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The Eudaimonic Tree Pilot: A Study of Public Engagement in Participatory Art at Three Sites

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The Eudaimonic Tree Pilot:
A Study of Public Engagement in Participatory Art at Three Sites

A Thesis Presented
By
OLIVIA ASHJIAN JAMES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Landscape Architecture
The Eudaimonic Tree Pilot:
A Study of Public Engagement in Participatory Art at Three Sites

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By
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother and father for opening my mind to possibilities; to my partner for sharing the joy of this process; and to my committee for their belief in my vision and guidance to reach it.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my entire committee for their time and willingness to share expertise in the many directions this thesis explored. I would like to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Mark Hamin, for his endless support, extensive knowledge in all areas of my thesis, and inspiration throughout my analysis and writing; committee member, Carey Clouse, for her creativity, insights and resources into the world of spontaneous interventions, community engagement, and design research; and committee member, Michael DiPasquale, for supporting my transition from my first thesis to this one, trust and encouragement for the direction my work took, and ability to ground my vision in reality for a more powerful impact. Each member contributed vital perspectives and guidance, and I will be forever grateful for the privilege I had to work with this dream team.
ABSTRACT
THE EUDAIMONIC TREE PILOT:
A STUDY OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN PARTICIPATORY ART AT THREE SITES
B.S., CLARK UNIVERSITY
M.L.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
Directed by: Professor Mark Hamin

In times of crisis, what tools do planners and designers have to inspire a sense of well-being? How can we heal community through dialogue, recognizing the ongoing need for connection with or without a crisis? Are there ways to uncover unknown concerns and values in a community? The engagement approaches many planners and designers rely on do not typically aim to access these deeper questions in society. Surveys, public meetings and focus groups seek tangible results that target specific issues. They are often conducted out of context, taking the public out of the environment at issue to answer questions on a defined topic. What tools do professionals designing our urban environments have for discovering unknown issues in a more spontaneous and practice-based way in places where community exists?

Through the Eudaimonic Tree Pilot I explored these questions, using the framework of eudaimonia to guide my process. The objective of my study began with my desire to inspire a sense of well-being, eudaimonia, in my community during a time of great loneliness and mental health decline due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This historic moment left many people feeling disconnected and hopeless, exacerbating a national trend that started well before COVID (Ammar et al., 2021). In response, I produced three installations using trees in the landscape to offer the public a means of expression. Each tree housed a different prompt rooted in
eudaimonic sentiments and blank note cards for public response. Their messages hung from tree limbs and became an embodiment of the collective consciousness.

This study of public engagement through participatory art unearthed profound implications for the planning and design fields. Some of the primary takeaways suggest that participatory art can catalyze community dialogue; spontaneity heightens co-creation; and highly co-created initiatives are likely to generate a eudaimonic effect. This process was led by results as they emerged, highlighting previously unknown resolutions and considerations. This heuristic, emergent methodology could be used more often by planning and design professionals as a means to perform design research that embraces the ephemeral and eudaimonic aspects of communities.

KEY WORDS:

Participatory Art, Eudaimonia, Urban Environments, Spontaneous Co-Creation, Community Engagement, Community Dialogue, Design Research
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................................................................................................. iv.

ABSTRACT....................................................................................................................................................................... v.

LIST OF FIGURES........................................................................................................................................................... xiii.

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION............................................................................................................................................................ p.1

II. LITERATURE REVIEW...................................................................................................................................................... p.12

   A. Aristotle’s Eudemian Philosophy ................................................................................................................................. p.12
      1. In His Own Words: The Eudemian Ethics & The Nicomachean Ethics................................................................. p.12
      2. Reinterpretations of Aristotle...................................................................................................................................... p.10
         a. Modern Philosophy ............................................................................................................................................... p.10
         b. Modern Psychology ............................................................................................................................................ p.14
            i. Theoretical Frameworks ................................................................................................................................. p.15
            ii. Effects of Urban Living ............................................................................................................................... p.19
   B. Restorative Environments ........................................................................................................................................... p.21
      1. Nature Connection .................................................................................................................................................. p.23
      2. Art Therapy ........................................................................................................................................................... p.26
      3. DIY Urbanism ......................................................................................................................................................... p.28
   C. The Role of Participatory Art ..................................................................................................................................... p.30
   D. Precedent Studies ......................................................................................................................................................... p.35
      1. Tactical Urbanism .................................................................................................................................................. p.36
         a. Sanctioned Interventions .................................................................................................................................... p.38
            i. Intersection Repair ......................................................................................................................................... p.38
            ii. Park(ing) Day, Parklets and Pavement to Parks ......................................................................................... p.39
         b. Unsanctioned Interventions ............................................................................................................................... p.41
            i. Guerilla Gardening ........................................................................................................................................ p.41
            ii. Guerilla Bike Lanes ...................................................................................................................................... p.43
            iii. Guerilla Knitting .......................................................................................................................................... p.44
      2. Co-Creation ............................................................................................................................................................... p.46
         a. Artist-Initiated Participatory Art .......................................................................................................................... p.49
            i. Reconstruction ............................................................................................................................................... p.49
            ii. RisingEMOTIONS ........................................................................................................................................ p.51

vii
Before I Die ....................................................................................................................... p.53
b. Community-Based Art Therapy ............................................................................. p.54
tl. Adults with Chronic Pain ....................................................................................... p.54
lil. Living Well .............................................................................................................. p.56
c. Spontaneous Co-Creation ...................................................................................... p.57
lli. George Floyd Square .............................................................................................. p.58
ill. Graffiti Alley .......................................................................................................... p.60

3. Discussion .................................................................................................................. p.62

III. METHODS .............................................................................................................. p.68

A. Critical Reflexivity Methodology ........................................................................... p.68
  1. Relevant Methods Derived from Other Fields ..................................................... p.69
B. Pilot Study ................................................................................................................ p.75

IV. THE EUDAIMONIC TREE PILOT ANALYSIS ......................................................... p.94

A. The Grateful Tree’s Success ..................................................................................... p.94
B. Site Engagement Analysis ........................................................................................ p.98
  1. The Act of Engagement ......................................................................................... p.98
  2. Observations .......................................................................................................... p.98
     a. Grateful Tree ....................................................................................................... p.100
     b. Dream Tree ........................................................................................................ p.101
     c. Proud Tree ......................................................................................................... p.102
  3. Community Additions ............................................................................................ p.103
  4. Vandalism ................................................................................................................ p.105
C. In What Ways and to What Extent was Eudaimonia Expressed? ....................... p.106
  1. Ryff’s 6 Dimensions Applied to Prompt Phrasing and Message Content ........ p.108
     a. “Welcome to the Community Tree/Tell us what you are grateful for” ....... p.110
     b. “I Dream…” ....................................................................................................... p.113
     c. “I Am Proud…” ............................................................................................... p.118
  2. Significance of Expressed Dimensions ............................................................... p.121
  3. Other Eudaimonic Influences ................................................................................ p.123
     a. Location ............................................................................................................ p.123
     b. The Role of Anonymity .................................................................................... p.124
  4. Effects of Six Motivations .................................................................................... p.125
     a. Generate a Sense of Well-Being ..................................................................... p.126
     b. Co-Create with the Public ............................................................................. p.126
c. Form Community Connection................................................................. p.128

d. Alter the Urban Experience................................................................. p.130

e. Develop a Place-Based Initiative.................................................... p.131

f. Produce a ‘Surprise Effect’ from the Intervention............................. p.132

g. Concluding Thoughts........................................................................ p.132

V. CONCLUSION........................................................................................ p.134

A. Takeaways.......................................................................................... p.134

1. Participatory Art Can Be a Catalyst to Community Dialogue.......... p.134

   a. Choose ‘Places’ Not ‘Spaces’........................................................ p.136

   b. Pick the Best Medium for the Issue and Public Expression........ p.138

   c. Provide a Narrative Prompt......................................................... p.139

2. Highly Co-Created Installations May Generate a Eudaimonic Effect p.140

   a. Site Maintenance........................................................................ p.141

   b. Allow Public to Transform Piece.............................................. p.143

   c. Spontaneity May Heighten Co-Creation Potential..................... p.144


B. Improvements..................................................................................... p.146

1. Include Community in Design......................................................... p.146

2. Expand Engagement Opportunities............................................... p.147

3. Conduct More Site Observations.................................................... p.149

C. Directions for Future Research.......................................................... p.151

1. Generate an EWB Scale for Geographic Application....................... p.151

2. Participatory Art as a Means of Community Dialogue.................... p.152

3. Develop Anonymous Yet Accountable Methodology for Spontaneous Co-Creation................................................................. p.152

4. Interview Co-Creators and Participants.......................................... p.153

5. Further Develop an Emergent Methodology for Design Research..... p.153

6. Create ‘Sanctioned’ Installations...................................................... p.154

D. Final Reflections................................................................................ p.154

1. New Emergent Methodologies......................................................... p.155

2. The Pilot Study’s Unique Positioning.............................................. p.156

3. Novel Forms of Community Connection....................................... p.157

4. A Final Thought................................................................................ p.158

APPENDICES............................................................................................ p.159

A. IMAGES............................................................................................... p.159

1. Eudaimonia Concept Drawing (2018).............................................. p.159
2. Reconstruction – Architect and Builder Stage……………………………………………….. p.160
3. Reconstruction – Graffiti Stage……………………………………………………………….. p.160
4. RisingEMOTIONS – Hand Transcribed Messages………………………………………….. p.161
5. RisingEMOTIONS – Installation………………………………………………………………… p.161
6. RisingEMOTIONS – Final Piece……………………………………………………………….. p.162
7. Before I Die………………………………………………………………………………………. p.162
8. Before I Die – Prompts…………………………………………………………………………….. p.163
9. Past, Present, and Future Self…………………………………………………………………….. p.163
10. Graffiti Alley, Cambridge, MA………………………………………………………………… p.164
11. Original Community Tree, Amherst, MA (2019)……………………………………………… p.164
12. Grateful Tree Site Context, Cold Spring Park, Newton, MA………………………………….. p.165
13. Community Tree, Newton, MA (2019)………………………………………………………… p.165
15. Grateful Tree Prompt (2020)…………………………………………………………………….. p.166
16. Grateful Tree Set Up………………………………………………………………………………... p.167
17. Dream Tree Site Scouting………………………………………………………………………….. p.167
18. Dream Tree Observation Set Up………………………………………………………………….. p.168
19. Teen Photographing Prompt at Dream tree…………………………………………………….. p.168
20. Proud Tree Day 1…………………………………………………………………………………… p.169
21. “Thank You” Note Left at Dream Tree……………………………………………………………. p.169
22. Dream Tree Sign Vandalized……………………………………………………………………….. p.170
23. Proud Tree Sign Vandalized………………………………………………………………………. p.170
24. Leaf Note 1…………………………………………………………………………………………… p.171
25. Leaf Note 2…………………………………………………………………………………………… p.171
26. Leaf Note 3…………………………………………………………………………………………… p.172
27. Index Card Note Left at Dream Tree……………………………………………………………… p.172
28. Construction Paper Note Left at Proud Tree (front)…………………………………………… p.173
29. Construction Paper Note Left at Proud Tree (back)…………………………………………… p.173
30. Washed Off Note…………………………………………………………………………………… p.174
31. Note Attached to Washed Off Note……………………………………………………………… p.174
32. Sumac Flower Additions on Branches…………………………………………………………….. p.175
33. Twig Halo……………………………………………………………………………………………. p.175
34. Note with Drawing…………………………………………………………………………………… p.176
35. Child Note 1…………………………………………………………………………………………. p.176
36. Child Note 2…………………………………………………………………………………………. p.177
37. Child Note 3…………………………………………………………………………………………. p.177
38. Community Response Note 1 ……………………………………………………………………. p.178
39. Community Response Note 2 ……………………………………………………………………. p.178
40. Political Friend Note 1……………………………………………………………………………… p.179
41. Political Friend Note 2……………………………………………………………………………… p.179
42. Community Response Note 3 ……………………………………………………………………. p.180
43. Community Response to Note 3…………………………………………………………………. p.180
44. Child Note 4………………………………………………………………………………………… p.181
45. Child Note with Assistance………………………………………………………………………… p.181
46. Child Note with Signature........................................................................................................... p.182
47. Youth Note 1................................................................................................................................. p.182
48. Youth Note 2................................................................................................................................. p.183

B. PRECEDENT CHART.................................................................................................................. p.184

C. TABLE OF CARD RESTOCK DATES AND AMOUNTS......................................................... p.185

D. MESSAGE DATA QUANTIFIED................................................................................................. p.186
   1. Message Overview.................................................................................................................... p.186
   2. Data Quantified....................................................................................................................... p.187
      a. Grateful Tree....................................................................................................................... p.187
         i. Message Sentiments Identified within 14 Categories....................................................... p.187
         ii. Message Sentiments Identified within Ryff’s 6 Dimensions...................................... p.187
      b. Dream Tree........................................................................................................................ p.188
         i. Message Sentiments Identified within 14 Categories....................................................... p.188
         ii. Message Sentiments Identified within Ryff’s 6 Dimensions...................................... p.188
      c. Proud Tree............................................................................................................................ p.189
         i. Message Sentiments Identified within 14 Categories....................................................... p.189
         ii. Message Sentiments Identified within Ryff’s 6 Dimensions...................................... p.189

E. COMPLETE MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS..................................................................................... p.190
   1. Grateful Tree............................................................................................................................. p.190
   2. Dream Tree............................................................................................................................... p.200
   3. Proud Tree................................................................................................................................ p.205

F. INITIAL CATEGORY ANALYSIS OF MESSAGE CONTENT.................................................... p.209
   1. Message Analysis....................................................................................................................... p.209
      a. Eudaimonic Expressions within Categories......................................................................... p.210
      b. Significance of the Most Prevalent Categories.................................................................. p.214
         i. Grateful Tree....................................................................................................................... p.214
         ii. Dream Tree....................................................................................................................... p.216
         iii. Proud Tree...................................................................................................................... p.218
      c. Significance of the Least Prevalent Categories.................................................................. p.219
         i. Grateful Tree....................................................................................................................... p.220
         ii. Dream Tree....................................................................................................................... p.221
         iii. Proud Tree...................................................................................................................... p.224
   2. Categories Explained................................................................................................................ p.226
      a. Community............................................................................................................................ p.226
      b. Covid-Related......................................................................................................................... p.227
c. Family………………………………………………………………………………………………. p.228
d. Friends………………………………………………………………………………………………. p.229
e. Future ........................................................................................................................ p.229
f. General ........................................................................................................................ p.230
g. Health........................................................................................................................ p.232
h. Joke .............................................................................................................................. p.232
i. Kid................................................................................................................................ p.235
j. Outdoors .................................................................................................................... p.239
k. Personal Accomplishment ....................................................................................... p.239
l. Pet................................................................................................................................ p.240
m. Political...................................................................................................................... p.241
n. This Tree..................................................................................................................... p.241
o. Multiple Categories................................................................................................. p.242

   a. Grateful Tree............................................................................................................. p.243
   b. Dream Tree............................................................................................................. p.244
   c. Proud Tree.............................................................................................................. p.245

G. INTERSECT OF 14 CATEGORIES AND RYFF’S SIX DIMENSIONS.............................. p.246

H. RYFF’S 6 DIMENSIONS EXPLAINED........................................................................ p.251

BIBLIOGRAPHY................................................................................................................ p.253
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Ryff, (2013), Core dimensions of psychological well-being and their theoretical functions ................................................................. p.16
3. Theories, Aims, Practices and Catalyst Flow Diagram .................................................... p.31
4. Lydon et al., (2015), Spectrum of tactical urbanism from unsanctioned to sanctioned ................................................................. p.36
5. Millie, (2019), God save the Queen and her fascist regime: Yarn bombing as craftivism ........................................................................ p.45
6. Co-Creation Continuum ...................................................................................................... p.47
7. Yang, (June 20 2020), George Floyd Square .................................................................. p.59
8. Precedent Category x Motivations ...................................................................................... p.62
9. Co-Creation Continuum With Precedents ....................................................................... p.64
10. Co-Creation Precedent x Motivations ............................................................................... p.65
11. Conventional v. Emergent Processes .............................................................................. p.73
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

To flourish and prosper is our ultimate goal. It means living a life that meets all our needs. It’s the goal of everything we do.

--Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics
Trans. Beresford, A., 2020, 1097b20

My journey throughout the development of this thesis did not follow a straight line. An abiding interest in understanding the world and our place in it led me through my first master’s degree studying communications, then a career designing jewelry, and now my education in landscape architecture and regional planning. Along the way I have become attuned to new information, incorporating fresh perspectives into my own—a constant and purposeful evolution.

My flexible exploratory nature lends itself to creative fields and now, creative research methodologies. This is a new understanding of my research process. In my first thesis scope for my MLA, I began from the same point of interest that I am now writing from: eudaimonia. I have carried this concept with me throughout my studies at UMass ever since my first semester in the program. In one of my first landscape architecture studios we were asked to consider what our source of inspiration would be for the project we were about to begin. Around this time, I had what turned out to be a highly influential conversation with a Greek friend of mine. I was describing to her my overall vision for my future design work in the landscape. “Sounds like eudaimonia” she said. I asked her to explain what that was and she gave me a general understanding of the ancient Greek term. Inspired, I looked up articles on the subject to become
more familiar with it as it seemed to so completely encapsulate much of what inspired my art, my jewelry business, and now my future career working in the landscape.

For studio I drew a representation of eudaimonia in the form of two flowers diverging from one stem, each with a unique flower head (Appendix A.1). Blocks of text circled around them explaining my idea that public spaces have the ability to inspire eudaimonia, ‘flourishing’, in people who come upon them when created with that concept in mind. This was my source of inspiration for that project, and for every project since. With each new studio, my application of the concept shifted to meet the unique conditions of the site and project goals. I always found a way to express the flourishing aspects of the ancient concept, and through it all, my understanding has deepened and I have become more convinced of eudaimonia’s potential impact on landscape design and planning initiatives.

This is where my initial thesis began. Old notes from then that I have since revisited outline my thought process from eudaimonia to placemaking to spaces for youth. I was interested in creating spaces in the landscape designed for youth as so much of our public spaces restrict their access, limiting their ability to flourish. I unfortunately allowed this initial inspiration to be swept up into the rigid structure of research methodologies typical of the field. I began with a hypothesis and research questions aimed at understanding a specified problem, conducted a literature review, and outlined a strategy for answering my research questions. My strategy followed the visual preference survey model and would have been distributed to high school students in Springfield, MA in conjunction with conducting small focus group sessions.
Perhaps one of the few benefits of the global pandemic that hit in early 2020 was the limitation it imposed on my research process. I was not able to conduct my research in the manner I had proposed, and kept encountering obstacles because of the restrictions on in-person research sanctioned by the university. After presenting my proposed thesis in fall 2020, I was left faced with the reality that a) the pandemic’s impact was greatly limiting my research abilities on this topic and b) I was so far from my initial inspiration that the topic did not feel like my own anymore. After a few days of deep internal exploration, I alerted my committee that I would be pursuing a different (still unknown) topic for my thesis. To my great relief, they understood and I released myself to my intuitive reflections once again.

By winter break, the annual time for setting up a communal tree in a local park in my hometown of Newton, MA was approaching. The tradition was inspired in December, 2019 during a chance encounter with a ‘community tree’ erected on a neighbor’s property in Amherst, MA. The neighbor had placed an artificial Christmas tree along the road and tacked a prompt onto its branches asking the public to share their ‘hopes and dreams’ for 2020. The tree was filled with community responses, and the installation left me inspired to recreate the tree in my hometown.

Once on break for the semester, I bought a similar tree and used the same prompt wording and card design as the community tree in Amherst. I was interested in finding a different location than the front of my house as I wanted to expand participation to a wider audience of Newton and maintain anonymity for myself and participants. I settled on a trail at the mouth of the woods leading into Cold Spring Park and set up the installation on an early morning in late December, 2019. To my surprise, nearly all the blank cards I had provided were
used by the afternoon, a trend of engagement that continued through the last day of the installation. After a little over a week I dismantled the tree and decided it would become an annual tradition.

By December, 2020 Covid had sunk the nation, and the world, into a crippling pandemic, leaving society isolated and community intangible. I sensed the community tree would find new relevance and set it up earlier than in the previous year in order to provide this opportunity for community expression sooner. The prompt was worded similarly to the first year, however I changed the topic to ‘gratefulness’. This was intended to inspire appreciation in the community, allowing them space to explore the good in their life when COVID felt all encompassing. To my surprise, all twenty cards I had provided were used that first day, already reaching the total cards used in the week the tree was up in 2019. This to me reflected the potential need the public was experiencing for a sense of community and a form to express positive aspects of life that were still around during such dark days.

I decided to expand the installation by creating two more, each using different trees, prompts, and locations. I was inspired to understand what types of conditions create the best opportunity for high quality and quantity of engagement in what I later understood to be ‘participatory art’. Each prompt in this pilot study focused on one of three eudaimonic virtues: gratitude, aspiration, and attainment. After carefully selecting two additional sites and varying trees (one evergreen and one deciduous), I set up the “Dream Tree” and “Proud Tree” (named for their prompts) just a day after the “Grateful Tree” (previously the “community tree”). The installations were active for a little over two weeks, during which time I tended to their card stock, documented engagement practices, and observed participation.
By the end the Grateful Tree had received 108 messages, the Dream Tree 45, and the Proud Tree 37 for a total of 190 notes. All three sites showed varying levels of success and shortcomings which I will explore through an in depth analysis of the message contents, site conditions, prompt phrasing, observation sessions, and other critical data points. My central hypothesis I will explore is that public participatory art installations have the potential to inspire the community to express eudaimonia when the intention to do so guides the process, from conception to completion. This can be done particularly when participatory art installations combine tactics of collaborative placemaking, DIY urbanism and community-based art therapy, creating an opportunity to engage and connect the community. This enables mental health to improve through the design of healing places and art practices, and the act of communal dreaming through co-creation.

This exploratory thesis seeks to uncover lessons for creating eudaimonically-inspired participatory art installations in public space. It investigates a variety of questions. What are the tools and techniques at our disposal to create community during COVID and otherwise? Can participatory art projects be used to elicit public opinion that accesses deeper concepts than traditional public engagement approaches? What benefits to design practices would expanding the approach to include more heuristic (self-learning) practices offer? After exploring all of these questions, as well as subsequent ones, I am left with the ultimate question of my thesis: What conditions should a designer be aware of in order to create a public participatory art installation that engages the community holistically, improving their well-being and ability to flourish?

Employing design as an instrument of research, this thesis uses eudaimonia as a framework for an approach to participatory art installations that can be implemented in a more
planned way going forward in order to help foster a better functioning community. Through
design, I explore the potential to inspire eudaimonia in the broader public, applying its
overarching themes to the co-creation of participatory art installations at three sites.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this expansive review, Aristotle’s eudaimonic philosophy, modern interpretations, urban conditions, the need for nature connection, the practices of community-based art therapy and DIY urbanism, and participatory art will be explored. Through the seamless connection from one topic to the next, I carry the reader through the thought process of my thesis, investigating the role participatory art can have in catalyzing community change through engagement practices in the landscape.

A. Aristotle’s Eudemian Philosophy

1. In His Own Words: The Eudemian Ethics & The Nicomachean Ethics

Aristotle’s interests spanned diverse fields, from ethics to zoology, aesthetics to mathematics. For the purpose of this paper I will focus on one of his many ideas—eudaimonia—and limit my references to two of his treatises, *The Eudemian Ethics (EE)* and *The Nicomachean Ethics (NE)*. This is to ensure the subject at hand—the role of creating participatory art to enable eudaimonic spaces for the public to engage, connect, and grow from—is not lost in the many directions the following discussion could take.

The etymological origins of the word “eudaimonia” are composed of two terms: “eu” meaning “well” or “good” and “daimon” meaning “spirit” or “self.” Aristotle used the Greek word, *eudaimonia*, to describe the highest form of human potential. He spent years teaching its
meaning and value at the ancient Lyceum, an informal institution for philosophers and scientists to discuss new ideas and works. While Aristotle’s lecture notes were not preserved, two seminal collections of notes taken, most likely by his pupils, during his lecture series are captured in the *NE* and the *EE*. Their contents are believed to date back to the 340s and 330s BCE during the final phase of his philosophical career, and have been translated by many.

While Aristotle never clearly defines the term, the closest he comes is through a question: “So why shouldn’t we say that someone is flourishing (or is blessed), if they’ve been exercising complete goodness, and they’re adequately supplied with external goods, and they’ve been that way not just for some trivial amount of time but for their entire life?” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1101a14-16). We can recognize that in this translation synonyms for eudaimonia include “flourishing” and being “blessed.” These are some of the closest words the English language has to describe this ancient concept. Other common translations include “well-being” and “self-fulfillment.” To Aristotle, flourishing is only possible by “exercising complete goodness” which he defines as man’s *ergon*, man’s “function” or “task.” Throughout both books, Aristotle explores what unique purpose humans have, finding his answer in the soul’s pursuit of virtue through our ability to reason. To Aristotle, it is critical that living virtuously is a sustained practice and not experienced “for some trivial amount of time.” The more noble and moderate a person is in their reasoning skills throughout all of life’s situations, the better life they will lead, and will therefore have attained a human’s chief good: eudaimonia.

In *EE*, Aristotle breaks down “living well” into three influences—virtue, wisdom, and pleasure—and demonstrates their application in several books that make up *EE*, such as in *Book III. The Moral Virtues* and *Book V. Intellectual Virtue*. Aristotle claims that without possessing all
three, there is no means to flourish. He links virtue and wisdom throughout his teachings as co-requisites in one’s ability to reason correctly, perhaps captured best when he says that “all virtues are a form of knowledge” (Aristotle & Kenny, 2011, 1246a36). Since “Knowledge is a judgement about what is universal and necessary” (1140b31-32), virtue is equally important to possess in order for an individual to judge correctly with moderation.

Pleasure finds its role as “the unimpeded activity of a disposition in accordance with nature” as summed up by Kenny in his introduction to *EE* (xxiii). It is the part of eudaimonia we may refer to as “happiness” according to Aristotle who says,

> Given that every disposition has unimpeded exercises, it may be that the unimpeded exercise of all of them, or of one of them, is what happiness is; and, if so, it is perhaps necessary that this is the thing most worth choosing. This activity is a pleasure” (Aristotle & Kenny, 2011, 1153b7-11).

Kenny explains that this means “If happiness consists in the exercise of the highest form of virtue, and if the unimpeded exercise of a virtue constitutes a pleasure, then happiness and that pleasure are one and the same thing” (xxiii). Importantly, happiness is different from pleasure and is not considered a synonym for all of what Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia is intended to mean, it is one third of its meaning, and only serves a virtuous purpose in conjunction with virtue and wisdom.

In *NE*, Aristotle further clarifies this point when he states that “the key good for human beings turns out to be: activity of the soul that expresses our goodness or our virtues” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1098a16). What one finds pleasure in becomes the expression of their goodness, and therefore of their virtue and wisdom. Pleasure is the outward face of the two; only a good man finds pleasure in the right activities and thoughts.
In Aristotle’s decades of philosophizing humanity’s ultimate purpose in life, the conclusion remains that “flourishing, being blessed, is some form of contemplating” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1178b32) and that “A life of exercising your goodness in that way will be a life of ‘flourishing’ and ‘prospering’” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1179a9). This requires that all aspects of our interactions and relationships are approached with thoughtfulness, moderation, and virtue. Only by sustaining this level of engagement with our community and ourselves can we fulfill our potential to live eudaimonically.

2. Reinterpretations of Aristotle

a. Modern Philosophy

There are many aspects of eudaimonia that modern philosophers have addressed in their works. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on two aspects that are most relevant to my discussion later regarding my pilot study: human function, and the difference between happiness and eudaimonia.

A primary component of Aristotle’s eudaimonia is reaching one’s fullest human potential and function, referred to in Greek as ergon. Nagel (1972) focuses on the role of ergon in achieving eudaimonia, claiming that ergon, or the function of the thing, is dependent on what defines it as that thing in the first place. To Aristotle, the primary feature defining humans as different from “a giraffe is that a human being has reason, and that his entire complex of organic functions supports rational as well as irrational activity” (p256). Humans have the capacity to reason rationally due to the makeup of our species.
Hester (1991) addresses this biological interpretation of Aristotle's *ergon* and challenges it as misguided, focusing her discussion on *NE*'s Book I. Hester points out that Aristotle begins Book I by claiming “good has two characteristics—it is sought for its own sake and it is self-sufficient” (Hester, 1991, p6) and applies the same characteristics to eudaimonia. Hester argues that Aristotle sets the foundation of eudaimonia “based in a psychic function and not a biological one” (p7). For eudaimonia to have the two qualities of goodness “does not depend on relating the species of man to eudaimonia” (p6). The simplistic interpretation of Aristotle’s “function argument” (as Hester terms it) as being that man’s *biological* function is the source of rational value, should be replaced with the “*cultural experience*, as embodied in the opinions of the many and the wise” (p7). “Individual experience of what activities give eudaimonia converts cultural memory from mere memory to a living end” (p7), and paints the broader picture Aristotle was intending. Hester furthers her point by asserting Aristotle’s claim that “The truth in practical matters is discerned from the facts of life” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1179a19). Man’s function should be understood as a cultural manifestation of values, and not an inherently biological function.

Modern philosophers, having the advantage of great familiarity with ancient philosophical concepts, generally argue that eudaimonia and happiness are not synonymous, but not all agree. In the context of Aristotle’s eudaimonia, European philosopher Carlotta Capuccino contends that “we can easily realize that eudaimonia was for a Greek what happiness is for us today and that therefore Aristotle’s theory relates to the common sense of his time in the same way that our contemporary theories about happiness relate to today’s common sense” (2013, p12). To Capuccino, happiness can be used as a marker of eudaimonia in modern life.
since the morals espoused by a eudaimonic life coincide with pleasure. “To be happy is a moral
duty because our nature demands it” and it “cannot be separated from fulfilling one’s own
moral profile” (p15). This assertion is rare in the literature of modern philosophy’s understanding
of Aristotle’s eudaimonia.

Moran (2018) contends that the two concepts “inhabit different concept worlds” and
that “there is a conceptual mismatch between eudaimonia and ‘happiness’” (p98) because of
this. To Moran these two different eras of history, separated by thousands of years and therefore
experiences, cannot be approached as synonymous eras and what eudaimonia meant to
Aristotle is not what happiness means to us. This requires that the two concepts be addressed in
their own unique contexts. With this in mind, Moran argues that Aristotle maintained a very
narrow concept of what constitutes happiness and pleasure. According to Moran, Aristotle’s idea
of “complete goodness” is questionable in the context of happiness because it is not clear that
happiness is an end at all.

Happiness is not a good that is achieved as other goods are, by pursuing them.
Happiness is a supervenient good, unsought (except as what philosophers call an
‘intentional object’) and unforeseen. One cannot imagine Aristotle’s happy man being
‘surprised by joy’.” (p95)

To Aristotle, happiness can only come from reason, which excludes, for example, children from
being considered happy due to their limited reasoning abilities and unexpected moments of
happiness. In addition, happiness is defined by its phenomenological element, a critical aspect
Aristotle did not consider when describing eudaimonia as only experienced through action.

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive and clear distinctions between happiness and
eudaimonia is made by Timothy Chappell in his 2013 article, *Eudaimonia, Happiness, and the*
Redemption of Unhappiness. In this article Chappell focuses on NE, challenging the value of eudaimonia and offering an alternative solution for how to live our best lives. Chappell develops a framework for understanding what constitutes “happiness” and “unhappiness” before addressing their relation to “eudaimonia” which he claims “barely overlap” (p34) with the two. In his argument he asks us what would be eudaimonia’s opposite if unhappiness is the opposite of happiness? The NE never provides an opposite to eudaimonia even though “Aristotle himself was notoriously swift to neologise wherever he felt a need” (p34) and yet he did not do so with this main concept in his lectures. The closest Aristotle comes to describing unhappiness is through the word, athlios, which can be translated as “unsuccessful,” so pairing eudaimonia and athlios as we would happy and unhappy does not work. Chappell then provides a clear distinction between happiness and eudaimonia:

Happiness in one sense can be (1) a matter of temperament, or a(n emotional/affective) response to some event or state of affairs; eudaimonia cannot possibly be either. Eudaimonia does correlate (2) with getting what we want and (3) with seeing justice done; but not in the way that happiness does, and only on condition that we want the right things and are on the right side of the doing of justice. (4) Eudaimonia simply cannot mean, as ‘happiness’ can, either satisfaction with a job well done, or more broadly, any positive affective state. (5) Unlike happiness, eudaimonia cannot be either justified or unjustified - if it is present at all, it is automatically justified; nor can eudaimonia be proportionate or disproportionate. (To what?) In fact, it is only with my distinctions (6) and (7) that happiness and eudaimonia even come into contact, as a closer look at Aristotle's discussion brings out. (p35)

Aristotle’s main concern is not with happiness but with what can be considered human good. It is this question that inspires Aristotle to explore the concept of eudaimonia, and not happiness.

Chappell cautions that living a eudaimonic life does not necessarily mean it will be a happy one. He asks, “What is to ensure that enacting the human function will coincide with positive emotions?” (p37-38). Chappell’s conclusion homes in on the question of how one who
is unhappy can achieve happiness “without losing touch with the persons they have been up till now” (p45). He terms his answer “the redemption of unhappiness”, a concept where “happiness might not merely cancel out unhappiness, but actually incorporate it: that an unhappiness might not merely be erased and replaced by a superseding happiness, but might survive to become an element within a larger narrative whole of happiness” (p49). Chappell recognizes that unhappiness serves a human purpose just as much as happiness does, and suggests that instead of shunning this side of existence, it should be embraced. For example, “one of the great recurring commonplaces of human history is that we can learn wisdom from both happiness and unhappiness - but especially from unhappiness” (p51).

Chappell’s holistic approach fills the gaps Aristotle left behind by not explicitly addressing the flip side of eudaimonia. The ancient philosopher’s focus on the ideal human life ignored the true nature of what it is like to be human, which is to fail or feel as though we have failed. Happiness cannot be considered intrinsic to eudaimonia, as Aristotle proclaims, because humans are complicated and have many aims to their actions. Our reasoning evolves constantly and cannot be “neatly or definitively coordinated around, or subordinated to, any single ultimate aim or plan in life” (Chappell, 2013, p42). Chappell embraces happiness and unhappiness as both positives in life that should be addressed together and not separately as Aristotle and countless other philosophers have done, leading to false conclusions that ignore our human condition.

b. Modern Psychology
i. Theoretical Frameworks

“Well-being,” “life satisfaction” and “subjective happiness” are a few of the most common synonyms modern psychology scholars use when referring to concepts expressed in Aristotle’s eudaimonia. This is a relatively new approach. Unlike the field of philosophy, rich with experts in the ancient Greek language, the lack of an exact English translation of eudaimonia led many founders of modern psychology to misinterpret Aristotle’s concept. To many, “happiness” was its equivalent and served as the primary interest of countless theories and pursuits. This misunderstanding is addressed in depth by Carol Ryff (1989) who claims the confusion on the difference between happiness and eudaimonia led to many misguided psychological studies seeking the quantification of people’s happiness, or more often, unhappiness, as the field tended to focus on the negative side of human existence in its formative years. She claims that “Had Aristotle’s view of eudaimonia as the highest of all good been translated as realization of one’s true potential rather than as happiness, the past 20 years of research on psychological well-being might well have taken different directions” (p1070). This led instead to an emphasis on the hedonic-based “distinction between positive and negative affect” (p1070)—happiness or unhappiness—rather than studying the multi-dimensional features inherent in achieving eudaimonia.

In her article, Ryff explores the most prominent theories in psychology that touch on some of these aspects, such as Maslow’s “self-actualization,” Jung’s “individuation” and Alport’s concept of “maturity.” Ryff notes that these theories attempt to understand human well-being beyond the black and white, happy or unhappy, limitations of the psychology field dominant at the time. However she finds there are six factors to well-being that clarify the essence of these
theories: self acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Since Ryff’s publication, many eudaimonic well-being analyses have used her six subscales.

In a later article published in 2013, Ryff features these factors in a diagram demonstrating where each overlaps with a key psychology theory, shown in Figure 1.

**Fig. 1.**

![Core dimensions of psychological well-being and their theoretical functions (Ryff, 2013, p.11)](image)

In this article, Ryff dives deeper into the reason these measures were consistent with a eudaimonic perspective, more than earlier studies that focused on the hedonic approach of understanding well-being. She notes that to Aristotle,

> the highest of all human goods is *not* happiness, feeling good or satisfying appetites. Instead, it is about activities of the soul that are in accord with virtue, which Aristotle elaborated to mean striving to achieve the best that is within us. Eudaimonia thus captured the essence of the two great Greek imperatives: first, to know yourself, and second, to become what you are.” (p11)
Achieving a life lived to one’s fullest potential was at the crux of Aristotle’s decades of ethical philosophy, and is today’s highest mark of personal and societal achievement. Figuring out whether someone is happy or not does a disservice to human capacity. Rather than focusing on the pleasure-seeking side of humanity, it is important to understand how to nurture the growth of our deepest sense of satisfaction—that which sustains our hopes, aspirations, and connections to each other—which can be called a flourishing life.

Ryan et al. (2006) developed a model of eudaimonia based on an extensive review of psychological and medical research conducted over decades in their comprehensive article, *Living Well: A Self Determination Theory Perspective on Eudaimonia*. Their model is based in self-determination theory (SDT) and demonstrates the overlap of eudaimonic living and motivational concepts inherent in SDT. They find that four concepts describe a eudaimonic life:

1. pursuing intrinsic goals and values for their own sake, including personal growth, relationships, community, and health, rather than extrinsic goals and values, such as wealth, fame, image, and power;
2. behaving in autonomous, volitional, or consensual ways, rather than heteronomous or controlled ways;
3. being mindful and acting with a sense of awareness; and
4. behaving in ways that satisfy basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. (p139)

Throughout their article, they treat Aristotle’s eudaimonic theory as a framework but not the final word on what eudaimonia is.

Ryan et al. provide an expansive review of studies that demonstrate the psychological benefits eudaimonically-motivated actions have over hedonic ones. For example, “Kasser and Ryan (1993) found that persons whose aspirations for financial success were strong relative to those for relationships, growth, and community had lower well-being on a number of indicators” (p51). Wealth, along with fame, image and other extrinsic aspirations fall under hedonically-
motivated volition. In contrast intrinsic aspirations “for personal growth, deep relationships, and
generativity” (p147) are examples of eudaimonic motivations. Ryan et al explain that SDT
theorizes three needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—all of which can be attained
by satisfying intrinsic (eudaimonic) goals that in turn enhance well-being.

Ryan et al.’s review also addresses the physiological benefits of eudaimonic living. “Some
of this body of work makes it plausible that it is eudaimonic living that yields better physical
health, such as the within-person approach of Reis et al. (2000) and some of the in-depth
studies accomplished by Ryff and colleagues” (p162). The studies suggest that positive
psychology predicts beneficial physical health outcomes.

The positive physiological implications of eudaimonia have been studied by many
psychologists. Diener & Seligman (2004) argue that a key influence on peoples’ subjective sense
of well-being is the effect it has on one’s health. They provide several examples from studies,
such as one longitudinal study conducted by Kubzansky et al. who “found that people with an
optimistic explanatory style had better pulmonary function than people with a more pessimistic
style, and showed a slower decline in health over 8 years” (p14). Diener & Seligman continue
that “Other studies have shown that happy people act in healthier ways than unhappy people
do. For example, individuals who report high wellbeing exercise more and engage in more
physical activity than people who report low well-being” (p14).

The article addresses the issue of having a mental disorder which they state “almost
always causes poor well-being” (p16), with bi-polar disorder, depression and anxiety all
contributing to lower life satisfaction rates. The effects of mental illness are not limited to the
individual experiencing the disease. Studies have found that family suffering increases due to
mental disorders and the effect caring for a family member with such a condition has on the whole family.

Diener & Seligman suggest that it is social relationships that have lasting effects on an individual’s subjective experience of well-being. The more connections one has, the less lonely they will be, reducing the risks associated with loneliness which include “psychological problems, physical impairments, and low life satisfaction” (p19). They argue that personal well-being should take a more prominent role in policy making as “well-being is the common desired outcome” (p2) of life. Economic measures of well-being fail to give a full account of quality of life, yet it is often the metric used by politicians when outlining agendas of increased jobs and minimum wage. Instead, Diener & Seligman suggest that increased social amenities would do far more for the communities targeted by politicians by improving their health and life-satisfaction.

ii. Effects of Urban Living

Environments that do not support mental and physiological health present obstacles to achieving a sense of well-being. The taxing environment of urban life is an increasingly salient topic in modern psychology, and should be emphasized more in the urban design and planning fields. Stressors unique to cities such as their condensed, heterogeneous makeup and disconnect from nature have led to startling statistics regarding city dwellers’ well-being. Adli’s 2011 article, Urban Stress and Mental Health, points to chronic stress exposure common to city living as the leading cause of increased risk of developing mental disorders. His article urges architects, urban planners and other stakeholders to take seriously the impact urban living has
on its residents and to make design and policy choices that address it. According to Adli, city dwellers have a 20% higher risk of developing anxiety disorders and a 40% higher risk of developing mood disorders such as depression. Schizophrenia is at double the risk for city dwellers. Some factors leading to increased stress include living in crowded areas, which “is associated with increased social stress, since the environment becomes less controllable for the individual” (p2); “disparities also become much more prominent in cities and can impose stress on the individual” (p2); and even physical impacts such as the over production of cortisol which reflects chronic stress conditions. According to Adli, social stress appears to be the largest contributor to higher risks of developing mental disorders in urban residents, and “seems to outweigh other urban stressors such as pollution or noise” (p2).

An article by Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryan published in 2009 explores the role location plays in subjective happiness by revisiting Wirth’s 1938 theory of the Urban-Rural Happiness Gradient in a modern context. Using data gathered between 1972 and 2008 from the General Social Survey (GSS) which asks respondents various questions that indicate subjective happiness, Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryan evaluate the geographical dispersion of happiness depending on four levels of population: rural, suburban, small central cities, and large central cities. Their study found that “happiness has been lowest in the nation’s largest cities and has consistently been at its highest levels in small towns and rural areas” (p874). They extrapolate from their findings that “Higher population densities produced frequent physical contacts, high-paced living, and the segregation of people in a residential mosaic in which people with similar backgrounds and needs consciously selected, unwittingly drifted, or were forced by circumstances into the same district of the city” (p873).
It is important to reflect on this gradient in today's context. In recent years, rural resentment and reduced resources in low-density communities have complicated Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryan’s analysis. In 2021, Okulicz-Kozaryan returned to this research, along with Rubia Valente, in order to fill in some gaps. They used data from the World Values Survey between 1981 and 2020 “which is representative of about 90% of the world population” (p1) rather than the GSS survey and, in a later article, the Gallup Survey (Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryan, 2011), referring to the Gallup as “inadequate and poorly designed” (p1). While their findings generally still support the original gradient, (“without exception, we find that city dwellers are not happier than rural residents” (p2)) more nuanced findings did surface, including the need for more consideration of “smaller areas that have been left behind” due to “Redirecting resources away from smaller places” (p3).

Atkins et al. (2021) call these forgotten smaller communities “blind spots” and point out that the same disadvantaged, generally metropolitan, communities—Flint, MI; Cleveland, OH; Camden, NJ—tend to be the most visible for receiving resources and aid while “the 100 most disadvantaged communities are on tribal lands or clustered in less densely populated geographic regions, like Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta” (p27-28). Grants and policy measures often overlook these rural communities, causing ‘death from despair’. Philanthropy, they note, is “heavily skewed toward urban areas” (p28) according to the 2007 Rural Philanthropy report referenced in this article. They argue that more attention and resources must be given to America’s most neglected communities in order to truly achieve the philanthropic and governmental goal of ‘equity’ across the nation. In the context of my thesis, it
is important to be aware that the sense of well-being in rural, suburban, and urban communities is complicated by levels of resources, in addition to human connection.

Adams (1992) explores America’s middle ground between rural and urban living in his article, *Is Happiness a Home in the Suburbs? The Influence of Urban Versus Suburban Neighborhoods on Psychological Health*. In his analysis of the “‘happy suburbanite' hypothesis” (p353), Adams explores the relationship between high self-efficacy and living a dissatisfied life. On the one hand he refers to studies that show high density, heterogeneous populations cause “psychic overload” in urbanites who “respond to this psychic overload by ignoring, or at least allocating less time to, individuals they meet, adopt a cold exterior to block strangers from talking to them, refuse to participate in local activities, and engage in only exploitative or superficial forms of social interaction” (p356). Yet other studies show that suburbanites, who are largely in low-density, homogenous settings, do not experience “stronger neighborhood satisfaction, more positive perceptions of their life, and stronger feelings of self-efficacy” (p367) than people living in cities. Adams concludes that the actual cause of increased life satisfaction metrics is dependent on social connection and not residence location. “The more socially integrated into the local community people were, the more positively they viewed their community, which in turn, promoted good psychological health” (p398).

**B. Restorative Environments**

The environments we live in play an enormous role in our development but are often overlooked for the convenience of more tangible factors of well-being such as poverty and
crime rates, housing opportunities, and good school systems. While these play a vital role in our development, the substantial yet subtle influence our environments have on us is often overlooked. Many studies have explored how our surroundings influence us both cognitively and physically. The conclusion common to the majority of them is that our environments influence us in significant ways. Unfortunately public policy and design choices tend to focus on the aforementioned tangible aspects of human existence exclusively, and overlook the decades of research that outline the role our physical environment plays in shaping our well-being.

1. Nature Connection

The natural world provides humans mental and health benefits that have been studied through a variety of frameworks. In Yi-Fu Tuan’s seminal book, *Space + Place* (1977), the function of environment is explored by investigating the general concepts of “space” and “place,” and what distinguishes the two. He starts his inquiry by claiming “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place’” and only turns from “undifferentiated space” into a place when “we get to know it better and endow it with value” (p6). Later in his text he further clarifies this and writes, “When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place” (p73). He argues that space feels exposed and public whereas a place feels intimate and private. To Fuan, “Intimate occasions are often those in which we become passive and allow ourselves to be vulnerable, exposed to the caress and sting of new experience” (p137). It is difficult to make intimate experiences public, whether between people or things. Trees, he argues, are an exception, “planted for aesthetic effect but their real value may lie as stations for poignant, unplanned
human encounters” (p142-143). He also relates the intimacy of art to the public realm when he writes that “Art makes images of feelings so that feeling is accessible to contemplation and thought” (p148). Based on Fuan’s investigation of placemaking, the combination of art and trees would therefore lead to an unusually intimate opportunity to create a “place” by transforming a public “space.”

There is also a broad field of study on “nature connectedness” and its effects on well-being. Pritchard et al. focused their recent 2020 analysis of eudaimonic well-being (EWB) in relation to nature connection (NC). They point out the disproportionate number of studies addressing hedonic well-being (HWB) generated by NC compared to the relatively few discussing the relationship between EWB and NC. In their subsequent analysis, twenty-five studies were explored using positive affect and life satisfaction HWB subscales in combination with Ryff’s six EWB subscales of personal growth, autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, self acceptance, and positive relations with others, as well as vitality (based on other EWB research). The HWB and EWB subscales served as indicators of hedonic and eudaimonic effects due to NC. Pritchard et al. found that although there was a slight correlation between NC and EWB, “indicating that individuals who are connected to nature are more likely to be flourishing and functioning well psychologically” (p1159), a stronger correlation existed between NC and HWB. However, when analyzing the EWB indicators, the strongest correlation of the subscales to NC was with personal growth which Ryff notes is the closest to eudaimonia of her six distinctions of well-being (Ryff, 1989).

There is a broad body of research on the concept of “therapeutic landscapes,” first named by Gesler in 1992. This concept is thoroughly explored in his 2003 book, Healing Places.
His first line captures the sentiment best when he writes “Healing and place are inseparable” (p1). According to Gesler, there are four environments “that contribute to a healing sense of place: natural, built, symbolic, and social” (p2). Details of what aspects are encompassed by each of these environments are outlined in Figure 2 below.

**Fig. 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Aspects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Belief in nature as healer&lt;br&gt;Beauty, aesthetic pleasure&lt;br&gt;Remoteness, immersion in nature&lt;br&gt;Specific elements of nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built</td>
<td>Sense of trust and security&lt;br&gt;Affects the senses&lt;br&gt;Pride in building history&lt;br&gt;Symbolic power of design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Creation of meaning&lt;br&gt;Physical objects as symbols&lt;br&gt;Importance of rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Equality in social relations&lt;br&gt;Legitimization and marginalization&lt;br&gt;Therapeutic community concept&lt;br&gt;Social support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Aspects of a Healing Environment (Gesler, 2003, p8)**

Environments are heightened in therapeutic value when a combination of these types are present.

A recent publication by Bell et al. (2018) explores the impact Gesler’s “therapeutic landscapes” theory has had on research in the years since then, specifically between 2007 and 2016. From 161 articles collected from three online data bases—Web of Science, ProQuest and Scopus—Bell et al. summarize findings in an expansive catalogue of research. One area of analysis Gesler’s theory has inspired is the concept of “third spaces.” These are informal social spaces that become “havens of sociability away from home” (p126), such as cafés, public libraries, and activity clubs. Research has shown that these provide a “safe space for self-expression, candid dialogue” (p126) and escape to individuals.
Bell et al. point out in their discussion that there has been “relatively little research examining therapeutic landscapes through the arts” (p127), a reality they expressed surprise at given the mainstreaming of art therapy. Bell et al. provided a brief overview of some areas in the arts that have explored the role of therapeutic landscapes such as comparative analysis in literature (Willis, 2009; Houghton and Houghton, 2015), the effect on people in hospital waiting rooms exposed to landscape paintings on the walls (Evans et al., 2009), and therapeutic landscape sounds evident in music (Evans, 2014). Bell et al. did not discuss any research regarding the therapeutic effects of art in the landscape.

2. Art Therapy

Art’s healing qualities are often explored in the modern frame of ‘Art Therapy’. Its unique ability to enable expression and elicit emotion has been used to help people through difficult moments with the guidance of art therapists. Before diving into the field of Art Therapy and its role in my thesis, it is important to better understand how art relates to well-being.

To begin I turn to Wright & Pascoe (2013) who argue that relationships are what make our societies work and are our “hidden wealth” (p296), creating an impact on our wellbeing and sense of meaning. In addition, the arts are undeniably and “profoundly concerned with meaning-making, both through their practices and also interactions with artefacts that are developed as a consequence” (p296). When harnessed, “‘hidden wealth’ and arts practices bring connectedness and meaning-making together through the human impulse to create and express human experience and flourishing” (p296). Wright & Pascoe continue that
the Arts offer both tools for inquiry as well as expression, they offer both depth through linking cognition, affect and somatic ways of knowing, and breadth through multi-modal forms for sharing and engaging with diversity of viewpoints, experience, ideas and visions. In this way, participants are linked through sharing what is life affirming and has meaning. (p296)

Wellbeing is a “a process of becoming” (p296) just as art is. Through the practice of art, people acquire skills for responding to life’s events such as flexibility, fluidity, and leaning into change due to the freedom of imagination required in art making. Art allows people to ‘make’ new worlds, imagine new possibilities. This ‘making’ “has profound consequences for human flourishing through ‘functionings’” or “what a person is feasibly able to achieve” (p297), expanding their previously conceived limitations.

Since the start of the 21st Century, there is a growing trend in community-based health care (Kapitan et al., 2011; Ottermiller & Awais, 2016). Art therapy theorists have been urging practitioners to take note of this shift and develop more community-based art therapy initiatives. Ottemiller & Awais (2016) point out that as poor mental health continues to plague vast swaths of society, “One of the largest obstacles to mental health treatment is the fear of stigma” (p144). They note that “Art therapists and artists have a unique and powerful means for engaging and healing communities, reducing stigma, and generating social change” (p144). Finding ways for the community to participate in art making has the potential to affirm their worth and build a collective identity (Ottemiller & Awais, 2016).

Kapitan et al. (2011) use the umbrella term “creative art therapy” to describe the development of healing arts practices in community settings, pointing out the power of art as “a transformational act of critical consciousness” (p64), which “On the macro level of community practice...looks outward as well as inward, engaging a people’s collective dream life, their hopes
and images, their histories and current realities, and their discovery of new ways to go forward” (p64). In a community setting, art therapy practices break through barriers, enabling the public to see, reflect, and respond in new ways. In this way the community itself becomes the “client,” as Kapitan et al. point out, enabling art therapy to purposefully design therapeutic spaces and interventions specific to the community’s needs.

3. DIY Urbanism

In this era, our communities can feel as though they are not our own. Barriers of political red-tape and mandated approval processes seem to prevent immediate solutions to some of our most basic needs. This sense of inaction has inspired individuals and groups across the nation to enact change through what have been described as ‘spontaneous interventions’, ‘informal urbanism’, and more recently Do-It-Yourself (DIY) urbanism. These actions can take many forms such as unauthorized ‘shared-bike-lane’ signs spray painted on roads, billboards painted white, and benches left at bus stops where there had previously been no seating provided. Douglas (2012) points out that the history of formal design and planning in cities is relatively new.

As recently as a couple of centuries ago, the western city was still largely the popular bricolage it always had been. It featured considerable top-down design of course, as even ancient cities had, but was constructed day in and day out by its inhabitants as needed, right down to a good deal of architecture and streetscaping. It was largely during the 18th and 19th centuries that, in keeping with the wider standardization of enlightenment, modernity, and industrialization, the shaping of the urban built environment became increasingly formal and professionalized. From Nash, Hausmann, and Olmsted to building and zoning codes, Le Corbusier’s modernism, and ‘broken windows’ theory, by the 20th century western cities were not only master-planned but
tightly controlled and regulated, right down to the streets and sidewalks, essentially to be altered only by professionals. (p1)

Douglas continues that “informal alteration of urban space is as old as cities themselves” (p3) and yet we have collectively forgotten that history and often resign ourselves to the status quo of planning and design procedures. The urban built environment should be considered open to reinterpretation to reflect more livable, people-centric, and locally sensitive conditions (Douglas, 2012).

Douglas (2014) points out that unauthorized alterations in urban spaces have often been categorized in three ways: as acts of “vandalism”; “concept art” or other forms of personal expression; and “radical activism.” He argues that while the latter is perhaps the most sympathetic to the goals of unauthorized urban interventions, a fourth category is needed in order to capture the complexity of some of these public acts. Douglas defines “DIY urbanism” as “creative practices aimed at ‘improving’ the local built environment without permission in ways analogous to formal efforts” that “largely lack elements of destruction, self-promotion, or political communication and are defined far more centrally by their thoughtful, civic-minded design and functional implementation” (p11).

In his expansive research interviewing individuals and groups responsible for such interventions in three major cities—New York City, Los Angeles and London—Douglas found that “interventionists” often come from white, middle-income backgrounds; hold degrees in planning, design, or the arts; and are active in local politics. In other words, many DIY urban designers are familiar with the limitations (and slow process) of government interventions, come from positions of power themselves, and have deep knowledge of how to effect change in meaningful ways. Nonetheless, the actions of these civic-minded individuals with intentions to
create the “functional improvement of lived urban spaces through skillful, playful, and localized actions...have received little attention from social scientists or urban policy and planning professionals” (p6).

Iveson (2013) recognizes the limitations this ‘blind-eye-effect’ has on fixing the systems that are failing communities. He argues that while small-scale experiments in urban change can create impactful improvements, it is only the first step. Referencing Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city” from the 1960s (Lefebvre, 1968), Iveson contends that revealing alternative versions of a city within the city itself through these interventions should then lead to politicized campaigns to address those shortcomings. He writes that

DIY practices of appropriating urban space and infrastructure for alternative purposes do not necessarily constitute a democratic urban politics that will give birth to a new city. Certainly, such practices have the potential to establish democratic rights to the city. But for this potential to be realized, new democratic forms of authority in the city must be asserted through the formation and action of new political subjects. (p954)

In this way, interventions by the public would be viewed as more than ‘artsy’ moments and taken as serious implications of community needs. Iveson urges the DIY urbanists to consider reorienting their work in a more structured formality insistent on government awareness of the shortcomings experienced by the community.

C. The Role of Participatory Art

What can draw all of these ostensibly peripherally-related fields together? How does the ancient concept of eudaimonia and its relevance in today’s psychology; urban issues and the need for healing environments; the value of scaling art therapy to the community level; and DIY urbanism connect? This is where the role of participatory art finds meaning. This practice can be
understood as “art projects that involve many people...that rely on the collaboration between the artists and the audience” (Knutz & Markussen, 2020, p61). As described in the previous two sections, creation has a unique power to establish new realities in both the physical and mental world. Our potential as individuals as well as communities rests in our capacity to reshape our environments in ways that fit our needs and wants. Depending on the ‘people in power’ to effect change delays our ability to flourish now. Instead, why not enact change on our own terms? As members of our respective communities, we have the right to shape our environments, and arguably a civic duty to do so as long as it is beneficial and supports collective growth.

Before we begin to explore the layered connections between topics discussed in this literature review so far and participatory art, it is important to consider how best to ensure DIY activity will promote positive actions that address communal needs rather than become detrimental and harmful, risking local health, safety, and welfare. One critical purpose of DIY action is to generate dialogue. According to Dialogue: Rediscover the Transforming Power of Conversation written by the Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard, founders of the Dialogue Group, the purpose of dialogue is to 1) inquire to learn; 2) unfold shared meaning; 3) integrate multiple perspectives; and 4) uncover and examine assumptions. These four principles can serve to guide DIY actions in a positive, dialogic direction. Before beginning a project, consider how it may allow you and the community to learn, find common value, allow space for other perspectives, and investigate learned assumptions.

With this in mind, let us reflect on our discussion so far. Figure 3 outlines how the previous topics of this literature review relate to one another.

Fig. 3
When modern eudaimonia (which is rooted in Aristotle’s eudaimonia) is the base theory behind understanding the value of nature connection and challenges of urban environments, DIY urbanism and community-based art therapy practices are applicable mediums for addressing each. When DIY urbanism and community-based art therapy practices are combined they have the potential to become participatory art which can then act as a catalyst to improving urban environments, increasing nature connection, and building a connected community. Participatory art is arguably the ultimate form of both DIY urbanism and community-based art therapy practices when community well-being (modern eudaimonia) is the theory driving the aims. The application of participatory art is filtered through the community and back again, cycling through the DIY-urbanism-and-art-therapy-based-participatory art to inform further urban environment improvements and/or or nature connection goals. Modern eudaimonia becomes a check on intentions, guiding actions to attend to community well-being.

The benefits of art making are usually limited to the highly skilled. Many have found other careers to pursue or interests that they enjoy. For the artist, creating often becomes synonymous with breathing, needing to make art in order to feel whole. At the root of this need...
is a drive to express. But artists aren’t the only ones who need a means of expression. Those of us who are on a different path may not have tools to voice ourselves that are as easily accessible as artists do. This is the role of participatory art, particularly in public spaces. It can empower individuals to make their voices heard in a guided way. The artist responsible for creating such installations must provide the communal means of expression. The medium of participatory art defines the art that will be made and if the artist aims to improve the community’s well-being, it is important to consider this medium through the lens of eudaimonia and community—what will help nourish the greater good? This art is shared and shapeshifts, with each new act of participation adding a voice to the whole through co-creation.

Participatory art intrinsically makes tangible the existence of community. So often we live not knowing our neighbors, feeling limited to our known groups. The value of community is beginning to be addressed more directly since COVID-19 struck, which left many even more detached from society. However the benefits of community date back beyond ancient times. They are the basis for what pushed humanity to reach new technological feats and moral understandings. This act of ‘flourishing’ exists in its highest form in the ‘communal’ sense. ‘Eudaimonia’ may not be the word most would think of when trying to explain what they hope to get out of life, but it is often at the root of such thoughts. ‘To flourish’, ‘to be blessed’—the closest the English language has come in describing the essence of eudaimonia—are our shared goals for life. We all hope to live to our greatest potential, and to have family, friends—community—to enjoy it with. In this way, participatory art finds its place as the medium to teach the public the benefit of community, and to create a space for community to be felt, appreciated and contemplated.
Our preprogrammed lives that blind us to each other and ourselves are shaken awake by art that asks us to engage. Ellard (2015) describes the value of spontaneous encounters with art in the landscape as rare moments “when the journey breaks down and rules are broken...moments when we wake up and pay attention” (p84). He continues that “Such experiences...are the ones that make us aware of our surroundings and their impact on us” (p84). Spontaneous interventions (a form of DIY urbanism), when combined with art therapy based approaches (such as those aimed at inspiring well-being) that engage the public in participatory art act as a catalyst to communal awakening.

This approach could be particularly effective in urban environments where mental health issues are most commonly experienced. Argyle & Bolton (2005) argue that communities have extended too much focus on policy and not enough on the circumstances within which community lives, placing “emphasis on individuals rather than contexts” (p341). They continue that “The arts offered in a social community setting can increase community relationships, which in turn further increases well-being and potentially improves health” (p341). Art’s unique ability to “enable the expression of the otherwise inexpressible, and the experience of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual areas to which people otherwise have no access” (p342) makes it an ideal medium for communal healing, dreaming, and change. The participatory art piece becomes “more like a ‘conversation’ and people only participate if they want to” (p342), so the piece serves any purpose needed by the individual. They can witness the installation, engage with it, bring friends and family to experience it, or any combination depending on their mood and needs at that moment.
Ted Pures (2004) explains that “Rather than emphasizing process or production as the outcome, the exchange itself becomes the most important outcome identified through the project” (p11). He continues that “During a critical exchange, the conditions of the exchange itself are highlighted in such a way that they provide an expanded view of the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical forces at play” (p11). In other words, “EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST” (Beuys, 1973, p125). Every human has the capacity (and need) to explore ideas, themselves, and the contexts within which they live through the medium of art. It is the role of the community-minded artist and designer to enable this power in others through participatory art.

D. Precedent Studies

People performing interventions in our communities are not new and have taken many forms. For the purpose of this thesis, I have divided a collection of precedents into two overarching themes: Tactical Urbanism and Co-Creation. Within each theme are categories and precedents that follow from those categories. (Refer to Appendix B for visualization.) Each theme offers a variety of cases that range in motivation overlapping the six behind my pilot study: 1) Generate a sense of well-being; 2) Co-create with the public; 3) Form community connection; 4) Alter the urban experience; 5) Develop a place-based initiative; and 6) Produce a ‘surprise effect’ from the intervention. Through an extensive discussion of work by other designers, planners, and members of the public I will attempt to show that the new engagement style I have piloted combines motives behind many of the actions described into one seamless action.
1. Tactical Urbanism

As many city officials, planners, and residents know, changing the status quo in our communities can be a long and slow process. When the urban landscape is the topic of change, a complex network of interests from business owners, to abutting residents, to state infrastructure laws, to the basic need for funding can halt projects altogether. In recent decades a new approach has been adopted known as ‘tactical urbanism’ to work around these barriers to change. According to Berglund (2018), Lydon et al. (2012) coined the term in their manual, **Tactical Urbanism**, to describe grassroots strategies which included “placemaking, public art, street furniture and gardening” (p150). Yassin (2018) describes these tactics as “quick, low-cost, temporary, community based, scalable and creative interventions in attempt to improve the condition of cities, within both short and long term” (p254). Lydon et al. (2012) promoted the manual within the post-recession context as a novel alternative to state funded initiatives. By implementing non-permanent interventions, ideas can be piloted and researched in real-world conditions, opening new possibilities for reducing public pushback, finding creative solutions, and gaining data that support permanent installations.

Lydon & Garcia (2015) created a spectrum (Figure 4) of tactical urbanism actions that range from “unsanctioned” interventions (conducted by the public without official approval) to “sanctioned” interventions (conducted and approved by officials).

**Fig. 4**
Spectrum of tactical urbanism from unsanctioned to sanctioned (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

Several of these actions will be explored in the following two sections in order to better understand how tactical urbanism is currently being used to alter our urban experience, both formally and informally.

Before moving on, it is important to note that tactical urbanism is not necessarily an equitable act. Berglund (2018) points out a key difference between informal strategies and tactical urbanism depends on which community the interventions aim to serve. He writes that “informal acts are...done out of necessity and due to the city’s neglect in many neighborhoods” (p147), whereas people responsible for tactical urbanism are often serving those who “are part of a return to the city” (p147), in other words the gentrifying class. “These are newly arriving, often affluent residents making incremental changes to their neighborhoods” (p147). Berglund continues that “For individual residents, these two types of practices may have some overlap, but ultimately, informality often serves as a means to provide necessary services to a community, while tactical urbanism can be viewed as a way of getting the ball rolling towards more formalized urban regeneration” (p147). This distinction is critical to remain aware of as we
begin to explore a variety of tactical urbanism precedents, and should inform our understanding of who these acts are intended to serve.

a. Sanctioned Interventions

    City officials and planners have been sanctioning the use of tactical urbanism strategies more often in recent years as a form of urban renewal. The low cost, no commitment, experimental appeal helps bridge the gap between inaction and full investment in new ideas (Hou, 2020; Yassin, 2018). Lydon & Garcia (2015) describe a variety of officially supported tactical urbanism strategies that have been employed across the nation. They point out that many of the sanctioned interventions started out as unsanctioned and only after proof of concept were they adopted as options for officials to consider. The following are a couple of examples of interventions that began as unsanctioned and were later adopted as strategies for community improvement.

i. Intersection Repair

    In 1996 a group of community-minded residents of Portland, OR proposed to the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) painting an intersection as a street calming measure. At the time, there was no precedent for this in the city or anywhere else. The group was told “That’s public space—so no one can use it!” (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p96). The group switched tactics and applied for a block party permit. On the day of the block party, instead of setting up grills and street games, they moved forward with painting the intersection. They also put up a
children’s playhouse, which still exists today, and several other social amenities to enhance the sense of community. PBOT responded by threatening them with fines for “altering city streets without their permission” (p96). The group engaged the officials in a dialogue to explain the important street calming effects the painting had on driving behavior and provided surveys filled out by residents in the neighborhood supporting the act. According to Lydon & Garcia (2015) 85% of the respondents perceived the intervention as beneficial and impactful on reducing traffic speeds. After three months of talks, Portland agreed to allow the newly named ‘Share-It Square’ to remain. By 2000, an ‘intersection repair’ ordinance was passed allowing the traffic slowing tactic to be replicated across the city.

Intersection repair as a traffic calming tactic has since been adopted by cities and towns across the nation. Planning and design consulting firms actively promote intersection repair as a tactical strategy to municipalities that hire them. Neighborways Design in Massachusetts, for example, has been hired to implement nearly a dozen intersection repairs in the Boston metro area since 2017. What began as an act of well-intended civil disobedience has been adopted as a valuable and valid strategy for making impactful, low budget safety improvements in neighborhoods.

ii. Park(ing) Day, Parklets and Pavement to Parks

Public accounts of the origins of park(ing) day vary (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). As early as 2001 local activists in Ontario, Canada took over metered parking spaces and invited the public to fill them with instruments, bikes, wheelchairs, and anything else to help promote a carless
future. In 2005, designers at a San Francisco-based art studio called Rebar took a similar action. At lunch time, they crossed the street from their offices, paid a parking meter and set up a carpet of sod, a bench, and a tree to eat their lunch under. When a meter maid walked by and asked what they were doing, the designers replied that they had paid the meter and were simply using the rented space. And with that, the parking spot became a temporary park to enjoy lunch. When the meter expired, the Rebar employees packed up their belongings and went back to the office. This is another example of taking advantage of a city-sanctioned activity, in this case using a parking spot for an entirely different purpose than a car, in order to demonstrate a new function and possibility (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

Rebar would go on to field dozens of requests from the public to replicate the intervention and eventually created a how-to manual to empower community stewardship in this effort. These parking-spaces-turned-temporary-park became known as ‘parklets’ and have been implemented in cities as big as NYC. They range in use from pop-up cafes, to bike-repair ports, to the original temporary park. The fullest embrace of this initiative is found in the city where park(ing) day is widely believed to have originated—San Francisco. The city has adopted the idea of parklets in a municipally-run Pavement to Parks program, complete with a manual to guide parklet designs throughout the city (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). Park(ing) Day is also now an internationally recognized day of turning parking spaces into parklets.

As Berglund (2018) points out, however, this act reflects inequity in city law enforcement. “While not typically carried out by municipalities, these tactics that are orchestrated by individuals, non-profits, and local businesses are often implicitly endorsed by cities through their lack of regulation” (p151). He continues that “such tactics are superficial and apolitical” (p151),
with no real change being affected. And when funds are granted from municipal coffers, this shifts costs away from other services, making the act “complicit in the process of neoliberalization” (p151).

b. Unsanctioned Interventions

Douglas (2012a, 2014) points out that unsanctioned urban design interventions often result in a mixture of reactions by the public and officials, ranging from excitement and interest, to treating them as acts of vandalism and transgression. As demonstrated in the examples described in the previous section, most unauthorized interventions receive resistance. The following are examples of unsanctioned acts aimed at altering the urban experience that remain contentious, and at times are removed by officials.

i. Guerilla Gardening

In the 1970s, NYC’s Green Guerrilla movement led by Liz Christy marked the beginning of an effort to reclaim abandoned space for the public through gardening (Green Guerillas, 2021). Liz and her crew threw seeds over fences that barricaded vacant lots and ultimately grew and maintained unsanctioned gardens throughout the city. “The green guerillas began rallying other people to use community gardening as a tool to reclaim urban land, stabilize city blocks, and get people working together to solve problems” (Green Guerillas, 2021). Decades later guerilla gardeners are still using similar tactics to enable stewardship in their communities.
Lorraine Johnson (2006), a guerilla gardener in Canada, explains that activists like her “aren’t interested in taking over spaces that are already nurtured. They set their sights on the unloved and uncared-for corners of the cityscape, places of neglect” (p12). Through their approach of “the regenerative act of planting, they remind us all of shared responsibility” (p12). To Johnson, the beauty of the act is in its ambiguous origins. She writes,

By its very nature, though, guerilla gardening is an unsanctioned, surreptitious act that leaves hard-to-decipher traces on the landscape. Who really knows if those sunflowers along the laneway are the result of intention or serendipity? But perhaps that’s the main point—unexpected growth with a hint of purpose opens up questions, invites consideration. (p11)

Johnson describes this as “kick-starting the process of healing the land through natural regeneration” (p12). The sparked conversations and questions are as important as the beautifying result.

Hardman et al. (2018) describe how some are using the tactic of guerilla gardening to address food chain disparities. While many stigmatize the activity as illegal, Hardman et al. term it an “informal” act of urban agriculture which can be understood as “any form of growing activity conducted without permission of the land owner” (p7). Through their research, they explore what leads individuals to become guerilla gardeners. Hardman et al. found that the motivations vary from being unsure how to obtain permission for “sanctioned” community gardens, to a means of challenging authority. They point out that communities tend to have risk-averse planning processes that limit the potential to better utilize land, such as by creating community gardens in vacant lots. Crane et al. (2013) explain that “Actions like guerrilla gardening that encourage and promote open expression and agency provide powerful opportunities to reclaim city space as a lived project” (p85). Rather than depending on the
official stamp of approval, citizens take ownership of shared space and collaborate in its beautification and repurposing.

ii. Guerilla Bike Lanes

There are very few academic articles discussing the international phenomenon of guerilla bike lanes. Gordon Douglas, a prolific researcher of DIY urbanism, provides rare analysis of the act. His 2012 article, *Guerilla Bike Lanes and Other Acts of Civic Improvement Through Civil Disobedience*, discusses several guerilla bike lanes that have been implemented from Toronto to L.A. He explains that the creators often remain anonymous, “wanting their actions to speak for themselves” (p191). They target routes frequented by bicyclists that have poor infrastructure to support safe riding. Their actions range from stenciling in ‘sharrows’ (a symbol that indicates the road is shared with bicyclists), to lane-striping, to placing cones in the road to outline where a bike lane should go. Douglas writes that “In taking design actions into their own hands, citizens not only directly affect the change they want to see but may inspire others to do the same, fostering the possibility of a ground-up, crowd-constructed city” (p192). He continues that even if officials remove the interventions, the message has already been sent of what residents want to see, which is “something that authorities occasionally even recognize” (p192).

Douglas provides an example in L.A. where in 2008 a group of friends wearing workers’ vests and hard hats and protected by orange cones set up a professional lane-striping machine to add a bike lane over one of the city’s fourteen bridges. Motivated by the “lack of safe cycling routes across the bridges” (p191) that connect the East and Northeast sides of the city, the
guerilla bike lane creators studied municipal regulations and design standards, and even practiced using the lane-striper in a parking lot. This coordinated and thoughtful, highly local and unauthorized intervention was promptly removed by the city within days out of fear it was unsafe. Two years later, however, the impact of the intervention found new meaning when the city identified that bridge out of the fourteen to implement a new bike lane.

iii. Guerilla Knitting

Guerilla knitting, also referred to as knitted graffiti and yarn bombing, “is an example of an urban intervention that challenges the aesthetic order of the city” (Millie, 2019, p1273). Guerilla knitters create knit or crocheted items that are affixed to “street furniture, walls, trees or other surfaces” (Millie, 2019, p1269) as a challenge to the visual and sensual aesthetics of the urban environment. According to Millie (2019), the feel of the knit material is as important as the visual effect. It highlights the everyday feel of cities through the medium of material used. He argues that “yarn bombing is an aesthetic experience full of life and joy—and potentially beauty—yet it is also an imposition on the street” (p1272). Millie continues that “Urban interventions—including yarn bombs—fit with the current zeitgeist for temporary, adaptable and seemingly spontaneous urban use and form” (p1273), referring to the growing popularity of tactical urbanist initiatives. The medium is an intersection between street art, ‘craftivism’, and urban re-design (Millie, 2019).

According to Millie, guerilla knitters range in motivation from doing it for fun to those starting a new ‘craftivism’ movement. In his interview with five yarn bombers in England, a
variety of projects were described. One interviewee named Kerry explained how she wanted to make the area hosting an arts festival she was volunteering at look more welcoming. The festival sent her a bunch of yarn and she and another volunteer began knitting to cover the various surfaces at the festival.

Another yarn bomber named Helen described her motivation for yarn bombing trees as being about “people seeing something that they don’t usually see and it makes them smile and makes them want to talk to other people about it” (p1276). Unlike Kerry, Helen was not authorized to install her projects. This led her to yarn bomb “under the cover of darkness, putting things up so you wouldn’t get caught” (p1281). The cover of darkness also allowed her projects to become a surprise for the public the next day. This ‘gift’ to the community is a central motivation for the yarn bombers Millie interviewed.

For the ‘craftivists’, guerilla knitting transforms male-dominated spaces into a “potentially more feminized urban aesthetic” (p1273) while also “subverting ideals of the feminine and women as homemakers” (p1274) by instilling their presence in public spaces. The guerilla knitter finds power in turning a “granny hobby” (p1274) into a street act. Figure 5 illustrates yarn bombing as craftivism, making a political statement against the Queen through the unauthorized installation of a knit crown high on a lamp post.

**Fig. 5**
“God save the Queen and her fascist regime”: Yarn bombing as craftivism. (Millie, 2019, p1277)

2. Co-Creation

Public participation in creation realigns the relationship between makers and recipients (Bala, 2018). Ordinarily, a maker is an artist (or other expert) producing an art piece or experience and a recipient is from the public observing its outcome. In co-creation, artist and public share the act of producing an art piece or experience. Sanders & Simons (2021) describe this often elusive term as “any act of collective creativity that is experienced jointly by two or more people...where the intent is to create something that is not known in advance” (p1). They note that “Co-creation puts tools for communication and creativity in the hands of the people who will benefit directly from the results” (p6). It is through this lens of co-creation that I will explore a variety of participatory art precedents in order to better understand the spectrum of collaborative techniques currently in use.
Figure 6 outlines defining characteristics of public participation in co-creation on a continuum of low to high, in order to better understand the impact public input has in a variety of co-created initiatives.

**Fig. 6**

Co-Creation Continuum

Three characteristics shape co-creation in this context: 1) Who defines the vision of the final creation; 2) The role of the Artist; and 3) The role of the Public. At the low end of the continuum, the artist’s final vision is known before public engagement. It will be influenced by community participation but ultimately the final piece fulfills the original intent of the artist. This form of co-creation primarily challenges the views of participants with the artist playing the role of expert, guiding their understanding and the installation’s outcome to meet their intended vision. The public cannot be considered as collaborators since their impact is limited to the scope of the artist’s vision. In this sense, the public’s input has a minimal influence on the final outcome which is therefore marginally co-created.

In the middle of the continuum, the artist’s vision is influenced by public engagement and may shift in response. In this co-creation environment, both the artist and public are experts, each informing the other. The public are collaborators and not just participants as their thoughts and input are integral to the final outcome.
At the high end of the continuum, the artist initiates a project that, due to location, actively sought engagement or other invitation encourages the public to participate in its creation. The outcome at the start is not known, allowing community engagement to lead to the final piece. This “creative and interactive process which challenges the views of all parties involved and seeks to combine professional and local expertise in new ways” (Cottam & Leadbeater, 2004, p22) describes the purest and highest form of ‘co-creation’. The minimal hand that the artist contributes to the experience—limited to its initiation—allows it to grow in the hands of the community who transform the installation or space into an expression of their expertise in their community, experience, and reality. The community takes ownership of the experience, transforming the initial act of the artist into one that serves the unique and evolving needs of the public.

The element of time is also integral to understanding the co-creation continuum. Projects that fall on the low end tend to have short lifespans, often dictated by the artist responsible for it. This results in the messages and effects of the project having minimal filtration throughout the community due to both the reduced scope of individuals exposed to the initiative and lack of public control over its fate. In the middle of the continuum, projects have a longer time to grow and shift to meet the needs of the public. They follow the community’s development in relation to the initiative. At the high end of co-creation, projects last as long as they are needed, often dictated by the community and not the initiator. The initiative is defined by serving the public and remains relevant as it continues to evolve.

An important consideration in this discussion is the role documentation has on the element of time and, ultimately, the reach of artwork. Artist-led co-creation has the potential to
become a permanent installation or to be preserved through photograph and literary discussion whereas community-led co-creation may be more ephemeral and go unrecorded, reducing the scope and influence the piece may have on future observers.

a. Artist-initiated Participatory Art

The following precedents explore three different approaches taken by artists to engage the public in participatory art—a form of co-creation. Their tactics cover a range in medium, practice, and location and provide a snap-shot of artist-initiated projects that collaborate with the public in various levels of co-creation.

i. Reconstruction

Shana MacDonald and Brianna Wiens are co-founders of Canada’s Mobile Art Studio (MAS) which they describe as “a transitory creative research lab that brings participatory art into public space to develop greater community engagement with issues of social justice” (MacDonald & Wiens, 2019, p266). In 2016, MAS engaged the public in a performance piece titled Reconstruction which took place in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. At the time, the area was experiencing rapid development and change. The new Google headquarters supercharged this effect and much of the public was left without a means to express their discontent and opinions.

Reconstruction is described by its creators as “Part sculpture, part projection art, part performance” (p367). Set up in a space designed to evoke the experience of walking through a
construction area, twenty-four 4ft x 4ft blank white squares of cardboard hung from the ceiling. Each board represented a city block in Kitchener-Waterloo and was projected with images of popular sections of the streets. This collage of images beckoned public engagement with markers close by for people to draw on the boards. The MAS artist-facilitators, as they referred to themselves, wore construction attire and “adopted the roles of architect, builder, graffiti artist, construction crew, and supervisor” (p368). The city image transformed from photo to graffiti to redesign through a carefully choreographed performance by the facilitators, guiding the public between various stages of engagement. Throughout the four-hour performance installation, sounds of construction played in the background, reminding participants of the rapid development at issue. As architects and builders, the facilitators guided the public to trace the outlines of buildings with their markers (Appendix A.2). In the role of graffiti artist, they instructed the public to add their own slogans and characters to the scenes (Appendix A.3). By the end, the facilitators had the public reimagining their downtown through the repurposing of landmark buildings and a reconstructed street corridor.

In this example, the artists performed a tightly choreographed installation indoors. The engagement from the public was closely guided and led to the artists’ intended final display, though the content varied based on participant contribution. The public, while free to explore within the confines of ‘graffiti artist’ and ‘designer’, were nonetheless being curated by the artists throughout the four hour process. This precedent reflects low co-creation as the public’s visions were limited to the scope defined by the facilitators, and served primarily as participants in the artists’ vision.
ii. RisingEMOTIONS

In 2019, artist Carolina Aragón from the department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at UMass, Amherst worked with East Boston residents and volunteers to install a piece that visualized sea level rise titled, *RisingEMOTIONS*. The site of the installation was outside the Boston Public Library’s East Boston location.

Prior to the implementation of the art piece, Aragón distributed an online survey to gather responses from residents about how they feel about climate change and the inevitable sea level rise that will impact their communities. The survey was translated in both English and Spanish, reflecting the demographic of the community (Rising Emotions, 2021). 150 residents responded over a two-week period. Their responses were then gathered and coded into five emotions: concerned, optimistic, angry, sad, and other (Aragón, 2021). Aragón’s data showed that 51% of the respondents felt concerned, 17% felt optimistic, 14% were sad, 9% were angry, and 9% had other emotions (Aragón, 2021).

In the next stage of the process, each emotion was assigned a different colored ribbon to represent the sentiments in the installation. Responses that fell under “concerned,” for example, were given a teal colored ribbon, while those that were “optimistic” were assigned yellow. The number of colored ribbons used to represent each emotion reflected the percentages of responses correlating to that emotion (e.g. 51% of the ribbons were teal which represented “concerned”). Aragón and volunteers from the community as well as students then hand transcribed some of the messages onto correlating colored ribbons (*Appendix A.4*). At the site of the art piece, the ribbons were used to visualize future sea level rise by draping them over metal...
structures that marked the eventual flood level in 2070 (Appendix A.5-6). The installation was officially revealed to the public on December 7th, 2019 and was displayed for several months.

Throughout the process, Aragón engaged the public, starting with the bi-lingual survey that determined which emotions were prevalent, which led to the selection of appropriate colors to represent those emotions in the ribbons that built the piece. The residents’ own words and opinions were infused into the installation as well, and it was located in a public space for all to witness. This precedent engaged the community in more robust ways than the Reconstruction piece and was more collaborative. The public not only participated in the installation of the piece, their opinions influenced ribbon selection and their messages were transcribed onto those ribbons, further instilling the community’s spirit and emotion in the art. The location of the installation in a public outdoor space frequented by residents for a prolonged period of time also exposed more of the community to its sentiments.

Similar to the Reconstruction piece, Aragón was actively choreographing the various stages of creating RisingEMOTIONS, though in a less tightly choreographed way. This collaborative piece was heavily influenced by the words and opinions of the community which supported Aragón’s ultimate final vision for the installation. Through a collaborative process, the public’s voices were elevated while being educated on future sea level rise. This precedent falls between low and high co-creation as the final vision was influenced by the public who were treated as experts of their own experience and were closely collaborated with throughout the process.
iii. Before I Die

Candy Chang’s *Before I Die* participatory art installation was created in 2011 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Prior to installing the piece, Chang received approval from the property owner, residents on the block, the neighborhood blight committee, and other planning commissions. Using the walls of an abandoned house, Chang installed chalkboards and stenciled a prompt that read, “Before I die…” (Chang, 2021). She provided pieces of chalk for people passing by to contribute to the board and dozens of lines that read “Before I die I want to____” to guide public writing (Appendix A.7-8). “By the next day, the wall was entirely filled out and it kept growing” (Chang, 2021). The public began writing responses outside the provided lines and the installation became an international phenomenon. Chang received requests to install the wall across the globe and launched a project site to guide other community installations.

This precedent demonstrates a relatively-high co-created participatory art piece. While the format and medium was decided by the artist, the ultimate form of the installation was created by the public who were free to write outside the lines, draw images, and even ignore the prompt and write whatever they wanted to express. The hand of the artist was not closely choreographing the engagement, and appears to have had limited influence. Rather than having a multi-staged process like the other two installations, Chang’s one-step approach made her influence minimal. The public were given voice as experts of their lived experience, and the final installation reflected their unique choice of words, images, and sentiments.
b. Community-Based Art Therapy

In recent decades, community-based art therapy has grown in popularity as our culture slowly shifts away from individualized experience to a more holistic understanding of existence and the resurgence of valuing community. This approach can be used to treat a spectrum of ailments experienced by the public, from physical to psychological pain. In the following two examples, I explore one of the former and one of the latter in order to expose the reader to some community-based art therapy approaches, and the concept of using art to facilitate co-created space.

i. Adults with Chronic Pain

O’Neill & Moss (2015) piloted an innovative art therapy approach in Dublin, Ireland that provided “short-term, focused art therapy group support through a community art therapy initiative” for individuals living with chronic pain (p158). Using art therapy to treat chronic pain is a relatively new approach that reflects the growing population of adults living with this condition. They advertised their proposed 12 weekly sessions of community art therapy for chronic pain at a hospital next to a local arts center and received thirty-three sign ups. Only fourteen spaces were available which were given to the first people who signed up. Ultimately, nine individuals completed the full course with some citing time conflicts with other commitments and others not feeling the program was what they needed at that time. O’Neill & Moss aimed to teach self-expression through creative activity, give participants a sense of control over their emotions and situation, improve self-acceptance, and enhance coping skills.
Each session lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes and was held in a local arts center next to the hospital. All meetings began with introductions and a guided meditation or visualization exercise. After that, participants were given one of three tasks: 1) create an art piece based on a theme or directive; 2) do a creative response to the visualization exercise; or 3) use free time to make whatever they want. At the end of the meeting, participants shared their creations and discussed and reflected on them together. After the 12 sessions, O’Neill & Moss asked participants to give verbal or written feedback on their experience.

The ‘community’ aspect of this initiative was infused throughout the sessions. All meetings were held in a local arts center in the community where the participants were living. O’Neill & Moss also found the setting to be critical, writing that “the move from a clinical environment to an artistic one allowed members to respond creatively as the environment was more conducive to artistic activity” (p166). The structure of the sessions’ time was also community-oriented, fostering a sense of shared experience.

The sense of environment can be considered co-created as the trained art therapist guided participants in generating a safe space to explore difficult emotions. Each individual was an expert of their own experience and collaborated with each other in an effort to share the space harmoniously, with the trained therapist there to mentor and decide which activity the group should do next. The art projects themselves were conducted on an individual basis and were not co-created. This perhaps reflects the personal experience each participant has with their chronic pain, as depicted in Appendix A.9, “Past, Present, and Future Self”, sourced from this article.
ii. Living Well

In 1997 Pioneer Projects Ltd., a community-based arts in health organization, rented a public space in Bentham, North Yorkshire in the UK. The space was called Living Well and was intended to nurture the rural community and expand their understanding of health, the value of connection and the power of art. They designed the space to be domestic-scaled and furnished in order to hold friendly informal community events to promote art, health, and education (White, 2006). Through the space’s use, individuals built confidence and skills while supporting each other to solve problems and engage critically. Some examples of groups that met in the space include cancer support groups, individuals experiencing mental health issues, the elderly, and children from vulnerable demographics. Within two years over 1,000 people used the space.

Before renting the space, Pioneer Projects Ltd. conducted a health needs assessment and engaged in dialogue with the community to explain the benefits of health education and arts oriented projects. Eventually, with the help of health professionals, the barriers to public acceptance were reduced and the space was created. White (2006) points out that the concept ‘artist’ had “never been confined to individual professionals” at Living Well, rather the space was meant to include anyone “open to engaging in creative production, developing new skills” and often drew directly from the talents in the community (p132). He continues that “Several participants have gone on to run workshops in the wider community on their own behalf, embracing a belief in creative process” (p132). Other participants found a restored sense of self-belief and developed new habits. The space was eventually moved to a rented building that
provided four studios for community members and a larger outdoor space to continue community-based art initiatives.

This “community-based arts in health” approach, a term used by White throughout the article, required a lot of hands-on work, nurturing individuals in the community and sustaining the effort over many years. The results were compelling, with participants adopting teachings learned in the space and some even going on to teach others what they learned. White writes that “This kind of creative intervention is attempting to do two things at once; to convey both the therapeutic benefits for individuals from participating in arts activity, and the value of collective creativity in helping build social cohesion for a healthier community” (p129). Living Well was a moderately-high co-created initiative, engaging the community early on and allowing the space to adapt as the community needed with no official programming. While Pioneer Projects Ltd. initiated the project, the ultimate use of the space and therefore creation of the experience was directed by the public and their needs.

c. Spontaneous Co-Creation

Spontaneous co-creations exemplify co-creation in its highest form. Its unplanned nature, sparked by inspiration that can range from tragedy to aspiration, allows it to evolve organically, constantly reflecting the needs of the public engaged in its creation. In my first precedent, I will explore one of the many recent memorials that have grown out of communities experiencing police violence: *George Floyd Square* in Minneapolis. Memorials like this one capture the emotions of the public while creating a space to grieve and unite. I will then discuss
Graffiti Alley in Cambridge, MA, another highly co-created initiative that has been evolving daily for over a decade. These precedents are examples of highly co-created projects that also overlap with the majority of my pilot study’s motivations.

i. George Floyd Square

Roadside memorials have been erected for decades to help family and friends of those lost to car accidents express grief and regret that loved ones were “robbed of their chance to live longer” (Mchunu, 2020, p6). These “spontaneous, private, and intensely personal roadside death memorials” (Mchunu, 2020, p1) are ephemeral in nature. They follow the tradition that memorials, symbols, and signs have always played “as purveyors of meaning in society” (Mchunu, 2020, p1). The site of death is a critical component to the memorial as “No other spot will do except where the fatal accident happened” (Mchunu, 2020, p2).

Mchunu (2020) uses the vantage point of roadside memorials to contextualize the surge of spontaneous memorials appearing at sites of police killings in recent years. Similar to roadside memorials, memorials at sites of police killings are erected with an authority that emanates “from the intensity of grief, the spiritual presence of the deceased, and a profound sense of the importance of place where it happened” (p2). In the context of a city, they are “coproducing urban space” (p2) in what Mchunu describes as “loose space” characterized by the designated or official use no longer seeming relevant.

In the case of the George Floyd memorial in Minneapolis, the road outside Cup Foods where his life was taken by a white police officer on May 25, 2020 no longer serves the purpose
of transporting vehicles. It has instead been transformed into a spontaneous memorial that takes up the entire corner of East 38th Street and Chicago Avenue in a space that has been renamed *George Floyd Square* (van Agtmael, June 11 2020). In a news article published shortly after the killing, Otani & Belkin (June 2 2020) write that

> The memorial site started as a small pile of balloons and flowers. But over the past week, it has swelled into a block-wide gathering space, one where thousands of people of all ages and races have congregated to pay tribute to Mr. Floyd and express their outrage and solidarity.

It has become “a place to grieve—and to find unity” (Otani & Belkin, June 2 2020), to sit vigil, hold protest, play music, and even host dance parties (van Agtmael, June 11 2020). Figure 7 shows the memorial less than a month after Floyd’s killing.

**Fig. 7**

*George Floyd Square (Yang, June 20 2020)*

The collection of flowers, objects, art, and graffiti reflect a co-created memorial that transforms with each new addition day to day. There was no plan to create this space prior to the event of Floyd’s murder and it evolved from “a small pile of balloons and flowers” into an
expansive representation of “the city’s emotional center” (Otani & Belkin, June 2 2020). Its final form is similarly unplanned and unknown. It is instead a collective vision, an example of co-creation in its highest form.

The lack of permission sought prior to creating this display of communal grief reflects the sense of authority the public feels to redefine the place of murder as a place of change and unity. Mchunu points out that “Unplanned, unanticipated, and diverse, spontaneous memorials compete with conventional and official allocation and use of (urban) space” (p5), however the significance of the event appears to have neutered authorities from intervening in the illegal use of space. There are even plans to erect a permanent memorial for Floyd and preserve the ones already erected in George Floyd Square (Kennedy, July 18 2020).

Memorials erected at sites of trauma, like George Floyd Square in Minneapolis, reflect a collective ability to generate a restorative environment unique to each community’s needs and values. The flexible nature intrinsic to spontaneous memorialization provides space for collective grief and healing, matching shifting needs as time unfolds.

ii. Graffiti Alley

As Cortea et al. (2020) point out, “graffiti murals and paintings are starting to become part of our cultural heritage” (p184). What began in the 1970s in “the poorest and most degraded neighborhoods of the main American cities” (Di Luggo & Zerlenga, 2020, p1) as a phenomenon of youth writing on walls has evolved into a form of mass communication. Di Luggo & Zerlenga (2020) point out that it has even received tacit approval from municipalities:
From a vandalistic and isolated phenomenon, this artistic expression became an instrument of urban regeneration for sustainability, along with the physical, social and economic redemption of the degraded suburbs as an alternative to the intervention of the public administration. (p1)

They continue that graffiti paintings are “expressions of a desire to make public space the scene of a tale that is an integral part of the history of each community” (p2). Its ephemeral nature makes it “A visual art with a strong communicative power that originates from the place and to this it is addressed as soon as it is conceived and produced, entrusting to time the power of its message” (p2). These acts of “spontaneous artistic expression” address “cultural discomforts of the contemporary world” (Di Luggo & Zerlenga, 2020, p1).

The illicit nature lends it to a form of high co-creation due to the unofficiality of the work, allowing walls to shift in meaning with each new tag, painting, and quote. Cambridge, MA’s Central Square is home to an alley exemplifying this very dynamic. Richard B Modica Way, better known as Graffiti Alley, has evolved daily since it was first sprayed to life back in 2008. Geoff Hargadon and Gary Strack started the alley and soon “invited more than 30 artists from around the world to make their marks” (Mascarenhas, April 25 2018). Since then, countless local and international artists have added to the alley (Appendix A.10), as evidenced by close observation of “rippled layers of paint that have accumulated over the years” (Mascarenhas, April 25 2018).

Hargadon and Strack explain that they wanted the space to be “self-policed and self-curated” (Mascarenhas, April 25 2018). For example, in the early days someone put up a fake street sign that named it Graffiti Alley. The two men left the sign up, and the culture of co-creation was set in motion. Hargadon is quoted in the article by Mascarenhas (April 25 2018) as
saying “The work isn’t protected, and it’s not meant to be protected, and to me that’s part of the appeal...You put it out there, and it’s not yours anymore, it belongs to everybody.” To some artists, this act of release can be difficult. Local artist Brian Wentworth is quoted as saying “It’s a little frustrating when people spray over your stuff, but I guess it is what it is, it’s the art of letting go you almost never know how to do it as an artist.” For the moment their work is visible, artists have the potential to create images “that have resonance and make people think.” Others prefer to simply tag the wall, a form of ‘I was here’. Graffiti Alley welcomes it all as a highly co-created public art installation that has been in the process of becoming for over a decade and has grown well beyond the vision of its original artists.

3. Discussion

Through the exploration of twelve precedents that fell into two overarching themes—five Tactical Urbanism types and seven Co-Creation projects—multiple motivations have been discussed. There are six that can be identified that intersect with the motivations behind my pilot study, shown in Figure 8.

**Fig. 8**
Precedent Category x Motivations

Reflecting back to the six motivations mentioned at the start of this study, we can now assign them to the four overarching categories (*Tactical Urbanism, Artist-Initiated Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, and Spontaneous Co-Creation*) relevant to each. 1) Generate a sense of well-being (*Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 2) Co-create with the public (*Artist-Initiated Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 3) Form community connection (*Artist-Initiated Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 4) Alter the urban experience (*Tactical Urbanism, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 5) Develop a place-based initiative (*Tactical Urbanism, Artist-Initiated Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); and 6) Produce a ‘surprise effect’ from the intervention (*Tactical Urbanism, Spontaneous Co-Creation*).
Two important results are evident in this diagram: only spontaneous co-creations intersect with all six motivations and only the place-based motivation intersects with all four categories. The former suggests that the intervention-style most capable of achieving the motivations behind my pilot study are spontaneous co-creations. This informs how we can begin to understand my pilot study, which falls most in line with this intervention type. It is also important to note that the pilot study is not completely a spontaneous co-creation and still holds aspects of the other three categories in its inspiration, process, evolution, and implications.

The other important outcome from this precedent study is the commonality of place-based motivations among the four categories of precedents discussed. This reflects the importance of community issues among all the precedents, each addressing different areas of improvement using a variety of techniques. Public participation in community development takes many forms, each with its own set of goals and interests. Ultimately, they are all unique to the community and require place-based intervention styles.

The overarching theme of co-creation was discussed through the lens of a continuum (Figure 6). Throughout the discussion of each co-creation precedent, its location on the continuum was mentioned and is visualized in Figure 9.

**Fig. 9**
Co-Creation Continuum With Precedents

Interesting themes emerge when we consider the location of each precedent along the co-creation continuum in conjunction with the six motives discussed previously, illustrated in Figure 10.

**Fig. 10**

Co-Creation Precedent x Motivations

Because all of these precedents share a co-creation motivation, the Venn diagram is centered within a co-creation circle. The location of precedents within the Venn diagram reflects how many motivations they intersect. The higher the precedent is on the co-creation continuum, the more motivations they achieve. The *George Floyd Square* precedent captures all five motivations and is the most co-created of all the precedents discussed, located in the center of the Venn diagram. *Graffiti Alley* can be considered a close second and is only missing the well-being aspect. It is however, the only other co-creation precedent that is spontaneous, and therefore
should be considered more publicly owned than the *Before I Die* or *Living Well* precedents, which share the same number of motivations but fall between medium and high co-creation on the continuum. This is due to their lack of spontaneity which is more important to co-creation than the well-being motivation that *Before I Die* and *Living Well* share in place of spontaneity. Spontaneity is essential in achieving public control and influence, characteristics that define highly co-created initiatives.

The two precedents that fall in the middle of the continuum—*RisingEMOTIONS* and *Chronic Pain*—each have three motivations. They share community connection and place-based motivations and differ where *Chronic Pain* addresses well-being and *RisingEMOTIONS* alters the urban experience. In the discussion of each of these precedents, their placement in the middle of the continuum was already explained. What is important to note is their mirroring locations in the Venn diagram, indicating a shared number of motivations achieved and level of co-creation.

At the lowest end of the continuum is the *Reconstruction* precedent. Of the five motivations illustrated in Figure 10, only a place-based motivation is reached in this example. Its location on the outer edge of the diagram reflects its minimal level of co-creation. Figure 10 shows the intersection of motivations and level of co-creation, and suggests that when more of the six aspects are present in an initiative, there is a higher likelihood of achieving deeper co-creation.

It is important to note that initiatives that are without a high degree of co-creation are not therefore deficient. It is possible, and even likely, that the goals and interests of the creators differ from my interest in generating deep co-creation and may be aiming for a more curated or
moderated experience. Ultimately, understanding co-creation is a vital component to my pilot study. By reviewing an extensive range of precedents, the role of the six motivations behind my study may be recognized as critical in its evolution as a highly co-created initiative.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

A. Critical Reflexivity Methodology

The original thesis I intended to write for my MLA followed a traditional process of studying a topic, developing a research methodology, conducting in-field research, and then analyzing the results. As I worked through this process I began to recognize limitations. I did not find this approach organic, having to fight my urge to explore an idea through ‘doing’ before researching its significance, a method I later learned is termed ‘action-based research’. I also was going against the wave of the pandemic. COVID had greatly limited my access to subjects to study and I found the process of working around this nearly impossible within the traditional research framework. In this way, the global pandemic gave me an out. Rather than relying on a process that did not fit the moment, I allowed myself to discover a new means of conducting research that better suited my personal analysis style, the current conditions, and a less formal focus that enabled methods to emerge within that process.

My interest in engaging my own community in meaningful exchanges led to what has become this thesis. Stepping away from my previous thesis coincided with a new annual tradition I had begun the year before of erecting a community tree that provided a prompt asking the public to consider certain concepts. This act evolved into a pilot study that unfolded in unexpected ways and broke through barriers. The overwhelming engagement with 2020’s first installation inspired me to quickly erect two more for a total of three community tree sites. Each asked the public to consider a different eudaimonically-inspired theme—gratefulness,
aspiration, and attainment (which later led to the naming of the trees as the “Grateful Tree,” the “Dream Tree,” and the “Proud Tree” respectively). The speed at which I decided to explore the public’s engagement required many instances of intuitive decision-making. The overarching goal of every decision was to support the creation of a space for the public to express emotions in a constructive way that could inspire them, as well as the broader community, to become more eudaimonic, even if just for a moment when so much of life seemed uncertain and difficult.

My installations were up for about two weeks and received 190 total contributions. Each note reflected personal experiences and values, rich with information. I spent the rest of winter break analyzing message contents and other influences such as site locations and prompt wording. At this point I had decided to switch my thesis to analyzing the results of this pilot study and their implications. I was not sure, however, how to translate the valuable information I had unearthed into a valid research paper. In many ways, I had inverted the process we are taught to follow, starting with my experiment and then filling in the information afterwards. I had uncovered so much more knowledge and deep understanding from this exploratory method than I had following the more rigid research process in my first thesis attempt. I knew there had to be a place for this methodology in research, after all, how does a new idea come to fruition without a new process?

1. Relevant Methods Derived from Other Fields
I began delving into a wide range of experimental research methods used by other fields, such as anthropology, phenomenology, and even science history. Perhaps the best summary of the challenge to my methods is found in Henk Borgdorff’s (2012) book, *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. He writes

How can things that are fundamentally polysemic— that seem to elude every attempt to tie them down, to define them— still function as vehicles of research? That is, how can they function not just as objects of research, but as the entities in which, and through which, the research takes place—and in which and through which our knowledge, our understanding, and our experience can grow. (p187)

Borgdorff relays his understanding of the answer to this question through the research of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, a historian of science. Rheinberger argues that experiments are generators of knowledge, which Borgdorff expands with “This openness and room for not-knowing, or not-yet-knowing, cannot be imposed by stern methodological procedures” (p190). He continues that “serendipity, intuition, and improvisation are at least as important” (p190) as more traditional experiment techniques. Borgdorff applies Rheinberger’s “experimental systems” theory to artistic practices, which similarly “are vehicles for materializing questions” (p194), and require a different method than systematic, repeatable, rational and causal activities. “The dynamics of both artistic and scientific research lies in the dialectics of revelation” (p195) by creating “room for what is unthought and unexpected” (p196). Unlike the traditional research processes we are taught to follow, a more exploratory method opens the door to unpredictable knowledge and understanding.

Tim Ingold (2007) writes about the relation between evolution and research, pointing out that the former requires chance mistakes that allow new creations to emerge. He notes that
“Learning is like evolution in that the testing of these ideas, in different combinations, affects the probability of their recurrence” (p46). In other words, by experimenting the way I did, new understandings can be learned and applied in new iterations that ultimately, after repetition and reapplication, can evolve into new methods and understandings. The endless generation of new creations has been covered by many fields, from Chomsky’s linguistics’ rule of governed creativity to Levi-Strauss’ concept of the creative mind as a “bricoleur”—infinitely reworking new ideas from old ones. The “new arrangement of elements already known” (p47) is required for novel ideas to emerge. Ingold summarizes this when he writes that “creativity that is inherent in the flow of life or consciousness…is continuous rather than punctual” (p48). A method that depends on an output-driven focus cannot explore uncharted ideas that live in a continuum and not a vacuum.

Karin Barber (2007) discusses philosopher and sociologist G.H. Mead’s “emergent” model of understanding action. Barber quotes Mead who writes that the present “is not a piece cut out anywhere from the temporal dimension of uniformly passing reality. Its chief reference is to the emergent event, that is, to the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have led up to it” (Mead, 1932, p23). Barber expands on this concept, writing “The past is as hypothetical as the future; the present, defined by the emergent, is constantly breaking new ground” (p26). This can be applied to understanding my research method in that the response from the public was an emergent one that could not have been predicted prior to the moment it occurred. The new ground-breaking engagement required a flexible research model that reflected the continuum on which the installations existed.
Van der Schyff (2010) explores the limitations the scientific age has imposed on organic research methods that were critical to the majority of our human growth in understanding.

Over the centuries we have systematically rejected the most naturally human view of the world, and have given truth and meaning over to science and technology almost exclusively...This has often skewed the practice of philosophy, history, economics, and modern cultural activity in general, towards the brilliance of human artifice and the ideology of progress - the proper development and understanding of human orexis seems to be in a state of crisis. (p109)

Orexis in this context refers to the human desire to explore which, according to van der Schyff, has been sacrificed in the name of progress.

The scientific age has paid a price for rejecting the purposeful experience of nature that comes from the kind of naturally human point of view that Aristotle embraces. Mired in technology, we have lost sight of the natural sense of the world.... But the idea that the human mind might be, as a part of nature itself, perfectly suited to interpret or, indeed, “see” the meaning of things as nature gives it to experience is not a view that the scientific age accepts as valid. (p110)

Van der Schyff draws parallels between overvaluing metrics and what the phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl, describes as an “indifferent turning away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity” (Husserl & Carr, 1970, p6). Van der Schyff explains Husserl’s argument that there is a modern disconnect between our knowledge of how things work and what they mean. He writes that “There is a very real sense in which Husserl and the thinkers that followed him sought to reintroduce a way of seeing the world that Aristotle and the Greek philosophers embraced many centuries before - one that was lost, or at least rejected and repressed in the Scientific Age” (p98).

Merleau-Ponty’s preeminent book, Phenomenology of Perception, takes Husserl’s phenomenology theory a step further by incorporating subjective perspective which he refers to as “the body problem.” He argues that all forms of knowledge, even those rooted in science, are
experienced through the perspective of self. There is no escaping the subjective, requiring our understanding of phenomena to be the combination of consciousness, the world, and our own perspective. Everything that is experienced is in a constant state of becoming. In this sense, the need to acknowledge the subjective understanding of events is inescapable.

There is great value in scientific methodology, but the issue is knowing when to use such a strategy. In the case of uncovering novel social understandings in the public domain through the lens of eudaimonia during a global pandemic, such a strategy does not offer a good fit. The ‘emergent’, ‘evolving’, ‘unexpected’ and ‘unpredictable’ nature of my pilot study requires a new critically reflexive method that is exploratory and reflective of my subjective understandings of the relevance and value of knowledge unearthed.

Figure 11 demonstrates two different processes to help shed light on the emergent process I used.

Fig. 11
Conventional v. Emergent Processes

To the left is a representation of a conventional analytic process aimed at narrowing a research focus (the ‘funnel’ method). It serves to focus individual specialization and orient research in a proposed direction. To the right is a representation of a more integrative, synthetic, process that leaves room to incorporate emerging phenomena of an initial action-based inquiry (the ‘amplifier’ method), and reflects the process I will describe in the following section. The amplifier method leads to a broader understanding of the topic at hand, increasing the likelihood new information will be unearthed where little is known prior to the application (e.g. the intervention). It has the potential to support more collaborative and participatory co-creative research, which allows for more exploration and experimentation. This inquisitive research strategy can be followed to conduct DIY urbanism, tactical urbanism, spontaneous interventions, and other interventionist strategies in order to build a new knowledge base for future application.

Through the following narrative method of my pilot study which is critically reflexive, I ask the reader to consider the value of the lived experience of the researcher. This pilot study exists at the intersection of community participation and my own participation as the designer and interventionist. The nature of studying the development at each site as the public engaged required subjective assessments due to the anonymity among participants and myself. My active role in developing the research as it emerged was heuristic, testing-by-doing similar to the interventions described by Douglas (2012, 2014). My background in landscape architecture and regional planning finds an anthropological role in discovering new realms for design fields to explore and evolve into. Through my personal account where I work through understanding my
own process, a new experimental methodology can emerge and be interpolated for other
designers and interventionists interested in producing emergent research.

B. Pilot Study

The seed of an idea to put up a ‘community tree’ came from a walk I took a few years
ago while living in Amherst, MA. I walked past a seemingly out of place tree in the wooded
residential area I was living in. I wondered what a decorated Christmas tree was doing on the
side of the road. As I approached it, I realized the tree wasn’t covered in ordinary ornaments—
they were notes (Appendix A.11). A simple prompt introduced people passing by to the
“Community Tree,” inviting people to write their hopes and dreams for 2020. Reading through
the notes left by the community, I was touched by their candor and participation in this act of
communal dreaming. I left my note and walked away inspired.

A few days later I was on break from school and back in my hometown of Newton, MA.
The impact of the Community Tree had grown in me and I decided I would repeat the act in
Newton. I went out to a craft store and found an artificial Christmas tree with a stand and a few
holiday-neutral ornaments to give the tree some color. I also picked up sheets of plastic poster
board, sparkly pipe cleaners, and colored sharpies to water-proof the experience as best I could.

Back at home, I began preparing for my installation, following the Amherst template
almost completely. I cut up the paper into note-sized cards and hole-punched the top-center to
enable a pipe-cleaner to be strung through. I wrote out a prompt with the exact words from the
tree in Amherst, reducing the sign size a bit in order to leave more room for notes. I stuffed a ziploc bag with stickers, hole-punched cards, pipe cleaners cut in half, and sharpies.

All the while I was brainstorming where to set up Newton’s Community Tree. I knew I wanted a location that was both private and public in order to elicit participation from people passing by. The experience of writing one’s “hopes and dreams” is personal, and yet they would need to have access to the tree in a common community space to know the tree existed. It didn’t take much thinking to realize the trail leading into the woods at Cold Spring Park (CSP) would be well-suited. The park is a destination for people across the city seeking a quiet nature walk to experience alone or with family and friends. There is also a dog park located in the center of the woods that attracts many dog walkers. The trail is a circuit with various off-shoots that weave throughout the woods, but the section I was interested in was along its border, adjacent to playing fields. A fence separates the fields from the trail and provides a sense of separation and shelter (Appendix A.12). It is also about twelve feet away from the pathway, providing further separation from other pedestrians to enable a more private experience. Placing the tree along the fence but easily visible from the pathway was an appropriate location.

I decided I didn’t want anyone to see the tree erected. This would create a sense of magic about the tree, seemingly appearing overnight to regular visitors of the park. My partner and I woke up at 4:30am on December 19th, 2019 and packed the car with all our supplies. CSP is closed to the public after dark and so we were technically not supposed to be there at that hour. This made the installation all the more risky, and yet, the adrenaline of providing an experience for my community like the one I had in Amherst pushed me outside my precautionary bounds.
Once parked, we whisked the box carrying the tree, ornaments, and all our supplies out of the car and headed to the fence. We had never put an artificial tree together before, realizing in the dark of the early morning that a practice run would have been smart to do. Instead, we fumbled as we placed each layer of tree into the one before and hung our blue and white ornaments in holiday fashion around the tree. The sign I wrote out hung front and center with the ziploc bag of supplies hanging to the bottom right. We then each wrote out a card to get the tree started and to show the community how to participate. Our fingers frozen from the winter air, we tossed our tools into the box and raced back to the car having completed our first guerilla-art installation.

After getting home I was much too excited to sleep again. The anticipation of seeing whether people wrote their own notes for the tree was thrilling. I decided to check on the tree later that afternoon to see if anyone had written anything. When I got there, tears came to my eyes as I saw the tree sprinkled with notes from the community (Appendix A.13). Over the next few days, I stopped by the tree to check on its status. On one of those days, I was approached by a woman who asked, “Isn’t this amazing?”, unbeknownst to her that I was the initiator. Letting the moment sink in, I smiled at her and said, “Yes, it really is,” allowing the magic of the tree to remain intact for her and everyone. On another day, I was surprised when all the blank cards were used up and raced home to cut up some more.

When I put up the tree, I hadn’t considered how long I would keep it active. I wanted the end date to appear intentional so after Christmas I thought about it and decided the morning of January 2nd would be its natural end date. This would allow the community to state their “hopes and dreams” for the New Year and to release those wishes after New Year’s Day, essentially
sending them out into the world. But what to do with the notes? Should I put them up on the fence as a commemoration of their participation, even offer them to take their notes back? Would that take away from the magic of placing them on a tree, an act of releasing ownership performing co-creation? After much deliberation, I decided the notes should be taken along with the tree, but that a final note should be left thanking the community for participating. This would offer them closure from the experience while giving thanks for their engagement.

At 4:30am on January 2nd, 2020, my partner and I awoke to dismantle the Community Tree. We got to the park and hastily took the tree apart, stuffing its branches, stand, ornaments, empty cards, and filled-out notes into the box. I had decided to cut a heart out from the original sign to write my thanks as a symbolic gesture, recycling the prompt that had garnered such a pleasant response from the community into the final act of appreciation. I cut my heart-shaped note out of the sign and wrote a simple “Thank you for participating in the Community Tree! Cheers!” on the back (Appendix A.14). I tacked the note onto the fence where the tree once stood and my partner and I raced back to the car.

Later that day, I read through the cards that were left, a total of 21. Their messages ranged from hopes of being more open minded and loving to broader societal issues of reducing the impact of climate change and securing a democrat in the White House. I was touched by the ones that thanked whoever had erected the tree. This confirmed to me the value the installation had had in the community that engaged with it. I decided the tree would become an annual tradition.
2020 turned out to be a year unlike any the world had ever experienced. The circulation of COVID-19 created a global pandemic, ripping communities apart with death and isolation. Our own nation experienced a trifecta of societal waves, from direct impacts of the virus, to racial unrest, to political upheaval, all intertwined in messy and convoluted ways that fractured communities even more. By the time I was entering my next winter break from school, we were ten months into the pandemic and what many would call the worst year of their lives. I sensed the tree would have an even more important impact and decided to set it up earlier than before.

Some changes would need to be made in order to make people feel safe engaging with shared objects such as sharpies and note cards. I decided to make the cards as accessible to the public as possible with limited touch required. Instead of providing card supplies in a ziploc bag that required people to open the bag, take out a card, string it with a pipe cleaner, take a sticker from the pack if they wanted to use one, and share the sharpies, I would make the cards ready to go, tacked up on the fence with various stickers already added, and sharpies hanging beside them. I would also string up a big-pump bottle of hand sanitizer for people to take a squirt before and after completing their note, further reducing the risks they may feel coming in contact with strangers using the same supplies.

I wanted to provide a new prompt this year that was more in-line with the current state of affairs. What would help people see the light at the end of this long tunnel that at that point had trapped us in three seasons of isolation? The prompt would need to be broad enough to be relatable to as many people as possible while creating a meaningful inquiry. The concept of ‘gratefulness’ struck me as accomplishing the goals I had in uplifting the community. We all have something to be grateful for, and remembering what those things are can help shift
perspective away from the negative that seemingly surrounded us day in and day out in a COVID-stricken world. The prompt would provide the same introduction as the original one, introducing people passing by to the tree with “Welcome to the Community Tree,” followed by “Tell us what you are grateful for” with a heart drawn below (Appendix A.15). I wrote out my sign, prepped all the cards, and packed the tree into my car.

At 4:30am on December 11th, 2020 (more than a week earlier than the previous year), my partner and I drove to CSP to set up the Community Tree once again. We did it much more quickly than the previous year; perhaps the experience of putting the tree together in the dark once before lent a helpful advantage. Once the tree was set up with cards, sharpies, and hand sanitizer hanging on the fence beside it, we each took a card and wrote our own notes of gratefulness before packing our supplies and racing back to the car, the risk of being caught still hovering over head (Appendix A.16). As we carefully drove out of the park, headlights off trusting my local feel of the park’s back roads, I wondered how much more engagement this year’s installation would have than last year, back when most of us were only really thinking about gift-giving and New Year’s plans. Turning my lights on again as we turned onto the main road, my partner and I high-fived and excitement washed over me as I waited that morning in anticipation again as to what the community would say.

To my surprise that afternoon, all twenty cards I had put up on the fence were used! This time, basking in the community’s support, I recognized that I had felt its pulse. They were indeed craving a place to express themselves. I knew I didn’t have much more of the plastic poster board to cut for more cards and headed to a local craft store to buy out their stock. Back home, I prepared twenty more cards and timed my restock at the park to coincide with dusk.
This would allow me to reduce the risk of coming in contact with people headed into the park while also not needing to go completely incognito in the late hours of the night or early morning, which would have been unsustainable if the cards continued to need restocking.

After the overwhelming engagement at the Community Tree in its first day up, I decided to add two more locations. The following day on December 12th I took a long bike ride around Newton in search of viable sites. I decided I would not buy another artificial tree as I had no budget for the installation and was curious how the public would interact with a Community Tree that used trees already in the landscape, perhaps one that was an evergreen and one that was deciduous. I aimed to recreate similar conditions of the private yet public setting of the tree at CSP and settled on two trees in different parts of Newton.

One tree caught my eye as soon as I rode by on my bike. Its branches hung low with a majestic quality that seemed to create a cocoon under its limbs. This was an old Hemlock tree with branches the ideal height to hang notes on (Appendix A.17). I envisioned the effect of coming upon this tree with notes dangling at eye-level, a seemingly otherworldly space produced by the union of natural beauty and man-made creation. It was located in a park along a quiet residential side street off of the main road of Newtonville, just a few blocks from Newton North High School. The tree stands at one end of Washington Park (WP), a linear stretch of grass and trees between two one-way roads. Adjacent to it is the New Art Centre, a community art center that provides art classes to children as well as adults and even has two gallery spaces for art events. While the New Art Center was closed due to COVID, the nearness of it gave me the hope that a public art installation would be well received on this tree.
For my final location, I was interested in finding a tree in Newton Centre as this is the city’s most popular village to visit for food, shopping, and walking out of the thirteen villages it contains. The sprawling Newton Centre Park (NCP) offered the private yet public aspect I was seeking, and I settled on a tree along a path leading into the park from Newton Centre’s main road, Centre Street. The tree was deciduous and bare of leaves, which would allow me to compare its engagement to the evergreen in WP and the more traditional holiday tree in CSP. Its branches were also low enough to hang notes on, and easy to see from the path while providing enough distance from people passing by to create a sense of separation, similar to the tree in CSP.

While I had found my two new sites, I still needed to come up with prompts for the trees. I decided I didn’t want to repeat the prompt from CSP for several reasons. One was that I was worried someone who had engaged with that tree would come upon one of these two and the magic of the CSP tree would fade away. These two trees had to be special in their own way. I also wanted to provide more opportunities for anyone who had already hung a message on the Grateful Tree (the name I began to use in place of “Community Tree” at the CSP site) to engage with new prompts, if they were so inspired. A third reason for coming up with new prompts was to further my analysis of creating the ideal conditions for participatory art in public settings. While my original tree provided an introduction and more conversational prompt, what effect would a simple, bare-boned prompt have on engagement?

I spent the night of December 12th brainstorming ideal prompts. At the time, I was reading Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, a compilation of his lectures on the concept of ‘eudaimonia’. My understanding of eudaimonia was still a bit vague when I drew the
representation of it (Appendix A.1) after that conversations with my Greek friend. It remained unclear until I began reading Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* in December 2020, one of the few original sources on the topic left for us to decipher thousands of years later. I was about three-quarters of the way through when I sat at my desk December 12th to consider what prompts to post on my chosen trees. One of the main sources of eudaimonia that I understood from Aristotle’s teachings is that it exists in the middle of two extremes, what Aristotle termed the ‘golden mean’. It was a form of moderation, not too hot and not too cold. I recalled reading a list towards the beginning of the book that mapped this concept out. Under three columns titled, “Falls Short,” “In The Middle,” and “Goes Too Far” a range of characteristics were listed, demonstrating the spectrum of qualities one could land on. “In The Middle” were the eudaimonic traits while the other two were treated as equally disadvantaged in character. For example, “brave” would be considered a trait “In The Middle,” with its two polar opposites being “coward” (“Falls Short”), and “reckless” (“Goes Too Far”). I scanned the list for inspiration, homing in on words that fell “In The Middle.”

Many of them were not easy to address in a prompt, such as “like a friend” and “good-natured,” but two struck me as particularly resonant for our modern pandemic era. “Ambitious [in a good way]” could be addressed through the concept of ‘dreaming’ to do something, or be something. COVID left a lot of us ‘dreaming’ of all sorts of different realities. I thought this topic would make a good prompt based in the eudaimonic ethics of Aristotle, bringing hope back to the minds of my community.

Another concept that appeared relevant to today was “has a sense of pride.” Everyone has something they are proud of, I thought, perhaps I could ask the public to share what it is.
This could have a similar effect as the Grateful Tree, reminding people of the positives in life when so much felt marred by darkness. I jotted down various ways to ask the community to address these ideas and landed on “I Dream...” and “I Am Proud...”. The directness of the prompts would be a great source of information in comparison to the Grateful Tree’s more narrative prompt. They were also open ended enough (complete with ellipses to allude to vast possibilities) that the public could go in many different directions with their answer. I was a bit worried they were too broad or vague, but decided for the sake of my experiment it was worth trying them out to test that concern.

That night, I prepared supplies for the two installations as the final parts for what I later termed the “Eudaimonic Tree Pilot,” a study of public engagement in participatory art at three sites. I cut up more plastic poster board, skipping the stickers this time (something I ended up omitting at the Grateful Tree once the restocking became a daily task), bought more big-pump hand sanitizers and sharpies, and wrote out the prompts. Since neither site had a fence to use for staging the cards and other supplies, I found a red ball of yarn to tie everything up directly onto the trees. I packed two bags, one for each site, and set off to install the projects with my partner. (Since access to the parks were not limited by after-dusk restrictions, we were able to do our guerilla-art installation at night rather than in the painful early morning hours as in the CSP installation.) We started at the WP tree, soon to be known as the ‘Dream Tree’ between me and my family. I wasn’t sure how I would use the yarn to secure everything onto the tree and worked instinctively, having my partner hold the sign onto the trunk while I wrapped the yarn around the tree, strapping the sign’s upper and lower corners to the trunk. I then used the only low branch to swing the yarn over and tie a loop to hang the cards and sharpies on. The hand
sanitizer was secured similarly to the sign, first wrapping the yarn around its head and then around the trunk of the tree. We then each wrote out a card and hung it on a branch.

We hurriedly packed up our supplies and hopped back into the car to drive to the next site, about ten minutes away. We parked in Newton Centre and walked with our bag of supplies to the corner of NCP. I hadn't realized how busy Centre Street was at that hour, or how close it appeared to be when we were at the tree, soon to be called the 'Proud Tree'. This install was a bit more haphazard at first as I was concerned we would be spotted and our cover as the 'magical tree installers' would be blown. This led me to wrap the sign in a poor location on the tree at first, managing to pick a spot perfectly blocked by its low hanging branches when walking along the nearby path. Rather than leave it, I cut the sign down, took a step back to the path, and locked my eye on the ideal location for it. I wrapped the yarn around the tiny trunk and repeated the task of hanging the cards and sanitizer. Once the tree was done, we filled out our own cards before rushing to the street with our bag in tow and blending back into the scene. We reached our car in relief and drove back home.

The goal had been to erect all three sites of the Eudaimonic Tree Pilot in time for the unseasonably warm weather expected on December 13th when temperatures would reach a mind-bending 56 degrees. It was a Sunday and the warm weather promised a lot of foot traffic around the sites. It would be Day Three of the Grateful Tree, and Day One of the Dream Tree and Proud Tree. My plan was to observe all three sites in a circuit, starting at CSP, then heading to WP, and then NCP before repeating the loop. This would allow me to see, perhaps for the only day of the winter-bound pilot, a critical mass of people exposed to each tree. I was
interested in witnessing how the public engaged with the various installations, hoping to gain more information to inform my future analysis of the written messages left on their limbs.

At 10am I reached my first site and situated my observation post on the bench overlooking the fields with an unimpeded view of the Grateful Tree conveniently out of visual scope for anyone engaging with it. I took copious notes in a blue-paged observation book I had stapled together the night before, complete with data entry spaces at the top left of each page to note the “Site,” “Date,” “Start Time” (of observation), “End Time” (of observation), and “Weather.” (These data points were chosen based on William H. Whyte’s (1980) observation notes from his time studying the parks of New York City.) The rest of the page was left blank for written observations.

I wasn’t sure exactly what I would take notes about, and began to write down about every person who walked by which started to feel less and less important as I wrote. I realized I was most concerned with people I assumed would stop to write a message but did not, making note of why I thought they would (perhaps based on their characteristics or who they were with) and what they did instead (“glanced briefly,” “stopped and then walked on,” “did not look”). I was also interested in who did stop to write a message. I started timing how long people interacted with the tree, either to write a note or just observe it. The longest interaction I jotted down was a grandmother with her two young grandchildren who each wrote a note, and then posed in front of the tree for their grandmother to take a photo, a total of around five minutes. The average engagement time—from pausing to view the tree to writing a card—was between 30 seconds and a minute and a half.
In the hour that I observed the Grateful Tree, four sets of people stopped to write cards. Other than the grandmother with her grandchildren, there was a man walking alone, a pair of young couples, and one middle-aged couple. I noticed that people walking their dogs were less likely to stop and engage with the tree, as well as large groups of people where perhaps one or two stopped to look but the rest of the group continued on the path and the lookers turned to join them. Parents and grandparents walking with their children were more likely to point to the tree and appeared to talk to their children about it. It seemed to become a teaching moment for them. All the children I saw write a note, both on that observation day and subsequent, less formal days, were then photographed in front of the tree, a sort of memento of the moment.

After my hour at CSP, I packed up my notebook and rode over to WP. I was delighted to see two new notes hanging from the tree in addition to our two from when we installed the project. Perhaps the prompts and location would work after all. At first I set up my observation post on a bench at the outer edge of the park, about fifty feet from the tree. I thought that since the bench was at an angle, and not directly facing the tree, if anyone stopped at the tree they would not feel as though I was staring right at them. The first couple I witnessed from the bench appeared to live in the neighborhood as they were out walking their dog, and were surprised by the tree. They looked directly back at me as I was busy looking distracted, and then kept walking. This told me my post was perhaps not the most incognito. I noticed a few picnic benches on the outskirts of the New Art Center’s lawn and moved over to one of them. This put a street between me and the tree, and was barely noticeable to someone walking by as it was just out of peripheral sight (Appendix A.18). I sat at the table, keeping busy with a book and some snacks and was a bit disheartened to not see anyone do more than glance at the
installation. There was even a young family with a toddler running around the tree and no one stopped to engage with it. An uneventful hour passed and I packed up to head to the Proud Tree for observations.

A few cards had been hung at this tree as well which brought my spirits up again. I parked my bike at a tree down-hill from the Proud Tree and sat leaning against its trunk. The park was teeming with young people, walking along its path, playing basketball, and sipping on sodas from the Centre. My first observation of engagement was of two teens who stepped off the path to read the cards. Soon after, a middle-aged couple with two dogs did the same. Then some young teen boys stopped to read the sign and one card. The amount of people reading the cards was an interesting occurrence. Most people at the Grateful Tree did not stop to read the cards, which appeared to be more popular at this site. In addition, the people at the Grateful Tree who did read the cards appeared to then write one themselves, as opposed to what I was witnessing at the Proud Tree. This, I hypothesized, may be because the location of the tree was between two highly-attractive destinations: the park and the Centre. People walking around CSP are not often in a rush, rather they are there to relax and enjoy the experience. People walking by the Proud Tree are on their way to destinations, perhaps to meet friends or on their way to get food. Interestingly, the first people I observed writing notes to hang were again a grandmother and her grandchildren who this time were teenagers. They spent a little over four minutes at the tree, reading the cards, and coming up with their own messages. This was the only group of people hanging their notes that I observed in the hour I was there.

I hopped back on my bike to observe the Grateful Tree one last time that day. It was now 2:30pm and from a distance I noticed that the fence of cards appeared to be in low stock. It was
too busy and bright out to put new ones up, but I noted that I would need to make another stop there later on to do so. The trail was even more busy than before and I observed many families stop at the tree to look or hang a message. I only stayed for thirty minutes this time as I knew it would get dark by 4pm and I still had the other two other sites to observe before the end of the day.

I decided to stop home to get my car since I would need to rush to CSP right at dusk to restock the cards and I didn’t have any with me at the time. I then drove to WP and this time observed from my parked car. This offered plenty of cover for me to view peoples’ interactions with the tree. Most people walking by were out with their dogs and only briefly glanced at the tree. There were much fewer people out as it was now around 3:30pm and the air was more brisk than before. The most direct engagement I witnessed in the thirty minutes I was there was a teen girl stopping at the tree to read the sign, then taking out her phone to take a photo before walking away (Appendix A.19). Since it was so quiet, before leaving I went to the tree and counted how many blank cards were left from the twenty-five it started with. Nine cards had been used, much to my surprise after observing hardly any engagement in the two observation sessions I had performed that day.

I got back into my car and drove to the Proud Tree which had filled out in the few hours since I was last there. Twenty-two of the twenty-five cards had been used. The sight was striking: a bare tree along a cold winter path with bright cards of pride whipping in the wind (Appendix A.20). From 4pm to 4:30pm no one engaged with the tree but the work had already been done for the day, and the community had embraced the eudaimonically-inspired prompt.
For the next few weeks, the trees filled up and I sneakily restocked the cards, keeping a tally of how many were used each time I did (Appendix C). The Grateful Tree was by far the most popular. It filled up to the point where people were actually using their own paper and even leaves to write notes when card stock ran out—examples of the community taking ownership of the installation. The community appeared to embrace the tree, making it their own with offerings of sumac flowers balancing on its branches and a halo of twigs donning its crown. The tree was a hit, overwhelming my modest expectations of a somewhat better year than last, and instead displaying a tremendous outpouring of engagement from the community as shown by the cards left on its limbs. There were many more notes thanking the creator of the installation for providing the tree. The other two sites used significantly fewer cards over the same amount of time. I didn’t spend too much time reading the cards or analyzing them at the time, and was most concerned with photographing as much as I could of public engagement for future analysis.

I decided to end the experiment before the New Year this time as the Dream Tree and Proud Tree had both experienced vandalism and I was feeling like their time had run out, that the community had engaged as long as it wanted to and they were now a marker of teenage mutiny. I had noticed early on with the Proud Tree that there was a day when no cards had been used at all, which surprised me. On average, there was always at least one card used at each site, more often four to five cards. It was late and I didn’t think much of it however the next day when I went to check on the card stock, I noticed there were no sharpies left. I realized they must have been missing the day before and I hadn’t noticed. Without sharpies, no one could write out a card, which explained the anomaly of no engagement that day or the day before. This didn’t
bother me as I took it as another data point to consider when installing a public art piece. I had even left up the somewhat crude message I noticed a few days before where someone had left a phone number and wrote “Dis Phatty,” allowing the public to express themselves regardless of intent. I headed home and grabbed the spare sharpies I had already purchased and headed back to the tree to hang them up.

The Dream Tree received a much more inappropriate note soon before I decided it was time to take the trees down. On Christmas Eve I visited the tree and noticed a note had fallen from a branch. Intent on putting it back up, I picked up the card and read “To get railed” as the claimed dream of the author. Knowing there were young children who frequented the park with their families, I decided this was a note I would not keep up and tucked it away in my pocket. There were also missing sharpies. This was perhaps the moment I felt the trees had served their purpose and would now become places of vandalism if I did not tend to them daily or comb through their message contents. I realized their locations in teen hotspots—this one down the street from the high school and the Proud tree in a park highly frequented by adolescents—combined with the somewhat private conditions had put them in an ideal setting to become targets.

I decided I would take them all down after Christmas but before the New Year. I wanted to write out my thank you note for the Grateful Tree before being on site this year, and wrote a few drafts before settling on this:

“Thank you for sharing in The Community Tree.

Your notes left behind offer parts of your lives for others to find comfort in and reflect on their own blessings. Together, we can support loved
ones + strangers alike through spontaneous acts of kindness and generosity.”

The note included a drawing of a tree with colorful rectangular ‘leaves’ filling its branches with a little girl pointing up to it. In her other hand was a sign that read “Happy 2021!” (Appendix A. 21). I hoped the note would offer those who knew the context a deeper understanding of what they had participated in, or witnessed.

At 4:30am on December 27th, my partner and I drove over to CSP and dismantled the tree, filling two big ziploc bags with the messages left. I tacked up the thank you note and we rushed to the car. Once we safely drove out of the park, we headed to WP to take down the Dream Tree which had messages on limbs I couldn’t reach but my partner could. After everything was packed away, we headed back home and I took the dismantled installations inside. It was then that I saw the latest vandalism that took place at the Dream Tree. Someone had written on the prompt sign “I dream to get railed by bill cypher and also nagito konaeda a lot” (Appendix A.22). This confirmed to me that it was the right time to take the trees down.

I was too tired to take the Proud Tree down that night so the next night I set out to do so. When I reached for the sign in darkness, I felt a thick substance on its surface. I pulled my hand away in disgust, unable to see what the material was that had been stuck on the sign. I carefully cut it down from the tree, making sure not to haphazardly touch it again, and stuffed everything else in my bag. Once I reached my car, I took a closer look at the sign and noticed it was an orange substance, perhaps putty or even mashed sweet potatoes. I dropped the sign to the ground to take a photo before promptly depositing it into the trash (Appendix A.23). This became another confirmation the Eudaimonic Tree Pilot had run its course.
I did not write thank you notes for the Dream and Proud trees for a couple reasons. One was to further set them apart from the Grateful Tree for comparison. Where the Grateful Tree had a conversational prompt, these two did not. And so, where the Grateful Tree had a closing note, these two would not. I was also perhaps still a bit taken aback by the vandalized signs I had encountered and even though I found them after taking the installations down, I did not feel encouraged to further engage at the locations.

Before beginning my analysis, I’d like to make a brief note on why I believed it was important to install the projects covertly. The overarching goal for the pilot study was to instill a sense of community among those who participated or encountered the installations. I wanted to remove my hand from the future creation as much as possible, allowing the public to feel ownership of its growth, beauty, and communal development. Allowing the projects to seemingly appear overnight (as they did!) set the stage for its reception as having evolved out of the community.
The Eudaimonic Tree Pilot explored the potential to elicit moving, yet anonymous responses from the public through provocative prompts in natural environments. The installations were placed along public pedestrian ways and were an unexpected sight to those who happened upon them. This spontaneous quality of the installations aimed to spark community connection and agency. I also aimed to explore whether the prompts were able to generate identifiably eudaimonic responses in the message contents. Word choice, location, and medium were among many critical influences in each tree’s engagement outcome, and will be discussed throughout the following section.

The Grateful Tree was by far the most heavily engaged with, requiring nearly full-restocking of the cards on several occasions while the most popular day for the Proud Tree was the first day (22 cards used), and day seven for the Dream Tree (14 cards used). By the end of their installations, the Grateful Tree had over double the amount of messages left at the Dream Tree (45) and nearly triple at Proud Tree (37), with 108 notes filled out by its last day. Although the Grateful Tree was up for one and two days longer than the other two respectively, this cannot account for the vast disparity in engagement numbers and quality.

A. The Grateful Tree’s Success

The Grateful Tree experienced much more engagement than the other two trees. Before diving into the many reasons why this may have happened it is important to point out that the
Grateful Tree was in its second year where as the other two trees were displayed for the first 
time. This may have led the Grateful Tree to be more familiar and garnered more participants 
due to the possibility they had witnessed this installation the year prior. While they may not 
have participated then, seeing the tree this second time could have reduced the barriers of 
engagement, a condition not present at the other two sites.

Nonetheless, the overwhelming participatory success and quality of engagement found 
at the Grateful Tree appears to be due to multiple other factors. I believe the location of the tree 
played a critical role in the number of responses and quality of the messages. The trail leading 
into the woods of CSP appears to attract community members interested in nature, exercise, 
connection, and family, among other values, due to the amenities available in the park that 
would attract such individuals. The park is also a destination in its own merit, attracting people 
to its landscape with the intention to experience it. This limits the public’s potential to become 
distracted, unlike the Proud Tree’s location in Newton Centre, one of the city’s busiest areas full 
of shops and restaurants. This prime location which attracts primed pedestrians out for a stroll 
may have generated the ideal conditions for ample engagement from the public.

I also believe the wording on the Grateful Tree’s prompt played a vital role in garnering 
the quantity and quality of participation. Unlike the Dream Tree and Proud Tree whose prompts 
could be described as ‘brief’ or ‘lacking context’, the narrative phrasing of the Grateful Tree’s 
prompt invited the public to engage. Its first line read, “Welcome to the Community Tree.” This 
created context for the public to understand what they came across unexpectedly in the park. 
Taking this word by word, “Welcome” is the invitation to engage with the tree. “Community” 
reminds the public that they are part of one. “Tree” is an artifact of nature that they are in
pursuit of, with the woods not far away. The prompt continued, “Tell us what you are grateful for” with a heart drawn below. An anonymous yet familiar “us” further instills the sense of community. This community (“us”) wants to know something about “you,” opening the viewer to the opportunity to engage and consider their broader context. And then, the subject of the prompt is introduced—being “grateful”—a concept we are often raised to value and view as the source of traits we admire, such as expressing humility and kindness. The addition of a heart beneath the words may have added an extra sense of familiarity, perhaps reminiscent of notes left by their own loved ones. Combined, the subliminal meanings behind each word of the prompt as well as its narrative format invited the viewer to ease into engagement, reducing the barriers often felt in public acts.

The Dream Tree and Proud Tree, on the other hand, had much more succinct prompts. “I Dream…” and “I Am Proud…” are without context. Unlike the Grateful Tree’s prompt with words that subtly inform the viewer of a broader scope (community), these two prompts leave interpretation wide open to the public. There is no “welcome” or hint at a communal “us,” in fact both are defined by “I,” perhaps setting the participant up for a less-than-eudaimonic answer. While the concepts of “dreams” and “pride” are rooted in the words of Aristotle (as explained in the previous chapter), the singular “I” may reduce the likelihood a response will be community oriented, a hallmark of eudaimonic sentiments. The prompts’ briefness may have also limited the warmth produced in the participant compared to the Grateful Tree’s more inviting words. These two prompts are more abstract, putting the onus on the participant to interpret it and find meaning.
Another distinct (yet intentional) difference between the Grateful Tree and the Dream and Proud Trees was the kind of tree used. The pilot was conducted in December when Christmas trees are relevant and induce an unavoidable sense of holiday spirit. While the tree was not a ‘Christmas tree’ per se, and instead was referred to as a religiously-neutral “Community Tree,” it nonetheless may have been identified as such. The somewhat subliminal effect this may have had on participants could have influenced the quality of responses left on its limbs.

Another quality inherent in the medium of an artificial tree is that it is not natural, rather someone bought and placed the tree in its current location. This may have also contributed to the type of message left as the knowledge that the Grateful Tree was someone’s ‘property’ and not of the public domain could have garnered more respect for its purpose. The Dream and Proud Trees were both naturally growing from public land and therefore may have produced a sense of ownership from participants. This in turn may have given some community members an emboldened response, leading them to vandalize and leave messages that subverted the intent.

All three trees, however, were located in public space. This allowed many different community perspectives to converge. Some may have viewed my attempt to create a community-based project as an interference with public space, resulting in responses that reflect that sentiment. Others still appear to have found value that reflects my original intent, as evident in their message contents. These differences in response indicate varying conceptions of how public space is appropriately used, a distinction that is important to remain mindful of when erecting participatory art in the public domain. The community should be considered as the owners of the land used to house the project. Instilling the installation with as much sense of
respect, whether through location or word choice, is critical in shaping its reception, however there is likely to be diverging perspectives when public space is ascribed a particular use and responses that reflect that sentiment should be respected as well.

B. Site Engagement Analysis

In this section I will explore site engagement through discussion of direct observation of the sites, evidence of unexpected engagement left on the trees, participation from identifiable demographics, and vandalism experienced at two of the sites. By analyzing this range of influences, the success of future participatory art installations can be informed and anticipated.

1. The Act of Engagement

It is important to dive deeper into the creation of the art piece. Although only one Christmas-like-tree was used, the act of placing a note on any of the trees replicated the cultural ornamentation of a Christmas tree. This too is likely to have influenced engagement. There is something festive about placing an ornament on a tree in December. It is a seasonal marker of cultural expectations (such as gift giving and spending time with family), and is also often associated with past holidays (and therefore rich with personal histories). This deeply ingrained experience of decorating a tree was a critical influence in the design of this study. The timing of the installations was purposefully aligned with the holiday season, putting the project in sync with the community’s state of mind. It also provided fertile ground for considering the prompts which alluded to the season’s shared experience of reflection with loved ones.
Finally, the act of placing something you have written on a tree is an act of creation. The participant is now a spontaneous co-creator in the art piece, adding their note to the collection of notes spread across the tree. The art is the form that evolves from each participant’s hand in the creation of the whole with each note becoming traces of community. The significance of this will be discussed further in section four of this chapter.

2. Observations

As described in the Pilot Study section of this paper, a total of one and a half hours of observation at each site was conducted in one day. In addition to that day, many less formal observations were made throughout the duration of the pilot study. The following is a combined understanding of who participated at each site, and in what way.

A common participatory act observed at all three sites was the public taking photos of the trees. At the Grateful Tree I witnessed surprising commitments to photograph the tree by individuals who appeared to go out of their way to do so. One day I was busy covertly sticking more cards up on the fence when a man appeared who seemed to be hovering around the far end of the trail. I couldn’t continue without getting noticed and decided to walk back to my car and wait for him to leave the site. When I got to my car, I saw that he had circled back to the tree to take a photo. Another day, I witnessed someone walk from their car directly to the tree and take a photo, only to head back to their car and not into the park. This ‘out-of-the-way’ documentation of the tree through photos suggests to me that it became a ‘landmark’ of sorts. The public assigned meaning to this installation, so much so that it became a site within a site (a
‘place’) worthy of documentation, similar to monuments within cities. I also observed at the Grateful Tree grandmothers and parents photographing their young children in front of the tree after having filled out a card. This suggests the participatory activity became a teaching moment worthy of creating a photographic memento.

The other two sites experienced public photographic documentation as well. In the instances I witnessed they were taken by youths, perhaps a reflection of the demographic most likely to come in contact with these sites due to their locations. For example, at the Dream Tree I witnessed a young teen girl pass by the tree, recognize the unusual installation, and take a photo before walking away without filling out a card (Appendix A.19). It is possible this happened many times at the sites, and is important to consider why. While my participatory analysis is generally limited to the physical notes left on each tree, photographing the site is a participatory act as well, though one I would be generally unaware of unless by chance encounter. The ultimate destination of such a photo is likely to remain unknown—it is possible they then posted the image on their social media accounts or shared it with their friends—however the end is less important than the means. The act of photographing suggests the individual finds value in the object of interest. This further exemplifies the importance of observing installation sites as often as possible, which will be covered in the concluding chapter’s *Improvements* section. It also suggests the potential reach these installations had in accessing youth participation.

a. Grateful Tree
My observations of public engagement at the Grateful Tree revealed interesting participation trends. On several occasions I witnessed grandmothers and mothers help what appeared to be their grandchildren and children fill our cards of gratitude. The children tended to be old enough to walk on their own, and were often photographed after participating, as mentioned above. A couple of friends out for a stroll was another group of people likely to stop at the tree. This may be due to the casual nature of such a walk, with no set destination other than the path to distract from noticing the tree and delighting in its unexpected quality together. This shared experience was also not lost on couples who I witnessed pointing out cards they liked to one another before each filling one out.

There were also distinct groups that were less likely to engage with the tree. Families with strollers were less likely to stop at the tree, perhaps further supporting my hypothesis that adult assistance with child participation served a primary purpose of creating a teaching moment, one that would be lost on a baby still in a stroller. Larger groups of people walking by were also unlikely to stop at the tree. This may be due to the momentum of the group’s purpose for being at the park, which likely did not include participating at the tree. At times one or two group members would pause at the tree, but once they noticed the group did not stop, they rushed back to their friends, leaving the tree behind. Dog walkers appeared to be highly unlikely to stop at the tree, being led by their pooch and most likely headed to the dog park deep in the forest.

b. Dream Tree
I rarely witnessed direct participation at the Dream Tree, seeming to miss the moments of engagement but finding evidence of it occurring based on the number of cards used. I spent time observing from my car on the first day of the installation, and on many days after (prior to getting out to check whether cards needed replenishing). During these sessions, I witnessed multiple individuals pause at the tree or take photos but never in the act of writing a note. This is likely due to the time of day I often stopped at the tree to refill the card stock, primarily at dusk after most people were probably home preparing for dinner.

Nonetheless, the act of photographing (as mentioned earlier in this section) as well as an individual’s pause at the installation can still be considered forms of engagement. Of those I witnessed performing these acts, the majority of ‘photographers’ were adolescent while those who paused were often a mix of dog walkers, couples out for a stroll, individuals on their way into Newtonville, or mothers pushing a stroller. They would often stop in surprise at the installation before them and look up and around at the cards hanging from the tree limbs. Though the pause was often quick, between ten and thirty seconds, the intent was clear. These members of the community were observing the installation, taking in the effects, and walking on, perhaps thinking over what they had just witnessed. Due to the anonymity inherent in this study, I could not tell you what they were thinking, whatever it was, as Aristotle claimed, “flourishing, being blessed, is some form of contemplating” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1178b32).

c. Proud Tree
The Proud Tree provided more opportunities to witness individuals fill out a card and hang it on a limb. They ranged from teenagers out with one or two friends, to grandmothers with grandchildren, to single men and women passing by. As with the other two sites, the initial response from individuals was a sense of surprise followed by inspection. Often people would begin by reading what others had written before deciding to fill out a message of their own. Groups similar to those who passed the Grateful tree were unlikely to engage, particularly families with young children and people in large groups.

3. Community Additions

The community did not limit themselves to the cards and sharpies provided. At all three sites, notes were left on other materials. These materials ranged from leaves (found at the Grateful Tree) (Appendix A.24-26), to a large index card (found at the Dream Tree) (Appendix A.27), to hole-punched construction paper (found at the Proud Tree) (Appendix A.28-29). The Grateful Tree’s leaf-messages appeared to have coincided with when cards were out of stock at the site, suggesting a commitment from the public to participate nonetheless. They also seem to have been done by children, another testament to the commitment from parents and guardians to encourage engagement. Another outside material used for a note was found at the Grateful Tree: it was safety-pinned over the original note that had washed away. Apparently, the message-writer wanted to make sure their note was legible for the public (Appendix A.30-31).

The message written on a large index card at the Dream Tree may have had more to do with the limited space provided on the cards available as the message-writer had a lot to say.
regarding Donald Trump and the Republican Party. It suggests that the individual considered
the prompt, went home and filled out a note on their own materials, another demonstration of
commitment to participate. The Proud Tree experienced a similar engagement tactic, this time
from a child. The construction paper was hole punched and drawn on by a young child. Since it
is unlikely the parent or guardian had the paper and a hole punch on them as they walked by
the tree, this too suggests the participants filled out the message at home and came back to
place it on the tree. All of these instances suggest the public was highly engaged with these
installations and were committed to participate in the installation to their fullest capacity.

At the Grateful Tree natural decorations were another community addition. Early in the
study, a member or members of the public balanced sumac flowers along its limbs and added a
twig halo to the top of the tree (Appendix A. 32-33). This is an example of the public co-creating
the installation, expanding on the prompt through different mediums than the notecards
provided. Their additions turn the tree into an alter that seemingly expresses gratefulness to
nature.

Similarly, cards that included drawings can be understood as the public’s co-creation of
the installation by using images as a form of expression. Hearts were the most common drawing
found on the messages, with hearts present on 26 of the total 38 notes found with drawings.
Hearts are commonly used to symbolize love, and often accompanied statements regarding
family and friends in the message contents. Other times, more intricate images were drawn, such
as the mountains and sun that accompanied a note left at the Grateful Tree that read, “the
outdoors :)” (Appendix A.34). Drawings found on notes that were not accompanied by words
related to the prompt (rather were signed, or had no words at all) were exclusively done by
young children ([Appendix A.35-37](#)). This suggests the capacity of the pilot study to reach this often overlooked demographic and inspire participation to the best of their ability.

4. Vandalism

Two of the three sites experienced vandalism: The Dream Tree and the Proud Tree. These acts were performed in strikingly similar ways. Both trees had their sharpies stolen, essentially preventing others from participating in the installation. They also received messages that might have dissuaded other community members from engaging or left them feeling unsettled. This too is a form of vandalism, a deliberate subversion of the trees’ sentiments.

Perhaps the most striking similarity in the vandalism experienced at the two trees were the acts committed directly on the prompt itself. As described in the [Pilot Study](#) section, an individual at the Dream Tree added “I dream to get railed by bill cypher and also nagito konaeda a lot”. The placement of this message directly on the prompt ensured its visibility, and heightened its potentially-negative effects. The Proud Tree’s prompt was smeared with an unknown orange substance that both covered its words and made the sign unappealing. These two forms of vandalism were clearly intended to undermine with the intent of the art installations, and interfere on the community’s participation.

It is important to discuss what factors may have led to these acts of vandalism. To start, let’s take a look at each site’s location. The Dream Tree was located a short walk from the local high school. WP is a popular hang-out for students, with benches and picnic tables available and Newtonville’s takeout restaurants not far away. This increased the exposure of the installation to
this demographic. Adolescents are often just beginning to experience their rebellious side, are susceptible to the goading of friends and in need of social approval (and would score ‘low’ in Ryff’s Autonomy dimension as described later in Figure 12). These influences, combined with the relatively secluded location of the tree away from the main road likely made the Dream Tree an irresistible target. Similarly, the Proud Tree was situated just off the main road and was also located on a site frequented by youth attracted to the park’s amenities such as basketball courts, playing fields, and benches that were just down the path from the installation.

An interesting correlation emerged when analyzing the messages. Only the trees that received ‘joke’ messages were vandalized (see Appendix G.8 for more about ‘joke’ messages). The Grateful Tree did not have any joke messages and experienced no vandalism. As most of the joke messages appeared to have been left by adolescents, it is possible the vandalism occurred at their hands as well. This would further suggest the location of the trees and the demographics who passed them played a role in this correlating condition. The importance of choosing locations carefully will be discussed in depth in the concluding chapter.

C. In What Ways and to What Extent was Eudaimonia Expressed?

Returning to the framework of this paper, it is now important to reflect on what ways and to what extent the pilot study expressed the existence of eudaimonia within the community. As a reminder, eudaimonia can be understood generally as achieving a sense of well-being by reaching one’s fullest potential (Waterman, 1984). Assessing whether eudaimonia was expressed through the public’s engagement with the pilot study requires us to think creatively about how
to use psychological assessment tools in a novel way. Carol Ryff’s research has played a vital role in the development of Psychological Well Being (PWB) assessment scales, making the distinction between Hedonic Well Being (HWB) and Eudaimonic Well Being (EWB) (Pritchard et al., 2020). While there are well over 350 PWB scales in circulation (Ryff, 2013), Ryff’s EWB scale designed around her six eudaimonic indicators has been used by countless researchers to analyze eudaimonic effects in studies (Pritchard et al., 2020). These indicators were discussed in the Modern Psychology portion of this thesis’ Literature Review and will be reviewed briefly in order to establish a basis for understanding the pilot study in this context.

Ryff is interested in uncovering “what constitutes essential features of well-being” (2013, p11) in more meaningful ways than hedonically-focused research concerned with happiness and life satisfaction. To this end, Ryff distills six key components of well-being: Purpose in Life; Autonomy; Personal Growth; Environmental Mastery; Positive Relationships with Others; and Self-Acceptance. These dimensions create the framework for an 84-item self-reported assessment of well-being that she designed which has since been reduced to a 42-item and 18-item assessment (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Ryff’s brief definitions of each component are as follows:

(1) the extent to which respondents felt their lives had meaning, purpose and direction (purpose in life); (2) whether they viewed themselves to be living in accord with their own personal convictions (autonomy); (3) the extent to which they were making use of their personal talents and potential (personal growth); (4) how well they were managing their life situations (environmental mastery); (5) the depth of connection they had in ties with significant others (positive relationships), and (6) the knowledge and acceptance they had of themselves, including awareness of personal limitations (self-acceptance). (2013, p11)

(More in depth definitions of Ryff’s 6 dimensions of well-being can be found in Appendix H.)

Ryff then distinguishes the difference between scoring high in a dimension versus scoring low, as described in Figure 12.
Definitions of theory-guided dimensions of well-being (Ryff, 2013, p12)

This further delineates how we can understand the various aspects of each dimension which are “consistent with a eudaimonic perspective” (Ryff, 2013, p11).

1. Ryff’s 6 Dimensions Applied to Prompt Phrasing and Message Content

Ryff asserts that “research on well-being, if it is to do justice to the topic, needs to encompass the meaningmaking, self-realizing, striving aspects of being human” (2013, p12).

With this in mind, we can begin to apply Ryff’s 6 dimensions of well-being to our analysis of the pilot study’s eudaimonic effect beginning with the prompts themselves. All three prompts were
relatively broad in scope, allowing the public to choose what to focus their response on, but did prompt phrasing influence the eventual content left on each accompanying tree? How eudaimonically-rooted can each prompt be considered? In order to explore these questions, I have analyzed the prompt phrasing within the scope of Ryff’s 6 dimensions to begin uncovering the context in which the public approached writing their messages. I also turn back to Aristotle’s two treatises in order to provide a deeper context to prompt inspiration.

In order to explore whether eudaimonia was revealed in message content I have analyzed and assigned one or more relevant dimensions to every message, found in Appendix D.2 (bar graphs of each pilot tree can be found in Appendix D.2.a.ii; D.2.b.ii; and D.2.c.ii). For content that did not fit within one of the 6 dimensions it was assigned “N/A” for “not applicable.” The assignment of each dimension was determined based on a personal understanding of Ryff’s literature in conjunction with her own definitions of each dimension. Without direct input from message-writers we are limited to interpretation. (For a complete list of message content and applied dimensions please refer to Appendix E.)

It is important to note that these dimensions are being used in a different way than their original intent. Ryff’s 84-item self-reported assessment and subsequent shorter versions are typically used to conduct quantitative research. In my use of Ryff’s subscale, I will be applying her concepts of each dimension to data already collected in a qualitative research model. Perhaps more importantly I will be applying her concepts to data that was not designed to neatly fit the 6 dimensions. This again will require a subjective, novel application of her preeminent EWB subscale to my research. To this end, I will be relying primarily on Ryff’s
accompanying definitions of the “high scorer” of the 6 dimensions found in Figure 12 in order to apply them to my pilot study. The high scorer definitions will be used primarily because if messages align with those definitions they inherently do not express qualities of the “low scorer.”

a. “Welcome to the Community Tree/Tell us what you are grateful for”

It is difficult to pin down which of Ryff’s 6 dimensions can be applied to this prompt. This is because its phrasing is so broad and responses can easily be inspired from any of the 6 dimensions. In order to dive deeper into whether we can understand the concept of ‘gratefulness’ as eudaimonic in nature I have turned back to Aristotle’s two treatises. First however, let’s review what being ‘grateful’ is. We can understand gratefulness as being when one has a sense of appreciation and thankfulness. This feeling can arise due to specific actions someone else has taken on their behalf or from a general feeling of gratefulness in the broader scope of life.

In both the *EE* and *NE*, Aristotle lists character traits that fall on a spectrum. The middle state is the ideal ‘eudaimonic’ state and the far ends of the spectrum are both undesirable states. For example in the *EE* Aristotle lists “justice” as the middle, eudaimonic state with “gain” and “loss” on either extreme. Looking at just the middle states listed by Aristotle “modesty” and “gentleness” in the *EE* and “good natured” and “truthful about yourself” in the *NE* are characteristics that touch upon the concept of gratefulness. All of these characteristics infer a sense of understanding one’s own abilities and limitations. Having this understanding opens the
possibility to feel grateful as appreciation can only come about when an individual realizes some of these things about themselves.

In this sense the concept of gratefulness may be more likely to inspire respondents to think about people in their lives whom they are grateful for more than other influences, since being grateful is often in relation to other people. This may help explain why there were an overwhelming number of messages about Positive Relations with Others (PRO) found at this site. Of the 108 total messages left at the Grateful Tree, 74 had content that can be recognized as being about PRO. Some examples include, “Grateful for all the friends of Cold Spring Park!,” “My children who keep me happy & show me the joys of life!” and “our community our community our community.” Each of these indicate the message writers’ “warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others” (Figure 12), a critical element of Ryff’s PRO characteristics.

There is also an aspect of recognizing the “give and take of human relationships” (Figure 12) in these messages, acknowledging the dependence we have on others for our sense of well-being. In a previous section of this thesis I mentioned that this prompt was also distinct in its phrasing as it was the most narrative of the three prompts and invited people to consider a broader context (“the community,” “us”) when answering its main question about gratefulness. This too may have influenced the prevalence of PRO sentiments.

Over one-third of the messages left at the Grateful Tree also showed elements of Environmental Mastery (EM) (39 out of 108). This may be more reflective of the role location played in creating a setting to respond to the prompt. Cold Spring Park is a destination for recreation, relaxation and other restorative activities (Kaplan, 1995). People who are able to
make “effective use of surrounding opportunities” (Figure 12) such as taking a break at Cold Spring Park are likely to have heightened levels of EM. For example, one response read, “The sun shining/This wonderful park/A new era for our country.” This message writer is indicating in the content of this response an ability to “create contexts suitable to personal needs and values” (Figure 12) by seeking out “This wonderful park” and being where the sun is shining.

The third most common dimension identified in the content found at the Grateful Tree was Autonomy (AU). In this location, all of the messages that were assigned to that dimension were also contributed by youth (there are examples of AU messages found at the other trees written by adults which will be discussed in the other prompt sections). Even when a parent or guardian helped write the message for the child, the participation can be considered an autonomous act in the context of a child. The content reflects their thoughts, creativity and beliefs which suggests an understanding of “personal standards” (Figure 12). It is an act of independence as well by “self-determining” (Figure 12) what they wish to say or draw in response to the prompt. The assistance of the parent is also evidence of them helping the child gain a sense of AU by signing their name and including their age in some cases. When parents identify that the thoughts written by their hand are actually those of their child, it shifts ownership to the child and indicates independence of thought.

It is important to note the overwhelming number of youth participants in this prompt compared to the other two, which experienced far less. This is most likely due to a combination of the site’s location in a park frequented by families and adjacent to an elementary school, as well as to the prompt’s subject. ‘Gratefulness’ is a concept many parents would like to teach
their children. The Grateful Tree may have provided the perfect opportunity to explain to children what gratefulness is and help them formulate a response. The photographs taken after hanging their responses as noted earlier in this thesis are perhaps evidence of this as well. A parent can feel proud that their children recognize what gratefulness is and may hope to capture that feeling in a photograph.

The three least prevalent dimensions found in messages left at the Grateful Tree were Purpose in Life (PL) (10), Personal Growth (PG) (6), and Self-Acceptance (SA), (0). A common factor in all these dimensions is that they all closely relate to the self. The relatively few responses that apply to these dimensions therefore may still reflect a eudaimonic sentiment. The overwhelming majority of respondents were thinking of influences outside of themselves that they are most grateful for. This suggests the public who engaged with the Grateful Tree were influenced to approach their responses in a broader intersectional context. This is likely due to a variety of factors ranging from location in a communal area, prompt phrasing, and the concept of gratefulness.

Only eight messages were not aligned with Ryff’s six dimensions and were labeled N/A. Some examples include “Red Sox,” “photoshoot” and a short poem that read “For many a rose lipped maid + many a light foot lad.” In each of these cases it was not clear what the motivating factors were behind the messages and therefore they could not be assigned a dimension.

b. “I Dream...”
The Dream Tree experienced a more even spread of messages that fell into one or some of the six dimensions. This may be a reflection of the relatively sparse prompt phrasing which allowed the public to ‘dream’ broadly, considering many different aspects of life. The original inspiration for this prompt came directly from the NE. It aimed to capture the sentiments of one of Aristotle’s eudaimonic middle states, “ambitious in a good way.” I chose the word “dream” as a means of capturing this concept to give respondents permission to imagine new possibilities and recognize hidden ambitions.

The positioning of “I” as the subject makes it likely that responses would be more self-focused and tally more messages in the PG, PL, and SA dimensions. Upon analysis of each message in the context of Ryff’s 6 dimensions these three did capture many of the sentiments left at the Dream Tree but were not the most frequent. However, if we were to consider all three dimensions as examples of participants interested in self improvement they would represent the most messages.

The most common dimension expressed at the Dream Tree was PRO (18 out of 45 messages). Many of these messages were concerned with the broader scope of humanity such as “I dream of a world without suffering.” This message “is concerned about the welfare of others” and suggests the message writers possession “of strong empathy” (Figure 12). Still others were more personal such as “I dream of hugging my loved ones <3” and “I dream of my baby boy.” These two indicate that the message writers are “capable of strong...affection and intimacy” (Figure 12). All three messages are examples of eudaimonically charged sentiments that capture the essence of the PRO dimension. It is interesting that this dimension was the
most common given that the prompt is oriented toward the self. This indicates a deep appreciation of community and humanity in the public who engaged in this way, arguably exemplifying eudaimonia in its highest form.

The second most common dimension found in the messages left at the Dream Tree was EM (16 out of 45 messages). The vast majority of these messages were broad in scope, suggesting the public’s concern with global issues. For example, “I dream of a peaceful, healthy world filled with love and abundance <3.” In this message, the individual who wrote it is expressing a desire for the world to be able to “create contexts suitable to personal needs and values” (Figure 12). To the message writer “peace,” “love,” and “abundance” are key ingredients to a “healthy world,” characteristics that align with the EM dimension. The public may have been inspired to think more broadly when answering this prompt due to the visioning it stirred in them. The ellipsis infers something that is not mentioned, and may have been subliminally interpreted by the public to be about something big, like the health of the world or a world without violence (“I dream of a world without violence”). Similar to the PRO messages, this broader scope of consideration is indicative of the public’s greater appreciation of human value.

The third most common dimension uncovered in messages left at the Dream Tree was PG (14 out of 45 messages). This dimension more closely aligns with what I expected the prompt to inspire. These messages express “a feeling of continued development,” individuals’ seeing “improvement in self and behavior over time,” and having a “sense of realizing his or her potential” (Figure 12). One PG message reads, “I dream of being the best person I can be.” This indicates the individual who wrote this is aware that there is room to become the best person
they can be and has not yet fully reached that potential within themself. The desire to do so, however, is the most important part of this message. It indicates that PG is valued and prioritized by the individual. Another similar example is “To experience life with an open heart instead of a cold shoulder.” Again, the message writer is indicating an awareness of an area within themself that they wish to improve is naming that part to work on. It is likely that these desires for self improvement were already within the message writers prior to engaging with the prompt and the prompt gave voice to and expressed this eudaimonic goal.

SA is another common dimension found in responses at the Dream Tree that more closely aligns with my hypothesized response type (10 out of 45). These notes suggest that the message writer “possesses a positive attitude toward the self” and “acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities” (Figure 12). Most of the SA messages overlapped with PG and PL dimensions as well. One message that captured all three characteristics reads “to be kind + loving to all as well as myself now...” In this note the individual recognizes the value of SA by wanting “to be kind + loving” to themself and alludes to wanting to accept all sides of the self simply by writing this message. For an individual to voice a desire to be more kind to themself infers an interest in accepting “multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities” (Figure 12) that they are not currently accepting of. The desire to improve and grow is key to eudaimonia, and is voiced in messages like this that hope to reach a fuller degree of SA.

One message was purely within the SA dimension and read “I dream that I can c how swag I am ;).” While this message is a bit tongue-in-cheek it does identify the individual’s desire
to possess “a positive attitude toward the self” (Figure 12). It also proves to be on the higher side of SA when we look at a quality in the “low scorer” definition that reads, “wishes to be different than what he or she is.” Clearly this message writer is happy with how “swag” they are and does not wish to be any more or less “swag.”

The PL dimension tallied eight responses and was often found in messages that expressed the PG or SA dimension as well. This makes sense as all three of these dimensions intersect with self improvement and align with the subject, “I dream.” An example of a message that was both PG and PL reads “I dream to be a famous surgeon.” The message writer has identified a goal in life that gives them “a sense of directedness” and exposes “aims and objectives for living” (Figure 12), all qualities within the PL dimension. Inherent in this goal is the message writer’s desire to continue development and have a “sense of realizing his or her potential” (Figure 12) which capture the essence of PG.

The least common dimension expressed at the Dream Tree was AU. Three out of the four messages that are coded AU were written by children. This point has already been explored in the Dream Tree where youth participation can be considered an act of AU. The one message written by an adult that arguably falls within the AU dimension reads “To be as much in the moment as I can…” In order to achieve this goal, the individual would have to regulate “behavior from within” in order to be “able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways” (Figure 12). Being distracted is our modern norm so in order for the individual to be more present they would need to actively “resist” that “social pressure.”
The relatively few AU messages found at the Dream Tree is not necessarily a surprising result. While AU intersects with the concept of self improvement like the PG, PL and SA dimensions it is not as likely to follow from the subject of “dreaming.” Dreams are often about big visions for new possibilities whether that involves the self or the broader context of the world. When the self is considered, it is more likely concerned with PG, PL and SA characteristics as those are goal oriented and more tangible. AU is far more ephemeral and considers topics such as “social pressure” and “personal standards” (Figure 12). These concepts do not as easily align with ‘dreams’ for the future.

Only four messages were assigned N/A. These include “I wish for the new PS5 or xbox” and “I dream of a world without Donald Trump!” Similar to the N/A messages found at the Grateful Tree, the motivations behind these messages are not clear and cannot be assigned a dimension.

c. “I Am Proud...”

Like the Dream Tree’s prompt, this prompt was initially inspired by Aristotle’s list of eudaimonic middle states in the NE. I hoped to evoke the characteristic, “has a sense of pride,” in my prompt “I Am Proud...” The former closely aligns with Ryff’s PG, PL and SA dimensions as realizing one’s full potential, having goals in life, and possessing a positive attitude toward oneself respectively are likely to evoke a sense of pride. I would therefore hypothesize that the same dimensions would be most prevalent in messages left in response to the Proud Tree’s prompt which essentially reframes Aristotle’s original characteristic.
Surprisingly the most common dimension expressed in messages found at the Proud Tree was PRO (29 out of 37). This is a striking result given that “I” was the subject of the prompt and it would be reasonable to assume this would lead respondents to be more ‘self’ oriented in their messages. Most of the PRO messages intersected with other dimensions such as EM (“Myself and my loved ones are caring for each other and our communities so well <3”) and PG (“I am proud of my class for working so hard in school and out!”). These multi-dimensional intersections with PRO expose the value the public has in relationships that exist in a variety of contexts. Some wrote more personal and explicitly PRO-oriented messages such as “I am proud of my mommy!” and “of my children.” Each expresses a sense of having “warm, satisfying trusting relationships” (Figure 12) with members of their family. Even when individuals left messages about themselves they tended to include others as well: “I am proud of working hard in school. I am also proud of my friends.” Relationships with others appear to be highly valued in the community, a value that was elicited by the prompt.

Messages that aligned with the PG dimension were the second most common, tallying nearly half of the responses (16 out of 37). Some examples include, “of my straight A’s!! :)” and “I am proud of myself for persevering though this hard year & developing strong bonds with others.” In the former example “a feeling of continued development” is evoked as well as having “a sense of realizing his or her potential” (Figure 12). The latter example suggests that the individual “sees improvement in self and behavior over time” and “is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness” (Figure 12). These messages are closer to what I originally anticipated individuals would write in response to the Proud Tree’s prompt. The prompt was worded so that personal growth would appear to be more top-of-mind to
respondents and this proved correct in the large number of messages that aligned with the PG dimension.

Messages that aligned with the SA, EM, PL and AU dimensions tallied similar amounts (6, 5, 5, and 4 respectively). They represent between 10-16% of the messages. The relatively few notes within the PL dimension is perhaps the most understandable. The prompt is framed in way that alludes to previous accomplishments, rather than future endeavors (like the Dream prompt). This may cause people to think less about their goals and more about what has been achieved. The EM dimension is also a more difficult fit for this prompt as “pride” does not easily intersect with “mastery and competence in managing the environment” (Figure 12). EM is geared toward less tangible concepts than the things people feel pride in. Similarly the AU dimension in the context of this prompt would require respondents to prioritize resisting social pressures and being independent over the other dimensions that may better fit the prompt’s phrasing.

The relatively few messages that expressed SA characteristics was the most surprising. It would seem that “pride” inherently infers a “positive attitude toward the self” (Figure 12) and yet the majority of messages focused on other eudaimonic aspects, particularly subjects that were not self-oriented. As was mentioned in this section’s discussion of the prevalence of the PRO dimension, it is evident that the members of the public who engaged with this prompt were focused on community and close relationships. This is a striking result given that this prompt appeared to be the most likely one to inspire self-oriented responses—even arrogant ones—that would have been notably un-eudaimonic. Instead the public approached this prompt
considerate of its broader context while focusing on PG. (No messages were left that were marked N/A.)

2. Significance of Expressed Dimensions

Nearly all of the messages left at the three trees were closely aligned with at least one of Ryff’s 6 dimensions. This indicates that the prompts successfully elicited eudaimonic sentiments within the community. These sentiments were most likely already felt within the individuals who participated and it was the encounter with the installations that unearthed these feelings for themselves and the community.

A critical result is that the majority of messages intersected with more than one dimension. This suggests that the prompts inspired multiple values and thoughts to be expressed by the public. The prompts unearthed complexities of life that are often intangible and that found a means of expression through response to the prompts. This is perhaps the result of the phrasing for each prompt which was broad enough to allow the public freedom to explore any number of the dimensions. The subjects of the prompts—‘gratefulness’, ‘dreams’, and ‘pride’—easily intersect with all six of Ryff’s dimensions depending on the unique context and values of the individuals participating. According to Ryff, the more dimensions one possesses the higher their EWB score becomes. As was discussed throughout the previous sections, each prompt aligned with one or more of Ryff’s dimensions, which may indicate why there were varying levels of each dimension found in message contents left at the three sites. This is to say that the prompts made it unlikely that respondents would leave content that
intersected with all six. A more appropriate gauge for understanding the level of eudaimonia expressed would be whether one or more dimensions were expressed in content. The answer is yes, and more often more than one dimension was expressed, indicating high levels of eudaimonia unearthed.

PRO and EM were by far the most common dimensions that were captured in the message content. The prevalence of the PRO dimension indicates that the public strongly values relationships. This may reflect our current pandemic circumstances. For over a year, our interactions in communities have been drastically limited as we ‘socially distance’, work from home, and avoid contact outside of our chosen ‘pods’. It appears that the public has found deep meaning in their relationships during this time, with many expressing pride in family and friends, dreams to hug loved ones, and gratefulness for the community they have. The three installations became a means for the public to recognize their PRO dimension and perhaps through messages left, inspire others to do the same.

It is possible that the prevalence of the EM dimension is a result of the site locations all being in public spaces. This required that participants were already acting out EM by creating new contexts when needed and making “effective use of surrounding opportunities” (Figure 12) (e.g. leaving the house to go for a walk). It is also likely that being outdoors made the subject more top-of-mind, influencing their responses to include a more environmental perspective.

3. Other Eudaimonic Influences
a. Site Location

The public locations of all three sites likely had varying effects on engagement. At the Grateful Tree, the public was in a park with many recreational opportunities and a forest reserve. This context may have created a setting in which people were more aware of the community, and were possibly influenced by the natural environment, which has been proven to inspire EWB (Pritchard et al., 2020). While the tree used in the installation was not natural, it was recognizable as a holiday tree and, placed in the aforementioned context, is likely to have further amplified those influences. Cold Spring Park is a destination park, a ‘place’, tucked away from the busy street and neighboring houses. This also likely influenced participation as it attracts people looking to enjoy time with family and friends, as well as time alone. The motivations behind attending this park are eudaimonic in this way, inspiring PRO through EM while providing space to restore faculties and gain perspective on the self (PG, PL).

The Dream Tree was located in a residential neighborhood on a quiet side street. It is likely that participants were mostly from the surrounding neighborhood as this park is not a destination in the way that Cold Spring Park is, rather it offers locals restoration space. For this reason it provided an important eudaimonic setting for the prompt as its location attracts individuals engaging in EM, perhaps with family and friends (PRO), and provides space for self-reflection (PG, PL, SA).

The Proud Tree was situated along a path that leads into one of Newton’s most popular parks: Newton Centre Park. Like the other two sites, the act of being out in the park is most likely an expression of EM. It is also likely that individuals were with, or had previously
experienced the park with family and friends as it is a place that many enjoy with others. Being alone in the park also may have influenced participant perspective as they are surrounded by community. Both of these experiences could easily influence the participants to be aware of PRO when engaging with the prompt. And like the other two sites, the exposure of PG, PL, and SA dimensions were enabled by the location due to the context that leads people to seek outdoor restoration. This location however, was the least ‘place’ oriented of the three, rather the Proud Tree was located along a path that leads to a ‘place’.

At all three sites AU is likely to have been experienced by individuals engaging with the prompt since being out in public for many is an act of AU; it helps to regulate behavior and is an independent decision (Figure 12). This effect, however, did not translate into the message content which is all that was left for us to interpret. Instead, we can consider that AU was already expressed by individuals walking by the sites and may have influenced the content left as a result.

b. The Role of Anonymity

The installations were engaged with anonymously which may have encouraged participants to create artifacts of their values and the public to find meaning and comfort in those artifacts. The relatively private location where each site was situated supported the anonymous platform for people to share their values, interests, and concerns with the broader community. The anonymous act of placing a message on a tree has multiple eudaimonic effects, beginning by providing an opportunity for the participant to choose to engage. The anonymity
of engagement intrinsically instills in the individual a sense of comradery with the intangible—the broader community. Their message joins fellow messages that together create traces of one another like footprints in the snow. They leave their notes of hopes and dreams with the aspiration that others may draw inspiration from it. They will never know how the community reacted to their message, or whether it was ever read. This is an act of ‘letting-go’ of the outcome, trusting in the good their act of participation will have on others. Being good for good’s sake is the root of all eudaimonic acts.

Anonymity also serves another purpose, by allowing the private lives of the public to be expressed. Knowing that your message will not be linked to you (unless you choose to sign it) releases the pressure to be perfect in your response and permits vulnerability. There were many messages that in another context are unlikely to have been expressed. The pilot study provided a platform for the community to reveal inner truths that may have helped them feel better about their day, or reach a new perspective on a situation.

4. Effects of Six Motivations

I conclude this section by returning to the six motivations behind this pilot study initially discussed in the *Precedent Studies* section. This is to deepen our understanding of each motivation’s effect while analyzing their eudaimonic value. This will allow us to explore the various ways each motivation may have influenced the results of this study in order to inform future participatory art installations that aim to elicit eudaimonic responses.
a. Generate a Sense of Well-Being

This motivation was the central guide throughout the entire pilot study process. The study was inspired by a desire to elevate the public’s well-being during an unprecedented pandemic that left many feeling alone, hopeless, and depressed (Ammar et al., 2021). The framework for addressing well-being was the concept of eudaimonia, one of humanity’s oldest theories for how to live a flourishing life that is still used to guide modern research and philosophy (Moran, 2018; Ryff, 2013; Chappell, 2013; Capuccino, 2013; Wright & Pascoe, 2013; van der Schyff, 2010; Ryan et al., 2006).

The primary way this motivation was addressed was by enacting the pilot study. The trees that housed the installations provided a natural backdrop, creating a subtle sense of nature connection (Pritchard et al., 2020) which has been shown to increase EWB. The eudaimonic effect would be greatly influenced if another medium was used to house the prompts, for example a wall. The prompts were a more direct expression of eudaimonia as has been discussed throughout section two of this chapter, and appear to have elicited notes that reflected all of Ryff’s 6 dimensions. These messages indicate the well-being effect each installation had on the public.

b. Co-Create with the Public

The value of co-creating with the public was explored through a variety of participatory art projects, communal-based art therapy precedents, and two examples of spontaneous co-creations in the Precedent Studies section. A co-creation continuum (Figure 6) was designed to
help illuminate the differences in projects that were highly co-created and minimally co-created. The analysis indicated that spontaneous co-creations were the most likely, of the precedents explored, to be considered highly co-created while participatory art projects that were closely directed by artists tended to have minimal co-creation.

In this pilot study all three of the installations had elements of spontaneity in their creation. The Grateful Tree, while it had been erected the year before, can still be considered a spontaneous creation as the public was unaware of its origins and the participation with it was organic and led by the public—two critical components to the spontaneous co-creations discussed in the Precedent Studies section. The Dream and Proud Trees were even more spontaneous as they were inspired by the response first seen at the Grateful Tree. I interpreted the public’s engagement at the first site as a sign that the community craved a means of expressing the positives in life when so much seemed dismal. I spontaneously installed the Dream and Proud Trees the next day, having not planned to do so prior to the Grateful Tree’s engagement, and then left them for the public to participate in whatever manner they chose. My guidance was limited to the installation of the sites, similar to the Graffiti Alley precedent where artists made the first wall painting and then opened it to the public to be “self-policed and self-curated” (Mascarenhas, April 25 2018). Therefore this pilot study can be considered highly co-created.

Highly co-created installations reflect several of Ryff’s dimensions. AU is perhaps the most relevant. The community was given the power to choose whether to participate, and in their participation expressed AU by being “self-determining and independent” (Figure 12) in
making that choice and determining how to participate. The spontaneity of participating in a previously unknown installation allowed the public to feel empowered and have agency.

Highly co-created installations also express SA for similar reasons as the AU dimension. The agency to choose to participate and then actively engage with the installations reflect the public’s “positive attitude toward the self”; through participation they are valuing their voice and therefore themselves.

Participants are also expressing PRO in co-creation. The trees were clearly contributed by many different members of the community based on the quantity of notes and various handwriting styles. Participating in a communal art piece is an expression of PRO. It reflects the publics understanding of the “give and take of human relationships” (Figure 12): their additions (‘give’) added to the trees’ ability to inspire others (‘take’), resulting in a eudaimonic cycle of PRO.

c. Form Community Connection

The overall visual effect of the trees with messages dotting their limbs was evidence of community connection. So often, especially during this pandemic, community feels intangible. Making community visible had the power to remind the public of the love and support that surrounds them. As Ryff (1989, 2013) points out, PRO is a critical component of well-being, hence the installations’ communal effects are likely to have generated a sense of PRO.

All three sites experienced members of the public participating together as friends or family. This was evident in messages where multiple names were signed, adults wrote messages
for children, and individuals left notes about each other. I also witnessed participation among multiple individuals during observation sessions. This indicates PRO in action as a result of the trees’ installations and provided a novel means of connection.

There were also instances when the community responded to other individuals’ messages, writing directly on their notes. This connection between strangers reflects an incredible development of community generated by the installations. For example, the Grateful Tree had a participant who wrote on other notes “this” with an arrow to indicate they too felt grateful for the thing mentioned by another community member (Appendix A.38-39). This act of agreement between anonymous strangers suggests that this installation generated community connection that would otherwise have been unexpressed.

In another remarkable instance at the Grateful Tree two friends wrote separate notes identifying each other by the political party each affiliated with (Appendix A.40-41). These notes, written with respect and compassion for each other, suggests the ability of two friends from different political parties to still find commonality and friendship. They also offer a lesson to other community members who read their messages to find inspiration to do the same during a time when the country is hyper-partisan. These notes reflect community connection through the individuals writing notes to each other using the tree as a medium, as well as the anonymous connection they may have inspired between the wider public.

At the Dream Tree another instance of anonymous community connection was found on a note left by what would appear to be a teenager. The message writer wrote “I dream that Max Gilardi will fall in love with me oh god oh please” (Appendix A.42) to which an anonymous
community member responded on the back “Max will be lucky to be with you” (Appendix A.43).

In this instance, an individual who presumably does not know the person who wrote the original note offered guidance and a new perspective. Teaching that “Max will be lucky to be with you” flips the desperate plea for love into an empowering moment to recognize their own worth and value. This incredible act of compassion (PRO) and inspiration for the other individual to develop SA suggests the power the pilot study had in generating community connection in valuable and novel ways.

d. Alter the Urban Experience

This motivation aimed to elicit a more positive experience in an urban setting. While Newton is primarily a residential city, it is expansive and has an urban environment. Opportunities to connect with community in organic ways are minimal and yet studies have shown the benefit this has in mental and physical health (Adli, 2011). In order to alter the urban experience, I installed three participatory art sites that invited public engagement. These installations aimed to add both aesthetic and experiential value to the urban experience by producing spontaneous encounters that broke the journey to wherever participants were headed and made them “aware of our surroundings and their impact on us” (Ellard, 2015, p84).

This effect of ‘waking people up’ is critical to altering the urban experience and touches on Ryff’s EM dimension in that it “makes effective use of surrounding opportunities” (Figure 12). These trees were part of the landscape and found a new use for the space, inspiring individuals to participate in the co-creation of EM. The urban experience was altered by participants as
much as the existence of the installations, and perhaps even more so, due to the effect that was created by their hands.

e. Develop a Place-Based Initiative

As Yi-Fu Tuan writes, “if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (1977, p6). It is the ‘places’ in community that are valued. It is where community gathers and shares with each other. It is also where transformations are most possible. Local initiatives that address place-based issues are the most likely to achieve public support and engagement (Lydon et al., 2012).

Through this pilot study, I aimed to develop place-based initiatives that addressed issues of well-being. I did this by installing participatory art pieces in areas I understood through my personal experience to be ‘places’. My understanding grew as I witnessed varying levels of engagement at each site and I now conclude that they were not all equally ‘places’ in Newton, an issue that I will address in the next chapter. However, the installations can still be considered place-based as they occupied spaces in the community that encouraged people to “pause,” a key component to transforming space into place according to Tuan. This pause translates to EM as individuals “create contexts suitable to personal needs and values” (Figure 12). The sense of ‘place’ that was created by offering an opportunity to stop in their journey and engage or witness the art installation allowed the community to express EM.
f. Produce a ‘Surprise Effect’ from the Intervention

In the section on Precedent Studies I argue that the Spontaneous Co-Creation examples were most capable of creating a ‘surprise effect’. Previously in this section I suggested that the pilot study can be considered a Spontaneous Co-Creation as well, which indicates that a surprise-effect is likely to have occurred at the pilot study sites. The installations likely created a ‘surprise effect’ on those witnessing the interventions for the first time. There was no alert that these participatory art pieces would be in the various locations they were in, resulting in a spontaneous interaction with them.

Participants of the installations showed aspects of Ryff’s PG dimension by being “open to new experiences” (Figure 12). They willingly engaged with installations which for many was probably unlike anything they had seen or experienced before. This willingness is an expression of the public’s interest in growing through novel experiences. In this way, the ‘surprise effect’ is a critical aspect of the pilot study’s eudaimonic outcome.

g. Concluding Thoughts

My analysis of the six motivations behind this pilot study suggests that aspects of Ryff’s 6 dimensions were expressed in a variety of ways. This suggests that the motivations were critical in the eudaimonic expression produced by the public. Therefore, the motivations may serve as an important guides for future participatory art installations that aim to elicit a sense of well-being in the public. This will be addressed throughout the following concluding chapter as I
discuss what the takeaways are from this study, recommended improvements, and the direction for future research.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The issue of emotional well-being has not been fully addressed in the planning and design fields. All too often projects are solely concerned with final outcomes, funding, and keeping constituents at bay. There is much more to community development than physical infrastructure. Interpersonal infrastructure has been lagging in our communities and we are less healthy as a result. Studies have shown that the more we feel connected to others, the better our mental health and overall sense of well-being (Adli, 2011; Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2011; Ryan et al., 2006). In the era of COVID we have reached an even more dire state of mental well-being (Ammar et al., 2021). We must begin addressing our loneliness and sense of disconnect in demonstrable ways that empower the community.

I explored this concept through the framework of eudaimonia. This framework provided necessary guide-posts throughout a single pilot study. I was able to check back to what this ancient philosophy proposed and apply it to a modern context. Through this emergent process and analysis many important takeaways and areas for improvement have been identified that can inform future participatory art installations.

A. Takeaways

1. Participatory Art Can Be a Catalyst to Community Dialogue

   Traditional forms of public engagement are often result driven. Focus groups, surveys, and public meetings target specific areas of knowledge and are not designed to create dialogue,
rather they are focused on tangible outcomes. While such strategies offer valuable results for tangible issues, what strategy is available to municipalities and the public when deeper issues need to be broached?

Participatory art is an important tool missing from many planners’ and designers’ toolboxes. It offers the public a means of expression that would otherwise have no outlet. The unique impact on humans that creating art has—opening us to new possibilities; providing a platform of expression; giving form to intangible concepts—allows new knowledge on rich issues that are just under the surface to be exposed.

The effects of contributing to an art piece that is being co-created by one’s community function on multiple levels. The aesthetic effect of seeing such a project serves as a reminder of the existence of community. Our lives tend to follow a similar daily trajectory, performing the same tasks and interacting with the same people habitually. A participatory art piece jolts us awake from a streamlined existence and makes a powerful assertion of ‘us’. It is the embodiment of community. This striking effect has the potential to open individuals to dialogue as they witness the additions made by others in the community. A personal dialogue forms between the individual and the artifacts of community. This domino effect leads to members of the community contributing to the art piece, helping to transform it into a profile of that unique community.

This is an important tool that more planners and designers can make more use of. Participatory art is a medium that allows us to ask difficult questions while providing a means for the public to answer and find agency. This pilot study encouraged the public to share their values and concerns through thoughtful prompts, notecards, and trees in the landscape. This
low-budget, tactical strategy was able to dive deep into the community’s psyche and unearth valuable information that can be used to address pandemic concerns, political strife, family support and other important issues.

Perhaps more important than the application of the information is its ability to help form a sense of community. This often overlooked issue is becoming more and more vital to address. Mental health was already declining in the US (Adli, 2011) when COVID-19 appeared and exacerbated that trend by limiting our interaction with each other (Ammar, 2021). As we build back the livelihood of communities it will be vital to build back community health as well. Participatory art has the potential to integrate community-based art therapy practices in order to help heal the public.

The following outlines three important considerations for planners and designers interested in initiating a participatory art piece in a community.

a. Choose ‘Places’ Not ‘Spaces’

The concept of ‘place’ has been discussed as one where people pause and feel secure, able to put their guard down and become vulnerable (Tuan, 1977). Places often start as ‘spaces’ and it is only “When space feels thoroughly familiar to us” that “it has become place” (Tuan, 1977, p73). In order to increase the likelihood of engagement, a participatory art piece should be located in a ‘place’—one that is already valued by the community. Choosing a place where people already “pause” “makes it possible for the locality to become a center of felt value” (Tuan, 1977, p138).
Spaces, on the other hand, are areas people pass through and to which they do not attribute much value. This difference between ‘place’ and ‘space’ can be witnessed in my pilot study. Each site offered varying levels of ‘place-ness’. The Grateful Tree was located in the most ‘place’-oriented site. Cold Spring Park is a destination within the community for restorative activities and is a place that appears to be cherished by those who enjoy its amenities. While the tree was located along a path, similar to the Proud Tree, the path was towards the beginning and end of a loop through the forest. This likely provided ample reason to pause at the site, either due to individuals just starting their walk or concluding the experience respectively. In this way the tree existed in a place and time that may have expanded its potential to engage the public.

The Dream Tree was in both a ‘place’ and a ‘space’ depending on the individual passing it by. To those who use the center median on which the tree was located for recreation and relaxation, it was a ‘place’ due to their pausing and familiarity with the area. For others who do not use the amenities available on the median and simply walk by the tree on their way to a ‘place’, the Dream Tree was located in a ‘space’. This difference in experience likely accounts for some of the reduced engagement numbers at the Dream Tree. For those who experience the area surrounding the tree as a ‘place’, it is possible they were more likely to stop and engage since the tree is located where they have paused before.

The Proud Tree was located in the least ‘place’-oriented area of the three sites. Its position along a path existed in the ‘space’ that connects two different ‘places’: Newton Centre and the Newton Centre Park. The park is tucked away from the main Centre and requires one to walk along various paths, including the path that housed the Proud Tree, to go from one place
to the other. The destination pulls on either end of the path may not have made the area by the tree attractive for individuals to pause at. Rather, the tree existed in a space that held no particular value to the people passing by other than to connect them to other places.

It should be mentioned that a planner or designer can choose to locate a participatory art piece in a ‘space’, which can create different opportunities in the community. Doing so has the potential to help transition a ‘space’ into a ‘place’ by assigning it value through the art installation. For example, in areas where re-designs are being proposed but the public cannot envision their potential, a participatory art piece can be installed on that site and, through the process of communal engagement and co-creation, generate new value for the site. As Tuan explains, “Identity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life” (1977, p178).

For either scenario—whether choosing a place for ready engagement or a space for transformation—including the community in the selection process is vital. I did not do this in my pilot study for various reasons that resulted in important lessons and knowledge that can now be used to improve future installations. While I plan to discuss this improvement in methodology later in my conclusion, it is important to note here that community is an invaluable asset to planners and designers interested in initiating a participatory art piece. They are the experts of the community and know where the ‘places’ and ‘spaces’ are. Their input should guide the selection of a site and inform planners and designers on what effect they can expect to receive.

b. Pick the Best Medium for the Issue and Public Expression
The mediums used to create the participatory art piece should reflect the issue being addressed and be easy for the public to express through. This will require an artist’s sensibility, knowing what mediums to use for the desired effect. In my pilot study the medium of a tree was chosen in order to elicit a sense of comfort in its natural qualities and holiday spirit in its communal decoration. This effect undoubtedly influenced the content of the messages. A completely different effect would have happened had I chosen a wall to post responses on. A wall may have inspired more of a built-environment response. The influence a medium has on participants is important to consider when deciding how best to achieve the desired effect.

It is also important to make engagement easy and enticing for the community. Choosing the right medium for public expression is critical in the effectiveness of the installation. The choice of providing notecards and sharpies in my pilot study utilized the familiar act of writing and drawing in a novel engagement practice. Writing is a universal means of communication and gives voice to less tangible concepts. In this way the notecards and sharpies provided to respond to the pilot study prompts empowered the public to participate, likely reducing the barriers often perceived for creating art while elevating important ideas in the public’s consciousness.

For other intended purposes, a different medium may make more sense. Ultimately the awareness of this choice in medium for public expression is critical for planners and designers to consider. The community can offer valuable input in this domain as well and should be consulted prior to deciding the final format of the art piece.

c. Provide a Narrative Prompt
A critical element of creating a participatory art piece that will catalyze community dialogue is developing an effective prompt. The influence of prompt phrasing was discussed throughout Chapter IV and suggested that a more narrative approach that alluded to community and used direct phrases such as “you” and “tell us” was likely to garner more engagement than simple non-specific prompts. The Grateful Tree’s prompt appears to have been the most effective in enticing the public to participate and used welcoming language. The prompts at the Dream and Proud Trees were short and did not allude to community or give direction. The resulting quantity of messages left at each site suggests that the differing prompt phrasing effected engagement numbers. The Grateful Tree was by far the most effective at gaining participation from the public. This can inform future prompt designs and suggests that prompts that are more narrative, communal in language, and directive allow the public to feel comfortable and welcome to participate.

2. Highly Co-Created Installations May Generate a Eudaimonic Effect

In the section, Precedent Studies, I explored how the six motivations behind this pilot study overlapped with other co-created precedents. In this discussion I included a Co-Creation Continuum (Figure 6) that I designed to explain the different levels of participation in co-created experiences. When my six motivations were applied, my analysis suggested that cases that shared more of my motivations also tended to be highly co-created. Later in my analysis, Effects of Six Motivations, I suggest that eudaimonic values were present in each of my motivations using Ryff’s 6 dimensions of well-being as my guide. The combination of these results in the pilot study indicates that installations that are highly co-created are also highly eudaimonic.
In practice it would be important that planners and designers initiate a participatory art piece that enables it to become highly co-created. I will discuss important considerations for professionals to be aware of who are interested in creating eudaimonic experiences within a community in the following recommendations.

a. Site Maintenance

In this pilot study the primary maintenance I performed at each site was keeping up the card stock and making sure sharpies were available. It was important to maintain enough blank cards for the public to use for engagement, as well as enough sharpies. In order to know how many cards to leave at each site I kept note of how many were used during each re-stock session. For example, if I provided ten cards one day and found that there were no cards left the next day, this would indicate that ten cards were not enough and more should be left in order to better ensure that those who want to participate can.

This is a very specific example of site maintenance that demonstrates a universal lesson. Regularly checking that participation is possible, whatever form that takes, at the installation enables more engagement opportunities. More participation in an art piece increases its co-creation and likely its eudaimonic potential.

The issue of vandalism is important to address in this context. A knee-jerk reaction is to believe it is bad and should be removed. This was certainly my response when I found the Dream and Proud Trees’ prompts defaced. While at the time I recognized the acts were important to address in my analysis, I was not able to see another opportunity. Vandalism is an expression of feeling, similar to those intended to be conjured by the participatory installations.
While the expression is different than the ones proposed by the art piece, it still demonstrates an individual's presence and thought.

Vandalism provides a unique opportunity for engagement. How can one respond to vandalism by 'calling-in' the individual through supportive dialogue? According to Glenna Gerard and Linda Ellinor of the Dialogue Group, five behaviors enable dialogue: 1) Suspension of judgement; 2) Respect for differences; 3) Role and status suspension; 4) Balancing inquiry and advocacy; 5) Focus on learning. Figure 13 offers a brief understanding of each behavior.

**Fig. 13**

- **Suspension of judgement when listening and speaking.** When we listen and suspend judgment, we open the door to expanded understanding. When we speak without judgment we open the door for others to listen to us.

- **Respect for differences.** Our respect is grounded in the belief that everyone has an essential contribution to make and is to be honored for the perspective which only they can bring.

- **Role and status suspension.** Again, in dialogue, all participants and their contributions are absolutely essential to developing an integrated whole view. No one perspective is more important than any other. Dialogue is about power with, versus power over or power under.

- **Balancing inquiry and advocacy.** In dialogue we inquire to discover and understand others perspectives and ideas and we advocate to offer our own for consideration. The intention is to bring forth and make visible assumptions, relationships and gain new insight and understanding.

- We often tend to advocate to convince others of our positions. Therefore a good place to start with this guideline is to practice bringing more inquiry into the conversation.

- **Focus on learning.** Our intention is to learn from each other, to expand our view and understanding, versus evaluate and determine who has the "best" view.

- When we are focused on learning we tend to ask more questions, try new things. We are willing to disclose our thinking so that we can see both what is working for us and what we might want to change. We want to hear from all parties so that we can gain the advantage of differing perspectives.

**Behaviors that Support Dialogue (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998)**

Each of these considerations should guide one's response to vandalism. I would not advise doing nothing in response. The act should be interpreted as the personal feeling of being
challenged by the installation. This feeling expressed offers a unique opportunity to deepen engagement and include people who may not always feel welcome. By engaging people who vandalize there is potential to reframe the act and therefore counteract the potential consequences of the vandalism such as discouraging or destroying the contributions of others.

b. Allow Public to Transform Piece

It is important as the participatory art initiator, either as planner or designer, that one does not become too attached to the final outcome of the installation. As was indicated in Figure 9, the precedents that fell higher on the co-creation continuum were instances where the original creators left the installations to be curated by the public. In contrast, initiators who closely guided the process of co-creation limited the influence the public could have on the final outcome as the vision was set from the beginning by the artist. This serves many important purposes, however, when co-creation and the expression of eudaimonia are desired outcomes, this tactic does not appear to help toward that end. Instead, participatory art initiators should agree early in the process that most transformation of the piece should be allowed, and even encouraged.

The value of allowing the public to gain a sense of ownership over the piece is that it enables it to be transformed into whatever form the community needs. It becomes a living expression of thoughts and has the potential to expose unknown issues and values within a specific community. In this way, highly co-created participatory art provides a unique tool for engaging the public eudaimonically, empowering them to express dimensions of well-being in a constructive, community-based way.
c. Spontaneity May Heighten Co-Creation Potential

The precedents that were the most spontaneous appear to have also been the most co-created of the precedents discussed: George Floyd Square and Graffiti Alley. The co-creation effect from each precedent’s spontaneity appears to be due to their grassroots origins. Each was initiated by members of the community in response to vastly different inspirations—George Floyd’s murder by a white police officer which led to the evolution of George Floyd Square, and a blank wall along an alley that inspired two artists to start Cambridge’s Graffiti Alley. This is to say that the source of inspiration can differ greatly as long as the community feels like the installation is specific to and grew out of the community.

This pilot study more closely resembles the spontaneity behind the Graffiti Alley precedent. Both installations aimed at creating a participatory art piece (even if those words were not exactly how the original Graffiti Alley artists would have described it) along a path within a ‘place’ that was already established before its creation. Graffiti Alley connects neighborhoods of Central Square with the center itself just as the path along the forest’s perimeter at Cold Spring Park connects visitors to the park itself. This differs from George Floyd Square whose spontaneous creation came about in response to George Floyd’s death. The block was transformed from a space into a ‘place’ the moment George Floyd died and his memorial was initiated.

Choosing established paths within ‘places’ for my pilot study broadened its potential to engage unexpecting members of the public in a spontaneous way. It also allowed the community and me to explore a variety of concepts. Well-placed spontaneity is a tool planners
and designers should use more readily when one is interested in understanding complex ideas and concerns within a community that can lead to a greater sense of well-being.

3. An Emergent Analytic Process Generates Novel Research in Design Fields

My thesis process did not follow a traditional approach. As was discussed in Chapter III, my methodology was emergent and required flexibility. I set out to explore a topic that had not been addressed in my education and subsequent research in the planning and design fields: how does one enable eudaimonic expression within a community through participatory art? It was through my desire to uplift and empower my community that an understanding was produced, and many results followed.

By allowing myself to trust my intuition and my planning and design knowledge, I practiced an emergent analytic process, as illustrated in Figure 11. My pilot study followed a process that began with an application (my installations) which allowed results to lead to my analysis. This then caused me to develop a new method for approaching a problem that had been unearthed by the identification of a topic. In a more conventional analytic process this progression would be reversed, ending with a proposed application that would address a known topic. In my emergent (‘amplifier’) approach the topic does not need to be known prior to an installation, allowing new, previously unanticipated information to emerge as a result. Through this emergent process my pilot study exposed values and concerns in the community through the community’s own expression of them.

As Rheinberger explains, “experiments are generators of knowledge” (p190). He continues that “Artistic practices, like experimental systems, are vehicles for materialising
questions” (p194). Planners and designers have a unique position as creators of urban environments to utilize an emergent process when exploring new concepts. A similar process is performed in tactical urbanism endeavors. Through temporary interventions ideas can be tested and the public has an opportunity to adjust to the new approach or provide valuable input prior to a permanent installation. Similarly participatory art that is conducted through an emergent process is a low-cost, high impact means of generating new knowledge.

**B. Improvements**

This project was highly instinctual in nature. The pressure (and urge) to set up an additional two sites just a day after the Grateful Tree due to its unexpected level of engagement resulted in an emergent methodology. I was filled with many goals for expanding the experiment to two more sites in a short amount of time (one day) in order to observe engagement on a day forecasted to be a winter weather anomaly with a warm front coming in. I had to locate new sites, theorize two new prompts, prepare all the supplies, create an observation notebook, and finally, set up the installations. I was still not entirely sure what I was uncovering which required me to be flexible and open to new developments. Throughout this thesis I have worked to understand what emerged from my pilot study. Now that I have evaluated its [Takeaways](#) it is important to look for what planners and designers should consider in future public participatory art installations to build and improve on what has been revealed.

1. Include Community in Design
The spontaneous nature of my pilot study did not include community input in the installations’ initiation. While there was value in my approach it is best used in projects that aim to explore uncharted knowledge. It is important in future applications that a collaboration is formed between researcher and community. The community should be addressed as experts of their lived experiences and environments. The role of the researcher is to know how to effectively draw new knowledge out of community.

This thesis proposes using participatory art. Collaborating with the public throughout the process of creating participatory art that aims to serve them brings members of the community into the decision-making process. Their opinions can then guide decisions based on personal understandings of community values. This can inform researchers on what mediums would be best for enabling public expression as well as where the best ‘places’ are for the most effective engagement. Gaining the community’s ‘inside-scoop’ makes it likely that the installation will resonate with the local public.

Including the community throughout the process also better ensures the project will be accepted by the community which further increases the likelihood of participation. Projects that are rooted in community are the ones people find most value in. It is important to engage different demographics of people in the brainstorming and installation process. This helps ensure that issues specific to each demographic are addressed, further encouraging broad participation.

2. Expand Engagement Opportunities
Broad participation is essential for developing installations that are co-created and enable eudaimonic expression. A wide range of demographics should be included in the planning process that range across age, race, ethnicity, gender, income level, educational attainment, able bodied and non-able bodied etc. The more demographics that are enabled to engage, the more equitable the installation. It also increases the installation’s potential to uncover expansive and multi-dimensional information. While my pilot study provided blank cards and sharpies that people could use in any way they chose, there were still limitations to engagement that should be addressed in future projects.

The Grateful Tree was the only site that received messages written in different languages. This reflects a multi-cultural community that could have been better supported by my installations. Engaging different racial and ethnic demographics in the planning and development of a project is an important way to avoid exclusion. An additional consideration would be offering the prompts in multiple languages. This would enable non-English speakers to participate while also signaling support for multi-cultural engagement.

The Grateful Tree was also the site that experienced the highest percentage of youth participation among the three sites. This indicates that this installation was better suited to reach this demographic than the other two sites, though there is surely room for improvement. The purposeful inclusion of youth in the planning process as well as in choosing the prompt or medium for expression would offer several benefits. Youth are often an overlooked demographic and yet they experience our environments as often as everyone else. Including their opinions would increase the equity of the project while growing the amount of participation. Their ideas are also reflective of the future: understanding trends early can
illuminate community assets previously unknown. Including youth may also reduce the likelihood that vandalism occurs by making them feel considered and involved in the installation.

In my observations of the sites involved I also found that families with young children were less likely to engage with the installations. I witnessed engagement from young families at the Grateful Tree but only on a few occasions. This suggests to me that the site was the easiest to stop at. Considering how to include a wide range of demographics requires planners and designers to choose the right ‘place’ that is easy to stop at. The Dream Tree was located on a median with a curb and grass surrounding it which would make it difficult for parents pushing strollers to approach it. The Proud Tree was on a path that had an incline which may have made stopping difficult for this demographic as well. The Grateful Tree did experience some participation from young families although the dirt path was probably still a hindrance to their engagement. For similar reasons my sites were not easily accessible to all types of individuals. Choosing sites that are approachable by all individuals regardless of being able bodied or with a child is critical to expanding the reach of future installations.

3. Conduct More Site Observations

In my pilot study, the goals for observation were not clearly delineated prior to my one official day of observations partly due to the amount of objectives I set forth to accomplish, and partly because the project was so new and I was not quite sure what to expect, and therefore what to anticipate taking notes on. I managed to create an observation notebook inspired by
the ledgers used by William H. Whyte (1980) in his observations of how the public interacted with space in New York City parks. I provided areas to note the weather, time of day, period of observation, and ample space to jot down notes. The notebook ended up inspiring me to decipher what was most important to capture from what I was observing.

Moving forward I recommend that a clearer set of objectives should be established prior to observing public engagement. This will allow time spent observing to be more productive and targeted, as well as inform the direction research will go. I also recommend conducting official observations on more than one day. While I made many informal observations, noting brief encounters between the public and each tree before restocking the cards, observation sessions that last longer and occur on different days in different climates would expand my understanding of how the community engaged with the trees. This can be done in the form of ‘field notes’, a research methodology common in the anthropology field with precedents in landscape architecture that include the work of William H. Whyte (1980).

Gaining more information allows future analysis to be enriched by direct observations that help flesh-out results. It uncovers information not evident in the final additions made by the public, such as when I noticed how often parents photographed their children after participating at the Grateful Tree. This observation offered a deeper understanding of how the public was using the installation that could not have been known just by reading message contents. More strategic observation sessions that are planned and have clearer objectives would improve any future analysis of engagement.
C. Directions for Future Research

This pilot study serves as a proof of concept. This is perhaps the first research conducted that aimed to use participatory art installations to explore whether eudaimonic sentiments could be expressed by the community through co-creation in the landscape. As such, many new directions for future research have been discovered that did not fit within the scope of this research framework.

1. Generate an EWB Scale for Geographic Application

My inspiration for the pilot study was rooted in inspiring EWB in my community. At that time I had only really explored the concept of eudaimonia through the two treatises left from the ancient teachings of Aristotle. It was later in my thesis process when I engaged in an expansive literature review that I became aware of the many different interpretations and applications of this ancient concept. In that process I discovered the work of Carol Ryff, who has spent the better half of her career investigating how to assess EWB. I was able to use her seminal work on the 6 dimensions of EWB to inform my analysis of In What Ways and to What Extent was Eudaimonia Expressed. This application, however, was not seamless and required creative interpretations of her dimensions for geographic application.

My adaptation of a self-assessment scale for identifying EWB in my pilot study suggests that future research could be conducted that aims to build a framework for intentionally applying EWB to project designs. This research will likely draw from studies conducted in the field of psychology, as well as recent research in the planning and design fields that looks at the
role of empathy and other forms of compassionate design that aim to deepen connection to place and community. Through further research, criteria for assessing the eudaimonic effect of interventions can be identified and used to develop a framework that guides planners and designers throughout the process of creating projects that aim to heighten and uncover EWB.

2. Participatory Art as a Means of Community Dialogue

The pilot study enabled short-term community dialogue to emerge using the mediums of trees and note cards in park settings. It would be informative for future projects to explore different types of installations that lasted longer and were located in a variety of environments. The installations can explore different mediums, prompts, and concepts, as well as different locations and durations to compare results in order to generate a richer understanding of how participatory art can enable community dialogue.

Participatory art can also inform planners and designers about what the community values, needs, and has concerns about. This dialogue with the public can allow more effective plans and designs to be created that address these uncovered interests. By providing the public agency in directing us to what matters, we are positioned to better serve them.

3. Develop Anonymous Yet Accountable Methodology for Spontaneous Co-Creation

One of the improvements discussed earlier in this chapter was to include the community in future initiatives. How might we do that while maintaining the ‘magical’ effect of initiate-
anonymity? Is there a way to strategically include *some* community members to help ensure the project is conducted responsibly, perhaps through weekly check-ins? Developing a method that addresses these questions will be especially important for projects that are created outside of one's own community. This method should honor a variety of viewpoints in the creation and maintenance of an intervention.

4. Interview Co-Creators and Participants

My discussion of projects with elements of co-creation was limited to my interpretation of articles written by or about the creators of each installation. In order to further understand motivations, goals, and intentions behind co-creation initiatives it would be instructive to interview the co-creators directly. Learning from the individuals who conceptualized the projects can inform future initiatives and help generate intended effects.

Future research would also benefit from discussing engagement motivations, goals and intentions with participants of co-creation projects. This would allow deeper understanding of why various initiatives generate certain participation, what value participants find in engaging, and how co-creation is perceived, among other avenues of inquiry.

5. Further Develop an Emergent Methodology for Design Research

The emergent methodology I used throughout my thesis process became more clear as I reflected back on the intuitive choices I made along the way. I credit this methodological style
for unearthing important information that would otherwise have been left unexpressed. It is this latter point that provides a basis for future research in design fields to further explore an emergent methodology. So much of our work shaping environments is conducted under unclear and unknown conditions. An emergent methodology allows researchers in the planning and design fields to be flexible and comfortable in the unknown. By allowing the public to guide results and not leading them to the results we are seeking (as is done in a conventional analytic process), our projects can be more deeply informed by uncovering opinions and values that previously had no means of expression. A more heuristic approach in design research has the potential to lead researchers to new areas of study, improving the impact of future projects.

6. Create ‘Sanctioned’ Installations

The pilot study was an ‘unsanctioned’ intervention that was well received by the public. This mirrors unsanctioned tactical urbanism interventions like intersection repairs, guerilla bike lanes and memorials at sites of death that have the potential to evolve into ‘sanctioned’ tactics due to their impact on the urban landscape. This is where Iveson (2013) would argue that small-scale interventions need official support in order to create lasting and scalable impacts. He argues that it is only through ‘sanctioned’ support of interventions that real change can occur.

Future research can explore the potential impact that creating ‘sanctioned’ participatory art interventions may have on communities. These potential impacts include expanding engagement to a wider audience, improved options for installation locations, not risking the installation will be dismantled, and funds for more in-depth research of results.
D. Final Reflections

This thesis has illuminated many potential areas for future research; ways in which the pilot study can be improved; and takeaways that inform how participatory art can generate community dialogue, co-creation initiatives that hold the potential to inspire eudaimonia, and ways in which an emergent methodology can create novel research in design fields. We can now reframe these topics in three areas of focus: New Emergent Methodologies; The Pilot Study’s Unique Positioning; and Novel Forms of Community Connection.

1. New Emergent Methodologies

Through the process of writing this thesis, my analysis led to many new frameworks for understanding information that emerged. In the broadest sense, my entire thesis followed a heuristic methodology that was self reflexive and developed in tandem with my work. It suggested a novel means for action-based research to be conducted in the planning and design fields.

This led to the development of the ‘amplifier method’ – a framework that inverts the more conventional analytic process aimed at focusing research, referred to as the ‘funnel method’. The amplifier method, in contrast, offers a more integrative approach that allows new information to emerge and be incorporated into the methodology. Through this methodology, a broader understanding of previously unknown or unexpected topics may be illuminated in an experimental and exploratory process that is flexible and inquisitive.
The cases explored in the Precedent Studies section offered examples of co-creation that, upon analysis, could be identified as falling along a co-creation continuum. The continuum is defined by three components: vision, expert, and participant. At the low end the artist’s vision is realized and the artist themself is the expert. The public are actors in the artist’s vision—participants in creating the final display. Moderately co-created initiatives allow the vision to be influenced by the public with both the artist and public as experts and collaborators in the creation of the piece. At the high end of the co-creation continuum the vision is ephemeral. While the artist initiates the piece, they leave it to the public to define the vision with their own lived expertise.

Through this analysis of co-creation, eudaimonia appeared most likely to be generated in highly co-created projects. This ability exposed the potential for participatory art to be used as a dialogic tool in design fields. Through eudaimonic initiatives, participation in the creation of public art allows community to be made tangible, inspiring deeper topics to emerge and be supported, facilitating a sense of well-being.

2. The Pilot Study’s Unique Positioning

This thesis drew together topics that are often discussed within their own spheres, distinct from one another. The Eudaimonic Tree Pilot was uniquely positioned to unearth intersections between Tactical Urbanism, Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, and Spontaneous Co-Creation that may inform deeper understandings of how we connect to community. The Precedent Category x Motivations diagram suggests that these four categories
are only able to intersect one or some of the six motivations behind my pilot study: 1) Generate a sense of well-being (*Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 2) Co-create with the public (*Artist-Initiated Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 3) Form community connection (*Artist-Initiated Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 4) Alter the urban experience (*Tactical Urbanism, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); 5) Develop a place-based initiative (*Tactical Urbanism, Artist-Initiated Participatory Art, Community-Based Art Therapy, Spontaneous Co-Creation*); and 6) Produce a ‘surprise effect’ from the intervention (*Tactical Urbanism, Spontaneous Co-Creation*).

The place-based motivation is the only exception, intersecting all four categories. This is an important concept as when we then consider the case studies in a [Co-Creation Precedent x Motivations](#) Venn-diagram, we find that the place-based initiative, George Floyd Square, is arguably the only precedent that satisfies each motivation. This is significant and suggests that place-based participatory art guided by public vision – aspects that define the pilot study – can act as a bonding agent within community.

3. Novel Forms of Community Connection

This pilot study was conducted during a time of great uncertainty and despair. COVID unearthed many limitations in how we operate as a community, leaving many lacking a sense of place, identity, and connection. The original intent of the three trees was to foster community through anonymous interactions that illuminated deeply shared values and beliefs. The study was rooted in place and aimed to spread eudaimonic well-being to those who interacted with or
witnessed the trees. It indicates that participatory art has the potential to cut through social barriers and generate connection, and suggests that this tool may be used not only during this unprecedented time of a global pandemic, but also as a means to mend a polarized society, a fragmented rural / urban divide, and other deep societal issues. By making community tangible through artifacts of human creation, new connections can be forged that offer opportunities to heal and renew.

4. A Final Thought

My first tree in 2019 was inspired by someone else’s tree. My hope is that this thesis may provide a framework, an inclination, and a spark for someone else to start their own community project that aims to deepen connection, whether through a tree or something entirely different.
A. IMAGES

1. Eudaimonia Concept Drawing (2018)
2. Reconstruction - Architect and Builder Stage

Source: MacDonald & Wiens, 2019

3. Reconstruction - Graffiti Stage

Source: MacDonald & Wiens, 2019
4. RisingEMOTIONS - Hand Transcribed Messages

![Hand Transcribed Messages Image]

Source: Aragón, 2021.

5. RisingEMOTIONS - Installation

![Installation Image]

Source: Aragón, 2021.
6. RisingEMOTIONS – Final Piece

Source: Aragón, 2021.

7. Before I Die

Source: Chang, 2021
8. Before I Die – Prompts

Source: Chang, 2021

9. Past, Present, and Future Self

Source: O’Neill & Moss, 2015
10. Graffiti Alley, Cambridge, MA

Source: Jonathan Wiggs, in “In this hidden alley, a museum of modern art” by Mascarenhas, N. (April 25, 2018)

11. Original Community Tree, Amherst, MA (2019)
12. Grateful Tree Site Context, Cold Spring Park, Newton, MA

13. Community Tree, Newton, MA (2019)

15. Grateful Tree Prompt (2020)
16. Grateful Tree Set Up

17. Dream Tree Site Scouting
18. Dream Tree Observation Set Up

19. Teen Photographing Prompt at Dream Tree
20. Proud Tree Day 1

21. “Thank You” Note left at Grateful Tree
22. Dream Tree Sign Vandalized

23. Proud Tree Sign Vandalized
24. Leaf Note 1

25. Leaf Note 2
I wish for the imprisonment of Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell, the full recognition of this republican regime as being illegitimate, the expulsion of all their judicial appointees, and the destruction of the Republican means of unrepresentative power: exclusion of DC, R.P.R. Statehood, and the electoral college.
28. Construction Paper Note Left at Proud Tree (Front)

29. Construction Paper Note Left at Proud Tree (Back)
30. Washed Off Note

31. Note Attached to Washed Off Note
32. Sumac Flower Additions on Branches

33. Twig Halo
34. Note with Drawing

35. Child Note 1
36. Child Note 2

37. Child Note 3
38. Community Response Note 1

39. Community Response Note 2
40. Political Friend Note 1

My friend Kathy is a great Republican, person, and friend.

41. Political Friend Note 2

I am so grateful for my friend Kathy. A good Democrat, person and friend.
42. Community Response Note 3

I Dream that
Max will fall in love with
me oh god oh please

43. Community Response to Note 3

Max will be lucky
to be with you
44. Child Note 4

45. Child Note with Assistance
46. Child Note with Signature

I am grateful for my friends and school.

Alice

47. Youth Note 1

I dream that COVID can finally be over and we can move on in life (before the apocalypse).
48. Youth Note 2

mom + Dad
and my family
B. PRECEDENT CHART

TACTICAL URBANISM

SANCTIONED TACTICAL URBANISM
INTERSECTION REPAIR PARK(ING) DAY

UNSANCTIONED TACTICAL URBANISM
GUERILLA GARDENING GUERILLA BIKE LANES GUERILLA KNITTING

ARTIST-INITIATED PARTICIPATORY ART
RECONSTRUCTION RISINGEMOTIONS BEFORE I DIE

CO-CREATION
COMMUNITY-BASED ART THERAPY
CHRONIC PAIN LIVING WELL

SPONTANEOUS CO-CREATION
GEORGE FLOYD SQUARE GRAFFITI ALLEY
## C. TABLE OF CARD RE STOCK DATES AND AMOUNTS

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<td>12/24/2021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP</td>
<td>12/24/2021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>12/24/2021</td>
<td>5PM</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP</td>
<td>12/27/2021</td>
<td>5AM</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP</td>
<td>12/27/2021</td>
<td>5:30AM</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>12/27/2021</td>
<td>6PM</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### D. MESSAGE DATA QUANTIFIED

1. Message Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grateful Tree</th>
<th>Dream Tree</th>
<th>Proud Tree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days Active</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Notes</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegible Notes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes w/ non-English Language Used</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes Written on Other Notes (in response or due to lack of cards)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes that are Site Specific in ‘Outdoors’ Category</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes with Drawings (including hearts)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes with Only Hearts Drawn</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes by Kids</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joke Notes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation Vandalized (y/n)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Most Prevalent Categories:
- Family
- Friends
- General
- Future
- Community
- Covid-Related
- Joke/Outdoors
- Family
- Personal
- Accomplished
- Friends
- N/A

3 Least Prevalent Categories:
- Joke
- Personal Accomplished
- Political
- This Tree/Pet
- General/Personal Accomplished
- Kid/Friends/Political
- Health/Outdoors/General/This Tree/Pet/Kid
- N/A
2. Data Quantified

a. Grateful Tree

i. Message Sentiments Identified within 14 Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>QUANTITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-RELATED</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIENDS</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUTURE</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOKE</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KID</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTDOORS</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCOMPLISHMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PET</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS TREE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ii. Message Sentiments Identified within Ryff’s 6 Dimensions
b. Dream Tree

i. Message Sentiments Identified within 14 Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>QUANTITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-RELATED</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIENDS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUTURE</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOKE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KID</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTDOORS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PET</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS TREE</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ii. Message Sentiments Identified within Ryff's 6 Dimensions
c. Proud Tree

i. Message Sentiments Identified within 14 Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>QUANTITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-RELATED</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIENDS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUTURE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOKE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KID</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTDOORS</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCOMPLISHMENT</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PET</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS TREE</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ii. Message Sentiments Identified within Ryff’s 6 Dimensions

![Bar chart showing quantities for different categories]
### E. COMPLETE MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

#### 1. Grateful Tree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RYFF'S DIMENSION</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>NOTE</th>
<th>NOTES ON NOTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| PRO; EM           | -This Tree  
                 | -Family   
                 | -Outdoors  | -this tree!  
                 |           | -my daughter  
                 |           | -cold Spring pk |
| PRO               | -Family   | My children who keep me happy & show me the joys of life! |
| PL                | -General  | Life (written in other language below) |
| N/A               | -General  | For many a rose lipped maid + many a light foot lad |
|                   |           | Text faded so person appears to have come back with other paper with note rewritten on it and safety-pinned it over original! |
| PG, EM            | -Health   
                 | -Personal accomplishment | Sobriety. |
| PRO; EM           | -Friends  
                 | -outdoors  
                 | -Community | Grateful for all the friends of Cold Spring Park! |
| PRO               | -Family   | My mommy |
|                   |           | Someone wrote “this” with arrow pointing to text |
| EM                | -outdoors | Nordic Ski |
| PRO               | -Family   
                 | -friends  | friends and family |
|                   |           | -Emmy :) |
| PRO               | -Family   
                 | -friends  
                 | -Pet      
                 | -GENERAL  | for family + friends + food + pets |
| PRO               | family    | foraging pine boughs for my daughter |
| PRO               | -General  | the love that surrounds me every day! |
| PRO | -This Tree  
|     | -Community  
|     |     | So grateful for our community that thought of this idea!  
|     |     | note covered in hearts  
| PRO; EM | -friends  
|     | -outdoors  
|     |     | I'm grateful for my best friend Ben for our outdoor adventure and supportive conversation <3  
| PL | -General  
|     |     | I'm grateful for the universe and the place I have in it.  
| PRO; EM | -outdoors  
|     | -Family  
|     | -General  
|     |     | Outside adventures, my son, my husband, my sisters, my mom, optimism  
| EM; PRO | -This Tree  
|     | -Covid-related  
|     |     | we are grateful for the people who are making COVID vaccines and helping people. And for this tree. Thank you!  
| PRO | -family  
|     | -friends  
|     |     | friends and family  
| PRO | -Pet  
|     |     | I am grateful for my dog, Charlie <3  
|     |     | Drew a heart next to pic of dog  
| PRO; EM | -Family  
|     | -friends  
|     | -Pet  
|     | -outdoors  
|     |     | I am grateful for my family, my dog, my friends + the mountains <3  
| PRO; EM | -Family  
|     | -General  
|     | -Health  
|     | -Community  
|     |     | I'm grateful for my family, health, for having a house and food on our table  
|     |     | Merry Christmas all!! Xoxo  
| PRO; EM | -outdoors  
|     | -friends  
|     | -Health  
|     | -Family  
|     | -Community  
|     |     | grateful for this beautiful day, the ladies of Winslow Road and my health + family <3  
| PRO; EM | -outdoors  
|     | -friends  
|     |     | Grateful for sunshine and the kindness of friends  

191
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL; PG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N/A**
- political
- future
- I'm grateful for the victory of the election.
- something written in another language on back!

**PRO**
- family
- general
- family & a warm home to share with them! 😍

**PRO; EM**
- family
- friends
- This tree
- general
- Covid related
- political
- I'm grateful for...this tree, my family, my friends, our new president, scientists--so much to be grateful for!
- covered in hearts

**PRO**
- friends
- general
- For all the gifts of family friends + life

**PRO; EM**
- outdoors
- friends
- I am grateful that I have been able to walk at cold spring park daily with my BFF!

**PL; PG**
- future personal accomplishment
- I am grateful for getting into NYU! 😊
- (Donnie)

**PRO**
- family
- The unending patience of my loving boyfriend.
- (me)

**PRO; EM**
- outdoors
- Covid related
- family
- friends
- general
- This tree
- health
- Front:
  - daily hikes @ Cold Spring Park
  - Scientists who make vaccines. (+DRs +RNs)
  - artists who make beauty like this tree
- Back:
  - mom
  - pops
  - Judy + Will
  - Josh + Mích
  - Victor
  - Sabine
  - Mae
  - + for ns
  - + my health
  - + my fam
  - QUIET
- Wrote "thank you! 😍" at top
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRO, PL</td>
<td>General -Community</td>
<td>I am grateful for the hopes that all can share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO, EM</td>
<td>Family -Covid Related</td>
<td>My parents, and my motorcycle for getting me thru COVID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>General -This tree</td>
<td>Merry Christmas thank you covered in stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>Health -Outdoors</td>
<td>This Park! Healthy lungs Fresh air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>I'm so grateful for all my new zoom friends!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PL</td>
<td>Family -Friends</td>
<td>For friends, and life and family :-) And everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>The wonderful brass __<strong>?</strong> plays here on Saturday mornings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>I am grateful for the love that surrounds me and the warmth it brings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Friends -Political</td>
<td>My friend Ruthy :) A great republican, person, and friend :)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family -Pet</td>
<td>My sister and dog!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL</td>
<td>General -Future</td>
<td>to living, happiness + growth in '21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| PRO; EM | -Friends  
-Outdoors | I am grateful for daily walks with my dear friend Barbara, and the caring & loving support we share |
| PRO; EM; PG | -Covid Related  
-Future  
-Community | The reflection this pandemic has directed us to do <3 (but not the bad stuff) | Written on a note whose text had washed off |
| N/A | -General | The Red Sox |
| EMA/A | -Health  
-kid | Querido Santa te queremos pedir mucha solud Marto, Lala, Pilar, Nieves, Gustavo, Jose, Nicol, Marisel | Translation: Dear Santa, we wish for good health. From Marto etc. |
| PRO | -Family | Grateful for my wife! |
| PRO; EM | -Family  
-Community  
-Outdoors  
-This Tree | walks w/ my husband my park family, life! Thanks 4 tree :) |
| PRO; EM; PL | -Family  
-friends  
-Health  
-General  
-Pets  
-Covid related  
-Future  
-Community | -Family - Healthy + Safe  
-every new day  
-friends+neighbors  
-laughter  
-dogs  
-vaccines + all the helpers -2021 |
| PRO | -This Tree  
-Family  
-friends  
-Covid related | Thank you for this tree. I am grateful for my husband, sons + friends, and science |
<p>| PRO | -This tree | I am so very grateful for this TREE!! |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO; PG; EM</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Alan and Becky’s wishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covid related</td>
<td>-Happy New Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>-That Alan &amp; Becky get into dream schools :)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends</td>
<td>-Corona over by Jan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Grateful for: (?) friends, &amp; family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>photoshoots</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>^ written on back of Alan and Beckys wishes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO; EM</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>family, friends to walk with, Biden/Harris, science &amp; the outdoors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>-friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-outdoors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-covid-related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-political</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EM; A</th>
<th>Outdoors</th>
<th>we are grateful for outdoor spaces to run around safely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-kid</td>
<td>^ kids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-Alex, Eric, Zee + Nora</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO; A</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Will &amp; Hannah &amp; Freddie and Dinosaurs! &lt;3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>-kid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Red Sox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>^written on back of Will &amp; hannah etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| PRO | Family | Grateful for family |

| PRO | Family | I am grateful for my amazing family |

| PRO | Family | my family <3 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>I am so grateful for my friend Kathy. A good democrat, person and friend.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-political</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>^possibly written by friend of cell 44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO; EM</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>I am grateful for my family and my dog and CSP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>-Family&lt;br&gt;-friends&lt;br&gt;-Health&lt;br&gt;-Family&lt;br&gt;-Outdoors&lt;br&gt;-General&lt;br&gt;Thankful for walking with my best friend and for breathing.&lt;br&gt;For family&lt;br&gt;For kid who still believes&lt;br&gt;For the wind&lt;br&gt;For M + J my miracles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; A</td>
<td>-Family&lt;br&gt;-kid&lt;br&gt;I am grateful for my friends and school&lt;br&gt;Chloe&lt;br&gt;signed by kid with a star next to name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; EM</td>
<td>-Health&lt;br&gt;-Personal accomplishment&lt;br&gt;Rehab&lt;br&gt;-Heavily crossed out after this word&lt;br&gt;Note on back listed below</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>-friends&lt;br&gt;My friend Audrey &lt;3&lt;br&gt;-Written on back of note above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>-Family&lt;br&gt;My grumpy teenagers! &lt;3&lt;br&gt;&lt;3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>-Family&lt;br&gt;-friends&lt;br&gt;-Community&lt;br&gt;Grateful for friends family + the kindness of strangers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>-Family&lt;br&gt;-friends&lt;br&gt;-Covid related&lt;br&gt;My roommate Sam&lt;br&gt;My partner Rahi&lt;br&gt;and science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>-friends&lt;br&gt;Liz &amp; Ellen&lt;br&gt;Friendship like ours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>-General&lt;br&gt;-Family&lt;br&gt;-friends&lt;br&gt;-Future&lt;br&gt;--grateful for hope, peace, and all my friends and family.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>-Health&lt;br&gt;-outdoors&lt;br&gt;for good health and love, walking to park daily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family: Friends</td>
<td>Family &amp; Friends :)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>I am grateful for new beginnings &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>I am grateful for my stuffed animals. P.S. cutey Paws. P.P.S. tigers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>tigers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; A</td>
<td>Family: Kid</td>
<td>My sisters + Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Written by kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM; A</td>
<td>General: Kid</td>
<td>Alex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I am thankful for food and water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family: Friends: Community</td>
<td>I'm grateful for my wonderful partner, kids, community, + friends!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>Outdoors: Future: Political</td>
<td>The sun shining: This wonderful park: A new era for our country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>Drawing signed by Nora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>Drawing by other kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family: Health</td>
<td>I am grateful my husband survived being hit by a car!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>food on the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Pet</td>
<td>My dog Finn ♥</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; A</td>
<td>Family - Kid</td>
<td>Mom + Dad and my family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL; PRO; EM</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Grateful for - Life - Breath - Heartbeat - Hope - Love - Kindness - Compassion - Faith - You!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>Family - Friends - Health</td>
<td>Grateful for the health of my loved ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>Outdoors - Pet</td>
<td>I'm grateful for Cold Spring Park ??? With my dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>I'm grateful for my out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family - Political - Future</td>
<td>I'm grateful for my grand-children and Pres. Elect Biden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family - Community</td>
<td>Each other, our families and our first grand child!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>Family - Friends - Health - Outdoors</td>
<td>Grateful for my family's health, the beautiful snow and my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>The outdoors :)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>General - Personal accomplishment</td>
<td>My Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>The sun!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Our family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>My family is safe &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>&quot;I'm grateful Grandpa bought me a hula hoop&quot;&lt;br&gt;Ruby-Age 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; A</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Rex, Otis &amp; Erik &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; A</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>My mom + gramma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>friends &amp; family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>(Drawing by kid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>our community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>I'm grateful for&lt;br&gt;(Drawing of kid with hands wide by kid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYFF'S DIMENSION</td>
<td>CATEGORY</td>
<td>NOTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; A</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>To be as much in the moment as I can...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream of a world without violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream that I can c how swag I am ;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>health</td>
<td>I dream of a healthy world full of acceptance, compassion, and kindness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM; SA</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>I dream of an adventurous and fulfilling life...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream to be a famous surgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL</td>
<td>health</td>
<td>good health for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>I dream of a peaceful, healthy world filled with love and abundance &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Front: I dream that everyone can see their family and friends again &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Back: And for everyone to have an amazing holiday! Happy Holidays, Newton!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td></td>
<td>I wish for the time that families can safely be together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>joke kid</td>
<td>I wish for the world to be overrun by dogs HAHAHA!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>outdoors</td>
<td>Save the trees! Loggers stop slaying living trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>joke</td>
<td>I dream to cosplay Black Butler (Sebastian) (Geil) (Alois)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL; PRO</td>
<td>covid-related friends Future</td>
<td>I dream that corona ends &amp; that I can be the best person I can be. I also dream to travel the world with my best friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream of me being the best person I can be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>Covid-related Family friends Health</td>
<td>Front: I hope that everyone I love will be ok during these hard times Back: I wish that covid stops being a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I wish for the new PS5 or xbox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; SA; PG</td>
<td>future community general</td>
<td>I dream of a gender healed + gender equal society, where women &amp; girls have equal opportunities for success, safety + happiness! :)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>outdoors</td>
<td>Mother Earth that we love mother earth and heal what we have done to her &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>political</td>
<td>Move Mitch Get out the way Mitch...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>I dream of my baby boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>joke</td>
<td>That Santa doesn’t pay another visit to mommy late at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>I dream about mommy’s lightning room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>Of a world with no more fear of climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Future Community</td>
<td>Front: I dream that Max Gilardi will fall in love with me oh god oh please Back: (Response written by community member) Max will be lucky to be with you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream of a world without global warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>community future</td>
<td>I dream of a world without suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream of mask free days ahead xoxo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL; SA</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>To live and be the person I want to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>I dream of hugging my loved ones. &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Future/Community</td>
<td>Wished for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>outdoors future</td>
<td>I dream for nature to be saved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>community future</td>
<td>I dream of a world where no one hides who they are or who they want to become</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA; PL; PG</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I wish to experience life with an open heart instead of a cold shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; SA</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream of a world without Donald Trump!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream of never wasting a day with no laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>community future</td>
<td>I wish for the LGBTQ and BLM to forever be a part of our community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>joke covid-related</td>
<td>I wish for a real mermaid and a witch to come and make the virus go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>future community</td>
<td>I dream of a world where everyone is accepted for who they are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>future community personal accomplishment</td>
<td>I wish to continue being a better person for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL; PRO</td>
<td>future political</td>
<td>(\text{Looks like community member wrote this out at home, writing on a larger piece of paper and taping over it to waterproof it}) I wish for the imprisonment of Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell, the full recognition of this republican regime as being illegitimate, the expulsion of all their judicial appointees, and the destruction of the republican means of nonrepresentative power: exclusion of DC &amp; PR statehood, and the electoral college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>joke kid</td>
<td>to get railed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; SA; PG</td>
<td>community future</td>
<td>to be kind + loving to all as well as myself now... Happy Holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM; PG</td>
<td>community future</td>
<td>I dream the world becomes a happy place for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM; A</td>
<td>kid covid-related future</td>
<td>I dream that covid can finally be over and we can move on in life (before the apocalypse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL; SA</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>I dream of being the best person I can be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYFF'S DIMENSION</td>
<td>CATEGORY</td>
<td>NOTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA; PG</td>
<td>general personal accomplishment</td>
<td>sticking up for myself? My beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>joke kid</td>
<td>I am proud of my ability to get out of my clothes. - Kim Jong Un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>kid</td>
<td>(drawing on one side) Thank you Gahal (written inside a heart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; PL; SA</td>
<td>future personal accomplishment</td>
<td>To be following my instincts + letting life guide me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>family covid</td>
<td>I am proud of my daughters who have worked so hard during this time &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>future personal accomplishment</td>
<td>I am proud of praying to God even when I feel he has forgotten me. I won't give up. I continue to believe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>-Covid-related -friends -personal accomplishment</td>
<td>I am proud of myself for persevering through this hard year &amp; developing strong bonds with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>Of how my neighborhood supports and helps each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>political</td>
<td>I am proud of all those who resisted tyranny and defended our democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>My mom for working so hard for my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>friends covid-related</td>
<td>I am proud of my friends for surviving this tough year to the best of their ability &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>covid-related family</td>
<td>of my daughters how they adjusted to remote school and made the best of 2020!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A; PG</td>
<td>kid personal accomplishment</td>
<td>of my straight A's!! =D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>joke</td>
<td>I am proud of being a furry - Kristina M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>community covid related</td>
<td>I'm proud of my class for working so hard in school and out!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>community covid related</td>
<td>I am proud of the community humanity (particularly gen z) has built over this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG; SA; PRO</td>
<td>personal accomplishment</td>
<td>of my ability to love &amp; of my resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>My caring community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Family community Covid-related</td>
<td>I am proud of my family and grand kids + teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG; EM</td>
<td>personal accomplishment family friends community covid-related</td>
<td>Myself and my loved ones for caring for each other and our communities so well &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; EM</td>
<td>Family friends covid related Future</td>
<td>Je suis fiere de ma famille et des agens qui mes doure Dans l'attente du vous voir ou complet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PL</td>
<td>Family friends Future</td>
<td>Of our friend Annie, who we love and of the things my daughter will do for the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>I am so proud of my girlfriend &amp; all of her hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>I am proud of my mom!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>I am proud of my sister for working hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>I am proud of myself for still being in school even though its weird and I'm proud of my family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>joke</td>
<td>Dis phatty &lt;3 617-710-6458 youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG; PL</td>
<td>Personal accomplishment</td>
<td>I'm proud of studying for being a Nurse Practitioner. I hope to serve my community &lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>of my children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG; PL</td>
<td>friends</td>
<td>I am proud I lived with @charleyb12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG; PL</td>
<td>personal accomplishment</td>
<td>I am proud of all my hard work to get where I am today and my cat &amp; friends &amp; family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>friends</td>
<td>I am proud of working hard in school. I am also proud of my friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>personal accomplishment</td>
<td>I am proud of the person I am today, my family and friends. (and of my ???)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG</td>
<td>friends</td>
<td>Illegible at end of parentheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; PG; SA</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>of my sister for getting into colgate. I am also proud of the person I have become today &amp; my friends + fam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>I am proud of celine - my granddaughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>I am proud of the new school year!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO; SA</td>
<td>personal accomplishment</td>
<td>defining my own family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F. INITIAL CATEGORY ANALYSIS OF MESSAGE CONTENT

This Appendix is the original message content analysis I conducted early in my thesis process. After writing my Literature Review I realized that Ryff’s six dimensions would be more applicable to my study. I subsequently replaced this section with the section In What Ways and To What Extend was Eudaimonia Expressed. I still found value in writing the following analysis as it was a necessary part of my process and informs the direction I went in other areas of my analysis.

1. Message Analysis

Much of the public’s reception is found in the words left on each note. Traces of their values and beliefs were expressed in touching, often inspiring sentiments. Sorting through all the cards, I transcribed each message onto a spreadsheet in order to begin uncovering patterns (the complete transcripts can be found in APPENDIX E). Certain categories of messages began to emerge, refining the list as I combed through the notes. A set of fourteen categories were ultimately used to better understand the prevalence of certain concepts written about in response to each prompt, which I then used to compare between the three. These categories were: Community, Covid-Related, Family, Friends, Future, General, Health, Joke, Kid, Outdoors, Personal Accomplishment, Pet, Political, and This Tree. (Explanations behind each category and examples of notes assigned to it can be found in Appendix G.) Some notes touched on more than one category—even six in some instances. On these occasions, all categories that were relevant to the note were tallied. This was to ensure the full intent of each message was captured in my analysis, not prioritizing one quality over another.
For the purpose of focusing this paper on the analysis of the study, I will now proceed to examine the significance of the trends uncovered. In the broad sense, the overall quality of the notes was striking when reading them in totality. Message after message expressed sincere reflections on the prompts, some boldly inspiring in their honesty. While there were occasionally notes that ‘trolled’ the project (intentionally poking fun at the sentiment), the vast majority of messages left by the community were authentic statements of self reflection.

a. Eudaimonic Expressions within Categories

The eudaimonic value of each category of the fourteen used falls on a spectrum from high eudaimonia to low eudaimonia based on their intrinsic traits. Below is a visual expression of this spectrum:

Eudaimonia Spectrum

On one end of the spectrum we see “community” marked as its highest form. This reflects the conclusion Aristotle came to when he said that “what we mean by ‘right’ is whatever brings about and sustains the complete flourishing—and its components—of the entire community of citizens” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1129b17-1129b18). Serving “community” is the ultimate form of eudaimonia. It is not tinged by the lure of personal accolades that serving our friends, family, and personal goals are steeped in, even subconsciously. This is because by the very
nature of expanding our goodness to other, primarily anonymous persons, we fulfill the broadest form of eudaimonia: sharing blessings with all citizenry, not limited by our subjective experience, opinion, and emotion. The notes that considered community in their sentiments were closest to Aristotle’s beliefs on what defines acts of eudaimonia.

The notes that fell into the category, “this tree”, were also a form of a highly eudaimonic sentiment, and are found in the same position as “community” on the spectrum. Though they were often less explicit expressions of “community”, they nonetheless captured the same critical components. The notes were a recognition on the part of the message-writers of the ‘generous’, ‘community-oriented’ nature of the installation. They expressed appreciation of the tree’s ‘generosity’ and the act of writing appreciation was a ‘good natured’ act. Being “generous” and “good-natured” are two traits defined as eudaimonic by Aristotle in his list of eudaimonic characteristics (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1107a33-1107b). The appreciation of a community-oriented act (the installation itself) is also a reflection of what Aristotle holds as the greatest form of eudaimonia, serving community, but is a more subtle expression of the sentiment.

Serving friends, family, and our own personal accomplishments are not far behind in eudaimonic sentiment, however their “goodness” is not as complete as the goodness of serving and supporting the greater community. Nonetheless, considerations of those closest to us have eudaimonic value as well. The notes that fell under “family” and “friends” were overall expressions of being “good-natured”, “generous”, and even “like a friend”, a sample of characteristics found on Aristotle’s list. Traits from notes of “personal accomplishments” can also be found on his list, termed “ambitious [in a good way]” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1107a33). This is further supported by Aristotle’s claim that whatever thing “by its nature seems
to rule us and lead us...surely that ought to be the most perfect form of flourishing” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1177a13-1177a17). This translates to achieving personal goals, the things that drive us, “rule us”. When we reach our goals, we are “flourishing” on the path to eudaimonia. And when we help our family and friends do the same, that too is an act of eudaimonia. The less community-minded sentiments are what pull the notes in these categories back from being fully eudaimonic in nature.

In the next set of categories along the spectrum we find “pet” and “kid” listed. Notes that fall within these two categories are generally positive, but cannot be considered fully eudaimonic. “Pet” notes express the owner’s contentment with having an animal, perhaps due to the comfort it brings them or the overall beneficial influence owning the animal has had on their life. Whatever the specific reason for being pleased with their pet, ultimately their ownership solely serves them. There is no benefit to the community or the greater good from owning a pet, and it only provides the owner and their immediate family with its comforts. Similarly, notes written by a child too young to engage on their own would have required the help of a parent of guardian. While this teaches the child the value of participating in a community endeavor, the child is only just beginning to learn this eudaimonic characteristic and is not performing the task of their own volition. Therefore, notes that fall within “pet” and “kid” categories do not fully realize eudaimonic sentiments.

We also see “health”, “outdoors”, and “covid-related” in this section of the spectrum. These three categories are linked in their quality of pursuing basic needs for well-being. Being healthy, enjoying nature, and not falling sick are pre-requisite to a flourishing life. Without this...
basic level of goodness, no chance for expansion is possible. Similar to notes that fall in the “pet” and “kid” categories, these three express the potential to reach eudaimonia but do not suggest the actualizing of it.

“Future” and “general” notes are the next grouping of categories along the spectrum on the side of low eudaimonia. Future considerations are hopes for betterment, but not betterment itself. It is the seed to improvement that can lead to eudaimonia, but has not yet. Notes that fell within the “general” category sometimes expressed broad considerations, such as “happiness” and “life”, too broad to be considered a realization of eudaimonia. In other instances, the notes were unrelated to a specific eudaimonic pursuit, such as notes of gratefulness for “The Red Sox”, and therefore cannot be considered eudaimonic in nature.

The second lowest form of eudaimonic sentiments found on the spectrum were notes that were “political”. Aristotle stated that politicians should try to “eliminate civil strife and partisanship by which citizens are, in effect, enemies” (Aristotle & Beresford, 2020, 1155a25). In our political climate today, partisanship rules our society and has actualized Aristotle’s warning of making citizens enemies of one another. It is hard to imagine political messages in this climate breaking through partisan barriers and becoming eudaimonic. It is possible, however these sentiments were not apparent in the notes left on the Pilot’s trees, leaving the “political” category low on the eudaimonic spectrum.

Which brings us to the last category to discuss—“joke”—representing the lowest point of engagement with the study. Many of the notes that fell into this category were explicit in nature, or expressed negative thoughts. Purposefully expressing such sentiments without care for who
may read the message or feel offended is inherently anti-eudaimonic. It spreads negative influences into the community, and does not consider the greater good. It is, at best, neutral (such as the note that read “I wish for the world to be overrun by dogs HAHAHA”), and at worst vulgar and offensive (such as the note that read “to get railed”). In any circumstance, the joke notes did not improve the message-writer or the community at large.

b. Significance of the Most Prevalent Categories

There are many influences that could be attributed to why certain categories were more prevalent in messages found on each tree. For example, some categories were more relevant to one prompt over another, such as notes referring to the “Future” being found most often on the Dream Tree as the prompt intrinsically infers. Other influences may include the location of the tree, the demographics of pedestrians most likely to pass by, and responses already left by others on the tree. The following is an analysis of the three most prevalent categories found in messages from each tree through the examination of their contents and theorized reasons for their popularity.

i. Grateful Tree

Nearly half of all messages left on the Grateful Tree concerned “family” in their sentiments, the most popular category of this site (with 51 notes out of the total 108). This striking calculation reflects several influences present at this installation. CSP attracts many families across the city of Newton to its landscape. Its amenities support family recreation, such
as playing fields and a trail through the woods. This increases the likelihood that an individual who passed by the Grateful Tree and participated was either with their family or associates trips to CSP with their family, leading them to write a message with them in mind. The act of walking along the trail (where the Tree was located) also provides important information to consider. According to Attention Restoration Theory taking walks, particularly in nature, provides individuals the capacity to reflect and recharge from draining tasks (Kaplan, 1995). The act of reflection therefore provides space for the participant to consider family when addressing the prompt.

It should also be noted that for most people, it is likely that when asked what they are grateful for, they will answer “family” or “friends”, the second most popular category of notes found at the Grateful Tree (totaling 32). This is due to the very purpose these important groups of people have in our lives. Family is something we are raised to cherish, and we expect will support us in good times and bad. We are grateful for this unconditional love, and know how rare it is in most other relationships with the outer world. And though most of us did not choose our family, our friends are our chosen extensions of family. These relationships have gained increased importance during the pandemic as our social lives have narrowed. Combined, it is not surprising that the prompt resulted in high counts of notes related to both these categories.

The notes that fell in these two categories often overlapped. Some examples include, “grateful for this beautiful day, the ladies of Winslow Road and my health + family <3”, “For all the gifts of family and friends + LIFE”, and notes that simply read “friends and family”. At times, only “family” was mentioned, such as “Grateful for my wife!”, “Grateful for family”, and “I am grateful for my amazing family”. Other times only “friends” were the subject people, such as
“Grateful for sunshine and the kindness of friends” and “I’m grateful for my best friend Ben for our outdoor adventure and supportive conversation <3”. The overwhelming presence of sentiments involving “family” and “friends” informs us of the value the community that participated at CSP holds for these two groups at this time.

The third most popular category of notes was “general” (totaling 27). These notes had a wide spectrum of sentiments expressed, from “the love that surrounds me every day!” and “I am grateful for the hopes that all can share” to even broader concepts such as messages that simply read “life” and “happiness”. These more general messages suggest a big-picture response to the prompt, perhaps exposing again the reflective power of taking walks in nature.

ii. Dream Tree

It is not surprising that notes referring to the “future” were the most prevalent at the Dream Tree as most dreams consider what could be. 33 out of the total 45 notes left in response to the prompt were future-oriented. Although the prompt asked the community what “I” dream of, over half of the “future” responses were community-oriented. Some samples include, “I dream of a world without violence”, “I dream of a world where no one hides who they are or who they want to become”, and “I wish for the time that families can safely be together”. The “self-oriented” responses within the “future” category were also quite inspiring at times. Examples include, “to experience life with an open heart instead of a cold shoulder”, “I wish to continue being a better person for others”, and “I dream of hugging my loved ones <3”. These notes indicate the message-writers’ desire to act as conduits of betterment for others. Only
some responses were completely self-oriented, such as “I dream to be a famous surgeon” or “I dream that Max Gilardi will fall in love with me oh god oh please”. Otherwise, the community showed an overall interest in a future that benefits the greater good.

This is further supported by the second most popular category of notes found at the Dream Tree: “community”. As mentioned above, most of these also overlap with “future” sentiments, such as “I dream of a world where no one hides who they are or who they want to become” and “I wish for the lgbtq and blm to forever be a part of our community”. These messages reflect that the participants of the Dream tree value community and acceptance, important qualities that support a flourishing life.

Another category that many “future” messages aligned with were about the “outdoors”, which tied with “joke” and “covid-related” as the third most prevalent categories of messages (tallying five messages each). Notes that concerned “future” and “outdoors” include, “I dream for nature to be saved”, “…of a world with no more fear of climate change”, and “I dream of a world without global warming”. These “outdoor” considerations express concern for the future of our planet, and therefore humanity. They are less concerned with location-specific “outdoors”, unlike responses generally found in this category at the Grateful Tree (for example “I am grateful that I have been able to walk at Cold Spring Park daily with my BFF!”). This again reflects the community-oriented mindset of the Dream Tree's participants. Notes that fell under the “covid-related” category also showed elements of a community mindset, inherent in the shared hope that the pandemic ends.
This mindset, however, was contradicted by notes left as a “joke” on the tree, the other category tied for third most prevalent. While the vast majority of messages left expressed positive considerations for the community, the joke notes were at times offensive and did not benefit the community. In my later section titled “Vandalism”, I will delve more deeply into theories regarding the connection between the prevalence of “joke” notes, and vandalism that occurred.

iii. Proud Tree

45% of all messages found at the Proud Tree were about “family”, the most prevalent category at that site. Similar to the Grateful Tree’s location, the NCP attracts many families due to its recreational amenities. This may have led to participants filling out a card while with their family, or associating the location with previous times at the park with family, leading to their consideration of them in their note. Some examples of notes include, “I am proud of my mommy!”, “I am proud of my sister for working hard”, and “of my children”. These statements of pride in various family members may reflect influences from Covid’s effect. Many feel a renewed sense of appreciation for things often taken for granted, like the work of a mother or the perseverance of children. The actions previously assumed to be a given now hold greater importance in such a strife-stricken world.

It is not surprising that “personal accomplishment” was a close second in the ranking of most prevalent categories at the Proud Tree. Pride is often considered in a personal way, as a reflection of one’s own accomplishments. Some examples of notes falling in this category
include, “I am proud of myself for still being in school even though its weird and I’m proud of my family”, “I am proud of all my hard work to get where I am today and my cat & friends & family”, and “I am proud of working hard in school. I am also proud of my friends”. These examples suggest more than just pride in oneself, however, they include their “family” and “friends” as well. This creates a more dynamic understanding of the sentiments expressed in what could appear to be a very self-oriented response. These participants are proud of themselves, in conjunction with those they love. The two are equal, sharing in personal accomplishments. Some notes did not include family and friends, such as “I’m proud of studying for being a Nurse Practitioner. I hope to serve my community <3” which considers community, and “sticking up for myself? My beliefs” an expression of growth.

“Friends”, similar to “family”, hold new meaning in the times of Covid and marked the third most popular category of messages. Some examples of sentiments expressed are, “I am proud of my friends for surviving this tough year to the best of their ability <3” and “Of our friend Annie, who we love and of the things my daughter will do for the world”. Both of these examples make subtle reference to Covid, reflecting the value these message-writers have found in their friends at this time. It also may reflect the association participants have of the park with friends, similar to experiences of the park with family.

c. Significance of the Least Prevalent Categories

At each tree, there were notes that fell into categories that were significantly less prevalent than others. At all three sites, at least one category was left unfilled, with others only
nominally making a mark on the tally outcomes. The three least frequent categories expressed in messages found at each tree will be discussed in this section, along with thoughts on what may have caused such an outcome.

i. Grateful Tree

The Grateful Tree’s notes were defined by a quality of thoughtfulness not universally present in responses from the other two trees. Even in their least prevalent categories, positive qualities emerge. To begin, no “joke” notes were left on this tree, rather, messages found on its limbs attempted to address the prompt in an honest, and considerate way. This further iterates conclusions drawn in the section, “The Grateful Tree’s Success”. The combination of the tree’s location, CSP’s attraction to thoughtful community members, the sense of “property” inherent in the medium of an artificial tree, and the wording of the prompt likely played a vital role in the community’s response, and respect.

The second least prevalent category at the Grateful Tree was “personal accomplishment”, with only four messages out of the 108 total. While the category’s title may infer selfish responses, the notes that were left were not and read, “Sobriety”, “Rehab”, “I am grateful for getting into NYU! :D”, and “My imagination”. The first two indicate a striking vulnerability that these two message-writers were willing to express. To seek help for addiction, and to achieve sobriety are indeed, “personal accomplishments”, but in the most positive sense. The last two examples suggest a certain pride in accomplishment and could fall under Aristotle’s “ambitious [in a good way]” category of eudaimonic traits. The former suggests the value of furthering
one’s education, and the latter the value of creativity. All four of these notes of “personal accomplishment” are within the realm of expressing eudaimonia.

The “political” category was the third least prevalent among the messages, and is not one-dimensional. Of note were two messages that appear to be between friends. One reads, “My friend Ruthy :) A great republican, person, and friend :)” (Appendix A.41), and the other “I am so grateful for my friend Kathy. A good democrat, person and friend” (Appendix A.42). The similarity in wording suggests the friends were together and one saw what the other had written and reflected the sentiment back. While these notes are clearly political in nature, the gesture of writing messages of the same ilk—an acknowledgement and embrace of differences—was an act of shared caring and support for the other, regardless of political standing.

The other six messages that fell in the “political” category more closely reflected Aristotle’s claim that partisanship is anti-eudaimonic. Statements such as “I am grateful for the victory of the election” and “I am grateful for a president who will try to help us heal, take a breath and remember to be the Real America” appear to be positive in nature, however to a non-democrat they may incite anger and disunity with community. The politically-oriented messages on the Grateful Tree were overall the furthest from expressing eudaimonic sentiments at the site, with one outstanding exception between friends, Ruthy and Kathy.

ii. Dream Tree

There were two categories at the Dream Tree that did not receive any relevant messages: “this tree” and “pet”. I would hypothesize that “this tree” did not enter the minds of the
community for several reasons, the first being that the prompt did not align with such a consideration. It would be difficult to come up with a message in response to the prompt, “I Dream…”, that could relate to “this tree”. Only the Grateful Tree received such sentiments, partly due to the wording of the prompt that allowed such a response, and also due to the medium of being an artificial tree, and therefore purposefully placed there. The tree used for the Dream Tree installation has been there for possibly over one-hundred years (based on its enormous size). The tree did not one-day “appear”, rather it is an integral part of the residential landscape. What did “appear” was an installation on its limbs, however again, the prompt did not align with considering that in one’s response. The lack of messages related to “Pet” was also not surprising. It would be strange to dream about one’s pet when there are so many bigger dreams to have!

The second least prevalent categories were a two-way-tie between “general” and “personal accomplishment”, each receiving just one note respectively. For “general”, the note read “I dream of a gender healed + gender equal society, where women & girls have equal opportunities for success, safety + happiness! :)”. The broad considerations addressed in its wording caused it to be added to the “general” category, however it is not surprising only one “general” note was received for this prompt; “I Dream…” suggests more personal aspirations. This note was also counted as “community” and “future”, touching upon inspiring hopes for a “gender equal society”. The other category with a similarly low count, “personal accomplishment”, again reflects the angle of the prompt, which in this case infers the accomplishment has not been made yet. One clever participant however found a way to get around this by writing, “I wish to continue being a better person for others”. This suggests the message-writer believes they are actively “being a better person for others” due to their wish to
“continue” doing so. For all the other messages hanging on the Dream Tree, such a creative way of patting one’s own back was not initiated.

The third least prevalent categories were also tied in response level. “Kid”, “political”, and “friends” received three messages respectively. All of the notes that fell under the “kid” category were also found in the “joke” category, some more socially appropriate than others. The sentiments of each were categorically un-eudaimonic, as explained in the “Eudaimonic Expressions within Categories” section that discusses “joke” messages. It is significant that these un-eudaimonic messages were among the least prevalent.

The “political” messages also tended to express un-eudaimonic sentiments. One message was notable in that the community member appears to have used paper from another source (perhaps their home or bag) to allow ample room to write a declaration against Donald Trump and the Republicans. It reads:

“I wish for the imprisonment of Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell, the full recognition of this republican regime as being illegitimate, the expulsion of all their judicial appointees, and the destruction of the republican means of non-representative power: exclusion of DC & PR statehood, and the electoral college.”

The passion evident in the words of this message reflect the individual’s anger and frustration with the country’s political trajectory. While the validity of the points are arguable, it is, nonetheless, antithetical to supporting a sense of community, a critical component of eudaimonia. Other messages were far less passionate, but reflected similar sentiments. As described in the Eudaimonic Expressions within Categories section, it is no surprise that these “political” massages do not support community harmony. However, the relatively few messages
compared to the total number of responses (3 out of 45) indicates that the overwhelming majority of notes did not express such polarizing sentiments.

Notes that referred to “friends” on the other hand, were highly eudaimonic in nature, even though only three were identified. The messages read, “I dream that everyone can see their family and friends again <3”, “I dream that corona ends & that I can be the best person I can be. I also dream to travel the world with my best friends” and “I hope that everyone I love will be ok during these hard times”. These sentiments generally reflect community-oriented responses. The fact that participants were compelled to stretch the interpretation of “I Dream...” to include others is important to note. It indicates that the public values the wellbeing of the community.

iii. Proud Tree

Four categories received no relevant messages on the Proud Tree: “health”, “outdoors”, “general”, and “this tree”. It is not surprising that the least relevant categories to the prompt received the fewest responses. Writing a note of pride for “health” and “outdoors” would require a strange interpretation of “I am Proud...”. “General” notes would also be unexpected responses to this prompt as the wording is so personal. “This Tree”, on the other hand, may appear more relevant. The public, after all, could have written that they are “proud for the community that set up this tree”, or something to that effect. That they did not, however, is not surprising in the least. As with the Dream Tree, this installation borrowed a tree from the landscape.

The second least prevalent categories of notes were “pet” and “political”, tallying one each. The individual that mentioned a pet only did so in a list among other categories, writing “I
am proud of all my hard work to get where I am today and my cat & friends & family”. One’s cat is a strange thing to be proud of, however it can be interpreted indirectly as “part of the family” in a way, and therefore relevant. The “political” note read, “I am proud of all those who resisted tyranny and defended our democracy”. My conclusions on this mirror what has been written in the prior two sections. It should be noted that this rare political note suggests a more united sentiment from the Proud Tree participants.

The third least prevalent category of notes found on the Proud tree was “kid”. The majority of these notes were “joke” notes, the significance of which has been covered in this paper’s section, “Eudaimonic Expressions within Categories”. It is important to mention, however, that only one of these notes was written by a child and did not express “joke” sentiments. In comparison, all sixteen “kid” messages found at the Grateful Tree were by a child, and none were “joke” notes. This is perhaps a reflection of the demographic that tends to pass by the location of the Proud Tree.
2. Categories Explained

A description of each category and the basis for assigning messages is explained in this Appendix. Some of the categories use examples that overlap with other categories, however when used to exemplify the category presently being described, only the relevant portion of the message is discussed. My decision-making in assigning certain categories to certain messages was inherently subjective and may be subject to challenge, however my intent was to capture the essence of each message and convert the sentiment to quantifiable measures that would illuminate trends.

a. Community

Creating a space for shared experience and support was critical in the design of the Eudaimonic Tree Pilot. Traces of “community” left behind in notes for others to read and find comfort in made the community that surrounds us more tangible. Beyond the intrinsic nature of the trees showcasing the presence of community, some notes were explicitly community-oriented. Examples include notes that read, “Good health for everyone”, “So grateful for our community that thought of this idea!”, and “Of how my neighborhood supports and helps each other”. These notes use language that is directly associated with community, such as “everyone” and “neighborhood”, as well as using the exact word of “community”. Some less explicit examples that were marked as “community” were, “I am grateful for the hopes that all can share”, “Grateful for all the friends of Cold Spring Park!”, and “I dream of a world full of acceptance, compassion, and kindness.” In the first and last example, a broader sense of
community is expressed concerning “all” and the “world” while the middle example infers the community of Cold Spring Park.

Community was also marked on notes that were left in response to other people’s notes. My favorite example comes from the Dream Tree. What sounds to be a teenage girl wrote, “I dream that Max Gilardi will fall in love with me oh god oh please” to which a community member replied on the back, “Max will be lucky to be with you” (Appendix A.43-44). This anonymous act of support for the message-writer to believe in her own worth is the basis of community. In another example, someone at the Grateful Tree wrote on other cards they agreed with by drawing an arrow to the message and writing “this” (Appendix A.39-40). The act of writing on another community member’s note with supportive words is perhaps the most compelling form of “community” indicated in the Eudaimonic Tree Pilot. It captures the intention of the project with a simple gesture of the pen.

b. Covid-Related

The Covid pandemic was not absent from the minds of the community, its effects expressed in notes found on all three trees with the Proud Tree tallying the most Covid-Related messages. Some examples of notes referring to Covid include, “The reflection this pandemic has directed us to do <3 (but not the bad stuff)”, “I dream that covid can finally be over and we can move on in life” and “I am grateful for the people who are making Covid vaccines and helping people. And for this tree. Thank you!” These examples suggest the public’s desire for the pandemic to end and their hope for the future. School-related notes were often tinged with the
reality Covid set forth, such as “Of my daughters, how they adjusted to remote school and made the best of 2020!” and “I’m proud of my class for working so hard in school and out!” There were many messages that were less explicit in their reference to Covid such as the message, “I am proud of my daughters who have worked so hard during this time”, alluding to “this time” of Covid. In another, someone wrote, “My roommate Sam, My partner Rahi, and science”, with “science” presumed to be referring to the scientists developing vaccines in an effort to stop the pandemic. In yet another, a message read “I wish for the time that families can safely be together”, “safely” once Covid has ended. It is not surprising that Covid was top-of-mind for many community members as they considered the prompts. Our lives in 2020 were shaped by a virus that devastated countless aspects of our world. The notes that refer to it, both implicitly and explicitly, voice the community’s concern over its effects, and hopes for life once it has passed.

c. Family

Messages that refer to “family” through the traditional use of titles were relatively easy to assign to this category. Any mention of “mom”, “husband”, “son”, “sister”, “grandma”, or other family member term was included. There were a few instances where a broader application of the word was used. On the Proud Tree, one individual wrote “defining my own family”, implying they have chosen to identify with a family that is outside the traditional definition. Mention of “partner”, “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” were also added to the “family” category as romantic
relationships are more closely aligned with “family” than with “friends” due to the affectionate nature of the bond.

d. Friends

Most messages referring to “friends” used the word itself, making the categorization relatively straightforward. Some examples include, “I am proud of my friends for surviving this tough year to the best of their ability <3” and “I am proud of the person I am today, my family and friends”. There were also instances where “friends” were inferred in the messages, such as “I am proud of myself for persevering through this hard year & developing strong bonds with others”, “others” referring to friendships made.

e. Future

References to future times were most commonly found on the Dream Tree, as most “dreams” are for the future. 33 of the 45 total notes left on the Dream Tree were labeled “future”, and may have taken the place of the label “general” used more frequently at the other two trees. This is due to the primarily self-oriented notes found on the Dream tree, rather than the more generalized and open ended notes of the other two. Examples include “I dream of an adventurous and fulfilling life...”, “To live and be the person I want to be”, and “I dream to be a famous surgeon”. While these make reference to general concepts such as a “fulfilling life” and being “the person” they want to be, the personal angle of the messages shift from a communal
“general” to a personal “future” general interested in upcoming events and individual growth and successes.

On the other two trees, less explicit implications of future desires were deciphered, particularly on notes that were also “political”. “I am grateful for my grandchildren and Pres. Elect Biden” was labeled “future” due to the implication that the message-writer was looking forward to a new president in office. Another example is the note, “Family, friends to walk with, Biden/Harris, science & the outdoors”. In this message, the individual refers to “Biden/Harris”, again implying they are looking forward to the transition to a new president in office.

There were future-oriented notes that were not political on the other two trees as well. One note read, “I am proud of praying to God even when I feel he has forgotten me. I won’t give up. I continue to believe.” This has a subtle presence of the “future” in the language used when the community member writes they “won’t give up” on their faith, implying upcoming challenges to it they assume they will face. On the Grateful Tree, someone wrote “I am grateful for new beginnings <3”, an all but explicit statement of excitement for “future” possibilities.

f. General

The category of “general” was used for sentiments in notes that did not fall into the other thirteen categories. Notes in this category were most likely to be labeled only as “general” as opposed to falling into other categories as well. This is due to the broad nature of the messages left in notes labeled “general” such as simple notes that read “Happiness”, “Life”, and “My imagination”. These notes do not fit any of the other categories and allude to non-specific
ideas. Other notes included in this category exclusively are “I’m grateful for the universe and the place I have in it” and “food on the table”. In the former, the note again puts forth a wide-ranging concept, this time “the universe”, a concept so big it does not have a place in any of the other categories. In the latter message, a more subtle storyline appears, inferring the message-writer’s awareness of the struggle for many families today and perhaps, their own struggle to provide food. This is, sadly, a common modern narrative that finds its place in the broad landscape of the “general” experience.

There were some notes that did cover multiple categories and still fell within the “general” framework, often the result of a “list-like” message. One example comes from the Grateful Tree, with a note that reads “Outside adventures, my son, my husband, my sisters, my mom, optimism.” It is this last word that adds this note to the “general” category as “optimism” is again a broad, generalized term.

In one instance, a message that included a long list of items was categorized exclusively as “general” due to the items’ ambiguity. It reads, “Grateful for- life, -breath, -heartbeat, -hope, -love, -kindness, -compassion, -faith, -you!”. In this case, the message-writer compiled a wide range of topics that could have multiple interpretations and significances. For example “breath” could refer to being alive, being healthy, or even to the meditation technique of focusing on your breath. Due to the ambiguity of this list, the message was labeled “general” as I did not want to assume one meaning over another.

This category also served the purpose of being the “catch-all” for miscellaneous notes. These include messages that read, “Red Sox” (written twice on the Grateful Tree), “photoshoots”,
and one (improperly transcribed) excerpt from the A. E. Housman poem, “With Rue My Heart is Laden” that reads “For many a rose lipped maid + many a light food lad” (originally written “For many a rose-lipt maiden And many a lightfoot lad”). The lack of a contextual anchor in these notes required them to fall into the “general” category.

g. Health

Health was certainly on the minds of community members that participated in writing messages for the Dream and Grateful Trees. (The Proud Tree did not have any notes that were categorized as health-oriented, which will be discussed in the “Least Prevalent Categories” section of this paper.) In most notes assigned to the “health” category, the word itself was used, such as “This park! Healthy lungs, fresh air”, “For good health and love, walking to park daily” and “Grateful for the health of my loved ones”. Less explicit references to health were also identified. In one striking example, a community member writes “I am grateful my husband survived being hit by a car!” This harrowing experience alludes to the “health” of their husband as the subject of their gratefulness. Another more subtle example was the note, “I hope that everyone I love will be ok during these hard times”. Being “ok” is a broad concept and could be viewed as fitting the “general” category, however I placed this note in the “health” category as the context of the message infers the message-writers’ interest in the well-being, the “health” of those they love.

h. Joke
The trees were primarily filled with messages that answered the prompts from an honest, often personal place. There were, however, some messages that could be categorized as “joke” messages, intending to make light of the prompt or perhaps poke fun at it’s sentiment. There were notably no “joke” messages left on the Grateful Tree while there were several at both the Dream Tree and Proud Tree. This will be addressed in future sections of this paper. Since there were only five “joke” messages left on the Dream Tree and three at the Proud Tree, I will provide their contents in the following explanation.

Four of the five joke notes left on the Dream Tree were exclusively “joke”-oriented. They read, “I wish for the world to be overrun by dogs HAHAHA!”, “I dream to cosplay Black Butler (Sebastian) (Ciel) (Alois)”, “That Santa doesn’t pay another visit to mommy late at night”, and “To get railed”. Addressing these one by one, the first note was clearly written by an individual who was making a funny—most likely by adolescent standards—addition to the tree that they perhaps hoped others would smile at, like a joke. The second example refers to “cosplay”, which is when individuals dress up as characters such as those found in movies, books, and often manga and anime cartoons. In this note, “Black Butler” refers to an anime series, and the names “Sebastian”, “Ciel” and “Alois” are some of the characters featured in it. This is perhaps not exactly a “joke” as much as a tongue-in-cheek response to the prompt that presumes a more lofty answer. Nonetheless, the “joke” category comes closest to describing its contents and inferred intent. The third note is yet another tongue-in-cheek reply. A mother alludes to a sexual encounter with her partner who perhaps plays the role of Santa in their household on Christmas Eve. Hoping “Santa” doesn’t visit “mommy late at night” is a playful answer to the prompt that again, does not intend to answer the prompt with lofty assertions and rather, recounts to the
public in a funny way a very personal encounter. The last example is sexual in nature as well, however much more explicitly. “To get railed” is a vulgar way to describe the act of having sex, and is an obscene response to the prompt. It is likely that this was written by an adolescent who is perhaps just beginning to explore their sexuality, humor, and rebellious side and intended the message to provoke the public in some way. Nonetheless, the message was lewd and inappropriate, which is why I removed it (as mentioned in the previous section). It was not a joke but rather an affront to the project, however no other category comes as close as “joke” to define this response.

The fifth note at the Dream Tree that was labeled “joke” was lighthearted, similar to the others, but fell under the “covid-related” category as well, marking it a bit more steeped in the prompt’s inferred intention. It read “I wish for a real mermaid and a witch to come and make the virus go away”. The first part of this message refers to a wish granted by fictional characters, which is why it was labeled “joke”, but continues on and refers to the virus that they wish would “go away”. This is an earnest response masked in a lighthearted reference to the individual’s desire for life to go back to normal, prior to the Covid pandemic. Jokes are often used to help cope with difficult situations, as reflected in this message.

The Proud Tree had three “joke” notes left on its branches. They read: “I am proud of my ability to get out of my clothes – Kim Jung Un”, I am proud of being a furry – Kristina M.”, and “Dis phatty <3 617-710-6458”. The first message is a clear attempt to provoke those who read it, while also making fun of an American enemy and is most likely an adolescent’s sense of humor. The next message refers to being “a furry” which, similar to cosplay, is when an individual dresses up in costume, this time as anthropomorphized animals donning a tail, ears, or even a
full animal costume. The term can take on a sexual element, but it is not clear whether that was intended in this note. The sexual nature of the last message however, was clear. “Dis phatty” is most likely referring to a woman’s buttocks, and is followed by presumably the message-writer’s phone number. All three of these examples are more examples of the public’s tongue-in-cheek response to the prompt, and should be labeled as “joke” due to their lighthearted nature.

i. Kid

The “kid” category is unique in that it describes the demographic of participant and not exclusively the content of the message like the other categories. This distinction is due to multiple considerations, the first being that this demographic is the only one identifiable by the look of their writing, and in some instances the content of their messages. In any anthropologically-inclined study, knowing who is participating is an invaluable data point for the future analysis of results. It would have been preferable to have eyes on the three sites at all times to catalog every participant, however this was not possible due to the lack of resources and instinctual nature of the study. In some other messages, for example, its context could infer a woman or man author, however it would be presumptuous to assign a gender on a hunch. The hand of a child, however, is highly distinct and easily recognizable. There is a certain lack of control in their penmanship and in most cases, drawings that only a child would be inclined to make with the same lack of control evident in its lines (Appendix A.37).

The content of their messages was also distinctly youthful and many of them did not fit another category. This was sometimes due to the note only showing a drawing of a person or
unidentifiable subject (Appendix A.36) and other times due to the nature of the message itself (Appendix A.44).

On this last point, I would like to explain why I titled this category “kid” and not “child”. The broader age range inferred by the word “kid” allowed me to include distinctly early adolescent responses in this category as well. Lumping those messages under a category titled “child” would strip them of an identifiable quality that is important to note however, with the small number of clearly adolescent responses, there was not a critical mass that would require a separate category. Labeling all youthful messages as “kid” granted me greater flexibility to analyze the subject.

My final consideration was the importance of highlighting that the Eudaimonic Tree Pilot received messages from this often overlooked demographic. It suggests the capacity of this project to reach a wide range of age groups. While children may well have been lead by parents or grandparents in their engagement, the sentiments written are a direct reflection of their values and interests, just as valid and valuable as the majority adult responses. The young adolescents who participated can be assumed to have engaged of their own free will, further indicating the potential reach this project has.

With this in mind, I would like to explore some of the responses left by children, followed by adolescents. The Grateful Tree received sixteen responses that were categorized as “kid”, fifteen of which were clearly identifiable as being by a child (the sixteenth more likely a youth author). The Dream Tree did not receive any notes decipherable as having been written by a child while the Proud Tree received one (the majority of their youth engagement was from
adolescents). Six of the twenty-three “kid” responses included drawings, five of which were found at the Grateful Tree, and the sixth was at the Proud Tree. The drawings generally indicated a young child was participating due to form and subject, some indecipherable scribbles and others a simple stick figure.

Most children left messages that were not accompanied by a drawing. One example of a child’s message left at the Grateful Tree read, “Will & Hannah & Freddie and Dinosaurs! <3” (Appendix A.45). While the message was in an adult’s handwriting, the addition of “dinosaurs” in the list indicated that a child participated as this is a distinctly popular subject with this demographic. At the same tree, another message was written with the hallmarks of a child learning cursive. She writes “I am grateful for my friends and school. Chloe” (Appendix A.46). This is an example of a visual indication that the note was penned by a child. There were several other notes that had a similar sentiment, (for example, “I am proud of working hard in school. I am also proud of my friends” found at the Proud Tree), however it is the distinct hand of a child that rendered this note, leading me to mark it in the category of “kid”. In another message, the distinctly child-oriented subject tipped me off to the demographic of its author. It read, “I am grateful for my stuffed animals. P.S. cutey Paws. P.P.S. tigers”. Beyond the misspelling of the word “stuffed” in the original note (spelled “stufed”), the subject of this note is clearly of a child’s concern.

There was one note left by a child on the Proud Tree. On one side, the child drew hearts and spirals, and on the other side they wrote “Thank You/Gahal” (the slash indicating a separate line) which was written inside a heart. Clear hallmarks of a child’s hand were evident in the words and attempts to draw hearts that ended up looking more like circles with ends that crossed.
There was also no clear connection to the prompt, rather they participated in the capacity of child.

Several early adolescent messages were identifiable by the handwriting and content of the messages. It is quite possible (and even likely) that there were many more, however my analysis is limited to the resulting message and visual form of the note which for some youth may appear more advanced, and therefore appeared to be “adult”. At the Dream Tree, one note was left that was distinctly youthful that read “I dream that covid can finally be over and we can move on in life (before the acpocolips)” (Appendix A.47). The handwriting in this note appeared to be more advanced than the clearly child-like lines of younger participants, but not quite adult. This was not however, the defining feature that lead me to categorize this note as “kid”. The content within parentheses struck me most, first due to the terrible misspelling of apocalypse (left as originally written in my transcription above in order to allow the reader to conclude similarly), and then the highly adolescent reference to such an event, an equally harrowing and fantastical reality that captures many a youth’s mind. The Grateful Tree’s one distinctly adolescent response read “Mom + Dad and my family”, however in this case it was not the content that struck me as adolescent, rather it was the ornamentation drawn around the “my family” portion (Appendix A.48). This curly-cue-box around the words is a common adolescent doodle of sorts—decorating a page of writing. As with some of the more subtle interpretations of messages left throughout this experiment, I recognize the assumption inherent in my calculations of this note however I am confident in the youthful nature of its form.
The majority of adolescent messages left overlapped the “joke” category, reflecting the rebellious trait common in this demographic. These notes were discussed in the “joke” category above and therefore do not require further iteration.

j. Outdoors

Notes that fit the “outdoors” category were most common at the Grateful and Dream trees with 24 and five respectively. This is perhaps a reflection of the topics of each prompt. Participants at the Grateful tree both directly mentioned the outdoors – “we are grateful for outdoor spaces to run around safely” – and alluded to it – “Grateful for sunshine” – and typically referenced personal experiences with the environment. At the Dream tree the broader societal issue of global warming accounted for all five messages. This may reflect the prompt’s position to inspire more ‘lofty’ aspirations due to the concept of “dreaming”. The Proud tree did not receive any messages that relate to the outdoors, which is probably a reflection of the prompt’s sentiment.

k. Personal Accomplishment

It is perhaps not surprising that notes that fell within the “Personal Accomplishment” category were most commonly found at the Proud tree. The prompt asked participants to consider what they were proud of, a concept often associated with personal accomplishments. This was the second most popular category at the Proud tree with 16 messages alluding to this concept. Once example reads “Sticking up for myself? My beliefs.” This note expresses, at first,
the authors doubt, beginning with a question that may allude to whether “sticking up for myself” would could as an accomplishment, and then a closing statement that appears to affirm, stating pride in “My beliefs.” Another note read that the author was proud of “defining my own family.” This too, may be considered a personal accomplishment as it requires the author to understand what they need and find that support in other people who then create a newly formed family.

Four notes at the Grateful tree fell into the Personal Accomplishments category. Two of these notes referred to trouble with addictions with one that read “Sobriety” and the other “Rehab”. This indicates the prompt’s ability to access deeper, often hidden, personal traumas and stories. The other two responses were about mental acuity, with one expressing gratitude for being accepted into NYU and the other for having an imagination.

The Dream tree only had one note that was a personal accomplishment and read “I wish to continue being a better person for others.” This assumes that the author is already being a better person – which can be considered a personal accomplishment – and wishes to continue to do so.

1. Pet

Notes that mention a “Pet” were most common at the Grateful tree with a total of nine. These were easy to discern as notes about a bet because authors would write, for example, “I am grateful for my dog, Charlie <3.” The Proud tree received only mention of a pet, writing that
they are proud of their hard work “and my cat & friends & family.” The Dream tree did not receive any pet notes.

m. Political

Notes that were categorized as “Political” were often clearly identifiable by mentions of popular politicians and references to the Republican or Democratic party. An example of the latter is “My friend Ruthy :) A great republican, person, and friend :).” This message includes the concept of being a republican, which is identifiable as a political concept. Some examples of messages that include the names of politicians can be found at the Dream Tree where two messages specifically mentioned Donald Trump, our president at the time of the pilot study. The proud tree.

Subtler political notes were also recorded, such as “I grateful the victory of the election” (found at the Grateful Tree), alluding to the victory of Joe Biden who was recently voted in as President of the United States. Another political message reads “I am proud of all those who resisted tyranny and defended our democracy” (from the Proud Tree). Both of these messages, and others like them, are examples of individuals mentioning political concepts (e.g. “election” and “democracy”).

n. This Tree
Only the Grateful Tree collected notes that referenced the pilot study tree and were categorized as “This Tree”. These notes made specific mention of the tree, such as “walks w/ my husband my park family, life! Thanks 4 tree :)”, and less specifically but clearly identifiable as a note about the pilot study tree, such as “So grateful for our community that thought of this idea!”

o. Multiple Categories

The majority of messages left touched on more than one category. The notes that referred to the most categories were often in list form, some spanning the front and back of cards. A pattern emerged where certain categories appeared to be more likely paired with each other such as “friends” and “family”, “joke” and “kid”, “political” and “future”, and “health” and “covid-related.”

There were some that I had a hard time deciding whether they fell into a multiple categories, such as “I am proud of the new school year!” which could be Covid-related, but is not necessarily as starting a new school year is always a momentous time, especially for youth. Instead, I marked this message as only “Community” as the “school year” infers the community of school.

I also included messages that made references to “everyone I love” or other generalized statements like that in the “family” and “friends” categories as it was not explicitly clear which group the message-writer was referring to, which inherently implies both were intended.

“I am grateful for getting into NYU” future and personal accomplishment.
3. Message Diagrams of Categories

a. Grateful Tree
G. INTERSECT OF 14 CATEGORIES AND RYFF'S SIX DIMENSIONS

The 14 categories I developed in order to better understand common themes that arose from message content align in varying degrees with Ryff’s 6 subscales. Often times they allude to sentiments reflected in Ryff’s definitions. The dimension that intersects most often with my original 14 categories is Positive Relations with Others (PRO). Messages that are assigned the “Community”, “Family”, or “Friends” category tend to reflect PRO sentiments due to the message-writers expression of support, love, and awareness of these important social groups. “Pet” and “This Tree” messages also align with PRO qualities. The “Pet” messages indicate an individual’s propensity to wanting “affection and intimacy” (Figure 12) as well as developing warm and meaningful relationships. Messages about “This Tree” were community oriented and reflect what Ryff describes as “understanding the give and take of human relationships” (Figure 12).

Another dimension that intersects some of my categories is Environmental Mastery (EM). The most obvious category it overlaps with is “Outdoors”, though the reasoning may be less apparent. Messages that mentioned elements of the outdoors reflected the message-writer’s interest and ability to shape their own reality by choosing different environments based on their needs. This is a critical component to Ryff’s definition of EM where individuals “make effective use of surrounding opportunities” and are “able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values” (Figure 12). At times the messages assigned “Outdoors” are more concerned with environments outside their control, such as those that voice concern over climate change (Appendix E.2). These too align with EM’s definition due to the individual’s
awareness and interest in issues concerned with the environment and its effect on their ability to live well.

“Health” and “Covid-Related” are also assigned the EM dimension for similar reasons. Wishing the pandemic were over, being grateful that family and friends were not infected, and other sentiments related to health and Covid indicate the individual's awareness of the role our environment has in shaping our well-being. Covid-avoidance and beneficial physical health depend on environments conducive to that end. Therefore, messages that included either of those two concerns should be considered indications of an individual's understanding and value of EM.

The category of “Personal Accomplishment” often overlaps with Ryff’s Personal Growth (PG) dimension and at times the Purpose in Life (PL) dimension as well. Individuals who expressed pride in achieving life goals, from getting into college to beginning nurse training fit what Ryff describes as having “a sense of realizing his or her potential” within the PG dimension and having “goals in life and a sense of directedness” within the PL dimension (Figure 12). “I dream of never wasting a day with no laughter” (Appendix E.2) is an example of Ryff’s PG dimension due to the individual's “feeling of continued development” and seeing “self as growing and expanding” (Figure 12). Some messages were aspirational such as wanting to become a surgeon or remain sober. These too align with Ryff’s definitions of PG and PL.

Another example of a message that is both PG and PL is “I wish to continue being a better person for others” (Appendix E.2). The elements of PG are evident ("Has a feeling of continued development" (Figure 12)) however PL is a bit more subliminal. Looking at Figure 12,
we can see that one of PL’s defining characteristics is for an individual to have “aims and objectives for living”. This message is describing an aim in life to be “a better person for others”, and is therefore aligned with the PL dimension.

PL messages also intersect with the “General” category when messages allude to life, happiness, and other intangible concepts (e.g. “My imagination” found in Appendix E.1). This often reflects content that “holds beliefs that give life purpose” (Figure 12). At times messages within the “Future” category fit the PL dimension as well, such as “I dream of an adventurous and fulfilling life” (Appendix E.2) or “To be following my instincts and letting life guide me” (Appendix E.3). As evident in this brief outline of content assigned the PL dimension, it is an ephemeral concept yet aspects of it can be found in the words of the public upon careful analysis.

Messages assigned to the “Kid” category reflected the young person’s Autonomy (AU), even when written with the help of a parent. Their thoughts, creativity, and beliefs are expressions of “personal standards” (Figure 12). When written by the hand of a child, this can be especially understood as an “independent” (Figure 12) act since children are not yet fully autonomous beings. The context of a message being written by a child therefore uniquely fits it within the AU dimension. Similarly messages assigned the “Joke” category, which often were left by individuals whose notes were also in the “Kid” category, tend to intersect with the AU dimension. This is due to aspects of Autonomy that fall in the “low” score in Figure 12. Many of the “Joke” messages appear to reflect the individual’s conformity “to social pressures” that cause them “to think and act in certain ways” and is perhaps evidence of an adolescent’s compulsion
to fit “the expectations and evaluations of others” (Figure 12) by leaving messages that subvert the intended use of the tree and prompt. Nonetheless, the message contents that intersect “Joke” can be understood as reflections of a low AU dimension.

Adult AU expressed within message content is far less frequent. One example is a message that reads, “To be as much in the moment as I can...” (Appendix E.2). This message intersects with the PG dimension as the individual wants to see “improvement in self and behavior over time” while also “changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness” (Figure 12). This requires the AU dimension which is characterized by being “self-determining” and for one to regulate “behavior from within” (Figure 12).

Ryff’s last dimension of Self-Acceptance (SA) intersects with several categories. “Personal Accomplishment” is the most commonly aligned category with this dimension. One example reads “Sticking up for myself? My beliefs” (Appendix E.3). In order to stick up for oneself and one’s beliefs, an individual must be committed to their value as a person which requires one to possess “a positive attitude toward the self” and acknowledge and accept “multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities” (Figure 12). If we look at Ryff’s criteria for those who rank low in SA, “wishes to be different than what he or she is” is listed (Figure 12). This clearly does not reflect the sentiments of this message, which therefore means it can be considered high in SA.

At times the SA dimension is assigned to messages that allude to general self-acceptance. For example “I dream of a healthy world full of acceptance, compassion, and kindness” (Appendix E.2). Here the world is considered in the context of SA, reflecting the
message-writer’s global understanding of this vital dimension. (This message is also assigned PRO and EM.) Another message that expresses a broader sense of SA reads, “I dream of a gender healed + gender equal society, where women & girls have equal opportunities for success, safety + happiness!” (Appendix E.2). The critical components to SA in this message are its sentiments about a “gender healed + gender equal society”. This requires a broader understanding of acceptance by the public where, similar to the former example, the individualized aspects of Ryff’s definition transform from “possesses a positive attitude toward the self” to “…towards each other”; and “acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self” to “…multiple aspects of community identity”. Expanding Ryff’s definition to the broader public in this way makes sense as a reflection of SA as expressed in more communal terms.

There were several messages that could not be readily assigned to one of Ryff’s 6 dimensions and were listed as “N/A”. These most commonly fell within the “General” category. Some examples include messages that read: “For many a rose lipped maid + many a light foot lad” (Appendix E.1), “Red Sox” (Appendix E.1), and “I wish for the new PS5 or xbox” (Appendix E.2). It is possible that if we were to ask the individuals who wrote these messages what they were thinking about when they wrote them we would be able to identify the presence of one of Ryff’s 6 dimensions however there is not enough information to go off of based solely on message content.
**H. RYFF’S 6 DIMENSIONS EXPLAINED (RYFF, 1989, P1071)**

**Self-acceptance.** The most recurrent criterion of well-being evident in the previous perspectives is the individual’s sense of self-acceptance. This is defined as a central feature of mental health as well as a characteristic of self-actualization, optimal functioning, and maturity. Life span theories also emphasize acceptance of self and of one’s past life. Thus, holding positive attitudes toward oneself emerges as a central characteristic of positive psychological functioning.

**Positive relations with others.** Many of the preceding theories emphasize the importance of warm, trusting interpersonal relations. The ability to love is viewed as a central component of mental health. Self-actualizers are described as having strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings and as being capable of greater love, deeper friendship, and more complete identification with others. Warm relating to others is posed as a criterion of maturity. Adult developmental stage theories also emphasize the achievement of close unions with others (intimacy) and the guidance and direction of others (generativity). Thus, the importance of positive relations with others is repeatedly stressed in these conceptions of psychological well-being.

**Autonomy.** There is considerable emphasis in the prior literature on such qualities as self-determination, independence, and the regulation of behavior from within. Self-actualizers, for example, are described as showing autonomous functioning and resistance to enculturation. The fully functioning person is also described as having an internal locus of evaluation, whereby one does not look to others for approval, but evaluates oneself by personal standards. Individuation is seen to involve a deliverance from convention, in which the person no longer clings to the collective fears, beliefs, and laws of the masses. The process of turning inward in the later years is also seen by life span developmentalists to give the person a sense of freedom from the norms governing everyday life.

**Environmental mastery.** The individual’s ability to choose or create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions is defined as a characteristic of mental health. Maturity is seen to require participation in a significant sphere of activity outside of self. Life span development is also described as requiring the ability to manipulate and control complex environments. These theories emphasize one’s ability to advance in the world and change it creatively through physical or mental activities. Successful aging also emphasizes the extent to which the individual takes advantage of environmental opportunities. These combined perspectives suggest that active participation in and mastery of the environment are important ingredients of an integrated framework of positive psychological functioning.

**Purpose in life.** Mental health is defined to include beliefs that give one the feeling there is purpose in and meaning to life. The definition of maturity also emphasizes a clear comprehension of life’s purpose, a sense of directedness, and intentionality. The life span developmental theories refer to a variety of changing purposes or goals in life, such as being productive and creative or achieving emotional integration in later life. Thus, one who functions
positively has goals, intentions, and a sense of direction, all of which contribute to the feeling that life is meaningful.

*Personal growth.* Optimal psychological functioning requires not only that one achieve the prior characteristics, but also that one continue to develop one’s potential, to grow and expand as a person. The need to actualize oneself and realize one’s potentialities is central to the clinical perspectives on personal growth. Openness to experience, for example, is a key characteristic of the fully functioning person. Such an individual is continually developing and becoming, rather than achieving a fixed state wherein all problems are solved. Life span theories also give explicit emphasis to continued growth and the confronting of new challenges or tasks at different periods of life. Thus, continued personal growth and self-realization is a prominent theme in the aforementioned theories. It may also be the dimension of well-being that comes closest to Aristotle’s notion of eudaimonia as described earlier.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


