Cross roads: a method for self-understanding

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Cross Roads: A Method for Self-Understanding

by

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Abstract

Mental illnesses are constantly misrepresented by the media. They are stigmatized or glorified in ways that can be harmful for those who struggle with them. And for these reasons many people choose not to seek out treatment, which can lead to much more harmful decisions. This project aims to combat those views of mental illness by creating a narrative that portrays mental illness in a realistic way. This narrative is influenced by my research and personal experiences with mental illness and emphasizes the importance of positive communication as a solution based on the concepts of using art as a means of hope and self-understanding.
Introduction

Late last year I was officially diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder and Generalized Anxiety. My current treatments for these disorders are weekly therapy and a cockatiel named Lemon, who is my emotional support animal. However, for many years I went untreated for these disorders. I used to tell myself I did not have depression because I felt I had no reason to be depressed. For years I pushed those feelings out of my mind and pretended they did not exist, and when I was not able to cope, I chastised myself for being weak. Then, I started going to therapy in March of 2018, because my depression had escalated to the point that I was falling behind in my classes. I had lost my motivation for everything, and I was afraid of failing out of graduate school. In the end, it was fear that forced me to confront my disorders head on and find a way to cope with them.

My coping mechanisms have always been drawing and writing ever since I was in high school. I created stories and characters to distract myself from situations or emotions I was not ready to deal with. Now, creating this project has helped me to look back on those experiences and reflect on how my mindset has changed. As I have grown older, I have developed a better understanding of how to cope with my mental illnesses. When I encounter a problem, I try to communicate with others rather than keeping it to myself. This focus on communication is the overall message that I aimed to emphasize when writing the narrative for this project.
Research

Art and Self-Understanding

Over the past year, I strove to understand more about myself and my experiences with mental illness by doing research. One source that really gave me a new perspective was Alain De Botton, and when considering my overall theme for this project the book “Art as Therapy” came to mind. According to De Botton, there are many ways in which people can interact with art to help soothe their souls, however the problem comes from how art is framed. When writing the narrative for this game my main inspiration came from the chapters on sorrow, re-balancing, and self-understanding.

“We are not transparent to ourselves. We have intuitions, suspicions, hunches, vague musings, and strangely mixed emotions, all of which resist simple definition. We have moods, but we don’t really know them. Then, from time to time, we encounter works of art that seem to latch onto something we have felt but never recognized clearly before.” (De Botton, 44)

The main concepts of these chapters are that art can help us remember we are not alone in our suffering. The art we resonate with contains pieces of ourselves that we may be lacking, and that we can understand more about ourselves through experiencing art. The pieces of art that I connect with the most are ones where I feel I can relate to the creator or the characters on a personal level. For example, I have been a fan of the Korean idol group BTS for several years now, and I connected the most with their Love Yourself series which consisted of three albums. Self-love is something that I am currently struggling with, so I find their lyrics reassuring. In this series, they emphasize the
importance of self-acceptance, while also recognizing that doing so is a long process that takes constant effort. One song that I connect with the most out of many others is titled “Sea” which is a hidden track in the first album Love Yourself: Her. Song lyrics are always up for interpretation, and even more so with songs in different languages. However, according to English translations of this song, the lyrics discuss the trials they’ve faced in their struggle to achieve fame as an idol group.

I find that I can relate to their feeling of anxiety as an artist who is trying to gain social media presence in a world of others who are trying to do the same. Whenever I post my work somewhere on social media, whether it be Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube it always feels as though I’m throwing my hard work and effort out into the void. This has often been a source of depression and anxiety for me. In that way, I can relate to their struggles. I want to achieve the same with my work. My aim is to share my trials and tribulations so those who play this game understand they are not alone in their suffering.

Mental Illness in Media

Glorification and stigmatization of mental illness has been a constant issue, especially in film and T.V. One recent piece of media that aimed to start a discussion about mental illness, but ended up glorifying teen suicide is the Netflix tv series 13 Reasons Why which tells the story of a girl, Hannah, who commits suicide and leaves a set of thirteen tapes as a form of note for the thirteen people she blames for her death. The narrative follows the main character, Clay as he listens through all the tapes to figure out why he’s one of the thirteen people.
While the show does start a discussion about teen suicide, it does so in an unhealthy way. This show seemed like it was meant more as a shock value piece rather than a discussion about mental health. One major issue with the show was how they put the main focus on the suicide and the reasons for it, without offering any kind of solution. Also, many of the scenes involving sensitive topics such as sexual assault seemed overly extended and gratuitous, which could be triggering for some audiences.

The series rarely focused on the ideas of mental health and how to cope. They included very little discussion about positive communication or therapy. The way the narrative was composed made it seem as though Hannah had no other choice. For example, in the thirteenth episode she decides to reach out to the school counselor, Mr. Porter for help. There is a brief moment where he mentions seeking other mental health options, but that is swiftly rejected without any other mention of it. Hannah then leaves his office in distress, hoping that he would come after her. When he doesn’t, she goes home to plan her death.

The scene is as follows;

**“Mr. Porter:**

It can be very dangerous to accuse someone of a crime like that. Look, something happened, Hannah. And I believe you. But if you won’t confront him then the only other choice is to move on.

**Hannah:**

Yeah. That’s just what I’m going to have to do. Thank you, Mr. Porter.

**Mr. Porter:**

Okay. There’s more to talk about, other resources.

**Hannah:**

No, I think we figured it out. I need to move on and get over it.
Mr. Porter:
Hannah, I didn’t say get over it. But sometimes that’s the only other option.

Hannah:
Look, you’re right. I know.

Mr. Porter:
Hey, Hannah, you can sit down. You don’t need to be in a hurry.

Hannah:
I need to get on with things. If things aren’t going to change, I’d better get on with it.

Mr. Porter:
Hey, Hannah.

(Hannah leaves Mr. Porter’s office in distress and stands outside his door as he is taking a phone call.)

Mr. Porter:
(muffled) Okay. I can have that for you

Hannah:
His door is closed behind me.

Mr. Porter:

Hannah:
(speaking to the tape recorder) He’s not coming. I think I’ve made myself very clear but no one’s coming forward to stop me. Some of you care. None of you cared enough. Neither did I. And I’m sorry. So it’s the end of tape 13. There’s nothing more to say.

(End)” (Yoker)

This series would have been a much healthier portrayal of mental health if there had been much more of an emphasis on solutions to problems with mental illness. This scene shows a very faulty, negative interaction with a mental health advocate that can be discouraging for viewers who are struggling with their mental health. Those who view this scene may be poorly influenced into thinking that councilors or other mental health
professionals are not helpful. When discussing mental health, especially with those who have issues with mental health, it is important to emphasize that there is always a solution.

According to “Images of Mental Illness in the Media: Identifying Gaps in the Research” by Patricia A. Stout mental illnesses in films and tv are often seen as

“associated with violence and that they are dangerous and should be avoided.”(Stout, P. 554)

For this reason, many are deterred from speaking about their mental illnesses and seeking help. Stout mainly references film and T.V in this article, however with the recent rise of YouTube as a major platform for visual media, there are more ways in which stigmatization can occur. A very recent example can be found in a YouTube documentary series titled The Mind of Jake Paul by Shane Dawson, a popular creator on the platform. The series covers a controversial YouTuber, Jake Paul, and discusses in-depth his mindset and life-style. A running theme throughout the series is Shane speculates Jake is a sociopath, and in the second video of the series he even collaborates with a licensed therapist, Kati Morton, to discuss sociopathy and its symptoms. Throughout the video the tone Shane used was very derogatory as he was using unsettling, horror-like imagery to describe some of the symptoms of sociopathy and using terms like “creepy” and “dangerous” to describe sociopathic tendencies.

There is a potential risk for mental illnesses to be misconstrued if the creator does not take into consideration how their content affects others, especially creators who have a larger audience. While YouTube is a more open platform for creators than film or tv, I believe there should still be more consideration for how viewers interact with their
content. There are currently over 22 million views on that video, which indicates that there is a wide audience interacting with and being influenced by this content.

When it comes to video games, the depictions of mental illness tend to be even more intense. In a study done by Shapiro and Rotter (2016);

“Based on the review of search terms and video footage, 23 of the 96 identified games (24%) depicted at least one character with mental illness. Seventeen of these 96 games (17.7%) contained at least one character classified as a “homicidal maniac.” Eleven of these 96 games (11.5%) depicted characters that did not fall within the proposed stereotype categories and placed into the “other depiction” category. ”(Shapiro and Rotter, P.1593)

Many horror games depict mental illness in an unhealthy way, mentally ill characters are often the villain, falling into dangerous tropes. For example, Manhunt 2 is a psychological horror game that was recalled for its depictions of mental illness. An offensive part of the video game involves a mental asylum where there has been a malfunction of the security system. All the patients’ rooms have been unlocked, and they are milling about in the halls attacking each other. The goal of this section is to escape from the asylum; however, all the patients are trying to kill the player. This section depicts all patients in the asylum as animalistic murderers, and the tone of the game infers that they are not meant to be viewed as human. Since the game was so controversial after its release Rockstar Games, the company that produced it, had the game recalled and put out an edited version of the game.
While the sensationalism in visual media often stigmatizes mental illness, it can also provide solutions. My aim for creating this visual novel is to combat these views of mental illness with a realistic portrayal of what it is like to live with depression and anxiety. I strive to create characters that are not defined by a single character trait but feel multi-faceted and real. My purpose for this project is to depict mental illness in a realistic way based on my research and personal experiences.

The Visual Novel Structure

A visual novel is an interactive video game that uses stationary images and text to advance the plot. There are two different types of structures that visual novels typically follow according to “How to Plan Structure of Your Visual Novel” an article by Sonya Fung which are; kinetic and branching. Kinetic visual novels have a linear structure including little to no player choices, whereas branching visual novels use player choices to dictate how the story progresses, they usually consist of a common route and two or more branching storylines. Within the category of branching visual novels there are two types of narratives that are most often used.

The first of the two is the plot-based visual novel, which typically has a lot of complex branching.

“When the story reaches peak of a buildup, there is usually a point of no return, where story takes radically different turn.“ (Fung, 2018)

Many creators choose this structure because they can have many arcs and supporting characters. The second type of branching novel is the character-based narrative. The main difference between the playthrough of these two narratives is most of
the focus is centered on how the player character develops along with the supporting cast. Player choices are recorded to indicate which personality choice the player leans toward. Unlike the plot-based narrative there is no point of no return. Instead each choice the character makes is at a pivotal point.

When I first started this project, the outline I created followed that of a kinetic visual novel. However, after much consideration on how I wanted the players to interact with the story I chose to use a plot-based narrative structure for two main reasons; I wanted to draw more attention to the characters and how they struggle with mental illness, and to emphasize the ability of choice. Something I also considered when writing the narrative is what genre I wanted to story to be. I knew that I did not want to create a dating-sim, a type of visual novel, which according to “Dating-Simulation Games: Leisure and Gaming of Japanese Youth Culture” an article by Emily Taylor is defined as;

“a video or computer game that focuses on dating or romance and may contain erotic content.” (Taylor, P.194).

Romance is not an integral part of this narrative, even though there mentions of possible romantic relationships. I wanted the focus to be on the individual characters and how they interact with each other, without the connotation of a romance. So, this story fits into the genres of slice-of-life and drama, as it has the serious theme of mental health, but puts emphasis on daily interactions, which I took reference from chapter 7 in Art as Therapy. De Botton explains how art can help us appreciate life more by calling our attention to the everyday. A practice that I attempt to accomplish daily and hope to pass along to others through my work.
The World of Cross Roads

Three years ago, I started developing this world in my mind involving all of my favorite original characters I had created since I was in high school, and it began when I was staying with one of my friends over night. We had gotten bored late into the evening, so I started drawing my original characters and explaining their personality and backstory to her. She told me that I should make this into an actual narrative, and so I started to write everything down.

Over the next couple years, I worked on writing down detailed profiles for each of the characters in my free time. I had eleven characters in total involved in this narrative, and I was having trouble figuring out a definitive story for all of them that gave each character the spotlight. I decided the best course of action was to split them up into different stories that all existed in the same universe. The first three stories became the foundation of this project.

When considering what form this narrative would take, I decided to create a visual novel game. This style of interactive storytelling appealed to me because I had a hard time nailing down a linear story for Cross Roads in the first place. With a visual novel I had the opportunity to create multiple endings. However, I never found the opportunity to work on this story until I started developing this project.
First Iteration Outline

Cross Roads

Chapter 1: Sophie

Sophie is at a crossroads between continuing in her current state where she is comfortable, but unhappy, or push forward and apply for college.

Chapter 2: Lillian

Lillian is at a crossroads between continuing to put effort into something she knows very little about, or to pull away from it and admit defeat for the time being.

Chapter 3: Jane

Jane is at a crossroads between opening to Rin and forming a potentially meaningful relationship and shutting her out and keeping to herself.

Chapter 5: Sophie

Sophie decided to take the leap and apply for college this is her first day of class.

Chapter 6: Lillian

Lillian spoke to her aunt and uncle and decided that it was best to take a break from running the shop. She is moving some of her stuff back to their home.

Chapter 7: Jane

Jane decides to overcome her insecurities and develop a more meaningful relationship with Rin.

Figure 1: First iteration outline
Second Iteration Outline

This is an overall outline of how the game would function.

*Figure 2: Second iteration game structure*
Figure 3: Story One outline

Story One:

Rain
- Leave Sophie alone
- Talk to Sophie

Sick
- Argue and leave the room
- Apologize and cook dinner.

Self-Destruction
- Argue and decide separate

Getting Close
- Cook dinner and encourage Sophie to apply for college

Bad Ending
- Searching for Solace

Good Ending:
- Moving Forward
Figure 4: Story Two outline

Story Two:

A New Strategy

Don’t take Sophie’s advice

Take Sophie’s advice

Learning

Delete email

Respond to email

Lies

Stagnation

Lie to aunt and uncle

Tell aunt and uncle the truth

Bad Ending

Repossession

Good Ending:

Letting Go
Figure 5: Story Three outline

Story Three:

First Meeting

Don’t talk to Rin

Talk to Rin

A Kind of Friendship

Show disinterest towards Rin

Express interest in Rin

I Just Want to be Friends With You

What do you think of me?

Reject Rin’s offer to travel

Accept Rin’s offer to travel

Bad Ending

Alone Again

Good Ending:

Out of this Town
The Characters

Figure 6: Second iteration characters
Jane Winters

Jane was the first character I ever created, for a short story I wrote in high school I never finished. At the time, she was written as a self-insert character. Her name is an anagram of my middle name, Jean. However, one major difference between us was that she was meant to be a stronger person mentally than me. In high school I experienced a lot of self-loathing. I hated how weak I was emotionally, and at the time, writing was my outlet. So, I created a version of myself that was able to handle the emotions that I couldn’t.

Even though I never finished that story I kept Jane as a character, and I used her as a self-insert for the many other shows I was a fan of throughout high school. Her appearance and character traits slowly changed over time, but her core purpose as a character
remained the same. At the same time, I was creating other characters and stories with my friends. Once I started developing Cross Roads, Jane found her place to belong in the narrative along with all my other characters. I changed her personality to make it separate from my own and gave her a backstory that helped her fit into that world. Once I wrote her into that world, I stopped identifying with her.

Jane is 30 years old. She loves spending time in her workshop, fixing cars and motorcycles with her father. Her parents are divorced, and she currently lives in her father's townhome. I wanted her to stay as a strong character, however her strength is also her flaw. She keeps her emotions to herself not only because she finds it hard to trust others, but also because she doesn't want to bother her family with her problems. She believes that no one can really help her, so she might as well not worry them. This used to be my mindset for a long time, and I've heard similar stories from others. With Jane’s character I wanted to teach others that it’s important for them to understand that their feelings matter, and communication is important to understanding one another’s feelings.

This is also something I wanted to emphasize in her relationship with Rin. The ability to have someone to rely on is important for anyone’s mental health. No matter how bad I felt about myself, I always felt better when I had someone to talk to. It was one of my friends last year that suggested therapy, and even though it took me awhile to act on that suggestion, just having it as an option in my mind helped. I feel like this is important for others who struggle with this type of mindset, to understand the importance of another person’s company.
Jane’s workshop is the most important place to her. This is where she spends most of her time. She comes here when she’s in a good mood and feeling productive, and when she’s distressed and needs to take her mind off things. If she’s not at home, she’s here working on projects. She’s never had any other interest and doesn’t know what she’d do without this job. This is often a cause of stress for her father because he sees her constantly overwork herself. It’s as though she’s trying to push out her internal issues and pretend, they don’t exist. He wants her to get out and explore the world, to find something meaningful outside of working at the shop.
As I progressed through high school, my perspective changed. I still got caught up in self-loathing, but I had an outlet that helped me focus on more positive thinking. Sophie became my second self-insert as my personality started to change. She was defined by her kind and positive attitude, because I wanted to be a more positive person. At the time, I was always moody, and I was never confident in the way I looked. So, I designed her to embody the things I always wanted to be.
Sophie is 21 years old. She loves reading and listening to the rain. She lived with her grandmother as her parents had issues with drug use. When her grandmother couldn’t take care of her she was adopted into Jane’s family and lived with them until she turned 18. Once she was able to inherit her grandmother’s shop, she moved there instead of going to college. She is still defined by her kind and positive attitude. She is calm and collected, however she tends to over-analyze situations. Whenever she becomes anxious about those situations, she spends a long time in her room, staring out her window. She considers it her safe space where she can let her mind wander. She spends a lot of time in her room alone.

In the narrative, she struggles a lot with whether she wants to go to college and what she would study. When I first started at Iowa State University, I had no idea what design program I wanted to go into. My mother and I had many discussions about it, and I decided to pursue an Interdisciplinary design degree as it allowed me to work with many different types of media. I think everyone struggles with what they want to do with their time. It’s something that I still struggle with, and with Sophie’s character I wanted to teach people they aren’t alone in their uncertainty.
Alice was the first character that I created that wasn’t a self-insert. She originally came from a steampunk version of *Alice in Wonderland* that I was writing with a friend of mine. The story was never finished, but I kept Alice and her older brother Allistor as characters, and they both became a part of Cross Roads. She used to be a much harsher character. She was more malicious, and her personality was never consistent. However, as I continued to develop her character, she became less intense.

Alice is 32 years old. She loves interacting with social media and cooking. When she turned 18, she moved out to live with her older brother, however soon after she became friends with Sophie and decided to move in with her. She has a lot of common interests.
with Sophie and loves to get into animated discussions with her. Her flaw is how she copes with her mental illness. She was diagnosed for Major Depressive Disorder as a young adult and used to take medication for it. However, when she moved out of her brother’s house, she stopped taking medication. Since then, her depression has worsened, and as much as she hates it, she worries that without those feelings she has nothing.

Her struggle with depression in the narrative is the same as mine. Her character is meant to teach others about depression, and how it feels to go through a depressive episode. When I experience depressive episodes, I have difficulty with doing the smallest tasks. I mostly end up sleeping most of the day, or if I’m awake I watch videos or listen to music, but I don’t comprehend any of it. Even composing a coherent thought is difficult for me at times. It feels as though I’m trapped inside my own head, and it becomes very frustrating. However, this isn’t all I wanted to convey with her character. I also wanted to show the healing process, and how positive communication and the right treatment, can help people cope with their depression.

Figure 12 Alice final illustration
Lillian came from a school project I did for my interpersonal communications class at community college. Her name started out as Lizzy, and she was this preppy, rich college girl character. However, that's as much as I remember about her original personality. I don't remember why I liked her so much at first. Maybe it was because she was nothing like any of my other characters at the time. Soon after she became a part of Cross Roads, and I started to develop her character more. She became more refined and less extroverted over time. While I love how Lillian has progressed as a character from when I first created her, I feel as though she still needs more development. As of now, her character still feels a bit
inconsistent and unrealistic, especially in how she reacts to situations throughout the narrative.

Lillian is 27 years old. She loves flowers and has a high-class aesthetic. She comes from an upper-class family, however her parents divorced when she was a child. Her father moved away, and she hasn’t ever seen him again. Her mother worked all the time when Lillian was young, so she was often left alone. In her teens she was sent to live with her aunt and uncle because of issues with bullies.

Lillian’s background is loosely based off my own experience living in a broken home. My parents divorced when I was young. I was so young in fact that I don’t even really remember a time when they were together. This often made me feel like an outcast as a child when most of my classmates had both parents. This experience has had a major impact on how I view relationships as well. I often go into relationships with the mindset that they won’t last long, and it’s often left me with a sense of loneliness.

With Lillian’s character I wanted to teach others about positive communication. Due to her background, Lillian carries a lot of anxiety. She doesn’t like to get in anyone’s way, and that causes her many problems throughout the narrative. I feel as though some will be able to relate to her stress when talking with others, so I aim to help them acknowledge that and give them solutions.
I created Rin when I was still in high school, as a romantic partner for Jane. Her character was influenced by a character from Vocaloid, a Japanese music group I was a fan of in high school. Vocaloid is actually a voice synthesizer. When this software gained popularity a set of characters started to develop based on the voicebanks in the program. Some of the popular characters are Hatsune Miku and Megurine Luka. Since this software and all the voice banks are open to the public, anyone can add to the narrative for these characters, and create their own stories through music. A friend introduced me to Vocaloid music in high school, and we were often inspired by the stories behind the lyrics. I don’t listen to Vocaloid much anymore, but it always has a special place in my heart because of the fond memories I have listening to them with my friend.
Rin was inspired by the character Kagamine Rin. Her relationship with Jane was inspired by the song “Alluring Secret~Black Vow~” written and composed by Hitoshizuku P, and the corresponding animated music video. The song tells the story of a stray angel, Kagamine, who falls for a human woman. When her love is rejected, she becomes a fallen angel, sacrificing her status to become someone who the woman would fall for. She and the woman then have an affair, much to the despair of the woman’s significant other, who in his anger kills her. In the end, the fallen angel sacrifices her life for the one she loves. This type of unrequited love scenario was something I was obsessed with as a teenager, and so it is no wonder why I wanted to create that kind of story at the time. However, much time has passed, and Rin’s personality, backstory, and how she interacts with Jane is quite different.

Rin is 23 years old. She has a bubbly yet mysterious personality. She estranged herself from her parents when she was 16 and ran away from home. She has been living on her own ever since, on the run from her family whom she suspects are still trying to find her. She carries a small suitcase with her which carries all her necessities plus a small stuffed bird, her most cherished from her mother. She feels a great sense of loneliness most of the time, and she has a hard time relating to others, despite how much she tries to communicate.

Her character is influenced by how I interact with others. There are instances where I have an easy time speaking with people, however there are often times where I have a lot of difficulty. In those times I often feel alienated from my peers, and it makes it more difficult to form lasting relationships with them. Rin has the same issues, which is why she
doesn’t stay in the same place for too long. She becomes anxious when she feels like she can’t relate to anyone.

Her relationship with Jane is meant to teach players about relating to and trust others. After Rin became friends with Jane, she had a difficult time leaving town, and ended up returning. After years of travelling she felt that she had finally found someone she could connect with. Everyone can feel alienated from others at times, and it’s important to understand that keeping in contact with friends and family is important. The place that Rin values the most throughout the narrative is the auto shop because Jane helped her to belong there. I hope this story encourages others to find a community to belong to.
Conclusion

As this project concludes, I’ve found that my views on mental illness have completely changed. About a year ago, I would have never considered therapy for myself. I rejected the idea that I had depression or anxiety because I felt that those feelings made me less of a person somehow. This made me feel uncomfortable talking about my emotions or even thinking about them, so I avoided it until I felt that I couldn't anymore. Once I started to be open about my experiences to my therapist, I became more comfortable speaking with others about them. Since I started therapy, mental health has been at the forefront of my mind. I wanted to learn more not only so I could understand myself better, but also help others. I’ve known what it’s like to struggle alone, so I want to help others who may have similar experiences.

The ability to illustrate some of these experiences and worries has helped to give me a new perspective. As I developed my characters, I found that they became reflections of me in one way or another. Jane and Sophie reflect parts of who I used to be when I was in high school. Lillian, Alice, and Rin reflect parts of who I am now. This is something that I didn’t anticipate when I first started this project. While I used my own experiences for the narrative, I didn’t especially want any of the characters to act as versions of myself. I believed that creating characters based on my own personality traits would make them shallow and less dynamic. In fact, that is still something I’m concerned about. However, since my narrative is self-reflective, I believe that it’s fitting if my characters are as well.

I believe there are multiple takeaways from this narrative, and I prefer to leave the exact message of this game up to interpretation. For me, the main takeaway is the emphasis
on communication with others. This was the main message from the beginning of the project because it's something I have a lot of issues with. However, as the project developed, I found other important things I wanted to emphasize such as self-reliance in terms of the power of choice as well as the importance of asking for help when it's needed.

The characters in each narrative all display different types of interpersonal communication that I’ve had some experience with. In the first story, it’s communication between people in a somewhat serious relationship. Sophie and Alice are starting to have discussions about more serious topics and are putting more trust in each other to support them and their decisions. The second story is about communication in family relationships, and the importance of honesty and asking for help. Lillian loves her aunt and uncle, and she never wants them to worry about her. However, over the course of the narrative she learns that in order to keep their trust she must remain honest, even though the truth is difficult to express. The final story illustrates the communication in friendships, and how to build lasting relationships with others. Both Jane and Rin have to make certain sacrifices over course of the narrative in order to build their relationship. Jane is forced to let down her guard and trust Rin to support her, and Rin has to sacrifice some of her freedom of mobility to build a lasting friendship with Jane.

The next step is to create the full game. After my graduation I want to start developing this game on my own. I want to change the way people think about mental illness, as well as how games are experienced. The narrative that I created isn't intensely dramatic, it doesn't have hard-hitting action scenes and that's the point. I want to create something that draws attention to everyday occurrences and makes them significant.
References


Appendix A: Setting Design

The Book Shop

Figure 17 book store floor plans
The design of the floor plans for each setting is loosely based on floor plans designed by Iowa State University’s Department of Residence, which I used for reference when I was figuring out how to draw floor plans (Figures 17 & 18).

Figure 18: Fredrickson Court Apartment Floor Plan by Iowa State University (2019)

Figure 19: Fredrickson Court Apartment Floor Plan by Iowa State University (2019)
The book shop (Figure 16) consists of two levels. The lower level is the main shop area, which is filled with large bookshelves stuffed to the brim with books. Near the front of the store there’s a small reading area where patrons can relax and read. On the front left side of the store is where Sophie's desk resides. This is where she spends most of her day reading if she doesn't have any customers. In the afternoons she works on reorganizing books and cleaning the floors and bookshelves.

Upstairs is Sophie’s apartment. It’s a small living space with enough room for a bedroom, bathroom, and a small kitchen/ living room area. It’s plenty of space for one person but becomes a little tight with two. However, Sophie and Alice don’t have many problems with the small space. And it’s easy to keep clean if Alice keeps up with the work.

Sophie inherited this building from her grandmother who ran the book shop until she passed away. This is the only thing she received from her along with all the furniture inside. She refuses to let go of this place because of its sentimental value. Sophie only vaguely remembers coming to the shop as a child and helping her grandmother, but it’s enough for her to want to keep the place up and running. However, her main motivation for keeping the shop open is for her patrons, especially those who remember her grandmother. Sophie finds most of her internal conflict in this shop. She relies so much on it, and yet she also feels trapped.
Sophie’s Room

The room that’s most important to the story is Sophie’s room (Figure 19). It’s where she relaxes at the end of the day, so she’s filled it with things she loves like bright colors, soft pillows, and stuffed animals. This room is meant to be a stark contrast from the bookshop downstairs which consists of darker, cooler colors. Sophie loves to read in this room, to the point where the area by the window is occasionally surrounded by books, and her bookshelf is almost empty.

The bookshelf contains her favorite books she’s collected over the years. The top self consists of comic books, the second shelf has her favorite novels, and the third shelf contains photo and art books. The plushies are part of a collection from a specific toy brand. They’ve been her favorite since she was a kid, and she always gets the latest ones as
they're released. Their design is loosely based on an animal design from a Japanese anime
*Penguindrum* (*Figure 20*).

![Penguindrum penguin design produced by Brain's Base (2011)](image1.png)

The Book Shop Area

The second most important scene to the narrative is the book shop (*Figure 21*). This is where Sophie spends most of her day. This creates a lot of internal struggle, which she takes out on Alice throughout the narrative. The book shop itself has become Alice's home because of Sophie, and so this conflict has become an integral part of their relationship.

The exterior of the shop, which can only be seen in the floor plans, is inspired by The Frame Shop on Main St. in Ames. The shop has two front windows, and a door in the center like The Frame Shop. The main difference between the two is that Sophie's book shop exists on a corner lot, unlike the frame shop (*Figure 22*).
Figure 22 Book shop area final illustration

Figure 23 The Frame Shop, Ames Iowa
The Flower Shop

Figure 24 The flower shop floor plans
The flower shop consists of a large main shop area on the first level, and a two-bedroom apartment on the second (Figure 23). Before Lillian made it into a flower shop it used to be a bakery. Lillian didn’t have to do much to update the property as the previous owner took proper care of it. Now Lillian does her best to keep the place clean and open for the plants. She does all kinds of flower arrangements as well as houses potted plants. Her favorites are the tiny succulents, especially ones that are easy to care for.

The second level is where she and her son live. It’s a space that’s perfect for two people especially since her son was old enough to need his own room. Lillian also loves the convenience of living above her own shop, so she doesn’t have to commute like she did with her old job. The building tends to get drafty in the winter due to its age. However, Lillian is slowly working on updating the property when she has the money.

Owning a flower shop has been Lillian’s dream since she started college. She had always loved caring for plants and learning how to arrange flowers. It was the only thing she was passionate about. When she told her aunt and uncle about this, they decided to help her earn the money and look for locations to set up shop. Lillian loved this place at first site, and it was one of the cheapest options the three of them considered. So, at the start of the year they began moving her into her new home so she could live out her dream.
The design for the layout of the apartment is loosely based on my current apartment in the SUV apartments I live in at Iowa State University (Figure 24). The main shop area and exterior are based on Ali Cakes, a bakery on Main St. in Ames which I often passed by when on breaks from studio (Figure 25).

Figure 26: SUV apartment floor plan by Iowa State University (2019)

Figure 25 Ali Cakes bakery, Ames Iowa
The Main Shop Area

The main area of the shop (Figure 26) is where the majority of the narrative takes place. In this image we see the flower shop in the early morning before the shop is open. Lillian prefers to keep everything neat and organized, and it shows in the way everything in the background is clean and orderly. The flowers in the shop have no direct visual reference. However, the potted plant designs are based on the plant Aloe Vera as well as a couple varieties of succulents, that my mom keeps at home.
The Auto Shop and Jane’s Town House

Figure 28 Townhouse floor plan
Figure 29: Auto shop floor plans

- Bathroom
- Break room
- Main shop
- Jane’s personal area
- Auto shop garage
The final setting is the auto shop and town house that Jane and her father live in. The town house (Figure 27) has two levels. On the first level there is the living room, kitchen, and bathroom, and on the second level are two bedrooms and a second bathroom. This used to be the place where Jane’s mother and Sophie lived as well. The narrative takes place after they have moved out. The place Jane spends most of her time in is her room when she isn’t working. Her father spends most of his time in the living room.

The auto shop (Figure 28) consists of a main shop area which has a front desk/waiting area, a small bathroom, and a break room. The other half of the shop is the working garage where they make their repairs. Jane spends most of her time in the garage and the break room. Her father typically works the front desk, and they have a couple other employees that take over from time to time. However, for the most part it’s just the two of them.

The design for the town house floor plan is loosely based on the apartment I lived in at University Village on campus. The upstairs is a direct reference to the layout of the second floor of my apartment (Figure 29). The downstairs is my own design. For the exterior of the townhouse and auto shop I took inspiration from Main St. in Ames (Figure 30). There’s a direct reference to this street in my illustration (Figure 31) which are the large flower pots on the sidewalk.
Figure 30 SUV apartment floor plan by Iowa State University (2019)

Figure 31 Main Street, Ames Iowa
The Auto Shop and Jane’s Personal Workshop Area

Her workshop is where she spends most of her time. Jane is the type to keep everything organized. She’s in the line of work where it’s dangerous to be unorganized. To keep the place clean she makes sure to keep tools in consistent places, and to put everything back after she’s done using it. She also makes sure to keep everything as clean as possible. She always has rags to wipe off surfaces, and she does laundry every other night. This workshop is at the back of the main garage area. Jane’s father allows her to use this space for her personal projects since she works so hard.

The motorcycle in this illustration (Figure 33) is loosely based off the motorcycle my significant other owns (Figure 32). However, I changed some of the details to make it easier to draw.
Figure 33 My significant other’s motorcycle

Figure 34 Jane’s personal workshop area
Appendix B: Cross Roads Written Narrative Outline

Cross Roads: The Second Iteration Outline

Story One: Sophie and Alice

Good Route

Scene One: Rain

Setting: Sophie’s room

The scene opens with Sophie sitting in her usual spot by the window. It’s a rainy evening after work, and she is feeling particularly melancholy. Recently she’s wondered if running the bookshop is really what she wants to do for the rest of her life, or if she really has any other choice than running that shop. As the evening continues Alice comes in to ask how she is doing, and Sophie expresses her concerns.

She explains that if she had been given an option she would have probably gone to college. However, she assumes that it’s probably too late now. Alice does her best to comfort and encourage her to at least do some research and see how possible it would be for her to attend. She states that she shouldn’t give up hope especially since she’s so young. After their long discussion Alice leaves to make dinner. She muses to herself that if she could go back in time, what decisions would she make differently. After talking with Sophie, she wonders what she wants to do with her time. It’s something she’s never really thought about before.
Scene Two: Sick

Setting: Sophie’s apartment living room

The scene opens with Alice lying on the couch, browsing through social media. She feels the looming sense of emptiness and unease that usually comes with a depressive episode. This, of course, isn’t helped by the fact that the room around her is a complete disaster area which she was supposed to have taken care of today. Alice and Sophie have an agreement that she doesn’t have to pay rent if she helps by cleaning, cooking, and working downstairs in the shop if Sophie needs help.

She usually does a thorough cleaning every week and she’s been putting it off for days now much to Sophie’s irritation. The day before Alice had promised that today would be cleaning day as it’s the end of the week. However, through the haze in her mind she finds that she barely has the energy to get up. She ends up staying in the same place that Sophie left her that morning, and this leads to an argument between the two of them.

Alice sincerely apologizes for being so down the past few days. She makes amends by cooking dinner and promising to get all the cleaning done tonight. Sophie asks her why she’s been feeling so down lately, and Alice decides to finally tell her about her major depressive disorder. It’s something she’s never really discussed with anyone because she never felt she had a need to. She hasn’t been close with anyone apart from Sophie. She hadn’t even taken medication for it in years, which was probably why it had become increasingly worse over time. Sophie comes to understand how she has been feeling and forgives her for putting things off. In the end she decides to help Alice clean the house to help make her feel less burdened, which she appreciates.
Scene Three: Getting Close

Setting: Apartment living room

Alice, per Sophie’s request, has decided to seek out help from a therapy office. She wants to be able to help Sophie and be the supportive person that she needs while trying figure out what she wants for the future. However, she’s also just tired of feeling that she’s accomplished nothing for weeks on end. She hopes that by seeking help she’ll also figure out what she really wants to do with herself outside of living with and helping Sophie. It’s the first time she’s thought of what she wants in a long time.

In this scene we see her cooking dinner at the stove. Sophie comes home as she’s setting the table. She has been going to therapy for around a month now and had a session that day. They talk about how therapy had been going for her, which she is happy to admit it’s been going well. Alice asks Sophie if she’s put anymore thought into applying for college, and she states she’s been sitting on a couple applications for a while now. Alice excitedly pushes her to complete and submit them that night.

Scene Four: Moving Forward

Setting: The bookshop

Sophie is accepted into their local community college where she decides to study business. She feels that, if nothing else, she’ll learn more about how to improve the book shop. In this scene, it’s Sophie’s first day of college, and she’s nervous but excited to start her new classes. Alice, equally nervous realizes that it’s her first time opening the shop on her own. However, she’s confident that she’ll be able to take care of it while Sophie is gone.
She sees her off and has a quiet day at the bookshop. She feels as though things couldn’t get much better than this.

Bad Route

Scene One: Rain

Setting: Sophie’s bedroom

The scene opens with Sophie sitting in her usual spot by the window. It’s a rainy evening after work, and she is feeling particularly melancholy. Recently she’s wondered if running the bookshop is really what she wants to do for the rest of her life, or if she really has any other choice than running that shop. As the evening continues Alice steps into the doorway, she’s worried about Sophie, but is unsure of whether talking would really help her. She decides to leave her be for now and make dinner.

They talk at dinner, and Sophie mentions college in an off-hand way, wishing that she had been able to go. Alice doesn’t really take the suggestion seriously and decides not really dig deeper. She states that running the bookshop is already quite an accomplishment. Sophie nods, and doesn’t say much more about it, but her mood doesn’t improve. Which is something that Alice doesn’t notice as she washes the dishes from dinner.

Scene Two: Sick

Setting: Apartment living room
The scene opens on Alice who is lying on the couch, browsing through social media. She feels the looming sense of emptiness and unease that usually comes with a depressive episode. This, of course, isn’t helped by the fact that the room around her is a complete disaster area which she was supposed to have taken care of today. Alice and Sophie have an agreement that she doesn’t have to pay rent if she helps by cleaning, cooking, and working downstairs in the shop if she needs help.

She usually does a thorough cleaning every week and she’s been putting it off for days now much to Sophie’s irritation. The day before Alice had promised that today would be cleaning day as it’s the end of the week. However, through the haze in her mind she finds that she barely has the energy to get up. She ends up staying in the same place that Sophie left her that morning, and this leads to an argument between the two of them.

Alice becomes embarrassed and irritated. She argues with Sophie and complains that Sophie just doesn’t understand what she’s going through. Sophie retorts with she would have an easier time understanding if Alice just talked to her about her problems. Alice becomes overwhelmed and storms off into the bedroom, locking the door behind her. Sophie, also overwhelmed and exhausted decides to leave and spend the evening with Lillian. Alice is left alone with her thoughts, she doesn’t eat, and she barely sleeps that night.

Scene Three: Self-Destruction

Setting: Apartment living room

Sophie doesn’t come back to the apartment until late the next evening and even then, it’s only to pick up clothes. Alice feels like she’s going crazy. She barely eats and
spends most of her time sleeping or watching sifting through the internet. She doesn’t know how to make amends. She assumes that Sophie hates her now, and she doesn’t want to get yelled at anymore. In this scene we see her inner monologue as she tries to pull herself together. Near the end of the scene Sophie comes back, and she becomes visibly uneasy and tries to keep out of her way. Alice becomes more irritated as she is ignored. She reaches out to Sophie who keeps her distance.

In the end Alice explodes, and asks why Sophie won’t talk to her. Sophie tells her that they need to take a break, that she should find someplace else to stay for a while.

Scene Four: Searching for Solace

Setting: bookshop

We fast forward six months. Alice has been sleeping on her brother’s couch while she tries to sort her life out. In this scene we see Alice visit the bookshop again, hoping that if they can just talk things through, if they can get back together. When she opens the door it’s not Sophie she sees at the counter, but someone she doesn’t recognize. She asks them about Sophie and finds out that she’s started taking classes at a community college and hired someone to help at the shop while she’s taking classes. Alice didn’t see this coming; she wonders what Sophie is studying. Alice stays in the bookstore until Sophie returns, hoping to at least see how she’s doing. When Sophie sees Alice, she’s surprised and wary, but is more than happy to talk with her and catch up. Alice asks if they could start over and Sophie admits that she is too busy with everything to consider having a relationship. Alice understands and leaves. She doesn’t know what to do with herself without Sophie. She feels
hopeless and unsure of what to do with herself. The scene ends with her walking along the
road, wondering what she’s supposed to do now.

Story Two: Lillian

Good Route

Scene One: A New Strategy

Setting: Flower shop

The scene opens with Lillian opening the shop. It's a bright sunny morning as she
prepares for the day. Sophie is coming over to help her think of new marketing strategies
since it’s a weekend. She doesn’t have a lot of money to spend on marketing, but since she
has a bit of design experience from marketing in college, she figures she can try to put
something together herself. The only issue she has when marketing is that she is anxious
when talking to others. It’s because of this that she has had a slow start in the flower shop
business. She hopes that Sophie will have some good advice.

The meeting goes well, and Sophie makes several suggestions including the offer to
have advertisements in her bookshop. She loves all of the ideas, but requests that Sophie let
her think over the weekend, and she’ll contact her with her final decisions on Monday.

Scene Two: Learning

Setting: Flower shop
It’s Monday morning and she’s figured out her strategy for advertising. She’s decided to take Sophie’s advice as well as advertise in her shop and she’s super excited to start implementing it. Over the next couple weeks there is a small increase in customer flow. However, it’s still not enough to cover all her expenses, and she finds herself falling further into debt. In this scene she also gets an email from her aunt and uncle asking how her flower shop is coming along, and if business is booming yet, after all it’s been six months since she’s opened the shop. She doesn’t know how to answer it at first, but in the end, she decides to respond. She doesn’t want to make them worry, but she figures it would be better to reply. She tells them that the business is a little slow at the moment, but she’s sure with this new business strategy she’ll be able to make it.

Scene Three: Stagnation

Setting: Flower shop

It’s been three months and she hasn’t seen much of an increase at all in sales. She finds herself falling into a depression as the days pass, knowing it’s only a matter of time until foreclosure. Every time she thinks about it, she feels sick, and at this point she’d rather just quit rather than continue falling further into debt. As it is now, she feels like she’s trapped in that shop, and she hates it. Her uncle calls in the height of this anxiety, and she finally admits how things are not going the way she intended. They talk for hours and after many tears, they work out a solution. They conclude that she needs to take a break, that she should let go now while she can still work herself out of debt without it costing her too much time. Lillian is relieved and feels like she finally has a solution. She doesn’t feel as burdened and is thankful to her aunt and uncle for being forgiving.
Scene Four: Letting Go

Setting: Flower shop

We open the scene to Lillian packing up boxes. It’s a melancholy activity, but she knows it’s going to be alright if she has the support from her friends and family. The sun is still shining. Her aunt and uncle come to help pack everything up into a moving truck. She then says her goodbyes to Sophie and Alice before she leaves. As she is leaving town, she feels a sense of freedom being away from that shop. Even though her dream didn’t work out, being able to leave the situation in the right mindset made it feel more like a happy ending.

Bad Route

Scene One: A New Strategy

Setting: Flower shop

The scene opens with Lillian opening the shop. It’s a bright sunny morning as she prepares for the day. Sophie is coming over to help her think of new marketing strategies since it’s a weekend. She doesn’t have a lot of money to spend on marketing, but since she has a bit of design experience from marketing in college, she figures she can try to put something together herself. The only issue she has when marketing is that she is anxious when talking to others. It’s because of this that she has had a slow start in the flower shop business. She hopes that Sophie will have some good advice.
The meeting goes well, and Sophie make several suggestions including the offer to have advertisements in her bookshop. She loves all the ideas, but requests that Sophie let her think over the weekend, and she’ll contact her with her final decisions on Monday.

Scene Two: Learning

Setting: Flower shop

It’s Monday morning and she’s figured out her strategy for advertising. As much as she appreciated Sophie’s advice, she hesitates in taking her help by having her advertise in the bookstore. This was her business, and she wanted to have the satisfaction of growing the business on her own. Over the next couple weeks there is a small increase in customer flow, but it’s nowhere near enough to cover all her expenses. In this scene she also gets an email from her aunt and uncle asking how her flower shop is coming along, and if business is booming yet, after all it’s been six months since she’s opened the shop. She doesn’t know how to answer and thinking about how to answer brings her so much anxiety that she decides to delete the email to put it out of mind. She doesn’t want them to be disappointed, it would just make her want to quit. She tells herself that she’ll email them later, hopefully when she has some better news to give them.

Scene Three: Lies

Setting: Flower shop

It’s been three months and she hasn’t seen much of an increase at all in sales. She finds herself falling into a depression as the days pass, knowing it’s only a matter of time until foreclosure. Every time she thinks about it, she feels sick, and at this point she’d rather
just quit than continue falling further into debt. As it is now, she feels like she’s trapped in that shop, and she hates it. Her uncle calls in the height of this anxiety, and she lies to him in order to keep him from worrying. She just wants to buy more time and hopes the next time he calls she can give him some good news. In the end of this scene she gets a call from her lender warning her that since she has missed another payment this year, she is in danger of having the shop being repossessed.

Scene Four: Repossession

Setting: Flower shop

We open the scene to Lillian sitting on the edge of the sidewalk outside of her flower shop. The property has been repossessed, and people have come to evict her. She is taking a break from packing up her stuff, and only now decides to call her aunt and uncle. They ask her why she never said she was having problems, and she apologizes for calling them about it so late. While they are disappointed, they are more worried about how Lillian is doing. Lillian isn’t sure what she’s going to do now, and she deeply regrets not asking for help sooner. The scene ends with her aunt and uncle arriving and she hugs them before going into the shop to continue packing everything up.
Story Three: Jane and Rin

Good Route

Scene One: First Meeting

Setting: The Auto Shop

The scene opens to her father forcing her out of the garage and into the main shop area, claiming that she was exhausting herself. She needed to let herself rest. He suggested that she go out and socialize, however out of all the things she wanted to do, talking to people were not one of them. It was at this moment that she meets Rin, who is sitting in the waiting area. Rin looks up as she enters and smiles as though in recognition to which Jane asks if they know each other. Rin tells her that they were friends as kids, but something about that didn’t seem right. Nevertheless, Jane decides to humor her and sits down next to her to talk. Her father did say to socialize after all. They talk until Jane’s voice is hoarse, which is something Jane hasn’t done with anyone for years, and exchange numbers which Jane says she’ll try to check her phone more often. At the end of the night Jane goes home and showers, feeling less heavy than she usually does after work.

Scene Two: A Kind of Friendship

Setting: Auto shop break room

To Jane it seems as though Rin appears whenever she has a free moment like magic. And to make things even more surprising Jane found herself not really minding her company. In this scene they’re talking in the break room. They’ve known each other for about 6 months now, and this has become a common occurrence. They don’t talk about
anything too important, but Jane notices that Rin has seemed much more tired this week than usual. When Jane’s break ends Rin admits that she’s going to be out of town for a couple weeks, and that she may not have time to call while she’s away. Rin seems worried that Jane will be upset with her for leaving, but is relieved to find that Jane doesn’t mind, she only tells her to have fun. Rin gives her a quick hug before letting Jane get back to work, something that Jane didn’t expect nor realize she really wanted.

Scene Three: What do You Think of Me?

Setting: Auto Shop

It was a month before Rin returned, and when she did, it seemed as though she had only become more exhausted. It was while Jane was deeply invested in working on her motorcycle that Rin came to visit. In this scene the two of them make idle conversation. Jane sits back against the wall of the garage, taking a break from work. The conversation starts to become more serious as Rin asks what Jane thinks of her. Jane isn’t sure how to answer, and she’s starting to become uneasy with the personal questions. Near the end of the scene Rin asks Jane to go on a small trip with her. Jane never takes breaks, and Rin feels like it would be good to get out of her comfort zone a little and travel with her. Jane is unsure of what to say, she does want to spend more time with Rin, but is uncomfortable leaving the shop even if only for a few days. She asks Rin to give her a couple days to think about it.
Scene Four: Out of this Town

Setting: Outside Jane’s house

After a lot of consideration and speaking with her father, Jane decides to take a vacation and travel with Rin. She realized how much warmth Rin brings, and she doesn’t want that warmth to leave. In this scene, Rin is helping Jane pack her stuff into saddlebags on her motorcycle. She isn’t sure where they’re going yet, but Rin seems confident enough which helps to calm her unease. As they prepare to set out on their journey Jane’s dad comes out to say goodbye which resurfaces her anxiety. Her father seems to be happy that she’s leaving though, which makes her feel more excited about leaving. The scene ends with Jane and Rin riding off together onto their next adventure.

Bad Route

Scene One: First Meeting

Setting: The Auto Shop

The scene opens to her father forcing her out of the garage and into the main shop area, claiming that she was exhausting herself. She needed to let herself rest. He suggested that she go out and socialize, however out of all the things she wanted to do, talking to people were not one of them. It was at this moment that she meets Rin, who is sitting in the waiting area. Rin looks up as she enters and smiles as though in recognition to which Jane asks if they know each other. Rin tells her that they were friends as kids, but something about that didn’t seem right. Jane decides to head back home and have a shower instead of
going out. She doesn’t really feel like talking with anyone. Even if she’s lonely, she’s comfortable where she is. She decides to go to sleep early, feeling more tired than usual.

Scene Two: A Kind of Friendship

Setting: Auto shop break room

To Jane it seems as though Rin appears whenever she has a free moment almost like magic. And to make things even more surprising Jane found herself not really minding her company. In this scene, they’re talking in the break room. After months of making small talk during breaks they decide to exchange numbers. They never talk about anything too important; Jane doesn’t like to get personal. When Jane’s break ends Rin admits that she’s going to be out of town for a couple weeks, and that she may not have time to call while she’s away. And she seems disheartened that Jane doesn’t seem to care. Rin gives her a quick hug before letting Jane get back to work, something that Jane didn’t expect nor realize she really wanted. Jane goes back to work, wondering why Rin comes to talk to her of all people.

Scene Three: I Just want to be Friends with You

Setting: Auto Shop

It was a month before Rin returned. And it was while Jane was deeply invested in working on her motorcycle that Rin came to visit. In this scene we see the two of them make idle conversation. Jane sits back against the wall of the garage, taking a break from work. The conversation starts to become more serious as Rin asks what Jane thinks of her.
Jane isn’t sure how to answer, and she’s starting to become uneasy with the personal questions.

Near the end of the scene Rin asks Jane to go on a small trip with her. Jane never takes breaks, and Rin feels like it would be good to get out of her comfort zone a little and travel with her. Just a weekend away from this town. Jane is unsure of what to say, she does want to spend more time with Rin, but is uncomfortable leaving the shop even if only for a few days. She asks Rin to give her a couple days to think about it. Jane gives it some thought, and even after being encouraged by her father she decides not to go. She’s still not comfortable with leaving yet.

Scene Four: Alone Again

Setting: auto shop

A couple days pass, and Rin returns on the third day to hear Jane’s decision. Jane explains why she isn’t comfortable going, and Rin understands, but still seems depressed. They talk for a little while afterwards, and Rin leaves Jane to her work. She doesn’t come back after that. And months pass without any word from her. It’s been so long that Jane starts to wonder if Rin was even real. She finds herself feeling even more alone than she did before she met Rin, and she wished she had just taken a chance and gone on that trip with Rin. Then maybe she wouldn’t feel so alone now. The scene ends with Jane slouched in one of the chairs in the auto shop break room, staring at the ceiling. She doesn’t feel comfortable in her loneliness anymore.
Appendix C: Character Profiles and Illustrations

Jane Character Profile

Physical Description:
- Age: 30
- Height: 5’5
- Weight: 140 lbs
- Hair color: blonde
- Eye color: blue grey

Education/ Work/Home:
- Education: high school/no college
- Occupation: mechanic
- Salary: makes a decent living
- Status: middle class
- Lives in the space above the auto shop
- Transportation: motorcycle

Likes:
- Taking things apart
- Music
- Alone time
- Anime
- Vintage cars, motorcycles
- Dogs
- Coffee
- Alcohol

Dislikes:
- people
- Crowds
- Rain
- Foods that are too sugary
- Rude customers
- Reading

Figure 35 Jane’s profile page 1
Background

Family/Religion:
Parents: divorced after she turned 18. She lives with her dad.
Siblings: She has a step-sister named Sophie. Although due to the age difference they aren’t all that close.
Marital Status: single
Significant Other: None
Other Relatives: None in contact
Pets: she has a dog (breed?)
Friends: no one, doesn’t really like anyone, but doesn’t hate them either. Maybe Rin?
Enemies: Alice
Other relationships: Awkward relationship with Sophie and her mother
Ethnicity: Caucasian
Religion: Atheist
Beliefs: The only thing that means anything is hard work.
Superstitions: Ghosts
Diction: Midwestern

Astrology/Physiology:  
Birthdate: November 18th, 1988
Handwriting: legible, surprisingly
General health: decent
Mental health: not so great
Allergies: seasonal
Handicaps: None
Sexual Orientation: lesbian

Objects kept in:
Purse: she doesn’t own a purse
Wallet: cash/card, l.D, picture of her mom and dad
Bag: tool kit
Junk drawer: random tools, flashlight, random nails, dirt
Closet: clothes/storage/extra bedding
Psychology:
Fears: rejection, ghosts, loneliness, death, failure
Secrets: she keeps crushes she has on people to herself. Her relationship with Alice
IQ: Average
Eating habits: has a balanced diet, nothing too sweet. Prefers salty foods.
Sleeping habits: doesn’t take many naps, gets up early/ stays up late
Book preferences: none
Music preferences: pop and rock music
Generally prefers to be alone
Leader
Not very spontaneous
Keeps a journal
Hobbies: fixing cars and bikes, watching tv, sleeping
Relaxation: baths, naps when she has time, watching t.v
Excited by old books, vintage clothing, new anime/manga releases
Pet peeves: stupid people
Prejudices: None
Attitudes: Doesn’t smile a lot. Usually pretty pessimistic
Stressors: family, angry and/or stupid people
Obsessions: machines
Addictions: alcoholic, workaholic
As seen by others: asshole workaholic
As seen by self: asshole who doesn’t work hard enough
Favorite colors: blue and black
Sophie Character Profile

Physical Description:
- Age: 21
- Height: 5’1
- Weight: 145 lbs
- Hair color: burgundy
- Eye color: hazel

Education/ Work/Home:
- Education: high school/no college
- Occupation: Book shop owner
- Salary: not a lot
- Status: low middle class
- Lives in the space above the book shop
- Transportation: bus or on foot

Likes:
- Reading
- Plush toys
- Music
- Rainy days
- Alone time
- Anime
- Manga
- Vintage fashion
- Fashion in general
- Makeup

Dislikes:
- Loud unexpected noises/people
- Crowds
- The dark
- Horror movies/games
- Rude customers
- Modern technology

Figure 40 Sophie Profile page 1
# Background

**Family/Religion:**

Parents: Gone, her dad left due to her mother’s drug abuse issues. She was left with her grandmother until she died. She ended up in foster care until she turned 18.

Siblings: She has a step-sister named Jane.

Marital Status: single

Significant Other: None

Other Relatives: None in contact

Pets: None, but would love to have one if she had the money

Friends: Nathan, Jack, Allen, Elizabeth, Lillian, and Alice

Enemies: None

Other relationships: Awkward relationship with Jane and her foster parents

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Religion: Agnostic

Beliefs: Everything happens for a reason. We are all just people

Superstitions: Ghosts, demons, angels, aliens

Diction: Midwestern

**Astrology/Physiology:**

Birthdate: March 28, 1995

Handwriting: legible

General health: decent

Mental health: not so great

Allergies: seasonal

Handicaps: None

Sexual Orientation: Bisexual

**Objects kept in:**

Purse: Phone/ iPod, headphones, current book, wallet, small makeup bag, planner, keys

Wallet: cash/card, I.D, pictures of Jane and her grandmother

Junk drawer: simple tools, flashlight, random nails

Closet: clothes/storage/extra bedding
Psychology:
Fears: rejection, ghosts, demons, loneliness, death, failure, homelessness, abandonment
Secrets: she keeps crushes she has on people to herself
IQ: Fairly high, likes to learn
Eating habits: has a balanced diet, loves sweet foods. Enjoys coffee and tea.
Sleeping habits: doesn’t take many naps, gets up early/ stays up late
Book preferences: supernatural, romance, fantasy.
Music preferences: Western pop, J-pop, soft rock
Generally prefers to be alone
Follower
Not very spontaneous
Keeps a journal
Hobbies: reading, listening to music, sewing, anime, knitting
Relaxation: baths, naps when she has time, reading, watching t.v
Excited by old books, vintage clothing, new anime/manga releases
Pet peeves: People who are careless with books
Prejudices: None
Attitudes: generally upbeat, and calm. Doesn’t give extreme reactions to anything
Stressors: family, busy store hours, angry people
Obsessions: anything vintage, anime, coffee/tea, weather
Addictions: caffeine
As seen by others: cute/soft geek, kind hearted
As seen by self: cute, antisocial weeboo trash
Favorite colors: Pink and Green
Alice Character Profile

Physical Description:
- Age: 32
- Height: 5’7
- Weight: 135 lbs
- Hair color: black
- Eye color: brown

Education/Work/Home:
- Education: high school/no college
- Occupation: none
- Salary: allowance from her father
- Status: low middle class
- Freeloader, lives between her brother’s place and Sophie’s
- Transportation: bus or on foot

Likes:
- Plush toys
- Music
- Rainy days
- New people
- Anime/Manga
- Some video games
- sex
- Horror movies

Dislikes:
- Crowds
- The dark
- Rude people
- Her mother
- Bitter drinks and food
Background

Family/Religion:
Parents: Divorced, she doesn’t get along with her mother, has an awkward relationship with her dad.
Siblings: Has an older brother named Allistor
Marital Status: single
Significant Other: None
Other Relatives: creepy, rapey uncle
Pets: None, but would love to have one if she had the money
Friends: sophie is the only one wo really likes her
Enemies: None
Other relationships: Awkward relationship with Jane
love/hate kinda thing
Ethnicity: Asian
Religion: Atheist
Beliefs: We are all just people
Superstitions:
Diction: Midwestern

Astrology/Physiology:
Birthdate: May 3rd, 1986
Handwriting: not legible
General health: not great
Mental health: not so great
Allergies: none
Handicaps: None
Sexual Orientation: lesbian

Objects kept in:
Bag: clothes, snacks, wallet, first-aid, cigarettes
Wallet: cash/card, I.D, pictures of her parents plus Allistor
Pockets: phone, earbuds, lighter
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Psychology:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fears: rejection, ghosts, demons, loneliness, death, failure, homelessness, abandonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrets: she keeps crushes she has on people to herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ: Fairly high, likes to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating habits: She eats whatever is available to her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping habits: doesn’t take many naps, gets up early/ stays up late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book preferences: supernatural, romance, fantasy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music preferences: Whatever is on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally prefers to be alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very spontaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t keep a journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies: napping, playing video games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation: watching t.v, spending time with Sophie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited by meeting new people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudices: None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes: generally pessimistic but puts on a kind façade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressors: family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessions: video games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions: alcohol, smoking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As seen by others: kind of strange and distrustful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As seen by self: a kind, but selfish person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite colors: lilac</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lillian Character Profile

Physical Description:
- Age: 27
- Height: 5’7
- Weight: 160 lbs
- Hair color: light blonde
- Eye color: sky blue

Education/ Work/Home:
- Education: high school/no college
- Occupation: flower shop owner
- Salary: makes a decent living
- Status: middle class
- Lives in the space above the flower shop
- Transportation: car or walking

 Likes:
- flowers
- Music
- Spending time with her son
- Calligraphy
- cats
- Tea
- Fine wine
- Anything really high class
- reading

Dislikes:
- Having to deal with finances
- Crowds
- rain
- Rude customers

Figure 50 Lillian’s Profile page 1
Background

Family/Religion:

- Parents: She was disowned by them after she became pregnant with Thomas after high school. She comes from a very wealthy family, both her parents work high paying jobs. However, due to their work they were unintentionally neglectful.
- Siblings: no siblings
- Marital Status: single
- Significant Other: None, the guy that got her pregnant ditched once he got the news
- Other Relatives: She has an aunt and uncle she is really close to. Once she was disowned she stayed at their place while she decided what to do with her life. They helped her raise Thomas for a few years and gave her the down payment for the space for her flower shop. She works in order to support Thomas, and to get enough money to pay them back
- Pets: she would love to get a cat some day when she isn’t so busy
- Friends: Sophie, Elizabeth (who won’t be in the demo), Nathan (also not in the demo)
- Enemies: No enemies, but she doesn’t get along well with Alice or Jane
- Ethnicity: Caucasian
- Religion: Agnostic
- Beliefs: Work hard and you’ll be rewarded. There’s a reason for everything that happens
- Superstitions: none
- Diction: Midwestern
Astrology/Physiology:
- Birthdate: July 19th, 1991
- Handwriting: very curly and elegant
- General health: good
- Mental health: good
- Allergies: none
- Handicaps: None
- Sexual Orientation: straight

Objects kept in:
- Purse: wallet, keys, tissues, small makeup bag, a few toiletries, phone
- Wallet: cash/card, I.D, picture of her and Thomas
- Junk drawer: random tools, flashlight, random petals
- Closet: clothes/storage/extra bedding

Psychology:
- Fears: rejection, loneliness, death, failure, Thomas getting injured
- Secrets: none. She’s fairly honest with everything
- IQ: Average
- Eating habits: has a balanced diet, but loves sweets
- Sleeping habits: doesn’t take many naps, gets up early/ stays up late
- Book preferences: romance and classical fiction
- Music preferences: pop and soft rock
- Generally prefers to be around other people
- Leader
- Not very spontaneous
- Keeps a journal
- Hobbies: watching t.v with her son, reading, calligraphy
- Relaxation: baths, naps when she has time, watching t.v
- She gets frustrated when she doesn’t understand something
- Prejudices: None
- Attitudes: she has a very positive and mature personality
- Stressors: family
- Obsessions: flowers, she’s gotten into knitting lately
- Addictions: maybe coffee
- As seen by others: very mature and well put together
- As seen by self: nice, but kind of a mess
- Favorite colors: sky blue
Figure 53 poses line art

Figure 54 poses base color
Rin Character Profile

Physical Description:
- Age: mid 20’s, although the exact age is unknown
- Height: 5’5
- Weight: 140 lbs
- Hair color: white with pastel streaks
- Eye color: blue

Education/Work/Home:
- Education: not known
- Occupation: none
- Salary: none
- Status: unknown
- Homeless, occasionally stays with Jane.
- Transportation: walking or bus

Likes:
- art
- Music
- Plush toys
- animals
- socializing
- Coffee
- birds

Dislikes:
- being alone
- rain
- Rude or nosy people
Background

Family/Religion:
- Parents: unknown
- Siblings: unknown
- Marital Status: single
- Significant Other: None
- Other Relatives: None in contact
- Pets: none
- Friends: Jane
- Enemies: none
- Ethnicity: seems to be Caucasian
- Religion: unknown
- Beliefs: There is a reason for everything
- Superstitions: none
- Diction: Midwestern

Astrology/Physiology:
- Birthdate: unknown
- Handwriting: legible
- General health: decent
- Mental health: good
- Allergies: none
- Handicaps: None
- Sexual Orientation: lesbian

Objects kept in:
- Purse: she doesn’t own a purse
- Wallet: doesn’t have a card or any form of I.D. Uses only cash. No pictures
- Bag: clothes, toiletries. A little stuffed bird, journal, pencils
Psychology:
- Fears: loneliness and rejection
- Secrets: She’s a guardian angel watching over Jane. No one really knows anything about her
- IQ: below average
- Eating habits: loves sweets, not a balanced diet
- Sleeping habits: doesn’t seem to need sleep
- Book preferences: none
- Music preferences: pop and rock music
- Generally prefers to be in company
- follower
- Not very spontaneous
- Keeps a journal
- Hobbies: exploring, drawing, writing
- Relaxation: baths, watching t.v, spending time with Jane
- Excited by small, random gifts, birds, loves nature
- Prejudices: None
- Attitudes: very air-headed and happy-go-lucky
- Stressors: none, maybe an angry Jane
- Obsessions: soft, squishy things
- As seen by others: sweet but mysterious person
- As seen by self: cute and kind, maybe a little dumb
- Favorite colors: blue and pink
Figure 59 poses line art

Figure 58 poses base color
Appendix D: Prototypes

Once I completed the character and scene design, I started to create a visual prototype to show what the finished game would look like. I experimented with character placement and different types of text boxes. In this image (Figure 34) I chose to use an opaque text box with a color taken from the background, so the image is cohesive. The text comes from scene two in story one. The player progresses by pressing the space bar or left-clicking the mouse. There are also options for auto-scrolling, skipping dialogue, saving, and loading. This layout was inspired by the game Doki Doki Literature Club, which is also a visual novel game. I felt that the opaque text box detracted too much from the overall image so in future iterations I make the text box more transparent.

Figure 60 Game Prototype 1
Figure 61: Screenshot adapted from Doki Doki Literature Club by D. Salvato (2017)

Figure 62: Game Prototype 2
After creating the first prototype I decided to make one for each story to see how all the characters looked with the backgrounds. I used the same color for the text box as I did in the first iteration, but I reduced the opacity, which seemed to help make the image more cohesive. However, I believe the text box is a little too thick in this iteration, so I experiment with making the text box slightly thinner in the next one. The dialogue comes from the last scene in the good route of story three.

In this final iteration I mainly changed the size of the text box, which helps make the image more cohesive. In further iterations I may change up the color of the text box to fit the specific story. I believe in this image especially the color I used doesn’t fit with the background. The dialogue comes from the first scene in story two.