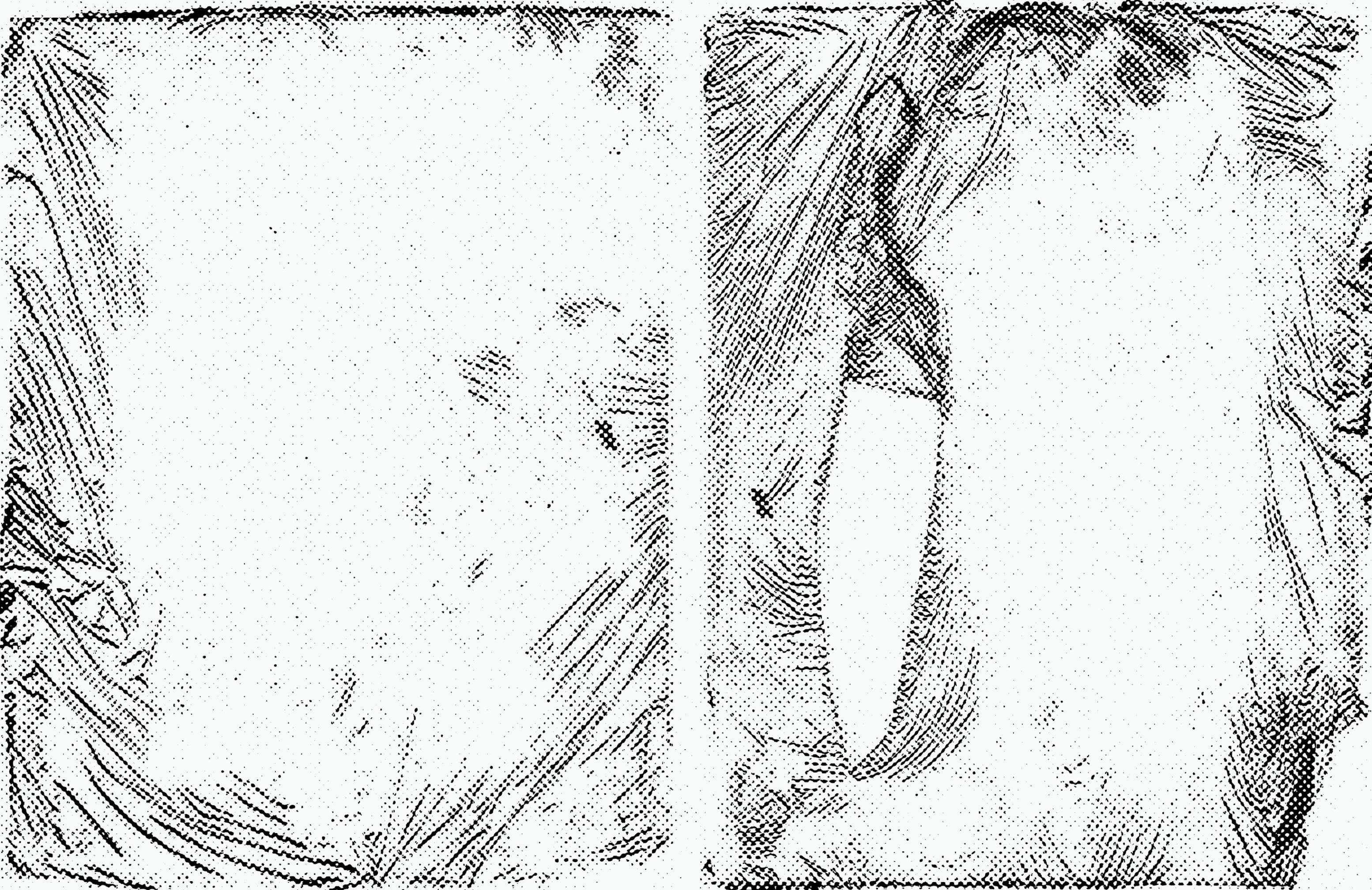
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MAYA JAFFE

The Wild

prose

Maya Jaffe is a student writer based in the Bay Area of Northern California. She is a junior currently earning a B.A. in Theatre Arts and a B.A. in English from Santa Clara University. While she enjoys all forms of creative writing, Maya's main passion is playwriting, and she is currently working with a team of writers and designers to devise an original show. In addition to writing, Maya is an avid reader and has been known to take part in the occasional craft night. She plans to go into the film industry post-grad with the intention of creating art that brings people joy.

The Wild

There is something so fundamentally cathartic about being a woman.

And the thing is, there are thousands of layers to girlhood and a thousand more to womanness.

There is inherent beauty and creation and anger and passion and destruction and pain in being a woman. There is emotion so powerful that it begins to glow inside your very being until it becomes so strong it blinds you. There is love so true and so strong that it threatens to overtake your entire life. There is pain that runs so deep you can feel the strain in your heart, sorrow that brings you to your knees and crumbles everything around you.

There is anger too. Oh, so, so much anger in womanhood. Anger that burns through your chest and runs up into your face and flares in your eyes with an intensity that can shatter even the strongest soul.

All of these equally define me, and all of these equally purge me.

And I do not like to pick favorites, because doing so would mean a disservice to all the others. Would mean choosing one that is prettier or cleaner or easier and that would mean contradicting the foundation of femininity.

But there are some moments of release that feel more sentimental. Not better, not worse, but more nostalgic. More grounding.

Unbridled joy.

Joy that cannot be kept in no matter how hard a girl may try.

The kind of running, jumping, screaming joy.

The kind that comes with swishing a skirt up around you.

With barefoot dancing in the grass and letting your hair run free. With singing. With howling at the moon. With spinning in circles.

The kind that comes from smiling so bright and wide that you start to laugh.

From running over vines and moss and branches and snagging your clothes on brambles and splashing your toes in cold streams.

From standing in the middle of a storm and letting it wash away all the pain.

From living. Living for yourself. Living to be free to make a mess. To scream and play and burn without an audience.

To be wild.

That is what makes me so much of a woman. The wild.

MATEO-LUIS PLANAS

Shaving

poetry

Mateo-Luis Planas is a Political Science major, poet, and East Coaster living in LA. Mateo is a proud Puerto Rican, Queer, Transgender man, and human rights activist. He loves stand-up comedy, horror movies, and playing with his dogs.

Shaving

Shaving; inspired by "Shaving" By Richard Blanco

I am not shaving, I'm writing about it;
Leaning over the porcelain sink,
Searching in the mirror for an ounce of familiarity
Finding only a skewed reflection that is not my own.
Yet here I am armed with Occam's razor,
Dreading the part where I cut away the simplest solution.
The fuzzy whiskers, a product of a month's labor,
A source of euphoric pleasure I wish I could bottle.
Trans joy, Testosterone Cypionate— I guess it can be bottled.

The self-inflicted agony as my skin submits to the thin needle,
The viscous fluid entering my muscle as my hand quakes to the finish,
All to grow these few whiskers;
Which I now cut away in this multigenerational ritual of masculinity.
How I yearned to partake in its exclusivity,
Yet these life-bearing pelvic bones, sturdy as a tree's trunk
And these shriveled skin sacks dangling from my chest like over-ripened fruit on a low-hanging branch
Would forever keep me an outsider looking in.

My father always told me we had the same hands.
His calloused palms brush across my face, feeling for gaps left by a misguided swipe.
He'd taught me without knowing I was watching.
His mannerisms escape my being as if they've always been my own,
Years of mirroring in admiration;
I find myself now, growing into him: a blueprint of idealized machismo, guarded by those few whiskers.
The astringent sting of aftershave coating my skin,
Triumphant lay the dead pieces of self, manhood, now circling the drain.

I am not shaving, but I will tell you about the mornings with scruff-sprinkled cheeks and excited energy
as I rush for the blade, When my heart flutters at the fact that now I must partake in this routine,
Like all the men that have come before,
I have washed and shaved—it is in that split second,
when perhaps the sun finishes rising and the first wave touches shore,
when perhaps the storm quiets and rainbows form,
that I most understand the invisibility of life and the intensity of vanishing,
like a highway mirage, without a trace.

Reverting to the mirror, all I can see is her.
Her tired eyes, the silent war she's been fighting all her existence.
I remain but a stranger in this body, as my euphoric bliss washes down the drain with those
whiskers. A chore that brings me momentary validation,
Traps me in a reflection.
She is inescapable.
And I've grown to hate it.

Therefore I am not shaving, I'm writing about it;

AVICARO

A Dying Star

photography

Avicaro Hunter is a sophomore at Loyola Marymount University studying psychology. Avicaro focuses on exploring different forms of art, including photography, painting, jewelry making, ceramics, and textile work. Most of her work centers on storytelling with themes of extreme juxtaposition, femininity, social issues, mental health, and a personal reflection on the definition of beauty in youth. When she isn't doing art, she is spending time with friends or listening to music.

A Dying Star



CONNER WILSON

Scaffolds

Los Angeles

poetry

Conner J. A. Wilson is a senior screenwriting major and theology/English minor at Loyola Marymount University. As a writer, he mostly works in the media of screenplays and poems. A second generation American, Conner grew up in southwest Missouri.

Scaffolds

I am as unsure what a pomelo is as you are
Besides that it is round
As a fern drowning from a lack of thirst
As a tornado whipping through our power cords
As the emerald sat in the heart of the mind of a dirt-brown toad
As the curve of your nose, the bend of your eyebrow.
But maybe you do know what a pomelo is.
Maybe you do know,
And it's just me who doesn't.

Someone hangs from a scaffold
Clutching with a little hand
Looking over a grey city,
Metal coated in mud,
The sound of cars and gunshots in a street.
There are no gunshots,
Just cars misfiring,
Sat where they must.

A scarf,
Dangling from a scaffold,
Wrapped around a stainless steel pole.
Nectar drips from the trees, somewhere.
Nectar drips from the ferns somewhere else.
You're in another place,
Cold and black,
Ice and rock,
A comet of the recent past or distant future,
Hiding a world
While a winter wind grinds a scarf to dust.

Where are you?
I have tried to ask so many times before,
But I have never learned,
And I just stare at a grey screen,
Hoping for three dots,
Comets flaring in the dim glow of evening.
But I stare,
And I stare,
And I cannot even look through you.
Do pomelos have nectar?
Maybe you know.
I don't think so.

Where are you?
You are sat in a car, or you are the car,
And you sit where you must,
And you misfire,
And I cannot see it.

A shoe falls off a foot
On a scaffold on a brownstone somewhere,
And the cars like gunshots misfire into the wind.
The tornado comes, and the people light candles.
I remember being there, and not being where I was.
There was no here, no now.
Just dead trees and broken houses.
What did you feel?
Would I have asked?
Could I have?
Should I have?

The night is long,
And the day is dry,
And I sleep curled up in a loveseat,
Wondering whether the river runs through everyone,
Drowning ferns and saving toads.
You . . .
I don't know.
I don't know anymore.
A foot dangles from a scaffold,
And a sock peels off like the skin of a mushroom.

Los Angeles

I

I saw your eyes

they were looking for the exit

I walked right past

them and let you be

I didn't want to enter

your life without permission

II

The music strobed
and the lights strobed
and a film played on a projector
and I sat in a corner
while you talked to someone
and I listened to the music that strobed

III

Four thirty-five in the afternoon
I nearly started
——
in front of everyone
I don't know why
I suspect last night
for reasons
good and bad
done and undone

IV

Circle
six
eight
only six
maybe seven

but only really five
an unkind phrase so

leave it off
hurry on
to six
two
Circle

V

Joy of your eyes

and you rode into the night

and left the world
of my eyes

and my mouth

filled with
joy in your eyes

leant to me for an hour

VI

Sit right down

Wake up

Go to bed

Walk home

Fall asleep

Write work

Dream of there

Sit down

Wake on up

In bed

Walk back home

Asleep

Write your work

VII

The last one sits at the first
in the vast stretch of freeway
before and after
curved like a branch
or a knife
dangling above the rush
of cold air forever
below the lazy breath
of a burst of charcoal

LEXISS MORGAN

Lookout

poetry

Lexiss Morgan is a senior English and Psychology major at Loyola Marymount University. Over the past couple of years, she has explored her love of writing, learning that she is very passionate about creating both fictional and autobiographical worlds in her stories. Her dreams are to write children's books and narrative-driven video games.

Lookout

A fire burned here just three days ago. *It happened on my watch.*
The bright blaze of phoenix feathers engulfed the skyscraping trees,
surrounding shadows melting in its light. *How bewitching.*

I should have paid better attention to those kids with shaved heads.
Rude neon hair and shoes to match,
so unnatural so artificial so forced.
Fluorescent tumors laughing, chain smoking, roaming without restriction.

Blackened twigs. *The bones of the old world.*
Once wealthy leaves dissolve into gray powder at the slightest touch
An aroma in the air asks for another chance.

Smoke signal Radio signal. *A forsaken oath to protect.*
The other rangers weren't yet aware
Only the birds and the bears and the deer and the kids with shaved heads knew
of the growing, hungry flame.

Forest lungs set on fire *What have I done?*
Nothing but a rib cage left
for scavengers to pick clean.

Descending the creaking steps of my lonesome lookout tower
Cabbage butterflies fled with the monarchs
In the face of disaster, a peasant is no different from a king.
But what are peasants and kings to a god that destroys their home?

In seconds, still nature morphed into an anecdote of animal screams.
Afflicted by instinct, chaotic riots ensued.
Singed feathers Wrinkled claws Blistered entrails.
Sweat-soaked skin, soot-stained hair. *All I could do was watch.*

Seventy-seven acres lined with caution tape.
Familiar dwellers border the forest's cavity
awaiting hasty restoration of their homes.

I ask for no forgiveness from the forest and her children
Not because they are in any position to forgive
But because I wanted her to burn.

KATY WOLFF

The Pursuit of Happiness

play

Katy Wolff is a second-year honors student at Santa Clara University double majoring in Communication and English with double minors in Creative Writing and Theatre. While not working on her academics, Katy is an assistant fiction editor at The Santa Clara Review, as well as a tutor at her university's writing center. She has been published previously in Prometheus Dreaming magazine for a personal essay, and was the recipient of Santa Clara University's 2021-2022 First-Year Composition and Rhetoric Prize. She enjoys exploring characters and small, potentially overlooked aspects of the human experience through every piece of art she writes or performs.

The Pursuit of Happiness

The Pursuit of Happiness

Two Ten-Minute Vignettes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ROY, a female college student. Beautiful, deeply insecure. A partier who frequently partakes in casual one night stands. Unattached.

LEO, a male college student. Relaxed, genuine. A frat brother who's not very connected to his fellow brothers. Disconnected.

VIVIAN, a female college student. Romantic, dreamy. Currently in a long-distance relationship with Sebastian. Stagnant.

SEBASTIAN, a male college student. Practical, compassionate. Currently in a long-distance relationship with Vivian. Constrained.

SETTINGS

Leo's bedroom, a single room in a frat house. Sparsely furnished, with only a mini fridge, a bed, and perhaps a desk. Lit only by strips of remote-controlled LED lights on the walls.

A park, located somewhere in a generic suburban town. A lone park bench, tucked away under some trees. Maybe there are some birds or a small body of water nearby. Grassy and quiet, a good place for picnic dates or serious conversations.

PRODUCTION NOTES

These vignettes are not meant to have any relation to each other except thematic. The colleges do not matter, nor does the style of costume for the vignettes. Both settings should be minimalist. The focus is entirely on the characters. The director may double-cast if they desire, but the appearances of Roy/Vivian and Leo/Sebastian should differ significantly in their costuming.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank her playwriting professor for a great class and the opportunity to explore and learn such a beautiful art form.

SCENE 1 — PRETTY PRETTY

Leo's bedroom. The LED strips are lit up red or purple, whichever suits the actors best. We should see the characters well enough to make out their general faces and physical features, but not by much.

The sounds of a dying party are heard faintly. Laughs, a hint of bass-heavy music, general commotion as the brothers work on shutting down the house for the night.

Roy and Leo sit on the bed, passionately making out. Hands in hair, whatever indicates a half-drunk college hookup best. All of a sudden, Roy pulls away.

LEO
What's wrong?

ROY
I just. Want to stop. Sorry.

LEO
No, don't be sorry. It's fine. Do you want to call a friend? Or I can walk you back to your dorm?

ROY
If you don't mind ... could I just chill here for a second? Maybe we can just talk?

LEO
Uh, sure. Ok. That's fine. Whatever makes you comfortable.

Roy sits down on the floor while Leo remains on his bed. Their position feels awkward. Roy has much on her mind, but is hesitant to speak without a go-ahead.

LEO
Was there anything you like...wanted to talk about? Specifically?

ROY
Do you think I'm pretty?

LEO
I—Of course I think you're pretty. That's kind of why you're in my bedroom right now.

ROY
Good.
What was the first thing you noticed when you saw me?

LEO
Um.

ROY
You can be honest. It doesn't matter much to me. Don't worry.

LEO
Ok, well. This is blunt, I guess, but. You've got great tits.

ROY
This shirt does a lot of the work for me.

LEO
Well. It's nice.

ROY
Do you think you would like me as a person? Like, if you really got to know me.

LEO
I mean, probably. I get along with pretty much anyone.

ROY
I asked you because I haven't been feeling pretty lately.

LEO
Oh—

ROY
Not just feeling physically pretty, but like, pretty pretty. Like I'm something worthwhile.

LEO
Everyone's worthwhile.

Leo moves to his mini fridge.

LEO
Do you want a shot?

He takes out a fifth of cheap hard liquor. The kind does not matter.

ROY
Nah. Do you have anything else?

LEO
Uh ... I got a couple of beers in here. You want one?

ROY
Sure. I guess. If that's what you've got.

Leo pours himself a generous shot and downs it. Professional, barely a grimace. He hands a beer can to Roy, who pops the tab and takes a sip. Leo sits on the floor across from Roy.

LEO
How is it?

ROY
It's beer.

She takes another sip, briefly lost in thought.

ROY
Do you feel pretty?

LEO
I'm a guy. Why would I feel pretty? Guys aren't pretty.

ROY
That seems a little narrow-minded. But, I mean, do you feel pretty pretty?

Leo groans.

LEO
Maybe if you tell me what that means I could answer your question.

ROY
I dunno. Like pretty on the inside. Like something about you makes people want to be around you. Like you have little sunbeams shining out of you all the time, and you're warm and people just ... enjoy you for you, no matter what.

LEO
I felt like that once when I took molly.

ROY
Because I don't know if I'm like that. I think people like me well enough but I don't think I'm that type of person. Did you like taking molly?

LEO
It freaked me the fuck out. You should probably avoid it. Might make all your ... pretty issues worse. No offense.

ROY
None taken. You said you get along with most people. How do you manage that?

LEO
Beats me. I guess I'm just chill.

Roy takes another sip of her beer and pulls a face.

LEO
Well, you don't have to drink it, y'know?

ROY
No, I'm going to.
I think I'm a little too overbearing to be chill.

LEO
Do you want me to agree or disagree with that?

ROY
What I want is your honest opinion. We barely know each other. You're unbiased.

A moment of pensive silence.

LEO
Well, this is definitely the weirdest hookup situation I've ever been in. Normally if a girl changes her mind she just leaves. You didn't. Obviously.

ROY
So I am overbearing.

LEO
I didn't say that.

ROY
You're kind of saying I'm intrusive.

LEO
C'mon, Roy, don't put words in my mouth. I'm trying to think here.

ROY
Sorry, sorry. Continue.

LEO
I think you're ... intense. Is that the right word? Like, you have to admit that starting this conversation with me was pretty extreme.

ROY
Do you like my intensity?

LEO
In a sexual way? Or what?

ROY
I don't know. It just felt like something I should say.

LEO
I thought you didn't want to hook up.

ROY
I don't! I just ... Shouldn't that be what I say?

LEO
Maybe just talk to me like how you would talk to a friend.

Roy takes a deep breath. Slow, long exhale.

ROY
I'm going to tell you something that I haven't told anyone else. You don't have to respond or try to make me feel better or anything. I'm just going to say it.

LEO
Shoot.

ROY
I guess I just feel inadequate. Like I've got this deep pit inside of me and no matter how much I drink or how many people I fuck I can't fill it. I feel desired but I just don't feel wanted. I'm scared. That no one is ever going to find me pretty pretty. Maybe I'm just not.

Silence. It takes time for Leo to find the right words.

LEO
I'm just kind of the chill guy. Like people are cool with me and I'm cool with them but I don't really have any friends. I live in this house but I don't think my roommates ever really see me. Sometimes I get way too high and I convince myself that I don't exist. So maybe I'm not pretty pretty, either.

Roy takes another sip of her beer.

ROY
I think you're pretty pretty. Someone who wasn't wouldn't let me stay and talk like this. You could've kicked me out, gone to sleep. And it would have been reasonable.

LEO
I thought about it, I guess. But someone who asks to stay and talk in the room of a stranger they decided not to hook up with probably needs some company.

ROY
And you needed company.
Any more deep secrets you want to share before the shot wears off?

LEO
I kind of thought it was your turn now. I just went.

ROY
Fair's fair, I guess.

Quick breath in before it all comes pouring out.

ROY
Sometimes I hate my friends. Sometimes I hate this school, I hate the parties, I hate the fucking hard seltzers ... I just hate it all. Not really hate, I guess, but ... I'm tired. Sometimes I go out and have a great time and sometimes I go home and sit on my floor and cry until all my mascara runs and my eyeliner gets smudged to shit and I finally look how I feel.

LEO
Lonely.

ROY
And I'm not a good person, you know. I'm jealous and I'm bitter and I'm petty and—

LEO
I get bitter all the time too. You think I'm a bad person?

ROY
... I don't.

Small pause.

LEO
You are a good person. Just for the record.

ROY
How am I supposed to take your word for it?

LEO
Guess it's up to you what you want to do with it. But I am unbiased.

Roy picks at the carpet, avoiding Leo's gaze.

LEO
I wouldn't do that if I were you.

Roy does not look up or stop.

LEO
It's pretty nasty.

Roy pauses, looks up at Leo.

ROY
Why'd you take molly? Just like, for fun? Because you're just chill like that, huh.

LEO
Uh. I guess I don't really know. Someone gave it to me. I just took it. Not too much else to it.

ROY
Okay. Okay.

LEO
Roy, are you sure you don't want to go home? It's late. I can walk you.

ROY
No! No! I'm fine. I just ... I need this. Can we just sit for a bit longer?

No discernible reaction from Leo.

ROY
You can say no.

LEO
No, no. We can sit. I'm just worried about you.

ROY
You don't really know me.

LEO
Well, that doesn't mean I can't be worried. And besides, I feel like we know each other pretty well now.

ROY
Let's just sit here together.

LEO
Okay.

They sit. Silent. Comfortable, pensive. It feels like hours, but it may just be a moment. Roy continues playing with the rug. Leo twists his hands aimlessly.

ROY

It's your turn.

LEO

Hm?

ROY

I told you another secret. It's your turn again.

LEO

I don't know. I don't think I have any more secrets.

ROY

Then tell me something you want to get off your chest. We don't ever have to see each other again. It's like telling your reflection or something.

LEO

Alright. My reflection. Um. I feel like ... um ... I don't know. I'm not sure if I really like the business school. Yeah. I'm not sure.

Roy has no reaction.

LEO

And uh ... I feel like I shouldn't feel that way. Because. Well. It's what I'm supposed to like.

ROY

But you don't. What do you like?

LEO

I don't know. That's the problem. I've always known I would go to business school. So here I am. Maybe it doesn't matter if I don't like it.

ROY

It always matters. It matters. Because, like ... what else do we have? If we don't have happiness.

Silence. Roy and Leo deep in thought.

LEO

Maybe you don't feel pretty pretty because you're not happy.

ROY

I don't know if I know one single happy person. But I must. Someone must be happy.

LEO

Maybe we're all just ... looking for it. I don't know. How can you tell, anyway?

ROY

I looked in the mirror earlier tonight and for this one fleeting, amazing moment, I thought I was so beautiful. But it didn't make me happy. It's a rather elusive feeling these days. Ironic, since this is supposed to be such a fantastic time in our lives.

LEO

I always feel worse when I'm drunk.

ROY

Me too. But I still go out and get drunk. Clearly.

LEO

I guess it's what we're supposed to do. Maybe happiness can be found at the bottom of a Coors Light can. Like a golden ticket.

Small exhale from Roy. Not a laugh, but an acknowledgement that Leo is trying to lighten the mood.

ROY

I'm sorry. That you don't like the business school, I mean. You can do something else. You can always do something else.

Leo does not seem to hear her.

ROY

Leo?

LEO

Yeah. You can. You can.

Heavy silence.

LEO

You make a good reflection. I think that if I saw you when I looked in the mirror ... I'd feel pretty pretty.

Blackout. Transition into ...

SCENE 2 — HAPPILY EVER AFTER

A quiet suburban park, late afternoon on a warm mid-August day. One park bench takes center stage. It's in a secluded area of the park, a stereotypically romantic setting for young summer love in all its forms.

Vivian and Sebastian sit next to each other, not looking at one another. They are attempting to break up amicably.

It's not an explosive, sobbing thing, this breakup. It's slow, careful, mournful. A funeral rather than a fight.

VIVIAN

I wish we went to the same school. Everything would be so much easier.

SEBASTIAN

You know that's not the problem here, Viv.

Beat.

Vivian turns to look at Sebastian. He looks back at her.

VIVIAN

I love you.

SEBASTIAN

We have to think logically about this.
I don't know if we could make it another year.
Let alone three.

VIVIAN

I just wish—I just wish that things were different, you know? That we could be happy together.

SEBASTIAN

I want that too. But you and I both know this isn't making us happy.

VIVIAN

I'm happy right now.

SEBASTIAN

We're happy because we're here together. You're not going to be happy when I leave and you sit here and watch your friends have all the experiences that you can't have. I'm not going to be happy when I leave and hear about all the fun you're having while I spend my nights in the library.

A beat.

VIVIAN

It's been a long time coming, hasn't it?

Sebastian heaves a sigh.

SEBASTIAN

I think I knew last winter. When I asked for some time apart to think. I didn't do anything with anyone else. And of course I missed you, but Viv. There was this pressure on my heart that I didn't notice until it wasn't there. And then I missed that pressure. I needed it.

But now?

I don't know what to do with it. I think it's going to crush me.

Can you do this again?

Beat.

VIVIAN

No.

I want to say yes.

I so want to say yes and to have that be true and to be that couple that makes it through long-distance and gets married and has that fairy-tale ending but I just don't think I can do it.

SEBASTIAN

Love can't be everything. Even after college, it wouldn't work, would it.

Vivian smiles, not so much happy but wistful. Almost mourning.

VIVIAN

You remember senior prom?

How we ran for prom court and you won King but this other girl won Queen?

Sebastian nods.

VIVIAN

I watched her up there with you and man did I want to kick her in the crotch. And you know how anxious I get about confrontation! But it wasn't really because I wanted to be Prom Queen. Like, yeah, it would've been cute but that wasn't what I was jealous about. I wanted so badly to be standing up there with you, together and shining in front of the whole auditorium. But even though you were up there with her, you never looked at her.

Not one time.

You only looked at me.

SEBASTIAN

I'm looking at you now.

VIVIAN

I don't think that you can give me that anymore. And I can't even be mad about it.

Imagine that.

Sebastian shakes his head very slightly.
Almost imperceptible.

VIVIAN

You know how I would feel if that happened today?

SEBASTIAN

Apathetic?

VIVIAN

C'mon, Seb, give me a little more credit than that, please.

Beat.

VIVIAN

No. I would feel ... melancholy, I guess. Maybe that's the right word for it.

Like, I'd feel jealous, yeah, but I wouldn't really have a right to feel like that. You're my fairy-tale prince. You're like ... a sweet dream that fades in the morning.
I see you on my screen but the longer this goes on the more you start to feel like just that. A—

SEBASTIAN

A picture on the screen. Safe, but not actually real.

VIVIAN

Nostalgia. That's all we are to each other now. And that's so. Shitty.
It's so shitty.
Because you feel so real right now. I can touch you, speak to you in person. I can look in your eyes and really see you. But tomorrow you'll be gone and it'll just be another memory that I'm loyal to.

SEBASTIAN

I can't ask you to do that.

Beat.

VIVIAN

Seb, I want you to be so, so happy.
But I don't think it's going to be with me. I don't think it could be with me. And that's just a terrible thing to say and maybe I'm just cold-hearted, but ... I can't do it.

Silence. A heavy blanket of sadness, like quiet snow.

SEBASTIAN

I know you can't.
You tried.
I know you tried.
And I would never ask you for anything more than that.

They hug, clinging to each other for dear life. A goodbye, an "I love you," an "I miss you already," an "I wish you the best," a "good luck."

SEBASTIAN

Would you hate me if I said that I'm not exactly heartbroken?

VIVIAN

I wouldn't necessarily be surprised.
You've been preparing for this for a long time. You already went through the heartbreak.
Like mourning someone who's dying of cancer before they're dead.

Beat.

VIVIAN

I think that maybe I've been mourning too.

Sebastian shifts, looks down at his feet.

VIVIAN

It's been over for a long time. We've just been living in the epilogue.

Silence.

SEBASTIAN

Your mom's reaction is going to be just fantastic.

VIVIAN

Everyone is still under the impression that we're going to get married and live happily ever after in the suburbs. She'll probably cry more than I will.

SEBASTIAN

You're not nervous?

VIVIAN

Of course I am. But ... I mean. It's not her life. Sure, she has this dream for us but I don't have to fulfill it.
And I have to keep thinking that because otherwise I'll just roll over, but I can't make you miserable because my mother ...

Vivian trails off, heaving a defeated sigh.

VIVIAN

She'll react how she'll react. Guess I'll find out soon.

SEBASTIAN

That's the curse of high school sweethearts.

VIVIAN

Damned if you do, damned if you don't. Break up and shatter everyone's idealistic view of unshakeable young love or stay together and shatter your own idealistic view of it.

Vivian takes a deep breath.

VIVIAN

Getting into this, I didn't know that it was so ... fragile. But I guess everyone feels invincible when they're seventeen and in love.

SEBASTIAN

What, you don't want to live like a couple who's afraid to get divorced the rest of your life?

VIVIAN

Funnily enough, no.

SEBASTIAN

I'm proud of you, Viv. I know that you had this whole plan and I'm sorry it couldn't work out.

VIVIAN

We don't live in a perfect world. It's not your fault.
I hope you know that I have never once blamed you.
And I never will.

SEBASTIAN

It's no one's fault.

Beat.

VIVIAN

Do you believe that we always carry a little bit of everyone we've ever

loved with us? One of my friends told me that she thinks that and ... I don't know. It seems nice, doesn't it?

Sebastian looks up at the sky.

SEBASTIAN

It's a very nice thought. I guess I can believe that. I mean, I doubt I would be able to forget you even if that wasn't true.

VIVIAN

I'm glad it was you.

Beat.

SEBASTIAN

Do you have any regrets? Or anything that you want to tell me that maybe you didn't before?

VIVIAN

What is this, a death row confession?

Pause.

SEBASTIAN

Well, not death row for us as individuals, but ...

Vivian nods slightly.

SEBASTIAN

If it's easier you can think of it as a severance discussion.

VIVIAN

That is actually not easier for me, believe it or not. But I appreciate you trying. Always trying.

SEBASTIAN

Sometimes succeeding. They laugh, trying to cheer themselves up and push through. Neither of them are ready to end the conversation quite yet.

Beat.

VIVIAN

Well if it's all coming out now ... I think that blue is really your color and you should wear more of it. It's nice. And I should have told you that earlier.

SEBASTIAN

I liked when you put the pink in your hair. I know your mom didn't, but it looked nice. And you liked it. That's more important anyway, you know.

Vivian smiles. They sit together quietly for a moment, reflecting.

VIVIAN

I have no regrets. I'd do it all again if I had the choice. Even the distance.

Really? SEBASTIAN

You wouldn't? VIVIAN

Distance was ... I don't know. I didn't ... SEBASTIAN

Well, I didn't either. But I'm trying to just appreciate it all for what it was. VIVIAN

Pause.

My roommate, she talks about that sometimes. The appreciation thing. VIVIAN

Vivian shifts slightly, trying to sort through her thoughts.

SEBASTIAN
She got dumped out of the blue one morning. I thought that there would be absolutely no way to come back from that. I couldn't imagine ... But she made it through. She made it through by just ... trying to appreciate what happened before everything fell apart. How she felt, what it was like to fall in love for the first time. Even what it felt like to get her heart broken. Because it all matters. VIVIAN

SEBASTIAN
Distance hurt. Because I realized I could live without you, and then I realized I probably would live without you. We're not going to have that happily ever after.

Not together. But we will have it. VIVIAN

Sebastian breathes in deeply.

Right? VIVIAN

Sebastian avoids her gaze.

Seb? VIVIAN

Sebastian looks at her, finally meeting her eyes. Unsure.

Sure. Sure we will. SEBASTIAN

Blackout.

TAYLOR DAVIS CROWELL

To My Family, Dead and Alive:

poetry

Taylor is a sophomore at Loyola Marymount University studying English and Public Relations. Born and raised in Southern California by two teachers, Taylor grew up reading and writing, but always stuck to poetry as her creative outlet. She sees poetry as an intuitive tool to understand yourself, others, and the world at large. Recently, Taylor has been fascinated with the various ways to approach a poem, and the many forms they can take.

To My Family, Dead and Alive:

Wipe the fog from the window and listen
closely with your blood –

a mother's love ends when the world does,
long after both are dead,

and a memory is just a memory until it's a story
children tell their children.

I'm sorry, little boy.
Someone should have held your heart
more gently,

so, you learned the hard way –

and you held your children as if they were
baby frogs, gently,
until they leapt off your padded hand.

*The future will always walk backwards if the
present does not change.*

Creation & Destruction:
the difference between melting and burning
is the shape it takes –
how something is made determines how
something ends.

It's all in the hands.

Love is a theoretical thing,
not a guarantee.

A will is just a will:
and obligation does not equal love,
just as legacy is the story, not the property.
A bridge burned is a bridge burned,
sometimes it's enough to remember
& not reconstruct,
because what comes after your best anyways?

(Maybe there are regrets in death).

Watch how a blade bends under stress,
how the tip of the tongue curls into itself,
how sometimes a woman's first blood is
from the bite of her lip

and the bit-lipped women are left
to take care of men of who'd like
to pretend the world is a grapefruit, and eat
half of it for breakfast.

(As if they couldn't care for themselves).

Two people born under the
same sun & moon do not like
to think that they might die
under different ones.

The fog is thick and it is too easy
to forget to clean the windows.
See each other through clear glass.

Listen to the thrum of your heart
and feel your blue blood pump red,
then maybe you can feel the difference
between fault lines or detect
when one is about to slip.

Did you know that tectonic plates have been slowly
moving for 4 billion years? To divide the continents
and oceans. Love born from obligation will never
last that long.

There's a kinetic invisible grid of us that flows
under the entire earth. It lights up purple
when any of us speak, dead or alive.

There are hundreds of us but
to hear it,

you must listen closely with your blood.

JULES BROWN

how do I reconcile that this is my body

multimedia

Jules Brown is a Film Production student who spends her free time trying different art mediums. In the past year, she has dabbled in tattooing, starting with stick-n-pokes and moving on to buy real ink and tattoo guns. This piece explores the mind-body connection during painful instances like tattooing—some people feeling the link and others feeling disjointed and uneasy in their own skin.

how do i reconcile



A body that's mine is one that I'm proud of, one that I have control over, one that I can put what I want on it.



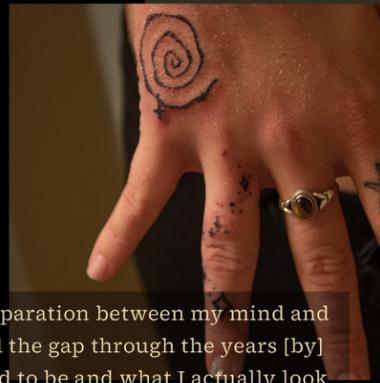
As someone who is non-binary and queer, I am constantly learning how to be in my body and what my body means to me...For me, tattoos are a form of freedom [and] putting who I am onto my skin.



Your body is you...What you do to your body also affects your mind. They're one in the same.



There used to be [a separation between my mind and body], but I've closed the gap through the years [by] merging who I wanted to be and what I actually look like and present as.



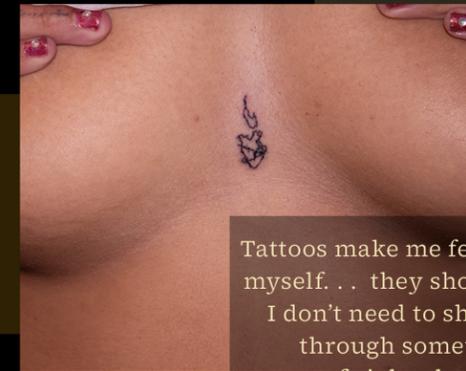
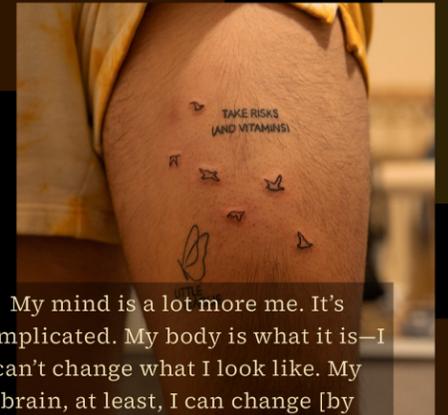
that this is my body?



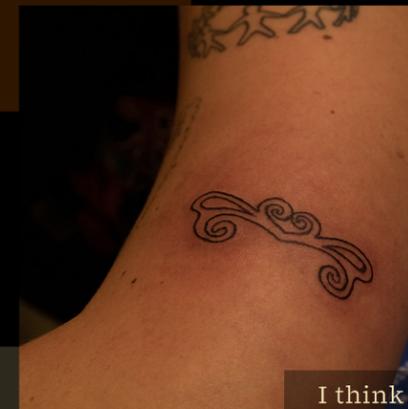
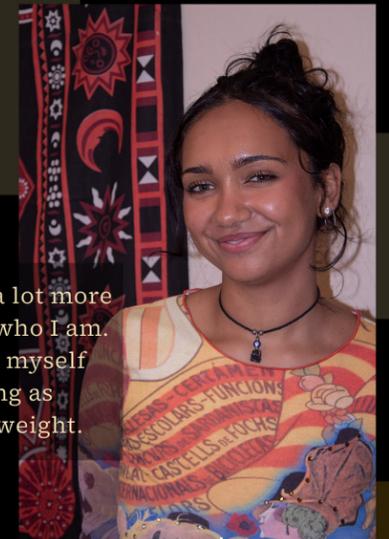
Being a dancer... I'm constantly on the search for feeling at home in my body. Every day I find a new way in which I have not reached that goal.



My mind is a lot more me. It's complicated. My body is what it is—I can't change what I look like. My brain, at least, I can change [by shifting] perspectives. It's much more indicative of who I am as a person.



Tattoos make me feel a lot more myself. . . they show who I am. I don't need to show myself through something as superficial as body weight.



I think of my body as a vessel... [Getting tattooed] is a way of controlling it and my self image.

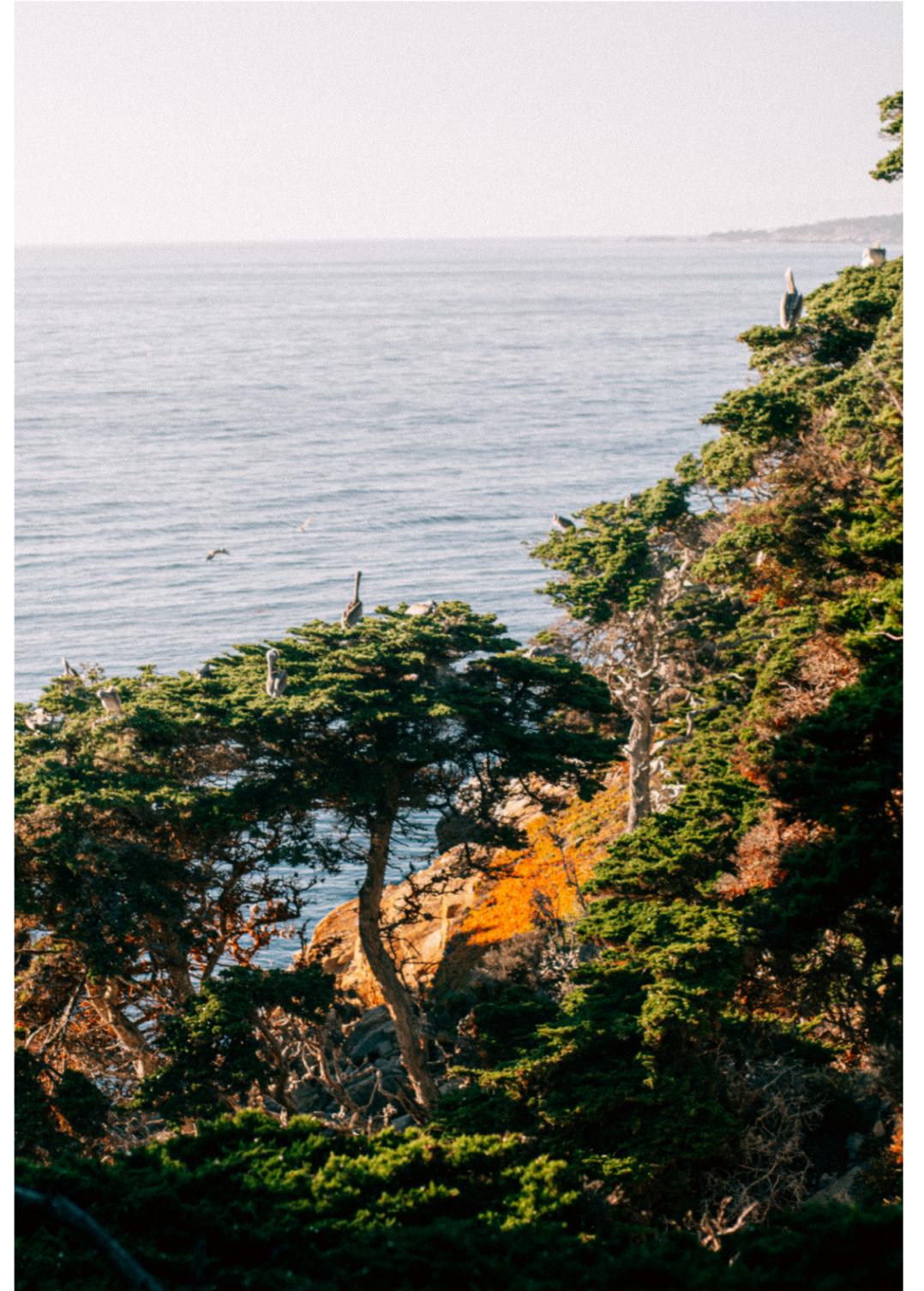
BRIAN GILMARTIN

Untitled

photography

Brian Gilmartin is a Third-Year Law Student at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles. He enjoys taking photos in his free time.

Untitled



Untitled



MICHAELA CAHILL

My Page-a-Day Calendar

poetry

Michaela Cahill is a senior English major at Loyola Marymount University with minors in Spanish and Political Science. Michaela has been writing poetry since childhood and is currently working on composing a chapbook to raise awareness and compassion for those who struggle with mental health challenges. Although Michaela is still undecided about her future, she is considering careers in teaching, editing, and marketing, as well as pursuing further education to earn an MBA or a law degree. Michaela has several years of tutoring and editorial experience and loves spreading her passion for language, creativity, and humor with others. In addition to her Spanish and English fluency, Michaela hopes to continue studying German to accomplish her lifelong goal of attaining or surpassing trilingualism.

My Page-a-Day Calendar

The page-a-day calendar
On my bedside table
Tells me that every day is fresh,
Torn only once
From the stack of 365–
That every day is as single-use
As a paper plate at a child's birthday party
Designed to hold a small slice
Of spat-on chocolate cake for a few moments
Before all that wasn't frosting and sprinkles,
And so hasn't been licked off
By the wasteful 5-year-old guests,
Is tossed into the trash
Atop party hats
And rubber remnants of popped balloons.

But despite what my calendar
Swears to be true,
Every day feels the same,
With the same bitterness,
The same boredom,
And the same battle
Of trying to believe
That today will feel different
From all the other todays
That have felt exactly the same
And have all left me feeling
Like a wasteful birthday girl
Who barely touches the sprinkles
And doesn't even taste the frosting
Of her own damn cake–
The exact same feeling every day
As I toss these tragically disposable
Tear-away days aside
Just as carelessly as
I've tossed years and years'
Worth of untouched cake
On single-use paper plates
Into the trash
Atop the wasted potential.

AYANA O'BRIEN

a girl, an Ocean removed

small

literary essay / poetry

Ayana O'Brien is a senior at LMU, majoring in International Relations and minoring in English. She loves writing for its ability to communicate deeply and incite empathy in others. She hopes to continue sharing stories which highlight intersectional identities and make people feel a little more at home.

a girl, an Ocean removed

When I scrolled through Vine in 2015, I'd come across short, six-second videos showing Black people pretending to be dead in a pool. Floating lifeless, their friends doing some hilarious action in the background. They'd dive into the pool to save a Jordan, to get some watermelon, to holla at some girl — the next shot their limbs spread out dead-bug style. The joke is that Black people can't swim. We don't swim, don't know how. I couldn't tell you where that stereotype came from.

When I was a kid, my summer camp used to take us to the pool — a full day of splashing about in three feet, four feet, five, pruning like a raisin and getting a dark line dividing my chocolate skin from its deeper summer color. I loved the pool. I paddled around my summer friends, showing off the bastardized version of the backstroke I'd taught myself. I dove under, the deep cool of the water sweeping over me, my eyes stinging slightly from the chlorinated water creeping into my goggles. I put my hands and feet together, one body, one long fin. I cut through the water in the way I'd seen the mermaids from the show *H2O* doing on television. I'd always wanted to be a mermaid — magical in more ways than one to my awkward and gangly younger self. The mermaids in my imagination didn't look like me. Even in fairytale imaginings, Black people had no business in the sea.

I am from the city — correction, the suburbs. From Atlanta, but if you tell me you know something about Georgia, I might afford you the truth, that I was from the Powder Springs, Marietta area. Northwestern Georgia, where the closest body of water larger than a community pool was Lake Lanier, the "haunted" lake of the state. Northwestern Georgia, closer to the mountains than I was to the sea.

I am from ocean peoples. My entire family, both sides, is from the Caribbean, the U.S. Virgin Islands on my mom's and Grenada and Montserrat on my father's. My mother was born here, an island girl on the mainland. Her parents moved from the territory in the same way most immigrants do — searching for more opportunity for their children. Of course, their shift looked different than most, a process made relatively simpler because of the United States' purchase of the Danish West Indies in 1917; March 31st, the day of transfer from imperial to imperial power, colonizer to colonizer. My paternal grandparents met and fell in love in England, both young professionals looking for more opportunity on a different island than their home. My dad, born on the British island, moved here when he was younger, growing up in the urban island of New York, same as my mom. Her hood, a different kind of island, interconnected by subways, bicycles, and blackness. My mom used to spend her summers water-borne, like I did, going back to the Virgin Islands and visiting family. Her skin would darken, like mine, accent thick with palm trees and Johnny cakes.

The water in the Caribbean, my mom would say, is blue, actually blue. Bluer than the east coast, bluer than the west. Blue like the crayon I used to use to color the sky in elementary school, blue like the eyes of the mermaids I used to idolize. I hadn't realized the ocean could be so truly that color — the waters of the beaches near my grandparents' retirement home

in Florida stayed, at best, a murky greenish-brown. I could see my toes, I remember, from my one visit to St. Thomas years ago, waist deep in the water off of Magens Bay beach. Pink polish, chipping slightly from the salt. Fish shifting swiftly out of the way of humans, of danger.

Oceans, like outer space, are known as our “shared commons,” spaces meant to be shared and enjoyed by everyone. Open ocean was borderless space, free from state control, free from maritime claims of the coast. It’s one of the few spaces of nature that man knows he can lay no claim. She, the ocean, is wild and untamed, centered and open. She knows no morality, yet she mothers. Many peoples have a connection with the ocean. Even here, in the United States, people look towards the beaches, towards the ocean, as a release, an escape, a departure from the business of everyday life.

In the south, our history is intrinsically linked with the sea. Colonizers crossing the watery mother, their push towards land. They saw the ocean as nothing but a road, a path to take over and over again, bringing settlers and enslaved Africans from their kingdoms on the west coast of the continent. Sea now served as a border between where people had been and where they were now. A border providing the illusion of safety for the founding fathers of this country, convincing them of their claim to this occupied land and their right to expand from sea to shining sea.

I was born here, in the United States, in the south. As someone Caribbean, American, and Black, a part of me still belongs to the ocean. Though most of the time, the call lies dormant, it is still there, wrapped up in my history, in my breath and blood. It arises in the summers, when I dip my head under the water, hold my breath. Watch the sunlight reflected, refracted. I put my hand up to my face and watch my skin dance with the current, each slow movement a particular nostalgic feeling. I remember when I was younger, my father would pick me up, my feet dangling above the water’s surface, unbroken and waiting. I would scream, and he’d toss me in, my voice catching in the water. The pressure would sting my eyes, my nose, clamp down on my ears. In the sudden silence, I felt my heart beat with joy. Again and again, over and over. My father lifting, letting go. The water catching.

Accounts from slave-catchers from some of the earliest recorded periods of chattel slavery in the United States report that often escaped enslaved Africans would be found eastward of their plantation. To get from my home in Powder Springs/Marietta/Atlanta to the sea, east. To get from my life in the states to my family on the islands, east. Like the sun rising, east towards the Ocean. Ocean, a borderless place, a synonym for a way home. Ocean as the final resting place of many Black bodies like mine, bodies like the Igbo brought off the coast of my state, their march into the ocean. Trying to get Home.

small

i sit with desks touching
his long white legs stuck
under a sneaker taps my foot and i squeeze in pulling
myself closer to the metal, pulling my feet underneath me if only
they could be pulled back into my chest

Black body, space redacted

my spine curves slightly inward
a star collapsing in on itself
a thought bubbles up in my throat and i open my mouth to speak but
your voice is louder, a wave crashing against the rocks and i am but
a pebble
tossed amongst the surf sinking
beneath your entitled tidal wave of sound

you have asked me my name twice now, and i have given it
the simple syllables fall between your fingers
it is sour in your mouth, i can tell by the way
your lips curl at its bitterness
its space unwieldy on your tongue
you chew
the sounds mangle them
spit them back out to me
i smile and nod
“exactly,” i say

i am well practiced in making myself smaller

CLARABELLE SULLIVAN

Out of Place

Deception

painting

Clarabelle Sullivan is a sophomore Studio Arts major at Loyola Marymount University. She is an oil painter who focuses on portraying the human experience through a uniquely feminine lens using realism portraiture. She is passionate about topics of social justice such as women's rights and intersectionality, which she touches on in her art. She strives to make art that evokes awareness and empathy, as well as inspire discourse. Her work was featured in the 2022 Juried Student Exhibition in the Laband Art Gallery at LMU. She was also published in last year's publication of *Attic Salt*.

Out of Place, Oil on canvas, 30 x 24"



Deception, Oil on canvas, 30 x 10"



KAYLA CHANG

It Was Going to be Beautiful

poetry

Kayla Chang is a senior at Loyola Marymount University. She is completing a double degree in Philosophy and Environmental Studies as well as a Bioethics minor. She is passionate about environmental justice issues and plans to pursue an environmental law degree after graduation. During her freetime, Kayla enjoys exploring the arts and being out in nature.

It Was Going to be Beautiful

An invitation to run barefoot in the woods
through needles of echoing laughter
soles meeting the damp undergrowth.

A dress of silver feathers
a veil of silk cobwebs
orchid heels to match.

A murmur from songbirds
telling me
it's all a lie.
And I should have known.

Should I have known?

When we were dancing on the crowns of pines
she swore she would catch me,
but she wasn't strong enough.

Plum blush petals scattered on the ground.
I didn't have to pluck a single one to know

that she revels in my silent screams of anger.

Because even though
I scrubbed my skin raw,
her grot and sludge still
blacken my thighs.

Still haunted by the echoes of our heavy breath
coaxing the embers that intertwined our flames.

I loved how she
kissed and trailed my body with marigolds,
planted honeysuckles in the waves of my hair.

Your sweet amber words
coated honey on your writhing hands
smearing ebony stains across my chest.

Though my dress now one of weeds
embellished with shackling stones
and my veil sewn with oleander,

I still yearn to run again with you in the woods.

JOHNNY YANUCCI

Home is Where I'm Not

poetry

Johnny Yanucci is a sophomore Philosophy major and English minor at Loyola Marymount University. He is from Winchester, Massachusetts, and often draws inspiration from the distance between his studies and home. His love for drumming and skateboarding are other sources of inspiration and creative exploration. Johnny enjoys the special self-expression that poetry provides in its ability to describe the indescribable. He hopes to pursue further education after graduating and find a career in academia.

Home is Where I'm Not

Do birds dream of migration
On suffocating summer nights?
The camaraderie of touching wings
Of flying in formation, the escape
From frozen foliage.
Ah, how pleasant is warmth when
It permeates permafrost feathers.
Shake it all out, shake that desolate
World away.

It's been two months marked by
The tropical tip of South America
Feeling less like an escape
More like purgatory, like
A polished rounded cage.
The memories of summer
seep their way in, spoiling
the best moments of life,
Little bird where is your home?

LACEY ARGUS

Fuck

poetry

Lacey Argus is a junior English major with a minor in Secondary Education and Women's and Gender studies. Originally from the suburbs of Chicago, Lacey moved out to Los Angeles to attend Loyola Marymount University. Poetry has given Lacey a space to be unapologetically unfiltered and grow both as an artist and as a person.

Fuck

My dad doesn't like it when I swear.
You sound uneducated, he says.
Those words sound ugly coming from your mouth, he says.
And my friends don't like when I talk loud.
You're making everyone stare, they say.
I can't take you anywhere, they say.
And boys don't like how I dress.
You would look so pretty in a dress, they say.
Are those men's boxers, they ask.
And my grandma doesn't like that I moved to California.
And my teachers don't like how I argue every point they make.
And my dog doesn't like it when I cry.
And my barista doesn't like how I order my coffee.
And my roommates don't like how I turn on the lamp instead of the overhead light.
And my cousins don't like how often I call.
And my dentist looks so fucking disappointed when I tell him I don't floss.
FUCK
Shit, I didn't mean to say that.

KYLA YEIN

“Curing” Aging by Self-Tracking: Anti-Aging Practices in Quantified Health

essay

Kyla Yein (she/her) is an undergraduate student at Loyola Marymount University, where she is a Biology major and Film, TV, and Media Studies minor. Combining multiple disciplinary frameworks, she focuses on history and theory centering on the intersections of science, technology, and visual media. Kyla seeks to critically analyze the physical and virtual states of the body by researching film, television, video games, and technology such as fitness self-trackers through a Science and Technology Studies lens. In her free time, she loves playing *Fallout: New Vegas* and *Skyrim* and watching horror and sci-fi films.

“Curing” Aging by Self-Tracking: Anti-Aging Practices in Quantified Health

With an infamous reputation of selling products such as “This Smells Like My Vagina” candles and jade eggs, Gwenyth Paltrow’s company Goop has been widely known for being home to numerous wellness and beauty products targeted towards affluent, middle-aged, white women. Not only does Goop sell peculiar products, but it also has ventured into television, releasing two shows as of 2022. The company, partnering with Netflix, released its first¹ show in January 2020 called *The Goop Lab*, with episodes highlighting topics ranging from cold therapy to psychedelics — promoting the experimental ways to be “healthier.” Episode four, “The Health-Span Plan,” follows Paltrow and two members of her executive staff, Elise Loehen and Wendy Lauria, seeking to reduce their age by changing their diets and receiving facials. The featured experts in this episode explain there are two possible ages, your “biological” and “chronological” age, with the former being “the age your body resembles or functions at” and the latter being “the amount of time since you were born” (“Calculating Your Biological Age”). Later, they receive facial threading and a “vampire facial,” both intended to make them appear “naturally” youthful. These two “ages” suggest that the lower the “biological” age, the “healthier” you are through methods such as facials and diets. As a result, the involvement of these elements reinforces the idea that to be perceived as healthy, one must be beautiful, thus appearing younger.

“The Health-Span Plan” shows the numerous kinds of services and treatments some women undergo to try to look younger and highlights the relation between appearing youthful and “beautiful.” Moreover, *The Goop Lab* reinforces the connection between health, youth, and beauty, where appearing youthful means being beautiful, indicating good health. The beauty industry has historically upheld the connection between femininity and age by selling products such as anti-wrinkle creams, face tape, and even cosmetic surgeries, and marketing them as necessary to seem youthful and beautiful, and in turn, healthy. Within this context, aging is associated with being unhealthy, and is something that needs to be fixed or cured. Seen in “The Health-Span Plan,” the goal of the experiment was to quantify health by using a “biological” age to get the number as low as possible, interpreting aging as a process to be controlled to achieve a beauty and health standard. With these rhetorics in mind, scholarly critiques have largely focused on the intersection of anti-aging, beauty, and femininity. However, the conversation has now expanded to new territory relating to health in the increasing availability and popularity of self-tracking technology.

Goop’s “The Health-Span Plan” uses “biological age testing,” which illustrates how biomedical quantification practices are now being used to supposedly measure, track, and ideally control one’s age. This continues with the emergence of self-tracking technologies, which allow everyday people to quantify their health by tracking their steps, counting their calories, and other activities - all methods for people to attempt to control their age to be healthy. Among these people, biohackers, those who self-track to improve and optimize bodily functions, have an active online community where they exchange advice and ask questions about quantifying their health with technology. This space is observed to be composed mainly of men, most of whom come from the high-tech-focused Silicon Valley culture, which is a shift from the traditional target audience of the beauty industry, changing the anti-aging discourse.

That being said, anti-aging discourse has historically targeted both men and women. The association between aging and health has pressured individuals, both men and women, to purchase products marketed to achieve health standards in Western countries. In this essay, I will

¹ Goop released their second Netflix show on October 21, 2021 titled “Sex, Love & Goop.”

be exploring this new community by outlining the history of how companies have used the fear of aging to claim their products improve wellness” and “health” and showing how the emergence of self-trackers in the biohacking communities have changed anti-aging practices and discourse by analyzing scholarship, literature, and online forum posts. Furthermore, I will show how modern biohacking communities inherit the neoliberal ideology of aging as something to be “cured,” which historically has been developed by companies selling wellness and fitness products, targeting modern biohacking communities.

“Selling” Exercise Using Anti-Aging Rhetorics

This section will examine 19th and 20th century Western history of how companies have been capitalizing the pressure to maintain a youthful appearance and the idea that aging must be “controlled” in order to fabricate the necessity of their products. Upon the discovery of vitamins in the early 1900’s, companies began to mention the medicinal value of their products in their advertisements, boldly claiming it can “rejuvenate” the body with their healing properties (Stark 95). In Great Britain, rejuvenation was hailed as a way to develop “desirable qualities of health and beauty in both men and women” through physical exercise and diets, starting a “mass physical culture” (Stark 3). The rejuvenation movement emphasized youthfulness by doing recommended stretches or changes in diet, not requiring doctors’ orders to improve one’s health. As this fitness culture emerged, companies would claim their food products contained “rejuvenating powers.” For example, Irving’s, a British manufacturer of yeast tablets called “Yeast-Vite”, boasted of the seemingly miraculous benefits of their tablets. In a 1925 advertisement, the company “hailed their product as ‘[t]he greatest medical discovery of the century’ ... their advertisements also promised that ‘[a]ll users ... will note the extraordinary rejuvenating powers. In many cases even wrinkles and crowsfeet disappear and the buoyancy of youth is prevalent” (Stark 95). Yeast tablets have numerous health benefits, but they cannot reverse or prevent aging. Despite this², Irving’s made these health claims surrounding rejuvenation because consumers would be more inclined to purchase Yeast-Vite, with the assumption that buying the yeast tablets would make one youthful, “curing” them from aging. Other companies in the 1930’s, such as Welch’s Grape Juice and Quaker Oats (Stark 88), have evoked similar marketing strategies of establishing the need to buy their products to be “rejuvenated” and youthful, thereby healthy. Rejuvenation was sold as a way to repair and heal the body from the natural conditions brought upon by old age, stating the product with these properties would make the consumer younger, signaling it to be a “cure” for old age. This manufactured connection is further solidified in the rise in popularity of exercise in Western countries, adding to the capitalization of wellness and health.

During the 1930’s, with the rise of physical fitness culture across the UK and US, aging discourse transitioned into a focus on the external appearance of the body, highlighting mass exercise. For this reason, British physician James Cantlie created an exercise regime called physical jerks, which were promoted as a way for the older generation to “render their physiology more youthful, banish disease and infirmity, and also restore their external appearance and aesthetic to that of a younger person” (Stark 158). To encourage the older British population to be more active, numerous organizations, as well as science and medical experts, advocated for this exercise regime by relating “disease and infirmity” with aging, using scientific language to fabricate validity. Moreover, physical jerks exemplify “the extent to which the building of a healthy, youthful body was a desirable end in the early twentieth century” (Stark 148), demonstrating the rhetoric that vitality and youthfulness were deemed crucial to being healthy. With advocates claiming physical jerks can be performed to control aging, the association between disease and aging pressures individuals to practice this regimen, rendering it a requirement. This logic renders the inevitable and natural process of aging something to fear and actively fight against. Aging is a malaise that must be “cured,” and physical jerks are prescribed as the necessary way to be “healthy” and “youthful.” This ideology was supported by organizations and experts who promoted

²The U.S. Federal Food and Drug Administration did not form strict regulations until it passed the 1938 “Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act” and the U.K.’s regulatory agency, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), did not form until 2003 (“How Did the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act Come About?”).

physical jerks, using pointed language and providing resources to ensure the exercise’s wide reach.

While early exercise promotion sold physical activity through the rhetoric of “youth,” the rise of the cardiac crisis in the 1960s fortified the idea that exercise was an essential way to maintain health and longevity. In the mid-1960’s, the increasing concern surrounding cardiac health in the United States was brought upon by the fact that coronary heart disease mostly affected men, resulting in government involvement to promote exercise — deeming this a cardiac crisis. With coronary heart disease escalating in the population, scientists and medical experts declared that sedentary lifestyles and stress were major factors in heart problems (Mckenzie 86), concluding that men with white-collar jobs were the most at risk while disregarding the cardiac health of anyone outside of this description. Notably, the cardiac crisis incited a panic as it occurred “when gender roles were in flux and cultural critics feared that the American male was in decline” (Mckenzie 86), threatening the “ideal” nuclear family structure and the labor of white-collar workers. While the beauty industry had been selling youth and longevity to women for decades, the cardiac crisis of the 1960s focused on selling exercise to white-collar working men as the “cure” to the early death sentence caused by the sedentary middle-class life. This link between class and availability of health resources was maintained as we will see in the rise of personal fitness, and later with the emergence of self-tracking technology.

With the rise in cardiac-related problems and chronic illness, personal fitness gained in popularity. Federal exercise promotions and a television episode focusing on exercise (Mckenzie 83), all attempted to tackle the cardiac crisis and get more Americans to exercise. As a result, many Americans turned to fitness as the government provided experts’ opinions on the importance of exercise and implemented federal fitness and health programs. As the benefits of fitness and exercise were considered among the American population, the prevalence of YMCA rose, and Business Men’s Clubs — catered to white businessmen — sprung from numerous YMCA clubs. Once approved to join, members of Business Men’s Clubs could access amenities such as saunas, weights, rowing machines, along with combining exercise with leisure and social aspects (Mckenzie 105). The association between gym culture and masculinity was shaped by the exclusivity of gyms, evolving from the government’s implementation of ways to solve the cardiac crisis. Although the cardiac crisis seemingly focused only on heart health, anti-aging rhetoric was used to motivate white-collar working men. The importance of having a healthy heart not only was associated with longevity, but also staying youthful to encourage middle-aged men to exercise. Exercising, thereby being “youthful,” would allow them to continue working in their white-collar jobs and maintain the nuclear family structure.

Whereas many white-collar working men frequented YMCAs and Business Men’s Clubs, women — especially housewives — turned to television for exercise. Popularizing at-home exercises, Jack LaLanne, host of the fitness television program The Jack LaLanne Show, would encourage his viewers to use home objects such as chairs and brooms. This convenience allowed housewives, who had ready access to many of the materials used for LaLanne’s program, to exercise more often, thereby contributing to the increasing popularity of exercising for leisure. The rising popularity of exercising prompted the fitness industry to promote their products as ways to “cure” aging. Like many other fitness enthusiasts, LaLanne believed “exercise was a panacea for all illness” (McKenzie 103), including aging, promoting his workouts as a way to keep people young. Promoting exercise as a way to appear fit and youthful, The Jack LaLanne Show enticed audiences to tune in by erasing the need for gym memberships, thereby making it easier for the viewer to achieve a “youthful” appearance. The expansion of the fitness industry during this period, through the work of figures like LaLanne, took advantage of and promoted the fear of aging and the ideology that a youthful appearance equates to healthiness. Through this framework, they attempted to persuade consumers to purchase fitness products and gym memberships to be “healthier,” and therefore younger. The association between buying fitness products and memberships and being healthy would help lay the foundation for the neoliberal ideology of individualism that is at the center of the modern fitness industry.

Today, the values and ideology that emerged in the early twentieth century have been intensified through modern practices of self-tracking in fitness. Made possible by significant advances in biotechnology and information sciences and driven by individualist-oriented innovation (Banner 7), self-tracking fitness technology is being used to measure and quantify a range of bodily movements and processes from step counting to menstruation tracking. These technologies, such as Fitbit and Apple Watch, allowed users to track numerous bodily functions — steps, calories, blood oxygen levels, and more. Self-trackers are promoted as devices to understand and improve one’s health, thereby providing ways for users to appear more “youthful.”

In some respects, the rise of self-tracking technologies as a tool to determine whether individuals are “healthy” is a response to the inefficiency of the healthcare system. The intensification of this shift was brought upon by Silicon Valley culture and habitus (Banner 81), where the workers seek to integrate technology into their daily lives such as health and wellbeing, ultimately giving the responsibility to “be healthy” to the individual. In the fitness industry, companies state that their fitness devices are “a healthy leap ahead” (“Apple Watch Series 8” accessed November 5, 2022) or will result in consumers improving themselves (“Fitbit Charge 3” accessed November 5, 2022). This pressure perpetuates neoliberal ideology, where “neoliberalism establishes and enforces a system of regulatory practices, including the legal, social, and political” (Fletcher 20), in which individuals are upheld to self-regulate their personal health and wellness by using self-tracking devices. Being able to share the collected data with healthcare providers is an emerging feature from newer self-tracking devices, and doing so allows the user to have an advantage over those who do not own this technology. The surveillant nature of the self-tracking devices lets users constantly gather health data that could possibly be used to help with diagnoses from physicians. Since there has been a gradual shift from the government implementing federal fitness and health programs as an attempt to manage public health to the individual, users can utilize the advanced health features from self-trackers to replace or enhance their healthcare.

According to the logic of self-tracking technologies, individuals are responsible for their own well-being and health by tracking health data to optimize and “fix” their health problems. The individualistic rhetoric of neoliberalism centers “well-being and wellness within a framework of optimizing efficiency and navigating risk as an individualized effort” (Banner 81), so users must understand and have knowledge about the numerous self-tracking devices the fitness industry offers and how they can use them. In light of this, the biohacking and Quantified Self communities, known as extreme self-quanters, play a significant hand in framing health (Banner 81) through a biodigital lens and the rhetoric of aging as something to be “cured” by the individual.

Framing Health as Youthfulness By Self-Quantifying

Self-quantification technologies claim to provide a way for users to “control” their age to be healthy by converting bodily functions into numerical data. Some enthusiastic users identify as “self-quanters,” who believe in the “general progression in human history of using measurement, science, and technology to bring order, understanding, manipulation, and control to the natural world, including the human body” (Swan 86). At the extreme end of this community are biohackers and the Quantified-Self community, who use online platforms and international conferences to exchange advice and ask questions about quantifying their health with technology (Neff and Nafus 70). Biohackers are those who seek to improve themselves by utilizing technology, such as self-trackers, to achieve “peak” health and human performance. The Quantified-Self community follows these rhetoric and practices, but forms a more specific space within the biohacking community. Created by Wired Magazine editors Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly in 2007, the Quantified Self (QS) is a cultural phenomenon where individuals turn to self-tracking technology to “answer a health question, achieve a goal, [or] explore an idea” (QuantifiedSelf.com). What distinguishes the biohacking community from QS, a biohacking niche community, is that QS allows people to utilize active online and in-person spaces to understand their self-tracking data, while biohacking is used to describe a general category of self-trackers and does not have an online

community, mainly relying on blogs. Comprised of approximately 43,000 “quant-selfers,”³ the QS community organizes conferences and conventions where members highlight what they learned from personal data and has regular posts on its forum and website to share how to optimize self-tracking techniques and practices (Smith and Vonthethoff 10), bringing the focus to where “communities, tools, and practices intersect” (Neff and Nafus 35).

Through self-tracking practices and knowledge shared within online biohacking communities, quant-selfers operate through the logic of the fitness technology market where individuals can use self-tracking to “achieve” or actively pursue health. They investigate which products can “optimize” their health, turning to the QS Forum and conferences where they are recommended self-trackers that would fit their needs, prompting them to purchase the suggested product. This “do-it-yourself” aspect of biohacking is sustained by online spaces, such as the active Quantified Self Forum, where “communication happens in a very open, direct, and rather uncensored way, providing a relatively genuine view of the inside dynamics and practices of the movement” (Meyer and Vergnaud 7). Continuously on the hunt for the best self-tracking device or hack to improve their data collection, quant-selfers ask for and exchange advice with other QS members to gather the most accurate information about fitness and health technology, inscribing a biometric framing of health and age into their habitus.

Biohackers and quant-selfers seek to utilize the most efficient methods to self-track numerous bodily functions to “improve” their health, thereby maintaining youthfulness. As youth is associated with the efficient, “optimized” body which can exercise, handle diets, and be active, collecting numerical data allows self-quanters to achieve a “healthy” body by measuring the body through experiments, analyzing their data to see how they can “fix” their habits, and repeating this procedure. By surveilling their activities and tracking their health data, these quant-selfers aim to control aging in an effort to prevent old age, which has been conceived as “a medical issue in need of a ‘cure’” (Fletcher 126). In other words, self-quantification of the body appears to be the solution to “reclaiming their youth.” Quantification methods to support this notion are exchanged among quant-selfers in the active QS forum, in which I will be analyzing numerous screenshots of the biometric framing of health used as a “cure” to aging. The QS Forum users, who have backgrounds ranging from enthusiastic layman to biotechnology employee to concerned patient, embrace a free-flowing conversational style in their posts, making the community a leading driver in shaping and evolving the discourse around biodigital public health and self-quantification (Neff and Nafus 30).

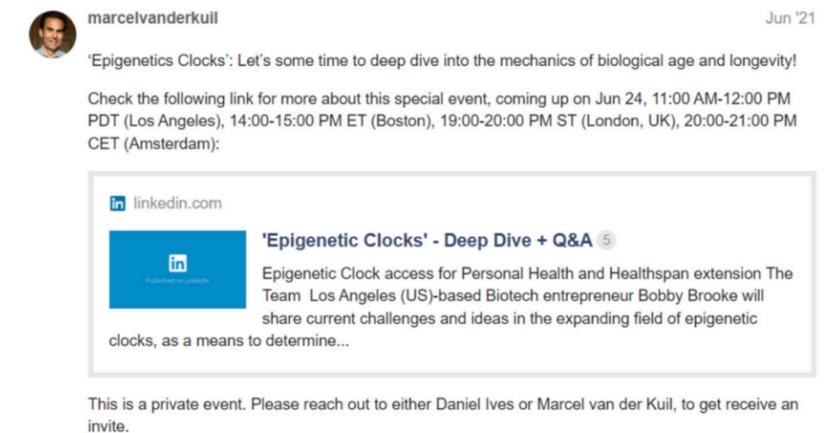


Figure 1. Screenshot of a post from user “marcelvanderkull,” announcing “Epigenetics Clocks,” an online talk focusing on the mechanics of biological age and its relationship to longevity. *Source:* Quantified Self Forum, posted June 23, 2021.

³“Self-quanters” are those who quantify the body and collect data from self-tracking to improve their health, while “quant-selfers” are specifically active members in the Quantified Self community, but are also considered self-quanters.

Seen in Figure 1, the screenshot displays a QS Forum member promoting an online talk about how to understand and control biological age to extend one's lifespan, where biotechnology and epigenetics are integrated into the "answer" to longevity. This post shows how the QS Forum provides resources for members to further their knowledge about biometrics to "improve" their health using various means, including attending talks about optimizing biological age to not only relate it to numerical data to reflect that of a younger body, but also to appear younger. With the "Epigenetic Clocks" talk, the user gains an insight into how biotechnology can be used to analyze biological age in hopes of achieving longevity. Interested biohackers are able to access information shared by other quant-selfers, which makes anti-aging rhetoric and practices more accessible, supplemented by the availability of health-related information on the internet (Lupton, *Digital Health* 28). The accessibility, in turn, intensifies the deployment of methods to "control" aging because social media allows for sharing of images, graphs, article links, words, and more. Specifically for the QS Forum, its users frame aging as a "disease-state" (Fletcher 12) and the proposed solution to this problem is the quantification of the body with a biometric framing of health.

CGM, glycemic responses and diet decision-making

Quantified Self Diet, Nutrition, and Weight

Max_Eastwood 1 Aug 20

Hello everyone, here i want to share my experience with CGM glucose measurements, food testing and diet decision-making process based on glycemic responses. I'm skipping here on topic "why glucose spikes are bad" there a lot of scientific studies confirming this.

My methodology is:

- apply CGM to measure glucose levels in high resolution with ability to export data and process it
- make isolated product tests
- produce single objective glucose response measure for each test
- build a list of foods and sort them according to responses
- exclude food which spikes even in small quantities, limit food which in a mid / high-mid range (and objectively calc limits) and do not limit food in lower mid / low.

My current setup is explained in details in my blog. In a short i'm using Freestyle Libre V1 sensor, android app Glimp to read data from sensor and export data in CSV.

After reading some papers about glycemic index (GI) i decided that iAUC - Area Under the Curve of glucose levels 120 minutes after meal is an objective measure which represents glycemic response and may be used in predicting how much food to eat to stay in range.

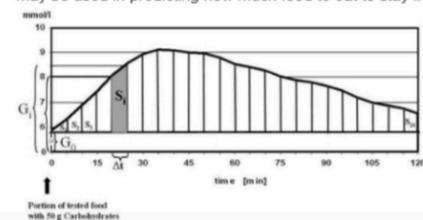


Figure 2a. Screenshot of a post from user "Max_Eastwood" sharing continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) glucose level measurements collected from self-tracker Freestyle Libre V1 Sensor and including graphs of data. Methodology is also listed.

Source: Quantified Self Forum, posted August 20, 2022.

OP_Engr Aug 21

Cool!

Did you do a baseline of pure glucose to calibrate your response?

Are you considering looking at resistant starches? (split a baked potato, eat half for baseline, refrigerate other half and eat it the next day.)

Cooking duration and processing may also be a factor (rice, pasta, etc).

Any concerns about missing nutrients with eliminating many foods?

Curious how you plan to do meal analysis. I would consider a Design Of Experiments approach.

Any changes to your micro-biome with your dietary changes?

Any data that Low Glucotype improves longevity biomarkers (beyond avoiding diabetes).

Did your blood results improve with your revised diet (A1C, Fasting Glucose, CRP, HDL, etc)

Thank you for sharing your work!

Figure 2b. Screenshot of a post from user "OP_Engr" replying to the original post shown in Figure 2a above. Keyword "longevity" is highlighted.

Source: Quantified Self Forum, posted August 21, 2022

Quant-selfers, highly passionate about biometric data, utilize self-trackers to "control" age by quantifying their diet, vitamin intake, and other bodily functions and activities. Figure 2a displays a post in which the original user shares their glucose level data from their self-tracker that continuously measures glucose, the Freestyle Libre V1 sensor. Common posts on the QS forums include members sharing their "experiments" (where $n=1$), posting their methodology and results from when they track one or more bodily functions for a designated period. The QS Forum platform "invites [users] to contribute personal information about their bodies, medical conditions, treatments, and healthcare experiences" (Lupton, *Digital Health* 29), similar to how the user in Figure 2a is sharing their glucose level data to other quant-selfers. In Figure 2b, the user replies to the original post (Figure 2a), asking for more details concerning the "experiment," with one of the questions about the correlation between low glucose and longevity. Not only does this question point to the demand for information about anti-aging practices, but also indicates the demand for a way to "control" aging, such as extending youth or slowing aging through longevity.

Although part of the appeal of biodigital and biometric health for self-quanters is the seemingly factual and "truthful" aspect of quantification, interpretation of self-tracking measurements is rooted in a biased perspective. The numbers from the collected data "are not neutral [and] the ways in which phenomena are quantified and interpreted and the purposes to which these measurements are put are always implicated in any social relationships, power dynamics, and ways of seeing" (Lupton, *The Quantified Self* 96). As has been noted, the social nature of the Quantified Self community, specifically their online forum, allows for members to access knowledge on optimizing and utilizing the best self-tracking devices to "improve" their health. This constant drive to achieve "good" health by "controlling" aging by appearing youthful can impact how QS members analyze their data from their self-trackers. The self-tracking subject, tasked with independently interpreting and analyzing their measurements using their personal knowledge, are restricted by social constructions, such as the rhetoric that old age is separated from the norm and that aging must be prevented or "cured" by quantifying using self-trackers. Contemporary neoliberal society homogenizes the aging population (Fletcher 108), meaning it reinforces the idea that the "aged experience," intertwining both bodily appearance and health, is universally the same among everyone. Despite the fact there is no singular way to age, this homogenization perpetuates the belief that aging is a disease that can be "cured" by a universal solution. The solution concerns appearing "youthful" by self-tracking bodily functions and activities and is further amplified by advanced biotechnology and the availability of information about anti-aging practices from self-quant communities.

Human Longevity, Inc. Launches the Health Nucleus, a Comprehensive and Personalized Health Platform for Individuals

Quantified Self General Health sleep, genomics



Dan_Dascalescu QS Forum founder

1 Oct '15

Very exciting news from anti-aging research company Human Longevity, Inc 5:

Human Longevity, Inc. Launches the Health Nucleus, a Comprehensive and Personalized Health Platform for Individuals 14

The Health Nucleus platform uses whole genome sequence analysis, advanced clinical imaging and innovative machine learning – combined with a comprehensive curation of personal health history – to deliver the most complete picture of individual health.

integrate your genomic, microbiome, and metabolomic data with your clinical data

The first center is located in San Diego, CA, and combines "genomics with a complete array of other clinical and biological measures, including":

- Whole human genome sequencing, spanning all 6 billion base pairs of DNA (most DNA tests examine less than 2% of the full genetic code);
- Microbiome sequencing which quantifies the collective genomes of the microorganisms that live inside and on the human body (it is estimated that there are 10 times more microbial cells than human cells in our bodies);
- Metabolome characterization which enables us to measure the unique chemical fingerprints that cellular processes leave behind;
- A comprehensive body MRI scan to screen for any abnormalities and provide a baseline for the future;

Oct 2015

1 / 3
Oct 2015

Oct 2015

Figure 3. Screenshot of a post from user "Dan_Dascalescu," announcing the opening of a longevity health platform that collects and uses personal clinical data.

Source: Quantified Self Forum, posted October 21, 2015

Upheld by the accessibility of information from self-quanters, QS Forum users turn to biotechnology, aiming to use it as their own form of healthcare. This phenomenon is seen from founder of the Quantified Self Forum and Silicon Valley entrepreneur Dan Dascalescu, where he promotes the launch of the "Health Nucleus," a platform that utilizes human genome sequencing and machine learning to personalize healthcare for users (Figure 3). At Health Nucleus, individuals are able to quantify their bodies by collecting their genomic, microbiome, and metabolomic data (Figure 3) as a part of their physical for a total cost of \$25,000, according to Science.org. This personalized healthcare exemplifies the increasingly biomedicalized neoliberal rhetoric, interrelated with the notion that aging is a "disease." Those utilizing these services from Health Nucleus gain an "advantage" over those who cannot afford the costly physical. The consumer circumvents the American healthcare system by opting to undergo a physical in a private healthcare center that claims to find "solutions" to health problems with individualized care. With quant-selfers continuously seeking the best resources and technologies to optimize the ways they can track their health data, services such as Health Nucleus can "[provide] specific medical care tailored toward their lifestyle(s), with the interest of maintaining optimal health for one's age" (Fletcher 132) while enforcing the neoliberal notion of privatized healthcare. As an active online platform for self-quanters, the QS Forum amplifies the consumption of technologies and services that contribute to anti-aging rhetoric and practices, enabling the position that aging as a "disease" can be controlled with a biometric "solution."

Conclusion

Historically, anti-aging rhetoric and practices have been exhibited through fitness companies claiming their products and programs would be the "solution" to old age, restricting access to these solutions by requiring individuals to purchase devices, memberships, and more to gain this health "advantage." This neoliberal rhetoric would be intensified by the popularity of self-tracking devices being used for fitness and health-related purposes. The biohacking and Quantified Self communities utilize online spaces and conferences to exchange information concerning quantifying the body and promoting related resources, thereby boosting the rhetoric that aging is a "disease" with self-tracking technologies as the "cure."

Furthermore, the conversational, open nature of the active QS Forum is shown to amplify the biodigital framing of what it means to be "healthy" through neoliberal values, where users commonly share which devices and memberships to purchase in hopes of optimizing collected data for their personal health as they deem the healthcare system to be inefficient. Resulting in changes in relevant discourse, industries promoting anti-aging practices are expanding their traditional audience of women to also include men, brought upon the heavy influence of the male-dominated Silicon Valley. Quant-selfers must navigate the fitness and health industries, which are often technology-dominated, to be able to track their bodily functions for their health, turning to forums, blogs, and other forms of social media. The information exchanged allows self-trackers to "experiment" on themselves with the aim of "improving" their health, thereby attempting to appear youthful and achieving longevity. In conjunction with the development of biotechnology, anti-aging is becoming a significant topic across numerous scientific and medical research; even though "there currently exists no legitimate anti-aging therapies or medicines[,]...substantial anti-aging research has taken place in the hard sciences" (Fletcher 138). With biodigital health shaping the discourse, the widespread use of the continuously advancing self-tracking technology calls for a reframing of health, diverting from anti-aging rhetoric and practices and the dimensions of surveillance and neoliberalism brought upon with it.

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TRINITY CATLIN

Clay Body

Antarctica

poetry

Trinity Catlin is a four-year English major at Loyola Marymount University. She was born and raised in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California. Greatly influenced by travel and exploration, her poetic interests involve environmentalism, ekphrastic poetry, gothic literature, and green spaces. Currently, she is in her second year as an editor of *LA Miscellany*, a fellow undergraduate literary magazine at Loyola Marymount University. Her poetry has been previously published in *LA Miscellany*, and *Sunstroke Magazine*.

Clay Body

I have made you, again.
Stuck my lips to your nose
and poured spring air
into your clay body.

Worms sing over mahogany,
weave pretty handkerchiefs
over your palms,
and come to life as a linen veil.

Will you take shape
as the wild things?
As dust?

Every word a flake of sand,
silica,
magnesia,
wavering on the axis,
trying to find center.

Where mountains fold over
into
a perennial wetland.

Where lungs can fill again,
and the curve of your shoulder
can hold strong.

From the speckled Earth,
pulled from the lakeside,
the inland hand feels silk out of sediment.

Gradually narrowing clay to the pinhole
of a camera.
Peering through and seeing the endless tunnel
of exposure-less night,
of polluted night.
The callused hand, stained brown with obsidian,
Rinsed again,
And again.
I see your shape in my tiredness.
pulling along an edge, and

grazing my hand against plasticity,
You collapse against yourself.

There is a deep breath,
through the nostrils,
an exhale of testimony.

I have felt your shape against my shoulder,
marble tears against the casket,
iron howls against your clay body.

Antarctica

The shelf swells out of the water. A wall of mirrors
fracturing against converging oceans.
Cape Horn at the backs of ice plates,
that ration the memory of standing on an older
Earth

That is why we've traveled here.

Digging our heels into the blue desert. Cobalt skin
wrapped in dense wool, trudging along the funeral
continent. You learn to shepherd ice dunes. I am
waiting for disease to melt out of the land. As the
shelves crumble behind our tracks, we only consider
farther south. The albatross never appears, nor
lingers. Wind exhausts the crystalline fields, that are
sewn together by desolation, by forgetfulness.
There is a silence that transposes
thought, and the white plains
somehow close in.

I have to hold
you. Look
deeper into
the tundra,
the clay
of my body
freezes
against
your purpose.
The naked candle drips along your down coat.

*We shall stick it out to the end,
but we are getting weaker...
and the end cannot be far.¹*

¹Robert Falcon Scott, "Tragedy All Along the Line"



