

A COMING OF AGE: EXPLORING THEMES OF ADOLESCENT IDENTITY
THROUGH AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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A Coming of Age: Exploring Themes of Adolescent Identity Through Autoethnography

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This paper emerges from a growing field of self-reflective and arts based qualitative research methods that are inadequately represented in the exploration of adolescent identity and the themes that function as moving parts in the continued creation of that identity from childhood. Research in this experimental form has the ability to provide a critical understanding of macro-sociological and psychological concepts by looking at small-scale and personal accounts, those of which are often overlooked and left out of social science reports entirely. Our own experiences and reflections -drawn from the same adolescence we seek understanding of- are not to be overlooked in their aptness in providing concrete, and oftentimes more accessible, data. In this paper, the exploration of my own adolescence provides the groundwork for an auto-ethnographic enquiry realized through a series of poems, short stories, and mixed media work. The paper first explores the visual/sensory ethnographic process of collecting and connecting memories to objects, which gives life and understanding to the narratives that are shown in the art itself. It then argues the usefulness and uniqueness of arts based and self-reflective research in growing academic fieldwork. Lastly, the paper uses scholarly literature to provide information on each overarching theme of adolescence being discussed in each chapter before introducing the particular art medium for that theme.

Introduction:

Why me? Why this? Why now?

The self is constantly evolving. Identity is much more of a living, breathing thing; ever-changing as new parts are introduced and altered. Since maturity aligns with a certain degree of autonomy, the concept of a “self” begins to develop during adolescence as the desire to achieve a new level of inner discovery and awareness becomes greater. As teenagers, we are thrust into the world, suddenly aware of our own internal shortcomings and begin to wonder: Who am I? What do I want? What matters to me?

It is through the relationships and interactions we have with others, the decisions we make, and the things we experience in our teenage years that play major roles in the craft of our own personal morals and values. Because of this, in order to understand an adult's inmost self, we must first take a critical look at their period of adolescence.

In the past hundred years, the majority of research done on adolescence has been done by those who have aged far beyond the time period they're studying. Generally, studies have been done by older, predominately male psychologists that use physiology and chemistry to explain what happens in adolescence by looking at the biological make up and chemical changes in the body that alter a teen's psyche. Although this research is critical to understanding the nature and physicality of adolescents in general, it does fail to cut to a deeper, more personal level, that actively engages the teen and those around them. It is through intensive self-reflection and immersion into memory that you find that the best way to understand something is to look within to draw similarities and connections from our own experiences and understandings of the world. At age 20, I'm young enough to still be actively participating in the themes of adolescence I'll be discussing in this paper, but old enough to recognize my own micro-participation in concepts and systems that are greater and more complex than me and my everyday life.

A brief background on adolescent studies:

Adolescence, a part of almost every human being's journey into adulthood, was a word that was coined by the first president of the American Psychological Association, G. Stanley Hall, in 1904. Hall was credited with discovering adolescence (Henig, 2010), and in his study titled, "Adolescence", he describes the new developmental phase that

came about due to social changes at the turn of the 20th century. Because of the influence of Child Labor Laws and the move towards a universal education system, youth had newfound time in these transition years, when the responsibilities of adulthood were not forced upon them as quickly as they had been in the past. Thus, teen culture was born.

Given a new title for their age group, adolescents were seen as a new breed of youth; feared by their parents for both what they didn't know about their children, and what they did. Hall, commonly known for his assertion that it was society's obligation to, "burn out the vestiges of evil in their (adolescent) nature" (G. Stanley Hall, 2010), did not approach the nature of adolescence with compassion or understanding. Therefore, adolescence was seen as a time of overcoming one's "beast-like impulses" while being engulfed in a period of "storm and stress" (Lerner & Israeloff, 2005, p. 4). Because of these seemingly outdated notions of adolescence, this field of study was built on a groundwork that suggested that teens were troubled, unavailable, and in need of fixing. These assumptions shut down any real chance of understanding the teenage brain; researchers approach the subject with preconceived thoughts that adolescent comprehension is unobtainable in itself.

It is with this study that I hope to provide a much more accessible and empathetic form of research that can provide a more intimate look into the adolescent mind. By deconstructing the assertion that understanding the adolescent mind is virtually impossible, I have extracted data from my own adolescent years and used them to fill the gap between research and authentic relativity to those studying the subject.

Objects and memories

It is the thought process mentioned above that brought me back to my parent's house, standing above the old trunk I pulled from my closet, covered in a floral pattern that could have only come from the 90s. Inside were physical memories my mom had saved from when I was a baby: old birthday cards with a scarlet "1" on them, my first pair of shoes, and tickets to the circus. As I sifted through the box, I realized how often we as humans hold onto objects simply because they tend to serve as a vessel for a particular memory. My mom held onto my first pair of shoes, not because she knew I would someday be able to wear them again. She kept these little pink shoes at the bottom of a trunk for 20 years simply because they reminded her of the time she put her only daughter's first pair of shoes on. This was a memory she wanted to hold onto, and the shoes provided a way to do that.

Then, I remembered the small box I keep under my desk that is filled with little things that I have acquired through middle school, high school, and college: little trinkets, notes passed in class, and other things that don't quite make sense or look special at face value. I kept each one of these things because they reminded me of a particular memory that I had no other way of holding onto outside of my own conscious. For example, there is a pink sugar packet that reads "Sweet Thing" that a boy gave me on a cruise before my freshman year of high school. He had handed it to me and said, "You dropped your name-tag", and winked at me. At the time, I was awkward, pudgy, and just happy to be noticed by anyone, so naturally I tucked it into my pocket and held onto it for years after.

So there I was, staring into a box full of physical representations of my early childhood, and it seemed necessary that I create a box of things that I felt best physically

represented my adolescence. After emptying the contents of when my life was only two feet tall, I stared into this box that now seemed suddenly very large and empty.

I got to work.

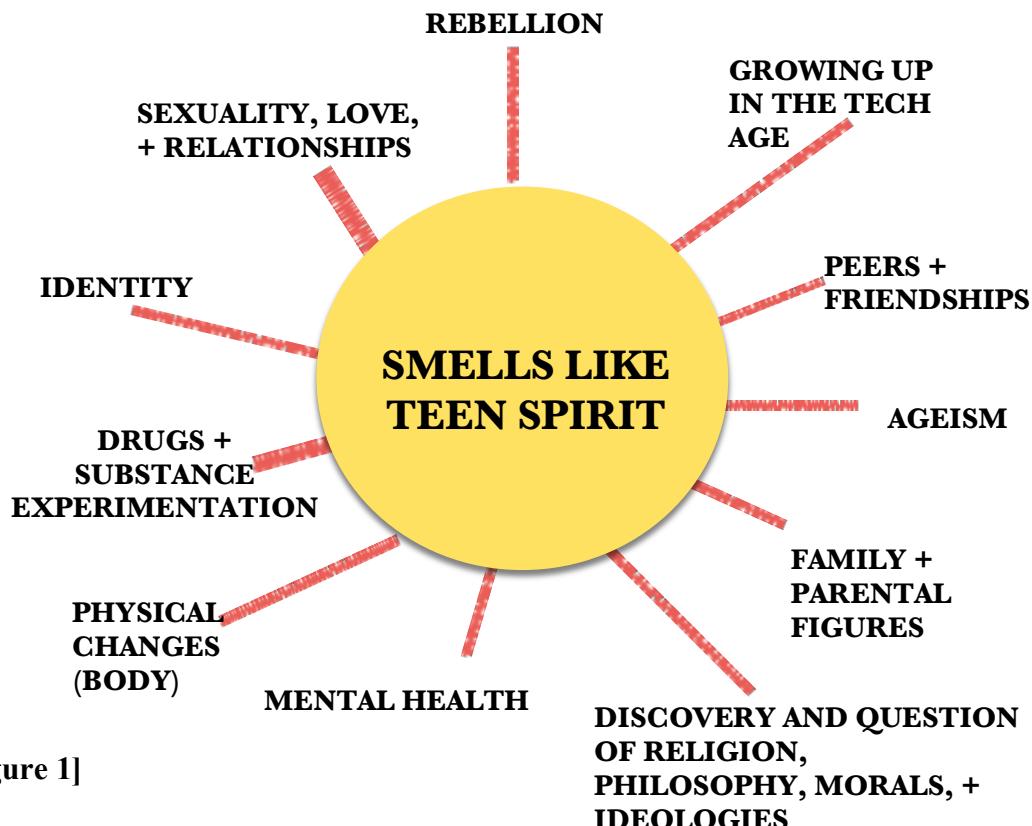
I opened my closet, dumped out keepsake boxes, pulled out old photo albums, and spread out all of my journals from eighth grade to the one I keep on my desk now in my senior year of college. I asked myself simple questions. Where do I come from? What shaped me into who I am so far? What things do I hold most dear to me? What makes me nostalgic about my teen years? What items represent my teen experiences best?

I grabbed everything I could think of:

- t-shirts bearing old marching band show names
- the unused condom my first college roommate gave me
- a lighter that barely worked
- my driver's license test evaluation sheet
- my jean jacket
- an empty pill bottle
- the ticket stub from the first (and not last!) rated R movie I snuck into
- my first boyfriend's soccer sweatshirt
- old fortune cookie messages
- notes that came attached to long-dead flowers
- a dreamcatcher
- favorite books
- photos of friends and family

Then, I bought a rather large, unlined, dark blue notebook from Hobby Lobby, opened it, and wrote the first thing that came to mind: “SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT” in sharpie. I imagined myself in a Yankee Candle store with Nirvana somewhere, picking out candles that fit that period of my life the most. From there, I drew lines branching out of the center, each one with a word or phrase written at the end that I felt was an important concept or theme of adolescence [Figure 1].

Then, I took some of the objects I had collected and matched them to the themes I had written down that I felt to be most critical to me in the shaping of the adolescent identity, and in particular, my own: Rebellion, Sexuality, Love, + Relationships, and Mental Health. My jean jacket bore a sticky note that read “Rebellion”, The grey soccer hoodie received one that said “Sexuality, Love, + Relationships”, and the dreamcatcher and journal entries went to “Mental Health”. As random as these objects are, out of context, I was less interested in the subjects themselves, but rather *why* I recalled them in particular above everything else when I asked myself to physicalize a branch of my own identity. And, if the way they trigger an emotional response from me is relatable enough to bring into the exploration of adolescence.



[Figure 1]

The grey hoodie

It doesn't smell like him anymore, my first *real* boyfriend. It smells like the off brand Tide Pods I've been using to clean my laundry with the past few years, but it still fits just like it did when I was seventeen. We're going to call him "C" for privacy purposes. C and I have been friends since our parents put us in the same preschool class. As all cliché stories go, we spent the entirety of our childhood and early teen years going in and out of having crushes on each other, but never confessing it to the other in fear of rejection. Finally, the stars (and our hearts) aligned the fall of my senior year of high school and after he took my hand in his on the car ride home from a Twenty-One Pilots concert, we descended down the curious path to becoming more than friends. Our relationship was short, as most are in our teen years, lasting only four months. He was my

first kiss. He played soccer on his high school's team and I attended as many games as I could. Since we didn't go to the same school, I didn't have anything to wear to the games that showed any sort of school spirit, and at the time he always wore this grey sweatshirt. It's still the thing that I picture him wearing when I think of him. He gave it to me at the beginning of our relationship, and I wore it practically every day because it provided me with a sense of both physical and emotional comfort and security. He asked me to keep it after we broke up, a way to remember this part of our lives.

Jean jacket

Bought at a thrift shop in Austin, Texas, this oversized closet staple has gotten into just as much trouble as I have. It's my go-to jacket that I wear to almost every party or social event I've gone to. It smells like smoke and Big Red chewing gum, and has a patch on the left chest side that I hastily sewed on that has a bouquet of roses printed on it and reads, "Do no harm, but take no shit". It's a motto I live by. I imagine someday my kids pulling this dusty old thing out of a box in the attic and asking me about it, and me giving them a mischievous smile, and saying, "I'll tell you about it when you're older."

Eagle dreamcatcher

Still taped shut, layers of it wrapped around the top and base several times to prevent this small cylindrical container from accidentally opening. There's an eagle's head and chest carved on the lid with a small turquoise bead nestled in the base. I got it on some camping trip I went on with my dad when I was in elementary school and it remained forgotten in my nightstand for years. When I was in seventh grade, I began

having panic attacks, but I never called them that because it was a new and confusing fear that I was just discovering and one that I couldn't find a name for. At some point I found the dreamcatcher while cleaning my room and started keeping it on my nightstand where I believed was its rightful place. One day, I came home from school and my overthinking escalated into a panic attack. I couldn't breathe. My thoughts were racing through my head, and I felt absolutely helpless. In the midst of the chaos I noticed the dreamcatcher sitting on my nightstand and without thinking too much into it, I grabbed it, opened it up, and mentally pictured all of my anxiety and fear pouring itself into the compartment. By some miracle, my breathing began to slow and I could feel my anxiety ebbing away as I watched the imaginary fear filling the cup. When I finally caught my breath and my heart beat slowed to something more normal, I put the top on as quickly as possible. That became an odd sort of routine of mine for years; opening the dreamcatcher and mentally storing my anxieties in it. My freshman year of high school I irrationally convinced myself that if I opened the dreamcatcher again, it would release all of my fear back into my life. So I sat, cross legged on my bedroom rug, and taped the lid again and again until I was certain it wouldn't fall open. Almost seven years later, and I still haven't opened it.

Journal excerpts

This was one of the most time consuming parts in my collection of data. One Friday, I drove six hours roundtrip to my parent's house just to pick up all of my old journals. When I got back to my place, I arranged them in chronological order and re-read all of them. Sifting through the endless rants of boys, school, and teenage injustices, I looked for lines that resonated with me, or accurately described the way I felt and

thought about myself and the world around me at the time, and highlighted them. There were several moments when what I read no longer resonated with me and it was then that I realized how much I had grown emotionally and mentally since my mid-teens, and I was reminded again of the importance and validity of self-reflection and the role it plays in understanding one's own evolving identity. These excerpts also served as a foundation of research data as they were concrete thoughts and feelings of an adolescent. I then compiled the multitude of lines in which I pondered my purpose and wallowed in self-pity from the 15 journals I went through, and set them aside with plans to use them in a mixed media collage.

METHODOLOGY

The autoethnographic process

'What is autoethnography?' you might ask. My brief answer: research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political. (Ellis 2004)

Rather than the ethnographic study method that involves researchers immersing themselves in a specific group of people to study their culture, autoethnography draws from personal experiences and reflections. In this particular study, I was able to get the best of both worlds. As a college-aged student, I have gone through my whole life consistently surrounded by my peers in school, extra-curricular activities, most of my workplaces, and my friends. Without actively noticing it, I have spent my entire life immersed in the culture of my age group, noticing and retaining the things I learn from watching and listening to those around me. This study focuses specifically on the culture of the age group consisting of 13 to 20 year olds, and through the autoethnographic

process I can recall both my own experiences and thoughts as well as the things I witnessed and noticed from those around me. Autoethnography is a way to use our own narratives and stories as data that is more concrete and relatable to those exploring the study, and works to involve the self as a valid and reliable source of information.

Arts-based research

In an increasingly polarized and temperamental society, there is a desperate need for research and communicational methods through the sciences that have the ability to foster genuine listening and promote empathy among humans. Arts-based research methods work to bridge the artificial line that has been created between arts and science. Though the use of arts as a form of research is slowly being adopted and accepted by researchers, there is still a hierachal system that is continuously reinforcing a disregard for how the arts can inform as much as they can engage (Giménez, Jennings, and Wilmer 2018). In this paper, I will be using mixed media, fiction, and poetry as my mediums to convey my research in a way that engages both the heart and mind to understand the adolescent experience. As researchers, we explore mediums like these because of their ability to humanize the research process, close the gap between participant and researcher, and consider how it raised our own critical awareness to the work and workplace of science (Smith 1999; Diversi and Moreira 2009).

CHAPTER 1: The Grey Soccer Hoodie // Love, Relationships, and Sexuality

INTRODUCTION:

I chose to have my first boyfriend's high school soccer team's sweatshirt that he gave me while we were dating as the symbol of this chapter. It's something that makes me feel incredibly nostalgic about him, the time we spent together, but, more importantly, the feeling of being in high school and being wrapped up entirely in someone else the way only teens seem to be able to do. It perfectly encompasses the way a relationship can provide a sense of comfort during the period of adolescence. As you and your partner grow into yourselves, it is through the way we confide in each other and communicate desires and challenges that we discover both them and ourselves at once.

Adolescent romantic relationships play a crucial role in a young person's emotional development. How healthy or unhealthy those relationships are shape how someone is likely to act and react in future relationships. It's during these relationships that adolescents discover the things they want and value from a romantic partner, while simultaneously realizing the things they don't want. Although many adolescent relationships last for only a few weeks or months, those early relationships play a pivotal role in the lives of adolescents, and are important in developing the capacity for long-term, committed relationships in adulthood (Sorensen 2007).

Romantic relationships are central to social life during middle to late adolescence (Sorensen 2007), and it is because of this that there is not only a pressure on teens to be in relationships, but to sometimes, unintentionally, put too much emotional and mental energy into trying to keep a relationship afloat, despite its unhealthy characteristics. Without a clear understanding of what makes a healthy relationship, teens are vulnerable and likely to tolerate relationships that include dating violence and risky sexual activity

(Sorensen 2007). Because of this, the quality of adolescent romantic relationships can have long lasting effects on self-esteem and how they shape personal values regarding romance, intimate relationships, and sexuality (Barber & Eccles, 2003).

It is through this research that I relived, pondered, and reconstructed my past relationships, all in the glory of their unconventionality in both labels and substance. Each one taught me something new about myself: what I was willing to compromise on, what I wasn't, and perhaps, most importantly, discovering how to communicate my love language as well as learning other's.

In deciding what arts based research medium to explore in my study of adolescent relationships, I chose to use poetic inquiry as a research and engagement method. By using transcription within my own journals as qualitative data, I was able to craft poems that both interpret and analyze. The bolded lines within the poems are there to show the reader that the words were pulled straight from diary entries discussing the relationship the poem itself is about. Poetry is unique in how its form can, “capture and portray the human condition in a more easily ‘consumable,’ powerful, emotionally poignant, and open-ended, nonlinear form compared with prose research reports” (Faulkner 2017, 211). Poetry does what quantitative research simply cannot do: engages the soul.

With that being said, I give you:

Dear ____ : A Series of Epic Poems About Not So Epic Loves

M // “long distance”

I.

I knew you **loved me**
the day I received your **postcard in the mail**,
the one from **Momorangi Bay**.
I could see it in your handwriting,
the way you wrote my address,
like each number and letter were made just for me.
three short lines-
the sweetest poem.

II.

that was the summer **I set alarms for 2 in the morning**,
to make up for the time change.
you'd call me from your twin sized bed in some Australian hostel
to tell me about the father and son you met while hitch-hiking through Sydney,
who took you to their home and cooked your dinner,
and that the people were good,
and **the kangaroos and wombats were like deer over there**,
pausing to show me pictures of the mountains, and the coast, and all of the sunrises that came
hours before mine.

and so this is how we loved each other during those months
where we lacked in proximity and touch,

and made up for in those conversations that went on well through the night,
in hushed tones and stifled laughter,
when you'd tell me about the **road trip** you took to **Lake Marian**
and I would ask you to describe what the **gum trees** smelled like,
and how the rain tasted down under,
and if,
when you looked at the reflection in the water,
you could see me smiling from America.

III.

I sit out on the back patio,
sipping from the lips of a bottle of red wine.
the more I drink, the more I want to call,
scream into the phone, demand to know
how dare you love me like that
and leave
too sober to give in,
not sober enough to stop you
from slipping into my thoughts,
through the ceiling of yesterday,
and onto the floor of tomorrow.

It always happens like that.

never inviting you into my mind,
but you come anyways, unannounced,

on the car ride home from work,
in the early hours of the morning,
when no one is awake to tell me you're not coming back.

It begins to rain,
whether the sky felt my pain too that day,
I'll never know as I sat,
red eyed and nursing
the only thing I can stomach,
accepting that the bottle is empty,
that you abandoned me,
and
as much as I want you

I don't know which would hurt more:
if you never came back,
or if you did.

B // “the entitled asshole”

I.

we move together,

like ship and water.

your body

over mine,

weathering down
until all we are is skin against skin-

I mold to fit what you need me to be
in and out of your bed.

you pull, and I move to fill the space
never asking,
but me,
giving anyways.

I suppose this is how the world works:
the ship moves
and the water gives in.

II.

now it's just you
and me
driving too fast in the wrong direction
your callous hands gripping the steering wheel
(pedal to the metal, baby)
flask in hand,
half-empty, half-full
of pure, liquefied desperation
telling me to slow down
the end always comes too soon

and me, always me,
fists beating the dashboard,
bloodshot eyes,
mouth torn at the seams shrieking,
“I can stop anytime I want, I can stop anytime I w

a

n

t. “

E // “my 2AM drunk text romance”

my 2AM drunk text romance,
both having a love affair with the same man
(Jack Daniels)
he likes to think I am a tortured artist type,
all red lipstick and Sylvia Plath
and I let him
because **it’s entertaining**
to put on a show, to play the part,
to wear the costume and show him how good I look in it.

one night we timed it perfectly
so we would be watching the same movie,
(eternal sunshine of the spotless mind)
at the same time,

with 155 miles between us.

we talked through the whole thing.

to me,

he's a pair of thick eyebrows,

a johnny cash playlist

filled with sad drinking songs,

and a name that pops up on my phone screen from time to time.

not love, never was,

but if the kids can play house,

why can't we?

E // “just friends”

I.

I met this hippie cowboy

in the season of my life when I smoked too many cigarettes

who was **still in love with the girl that broke his heart**

when he was eighteen

like the beginning of any good sad song

the type of boy you don't tell your friends about

bad news, too smooth

a hometown hero, heartbreaker.
the night he first kissed me
I decided I was going to let him ruin my life.

II.

he comes over at an hour that is too late for anything holy,
and we lay in my bed sharing a pack of American Spirits,
drinking whiskey without ice.

he plays his favorite Cage the Elephant albums,
and tells me about the cosmos and the navy,
and what he thinks about when he's tripping on acid

I think I might love him.

III.

sometimes I wake hours before he does
a veil of early light tossed over his sand tan shoulders
falling against his **impossibly high cheekbones**.
eyebrows soft and lips parted-
giving into gravity,
giving into the sheets.
he looks so **vulnerable** here,
a small and narrow cage
rising slow beneath the sheet.
careful not to wake him,
I lay my head back down beside his

and think,

I want to remember him like this,

boyish and innocent,

all of his edges smoothed out in sleep.

I think,

I'm going to need something good to remember

when this night eventually ends.

IV.

sitting at the kitchen table,

wearing the sweater you left at my apartment again,

I rub my fingertips together,

and discover **there's still the lingering scent**

of the pomade your fingers combed into your thick black hair

as you stood shirtless in front of my mirror,

your hip bones jutting out above the waistband of your jeans,

left eyebrow raised in concentration,

as you hummed along to music that wasn't playing.

I run my tongue along the roof of my mouth,

and taste you,

along with the **coffee and stale cigarettes**,

hours after we've kissed.

crawling back into bed, I find your cologne still living in my sheets

- spearmint and something masculine - clinging to the fabric

I can't bring myself to wash them,

or your empty glass

sitting on the nightstand,
still stained with the impression of your lips.

V.

half naked, half asleep
3AM
lights off
could scarcely make out the silhouette
as he crawled across the bed to where I sat
cross legged and eyes lidded,
and he kissed me
like any other
short and slow and sweet-

you never know it's going to be the last,
until it is.

C // “the childhood friend you tried dating”

I.

two kids,
on the one day a year we could be whatever we wanted.
me, little red riding hood,
still afraid of the big bad wolf,

(even now)

and him in a pirate costume,
an eyepatch over one of those big blue eyes

I want to go back and pull them both into my arms,
kiss their cheeks,
and whisper into their ears over and over again,
“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.”

II.

the **first boy I ever kissed**
in my best friend’s cul-de-sac
that night we **ditched homecoming and went bowling instead.**
the whole car ride home we laughed,
pink and tender with the idea of love,
and **I couldn’t stop staring at my hand in his.**

III.

so it goes,
as all firsts do,
our time together was short and new,
measured in pizza slices and concert stubs,

he brought me flowers the day my dog died,
and **rubbed my back when I couldn’t breathe,**
and on Valentine’s Day **I made a pros and cons list**

for breaking up with him.

there were only 3 cons.

I ended it anyways.

CHAPTER 2: The journal entries // Mental health in adolescence

INTRODUCTION: In G. Stanley Hall's study of adolescence, he viewed teen years as a time when depressive moods were at an all-time high. Quoted in a study, he found that, "The curve of despondency starts at eleven, rises steadily and rapidly till fifteen, then falls steadily till twenty-three" (1904, vol. 2, p. 77). Hall's research dove deeper to find the causes for this spike in mental turmoil and found that these moods were driven by "Suspicion of being disliked by friends, of having faults of person or character that cannot be overcome, and the fancy of...hopeless love" (1904, vol. 22, p. 8). Modern research showed striking similarities between Hall's study in the way social relations with friends and romantic partners were a common source of depressed mood in adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1994; Petersen et al., 1993). It seemed as the adolescent became increasingly aware of their place in the world, they also became hyper aware of their relationships with friends and family. This newfound sensitivity allowed for teens to see deeper into situations and pick up on hidden queues and of the emotions of those surrounding them. Suddenly, we are aware of the way our words and actions effect other peoples' feelings, especially ones that may be potentially harmful, making us paranoid even with our closest friends and partners.

As I sat on my floor, sifting through existential crisis after existential crisis, I found that the most prominent theme in my journals was a sense of emotional turmoil. Perhaps this is simply because journals serve the purpose of becoming an outlet to work through thoughts, emotions, as well as recording events, but I sensed a deep frustration in my past self as she fought to overcome overwhelming feelings of grief, chronic loneliness, and a general sadness. There were times in my writing when I would ask,

“why do I feel like this and why can’t I stop it?” It’s debilitating to be in a season of depression, recognize it for what it is, and still not be able to find a way to pull yourself out of the mayhem in your mind. In this chapter, I wanted to isolate moments in my journals that I felt perfectly encapsulated these feelings of hopelessness. Doing this would show how it truly feels to be in a season of your life when you are trying to figure out who you are and what your place is in the world, while simultaneously fighting off depressive moods.

On the other hand, I wanted to create a piece that also captured the opposite side as well. To show that where there is a place of hopelessness in despair, there is also a place of unwavering hope and stability. By contrasting two pieces’ side-by-side, both on their respective side of the mental and emotional spectrum, they both work to isolate the feelings they wish to provoke as well as support the other in how they seem to reflect each other.

For my art-based medium in this chapter, I chose to use a combination of mixed media, writing, and painting. Using magazines like *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue*, two magazines I read religiously in high school, I cut out images and letters to create a canvas that had a line from my 2016 journal: “Last night was golden. Absolutely golden”. This was simply just a line I had written after a night spent driving around with my closest friends, playing the music too loud and laughing at anything and everything. I was a night I felt whole and alive. Golden. This is a word I frequently use to describe a feeling of true, authentic happiness and contentment with my life. It’s the sunshine breaking through the clouds. The light at the end of the tunnel. A smile deep within my soul after a season of a particularly heavy heart. Mixed media works to deconstruct a medium (in this

case, a magazine) that has particular significance to the artist (a favorite magazine during my own adolescence), and then reconstructs those pieces to create a new idea. In the first piece [Figure 2], the use of old poetry magazines, dried flowers from my parents, paint in yellow hues, and magazine cutouts work to formulate a piece of art that holds a hodgepodge of good things in my life that, when combined, produce an overall much more powerful image of happiness than if each tool stood alone.

In the second piece [Figure 3], there is an obvious contrast in the use of blue, black, and grey hues. A line from my journal is written on a piece of paper torn from a journal reads: "I feel empty. Like all the color drained from my life". I sat with this line for a while and imagined what it would look like if I was asked to visualize the line. I immediately thought of black and white images, the lack of human touch, and shades of a rainy day. When I think of depression as a visual image, I think of the way it seems to get all over everything. Everything will still be in my life: my room, my bed, my friends, my family, the world around me, but there's a film over it all. A barrier between me and the things around me- a harsh disconnect. By having the paint run down the page and over the images and brighter shades of blue, I worked to show this feeling of isolation on the canvas.

TWO POEMS

ELIZABETH METZGER

Alicia

Cover That Shows Up
and Gets You All Wrong

More think the candle is supposed to be
your spirit
but it's the purple underneath

you inhabit.

Excerpts:
...about I like
or sweep away with the hand
comes in neatly a chance mat

Say you were told the life you
was terminal like this one—

never a year

would need friendship

of equivalent length

I'd say another age

to greet

And yet

Take this cover

on the illustration

We Are
of De-

As if we
was

LAST NIGHT

WAS

GOLDEN.

ABSOLUTELY GOLDEN.

FIVE POEMS

JERICHO BROWN

Duplex

A poem is a gesture toward home.
It makes dark demands I call my own.

Memory makes demands darker than my own.

My last love drove a burgundy car.

My first love drove a tangerine car.

He was fat and foolish, tall as my father.

Scared and avial, my tall father.

His hand is a bathroom. He leaves marks.

Laughter has ears but leaves its own mark

like the sound of another weeping again.

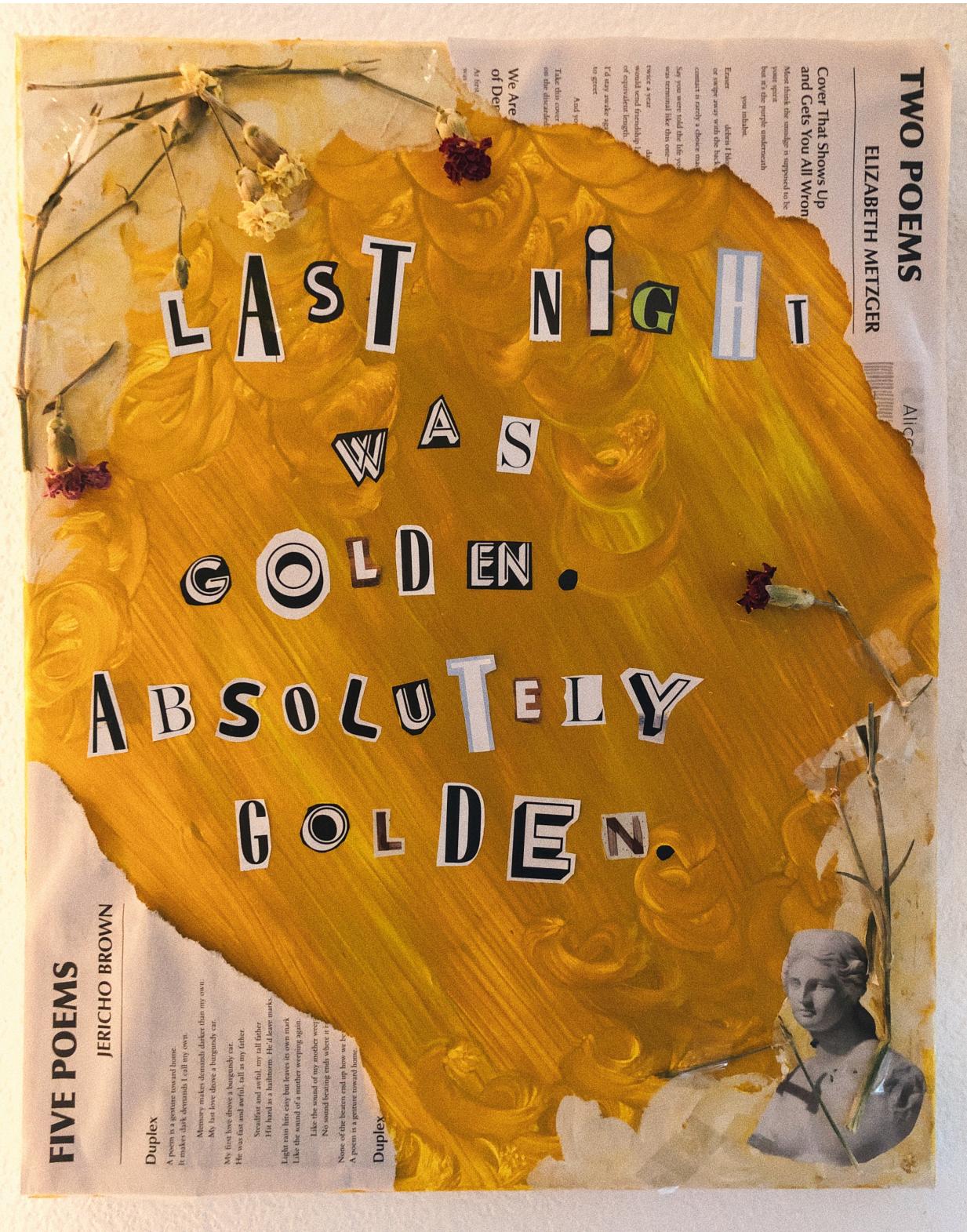
Like the sound of my mother never.

No sound bearing ends where it begins.

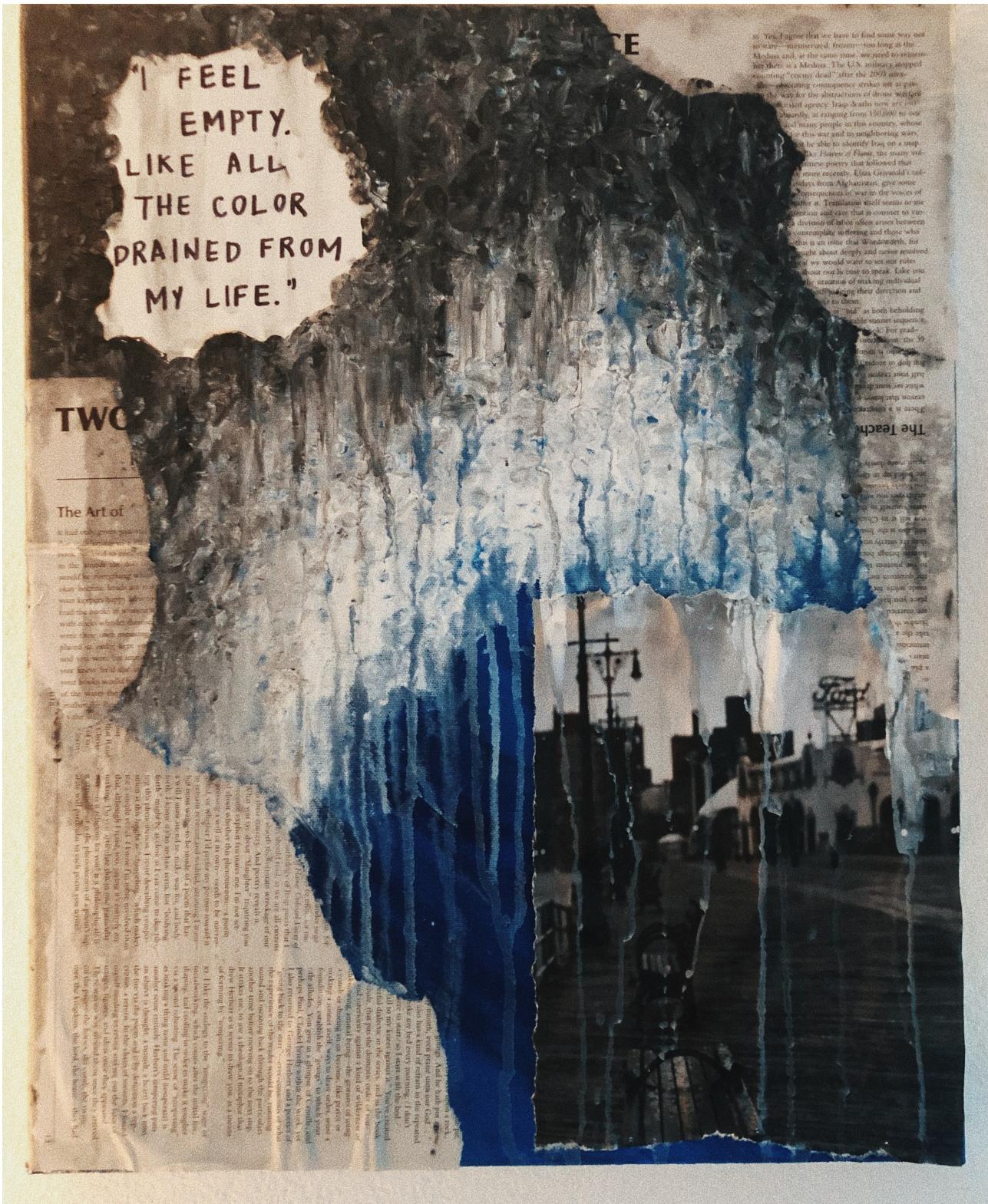
None of the beaten end up how we begin.

A poem is a gesture toward home.

Duplex



[Figure 2]



[Figure 3]

CHAPTER 3: The Jean Jacket // Adolescent rebellion

INTRODUCTION: Teens are popularly portrayed in the media as being reckless and risk-taking, doing things seemingly at random and with little regards to their health and safety. Parents feared what they didn't and did know about their kids' whereabouts.

Dr. Linda Mayes at the Yale University School of Medicine found that adolescence is a peak time for experimental and risky behavior. The prefrontal cortex is the front portion of the brain that serves as a command center where we ask ourselves, "Is this right or wrong?" and make decisions by weighing rewards and consequences. Because this part of the brain grows and develops well into adulthood, teens experience a dual challenge because the sub-cortical parts of their brain (the "pleasure zone") that develop very quickly and are hypersensitive to reward (Mayes 2008). It's this particular region of the brain that becomes hyperactive and releases feelings of pleasure, so the teen seeks out risky acts like driving too fast, taking drugs, drinking excessively, and altering their mental equilibrium. This promise of great pleasure is what drives the teen mind to override the warning signs that tell them the possible risks and consequences that are involved in their actions. Dobbs (2011) explains, "We all like new and exciting things, but we never value them more highly than we do during adolescence. Here we hit a high in what behavioral scientists call sensation seeking: the hunt for the neural buzz, the jolt of the unusual or unexpected. And although sensation seeking can lead to dangerous behaviors, it can also generate positive ones".

When writing this short, fictional story, I drew from a particular memory in my life that actually happened, and altered it in ways to highlight the themes of rebellion that frequent this story. Rather than simply writing pages of research done by psychologists on the science behind why adolescents frequent rebellious and risky activities, a fictitious story based on personal experience provides a much more accessible, an entertaining, form of data. Numbers and statistics can become impersonal and distant, creating a barrier between the researcher and the reader, while arts-based research can create a familiar and relatable way for the reader to immerse themselves in the data and better understand through shared experience.

A Chandelier in a Hail Storm

We didn't put shoes on. Despite the gravel driveway. Despite the sticker burrs in the grass that we had stepped on all day. Despite the orphaned beer bottles shattered on the sidewalk, their bronze glass reflecting the passing headlights of cars, remnants of a good time. It was too late for the nuclear families, their children put to bed long before the late-night George Lopez reruns began. The bars were just waking up, their neon lights blinking "Open", as friends and lovers, who insisted they were only friends, stumbled in and out of their crowded entryways.

At night, the city becomes a sanctuary for sinners, a place for the chaotic to get lost in the chaos. There were five of us, all different variations of the college student brand, but with the same mischievous idea to sneak away from the rest of our friends at the beach house for our own little rendezvous.

As we rounded the last street corner leading to the road that worked as a barrier of sorts between the city and the beach, we were instantly met by the merciless gusts of wind sent in from

the sea. I fought against the wind and managed to pull my hair into a sloppy ponytail, momentarily wishing I had short hair like the rest of my friends. Nicky took a long pull from the Ozarka water bottle we had replaced with vodka before leaving the house and she immediately doubled over, choking down its contents.

“Ugh, I can’t believe no one else wanted to splurge for something even just a *little* better than Taaka,” said Nicky, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and looked insultingly at the rest of us. “This shit tastes like rubbing alcohol.”

Tess rolled her eyes. “How many times do I have to say it,” she asked. “Ladies?” Looking at me, Wren, and Olivia, Tess raised her hands as if to conduct our response. “We don’t drink because it tastes good, we drink to get fucked up,” we all replied in unison before breaking into laughter.

Wren and Olivia both took pulls, wincing but staying quiet, before tossing the dangerously shallow bottle towards me. I finished it off and threw the empty bottle in a nearby trashcan.

Linking arms, we skipped, quite uncoordinatedly, into an empty intersection. There were no headlights in any direction and no one on the sidewalks. The only sounds were the soft crash and fizz of the waves breaking on the shore, and the muffled bass of some overplayed rap song in some overcrowded bar somewhere in the distance. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, savoring the salt in the air and a slow warmth blossomed in my chest. Maybe it was the vodka, or maybe it was the overwhelming feeling of freedom that we had desperately held onto all week, pretending that spring break would never end, but I was suddenly taken by a single thought.

“I wish this night would go on forever,” I said, lifting my arms and spinning slowly as I looked up at the streetlights changing from yellow to red, signaling the line of nonexistent cars to stop. Olivia walked over and put her arm around me.

“Well we all wish you’d take a shower; you’ve spilled so much beer on yourself today I bet if I closed my eyes I wouldn’t know the difference between you and that frat guy Wren slept with,” she said, smirking down at me.

“Wow, you sure know how to kill the moment, huh,” I laughed, rolling my eyes.
“Besides, this is spring break. If you don’t reek of beer, you’re doing it wrong.”

“Hey,” Nicky interjected. “It’ll be a pretty shitty spring break if we all end up in the hospital, so let’s get out of the street; I think I see a car coming.”

A quick ten paces and I felt my feet sink into the cool sand, a kindness to the pads of my feet that were blackened and sore from walking on concrete for so long. We walked down to the surf, silent, each of us with our heads turned as far upward as our necks would allow, lost in the stars.

“You can’t see ‘em like this in the city,” Tess said quietly, still looking up.

We nodded quietly in agreement, and as I held my gaze to the sky I felt a great loneliness creep up my spine; a sudden and heavy humanistic realization of my own mortality and relevance to the universe. I felt small. I shook my head in an effort to shake the thought.

“What’s wrong,” Wren asked. I didn’t even notice her watching me.

“Nothing...well, uh, I don’t know,” I said quietly. “I just don’t want to die I guess.”

I cleared my throat and laughed, trying to not let the mood sour. “I’m having too much fun, you know?”

They all looked at me and then at each other the way that only friends who know each other well enough to talk without speaking can do. An inexplicable understanding of the desire and need to savor the moment settled over us and we stood content in our shared silence.

Suddenly, Wren looked around at us, winked at me, and pulled her shirt over her head.
“Let’s go skinny dipping.”

We didn't question it. Nicky didn't protest it. We immediately began stripping down to our skin, laughing as we tripped out of our pants. Nicky's foot caught the waistband of her shorts and she fell face first into the sand. We erupted into laughter.

"Stop it you guys," Nicky said, laughing with us. "I can't help it; I am naturally unbalanced!"

"Oh and I'm sure the vodka has absolutely *nothing* to do with it," Tess replied, smirking down at Nicky.

"Oh fuck *off*," Nicky said, as she balled up her t-shirt and threw it at Tess, who shrieked, picked it up, and chunked it at my face. A clothing fight ensued. We ran half naked on the beach, with nothing to hide behind, slingshotting bras and throwing shoes like they were grenades until Olivia sunk to her knees and waved her white underwear in the air.

"I'm calling a truce!" she cried out. "I am officially naked *and* afraid."

The March air was still cold and I shivered as I stood naked in the sand and looked out at the road, squinting to see if we were the only ones on the beach. It was dark, and there were no lights beyond the street, only the moon sometimes catching our nude silhouettes as we moved. The remainder of our clothes littered the sand, and I briefly entertained the fear of someone stealing our clothes before Tess cried out, "The last one in has to shotgun a beer when we get back," before bolting towards the water.

"Hey, not fair," Wren shrieked, as we took off behind her, laughing.

In the midst of running blindly towards the great nothingness of the ocean I felt full. Whole. Endless. My feet kicked up sand and the grains stuck to my damp skin. I could feel the softer places of my body rising and falling heavily with every step, but I didn't feel embarrassed; I felt alive. I was aware of the way my body moved, how it took up and used space, and of all the things to think of in a time like this, I was surprised to hear the words from a poem I had read years ago being quietly repeated by the soft voice in my head:

I have learned that when I run, I move beautifully...

like a chandelier in a hail storm

The water was excruciatingly cold, as we knew it would be, but I respected the immediate sharpness and attention the Gulf demanded from those who entered its home. We shrieked out a cocktail of pain and delight, and splashed each other as we stood waist deep in black water. Our bodies gradually went numb, but the chattering of our teeth never ceased. Wren began humming the Jaws theme song and for a fleeting moment I realized that what we were doing was dangerous and I mentally lectured myself on safety and how my mom would kill me if she knew where I was right now. Then, I reminded myself that I was young and dumb and allowed to be reckless and I took a deep breath and allowed my body to sink and be swallowed by the ocean.

My head just below the surface, I could still hear the muffled laughter of the people who had somehow become my best friends in only a matter of months. I had never envisioned myself here. When I was a kid I wanted to be the person that did things exactly like skinny dipping in the ocean with her friends at 2AM, but never believed in my ability to push my boundaries and escape the prison of my comfort zone. I felt a deep and sudden gratitude in my bones, as if the remnants of the child left in my being was thanking me for growing into our body and using it to experience as much life as possible, for the both of us.

As I ascended from the water, hair soaked and stuck to my back and shoulders, I felt new and whole; like I had been baptized in the sea and she had held me and whispered in my ear what it means to be alive and free and young, and how to move beautifully... like a chandelier in a hailstorm.

A final note:

I hope you enjoyed my little anecdotes and small trips I took into myself in the creation of this paper. I had a lot of fun writing it, and looking at my past with new eyes. I discovered a newfound appreciation for the period of my life I've spent so long making fun of. By juxtaposing data from scholarly research alongside the art-based mediums, I worked to show how both approaches contribute to the overall study of adolescence while simultaneously healing the relationship between science and art. Rather than pinning the two against each other, this paper emerges as a way to allow the two to live in harmony; supporting each other's findings while still presenting them in ways that are both accurate and intriguing, while still remaining unique in their own creations.

Overall, I learned more about myself during those years of adolescence than I initially anticipated. By connecting the scientific findings rooted in physiology and psychology, with my own stories and memories, I found an overwhelming number of parallels between my own experiences and those of the overarching themes of adolescence. By using my own life as a space of research, it has allowed me to make connections easier and on a deeper level than if I simply regurgitated data found in outside research articles and books. In all, it is through this paper that I have found heart in science, and science in heart.

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