EXPLORING EMOTIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND REGULATION IN COMMUNICATION DESIGN THROUGH AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the remarkable people who have supported me unconditionally through some of my most difficult times. My mom, for her support and devotion to family. My dad, for always pushing me and never doubting my abilities. My siblings, for always being there to lean on and laugh with. My grandparents, who always bring light and encouragement. My friends, who provide immense positivity in my life.

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ABSTRACT

This research intends to study emotional regulation skills and how visual expression can be an instrument in communicating beyond words. It explores the reasoning behind different abilities in regulating emotions such as generational trauma and childhood adversity. It also aims to create awareness for the importance of practicing emotional identification and educate how one can utilize materials around us to immerse themselves into emotional sublimination, more specifically, through creativity and visual expression. Creativity and emotional identification will be explored by way of a multi-level aid developed to help narrow down the creator's emotional state at the time of creation. This thesis will also review the current blending of emotion and visual communication design through examples of existing integrations. Exploring emotionally inclusive design might help define and implement emotional intelligence to produce more effective and inclusive design. Additional purposes include further development in healing trauma, mental health, creative expression, and potential coping tools.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

> "The ubiquitousness of emotions, feelings, and aspirations might suggest that understanding and communicating them would be straightforward. In point of fact, it is extremely difficult." (Elias, 2018, p. 28)

Everyone's ability to utilize their emotions effectively is different. An individual who has not yet learned to regulate their emotions may be impacted in their communication abilities in stressful situations. Some examples of this result might be control over one's physical or verbal self, physical or mental abuse, drug use, and more. Another factor being considered is generational trauma, which can result in adverse characteristics passed down throughout several generations. In Fabiana Franco, Ph.D.'s article "How Intergenerational Trauma Impacts Families" an example of how the impacts of abuse can be entangled throughout families is noted as:

> "In families where there is a history of abuse, shame can become deeply ingrained. Internalized feelings of shame will damage perceptions of self that can lead to self-blame and self-harm. Shame can also encourage silence and avoidance of asking for help, leading to problems with finding closure or healing from early or ongoing trauma." (Franco, 2020)

The article also suggests that awareness, education, and understanding are approaches to combating the complexities of transgenerational trauma (Franco, 2020).

Childhood adversity should also be considered in a person's capacity to respond to overwhelming emotions. The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) survey, originally researched in 1998 at Kaiser Permanente's San Diego Health Appraisal Clinic, measured the trauma in over 9,508 adults between the ages of birth to 18 (Felitti et al., 1998). The results of the study found "a strong graded relationship between the breadth of exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults" (Felitti et al., 1998, p .564). Survey questions include childhood exposures such as psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, household dysfunction such as substance abuse, mental illness, violence, and criminal behavior. A score of 0-3 is ideal. When a person scores a 4 or above, they are more likely to fall victim to physical health related issues such as heart disease, mental illness, addiction, and/or death (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 565). These are the more severe results of a damaged response system, but important to know because the earlier stress responses are healed, the less likely these situations are to occur. Nadine Burke-Harris, a forerunner in fighting the negative impacts of high ACEs, alongside CPMC Bayview Child Health Center (BCHC), founded the *Center for Youth Wellness*. On their website they clarify the effects of adversity and toxic stress as:

> "Most of us – no matter who we are or where we come from – have experienced some level of adversity in our lives. However, there are wide ranges in the type, severity, and frequency of adversity. If it is severe or chronic, it can cause changes to our bodies and may lead to significant health problems" ("Our story: Center for Youth Wellness," 2007).

Lastly, suicidal ideation among adults has steadily increased since 2011-2012. More recently, it's been discovered that in comparison to 2021, "The estimated number of adults with serious suicidal thoughts is over 11.4 million—an increase of 664,000 people from last year's data set." ("The State of Mental Health in America", 2022). Regardless of the reasoning for over-reactions to emotional stress, learning to manage emotions properly is critical in an individual's effort of healing and it's "Never too late to start rewiring your stress response" (Burke-Harris, 2020, p. 167). If one cannot communicate their emotional needs, their emotional needs are likely not to be met. Over time, suppression and neglect become impossible to ignore, resulting in potential emotional crises and various levels of self-destruction. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) states that "Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States and a major public health concern." NIMH also claims that:

> "Stressful life events (such as the loss of a loved one, legal troubles, or financial difficulties) and interpersonal stressors (such as shame, harassment, bullying, discrimination, or relationship troubles) may contribute to suicide risk, especially when they occur along with suicide risk factors."

Some of the risk factors according to NIMH's include exposure to family violence, family history of a mental disorder or substance use, depression, other mental disorders, or substance use disorder, and a history of suicide attempts. ("U.S. Department of Health and Human Services").

II. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Visual Communication

Mixing the natural complexity of emotions with America's worsening state of mental health means there's a lot to uncover. However, if there's a chance to enhance one's ability to communicate emotions, the chances of being understood and feeling validated are better, which is likely to encourage them to cultivate healthy relationships. Exploring emotionally integrated design might help implement emotional intelligence into practice to potentially broaden design processes. It's an assumtion that an emotionally intelligent designer sould have the ability to read and logically utilize their emotional states to best benefit the design outcome. The term *design process*, or *design thinking*, are relatively common terms in communication design. Both refer to the concentrated practice of utilizing common design processes to solve real-world problems. In the book *Extra Bold: A Feminist Inclusive Anti-Racist Nonbinary Field Guide for Graphic Designers*, Ellen Lupton, alongside several other seasoned designers, theorize an updated perspective on how designers can and should be considering in their processes. In their intro they claim that "Design is created by people with varied identities backgrounds and abilities." (Lupton, E., Kafei, F., Tobias, J., Halstead, J. A., Xia, L., & Vergara, V., 2021, p. 9).

IBM is a pioneer in building business practices and has numerous resources for designers. One example is the "Enterprise Design Thinking Field Guide" which provides a "high-level overview of Enterprise Design Thinking" (IBM, 2018). In the introduction, they start with the term *user-centered design*, writing that:

> *By establishing empathy with the user, designers are able to work toward outcomes that meet those needs more successfully. This user-centered approach known as "design thinking" enables designers and others to address a wide range of complex business and social issues.* (IBM Studios, 2018, p. 2)

Additionally, IDEO, a design organization specializing in design methodology that benefits positive impact, defines design thinking as "A human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success." (IDEO, 2022)

In 2021, a research article from the School of Design in Jiangnan University, China, developed "A Novel User Emotional Interaction Design Model Using Long and Short-Term Memory Networks and Deep Learning" that gives designers, more specifically those working in interactive design, an updated view on how designers should be operating for a more emotionally diverse user. "In recent years, based on the user's emotional experience, the design concept of strengthening product emotional design has become a new direction for most designers to improve their design thinking." (Chen, X., Huang, R., Li, X., Xiao, L., Zhou, M., & Zhang, L., 2021, p. 1). This aimed to help bridge the gap between emotions and design by way of emotional recognition methods using sesnor devices such as cameras and microphones to collect data on physical behaviors such as facial expressions and body language. Results facilitated progress in the idea a more standard emotionally integrated design process, stating that "the design concept of strengthening product emotional design has become a new

direction for most designers to improve their design thinking." (Chen, X., Huang, R., Li, X., Xiao, L., Zhou, M., & Zhang, L., 2021, p. 1).

The importance of understanding these examples in design is to understand the power communication design has, and the process a designer uses to communicate visually. If the smallest detail is overlooked in terms of audience, it could be devastating, but if a design is to make positive impact, designers must be diligent in their research. Tim Brown, stated in Change by Design, that:

> "Design has the power to enrich our lives by engaging our emotions through image, form, texture, color, sound, and smell. The intrinsically human-centered nature of design thinking points to the next step: we can use our empathy and understanding of people to design experiences that create opportunities for active engagement and participation" (Brown, 2019, p. 121).

Emotions

In the "Handbook of Communication and Emotion," it's confirmed that "defining emotion is a tricky proposition" (Andersen, P. A., & Guerrero, L. K., 2007, p. 5). It's mentioned that the main terms associated with labeling emotions are happiness, anger, sadness, love, fear, hate, and joy. They also claim that "emotions evolved not just as internal control mechanisms, but as relatively universal communication systems that promoted the group survival of humans. Researchers have discovered a high degree of

universality in the displays of basic emotions." (Andersen, P. A., & Guerrero, L. K., 2007, p.10)

In a 2004 article published by Psychological Inquiry titled "Emotional intelligence: Theory, findings, and implications," John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David R. Caruso define emotional intelligence as

> "The capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth." (Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R., 2004, p. 197)

Therefore, if one struggles with controlling their emotions, it's likely they are preventing themselves from progressing into a more emotionally intelligent individual and unable to utilize their emotions naturally and effectively. The assumption for this thesis is that emotional regulation can help an individual, regardless of emotional history, practice healthy emotion processing if practiced on a regular basis in a safe environment.

James J. Gross, in "Emotion Regulation in Adulthood: Timing Is Everything" states that emotional regulation is "the conscious and nonconscious strategies we use to increase, maintain, or decrease one or more components of an emotional response." (Gross 2001, p. 215). Like research done by Nadine Burke-Harris, Gross touches on the

negative impacts unregulated emotions may have on our physical health, stating that "each time emotion is suppressed, physiological responses are magnified." A previous study by Denollet et al. in 1996 found that those who scored high on distress and suppression had higher death rates at 27% versus other patients at 7%, finding that suppression indeed has important cumulative health consequences" (Gross, 2001, p. 218).

In order to control the impact that a feeling of sudden anger may provide, such as being cut off in traffic, one must know how to regulate their emotions. Otherwise, the response could influence retaliation. Lieze Schoofs and An-Sofie Claeys conducted two experiments in crisis affect in an organization environment by examining how emotions are expressed visually and verbally. They found that empathy is important to understand as it motivates a person in conflict to understand the other more effectively. They define emotional empathy as involving "the recognition of another's emotions, which automatically triggers an emotional response in the observer that is congruent with the expresser's perceived emotional state" (Schoofs, L., & Claeys, A.-S., 2021, p. 273). They state that expressions made with our bodies, such as facial expressions, signal emotional information, which further confirms that emotions can be communicated beyond words.

In the Educational Psychology Review, Ross A. Thompson writes about the development and contributions of emotional self-regulation in people of all ages in the article "Emotional Regulation and Emotional Development." Although the article is slightly richer in child development, adulthood is touched on and helps us understand that

emotional regulation abilities vary for a number of reasons.

> "In many respects, the capacity of emotion to promote or undermine constructive functioning depends on the extent to which emotional arousal is monitored, evaluated, and (if necessary) controlled by the individual. In a sense, emotional arousal must itself be regulated for emotion to helpfully guide competent functioning. This is true not because emotional arousal per se is disorganizing, but because its biologically and psychologically adaptive motivational and organizational characteristics are contingent on arousal remaining within the individual's capacities to cope." (Thompson, 1991, p. 270)

Thompson also states that **"**The developmental research literature has little to say about growth in emotional self-regulation" (Thompson, 1991, p. 294) which is a key motivator for expanding on the research of how one can develop a better sense of emotional regulation in a person's natural routine. It's being assumed that by exploring a feeling-based model of emotional identification, a more practical understanding of emotions can be achieved. The goal is to allow space for creativity to interject with emotional identification and to strengthen one's ability to regulate their emotions by building self-understanding of one's emotions by challenging how one processes emotional information creatively.

If one struggles to regulate emotions, they might consider asking themselves if they are able to confidently *identify* their emotions. The ones who are used to suppressing

emotions are likely to be surprised by difficulty of putting words to feelings. The objective of emotional identification is to explore whether or not there is progress being made in building regulation and emotional resilience through practice. Communicating emotionally impactful events in an effective manner is critical because healthy relationships have been established as one of the healing components of a damaged stress response system (Harris, N.-B., 2020, pp. 97-154). Without an ability to converse in a wide variety of emotionally stressful situations, one may struggle to feel safe in vulnerability.

> "Conversation is a progression of exchanges among participants. Each participant is a 'learning system', that is, a system that changes internally as a consequence of experience. This highly complex type of interaction is also quite powerful, for conversation it is the means by which existing knowledge is conveyed and new knowledge is generated… It is near miraculous that we understand each other at all." (Dubberly, 2009 p. 2)

Healthy coping starts with one's willingness to focus on themselves internally. "The Handbook of Communication and Emotion" states that:

> "Coping may be viewed as an effect or outcome of a particular emotion in that emotions stimulate efforts directed at changing the conditions that aroused the emotion, the emotion itself, or both. But coping efforts are also casually antecedent to emotions in that coping efforts influence subsequent appraisals of

events and, thus, emotional reactions to them." (Andersen, P. A., & Guerrero, L. K., 2007, pp. 256-257)

Contemporary technology has developed coping solutions like "Calm Harm," an emotional regulation application that helps people fight the urge to self-harm when triggered. On their website it's claimed that by May 2021 after 1.9 million downloads, "92% of the individuals who used the Calm Harm app reported that an activity helped to reduce the urge to self-harm." (Calm Harm App, 2021). The ability to take an emotionally charged situation and help it pass to a more manageable experience is the basis for this research. Some key things that can be taken away from the referenced service is practicing how emotions are controlled through distraction, emotional expression, and finding comfort. However, how might impacts of overwhelming negative emotions be eased without technology? In this research it's important to expand beyond what requires internet access and it should be considered that all users are enabled to practice emotional regulation with what's already available to them in their environment.

A close example of emotionally integrated design exploration suggested for this research is BFA graduate's Esther Klingbiel's thesis at Parsons School of Design, "Beneath Language: Visualizing Emotion Through Design." In 2021 she proposed a "series of replicable visual systems that are evocative of the experiences of certain emotional states" to help advance visual tools to aid mental health and experienced emotions. On the university's website she states:

"I am a methodological designer. I invest most heavily in creating a distinct set of working rules for myself when creating anything visually complex. In this way, rules free my creative abilities because they allow such abilities to exist within distinct boundaries. It is important to understand this because I have employed rule sets and systems (a kind of conceptual artist's approach) throughout my project. The outcome of my work is not the most important aspect of whatever I create." (Beneath language, 2021)

Figure 1. *Klingbiel, Esther, Image of thesis, Beneath Language: Visualizing Emotion Through Design. (2021)*

Klingbiel's vision for her thesis is similar to this research in the intent to allow users outside of herself to explore emotional expression through design and self-awareness. To

expand on her research, it's being suggested that an effort to simplify instructions and omit the requirement of access to technology might provide a more diverse user experience in terms of accessibility.

Moving forward, the understanding of how emotions work in the design process could potentially start conversations of developing practices of emotionally intelligent design methods. The question for this research is — how might one visually communicate emotion? Since it's confirmed that emotions can be expressed outside of verbal expression, it's being suggested that a case could be made for visuals as well. According to Don Norman in "Emotional Design," "Emotions enable us to translate intelligence into action" (Norman, D. A., 2003 p. 166). A 2021 article in the Frontiers of Psychology titled "We're All in the Same Boat" presents challenges people with mental health face through recovery in personal growth using art-based positivity as a tool in self-expression and self-esteem building. The facilitators state that "There is growing evidence that a personal recovery process can be fostered by pursuing activities in various fields of the arts, and that these activities can improve social abilities, connect communities, and promote well-being." Most importantly, it was concluded that "Many participants indicated that creation and expression through the arts generate a sense of freedom, release inhibitions, and allow for the expression of emotions that would not have been expressed in other ways." (Nitzan, A., & Orkibi, H., 2021, p. 5)

III. AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION

Dutch art and design theorist Louise Schouwenberg is a co-author of the book “The Auto-Ethnographic Turn in Design,” She explains that “Auto-ethnography asks the researcher to interrogate themselves and to deconstruct their own discourse and practices, ultimately bringing their privilege and perspective into question.” (Schouwenberg, L., & Kaethler, M., 2021, p. 15). To bring better understanding to designing coping tools that aid emotional regulation, it seemed that the creator must have a strong understanding of their own emotional regulation abilities before attempting to bring the concept into a social context.

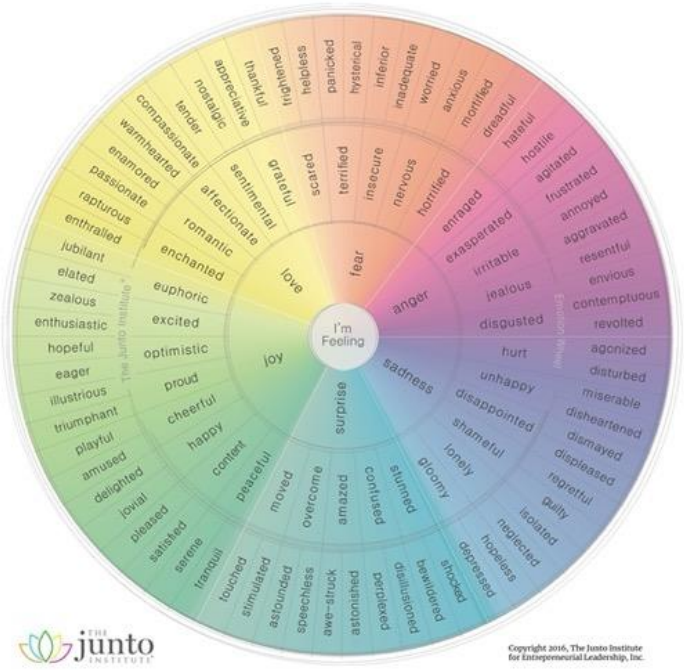


Figure 2. *Emotion & Feeling Wheel, Junto Institute of Entrepreneurial Leadership*

At the beginning stages of emotional identification development, the “Emotion and Feeling Wheel” from the Junto Instituted for Entrepreneurial Leadership (The Junto Institute, 2021) in Figure 2 was the starting point. Primarily for its ease of use due to the color coordination and information organization. The wheel provides a less committed start to categorizing emotion related words into main groups. The six emotions listed in the center are referred to as *primary emotions* and all of those outside the wheel are referred to as *secondary emotions*. However, it was later discovered that in “Emotion Knowledge: Further Exploration of a Prototype Approach,” the term *surprise* had very few secondary terms in the results (figure 3) (Shaver, P., Schwartz, J., Kirson, D., & O'Connor, C., 1987, p. 1067). This prompted the removal of “Surprise” as a primary emotion and resulted in the use of the other five: Fear, Sadness, Anger, Joy, and Love. Once the primary emotions were narrowed down, the secondary emotions were overlayed to best accommodate a more diverse identification system that would be used in creative output through an auto-ethnography.

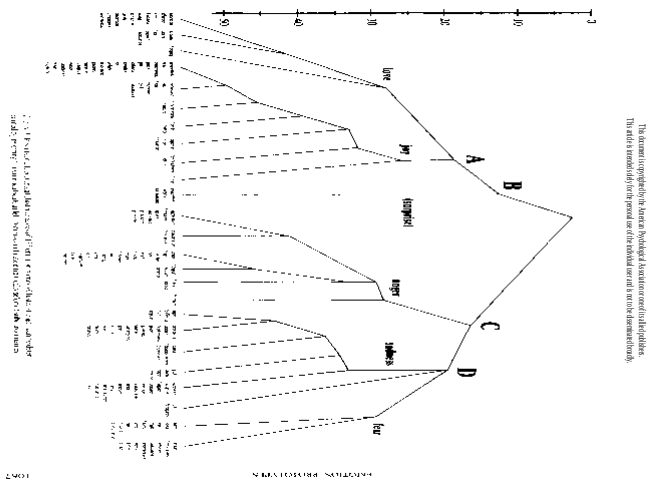


Figure 3. *Shaver, P., Schwartz, J., Kirson, D., & O'Connor, C., Emotion Knowledge: Further Exploration of a Prototype Approach, Results of a cluster of 135 emotion names. (1987) fig. 1*

Although it is anticipated that this aid may be experienced differently as there is no definite emotional identification system yet, it's critical that it's kept in mind that this is an exploration of the layering of research done on emotional identification and the blending of the researcher's experience with emotional identification including common language. This tool is to be used as a development in emotional identification, not a final outcome. Further research and development is encouraged to strengthen the tool and provide more aid to more users. That being said, the following is the final format of emotional creative output developed throughout and ultimately utilized for the auto-ethnographic portion of this thesis. *Table 1* features two levels of terms to identify emotions based on the researcher's knowledge and experience of emotional identification and a combined with the previously mentioned emotional identification systems.

Each of the primary emotions were to be treated as equal in value and are not listed by importance in any part of the table and these emotions should be used as equals until further development suggests otherwise. It's also an assumption that a more effective visual tool could be made for defining our emotions, and an ideal place to start development may be with those who regularly create visuals. The intent of this aid is to allow a space for growth as this topic is explored.

Table 1. Preliminary Emotion Identification Table

Primary feeling terms	Joy	Love	Fear	Anger	Sadness
Relative terms to help identify primary feeling	Relaxed Liking Calm Easy going Enthralled Elation Enthusiastic Optimistic Jubilation Euphoric Zeal Excited Hopeful Eager Content Happy Cheerful Proud Amused Pleased Satisfied Delighted Jovial Blissful Triumphant Illustrious Chilled out Enjoyment Relieved Resilient Excited	Peaceful Tenderness Desire Affectionate Compassionate Caring Infatuation Passion Attraction Sentimental Fondness Romantic Wanting	Horror Nervous Insecure Terror Scared Frightened Helpless Panic Hysterical Inferior Inadequate Worried Anxious Dread Uncomfortable Confused	Rage Exasperated Irritable Envy Disgust Revolted Contempt Jealous Resentful Aggravated Annoyed Frustrated Agitated Hostile Hate Mad Pissed Off	Suffering Disappointed Shameful Neglect Despair Depressed Sorrow Dismayed Displeased Guilty Isolated Lonely Grief Powerless Empty Nausea Sickened Weak

Typography

For this auto-ethnography, the creator will be working within visual communication design to develop artistic arrangements, called *compositions* (or *comps*) of type and image, that represent an identified emotion through a creative outlet in which they are accustomed to expressing visually.

Since the intent is to allow material choice for any creator, the methods and materials chosen are up to each individual participant. In this case, typography is being utilized due to the nature of the creator's comfort level of expression. In "The Typographic Experiment: Radical Innovation in Contemporary Type Design," type is defined as the "'Symbolic' representation of language in its mechanical (or digital) form" (Triggs, T., 2003, pp. 7-8) and is used to create meaning by way of organization. Historically, typography has been a hugely discussed topic amongst designers when it comes to emotions and interpretations and has had a complex relationship with designers. In the introduction of the book, Texts on Type, it's stated that "a vast divergence of opinion exists in the typographic community, whose members range from unyielding traditionalists to unbridled advocates of the shockingly new." (Heller, S., & Meggs, S. 2001, p. vii). If designers who are refined in typography are to immerse themselves in a composition, they could be biased if they are aware of the history of the typeface or have personal opinions on their form(s). What can be taken away from this is the intent to reduce the effects of type politics and focus on a more concentrated element of expression being the overall forms. What this boils down to is the idea that "No typeface is neutral" (Pater, 2017, p. 53) and it's being suggested that a portion of the compositions

in this exploration that contain letters/words/forms that are randomized as much as possible to strip a layer of personal backgrounds in experiencing typography.

Expressive Typography

Although it's not an unfamiliar topic in the design field, *experimental typography* has yet to be defined in a more scientific description. In 2005, Peter Bil'ak, Dutch designer specializing in type and typeface design, wrote the article "Experimental typography. Whatever that means." In the article he investigated the question as to if typography can in fact, be experimental, including the scientific and historic examples in experimental design, he argues that previous experimental typography is based on personal beliefs rather than scientific approach. Ultimately, he states a clearer description of the integration of experiment and typography as:

> An experiment in this sense has no preconceived idea of the outcome; it only sets out to determine a cause-and-effect relationship. As such, experimentation is a method of working which is contrary to production-oriented design, where the aim of the process is not to create something new, but to achieve an already known, pre-formulated result. (Biľak, P. 2005).

Although it could be argued that the typography used in this thesis is experimental based on Bil'ak's claim, it's perhaps more fitting to refer to this part of the process as *expressive* typography. Also in "The Typographic Experiment: Radical Innovation in Contemporary Type Design," where thirty-seven designers were asked to define their

understanding of experimental design, British designer, Jonathan Barnbrook's states his position on experimental type by comparing "an extreme expression of a philosophy" to "fashion and typography." (Triggs, T., 2003, p. 88) In terms of how one can further define the expectations of the results of experimental typography he states that "Typographic problems are so wide ranging that it is almost impossible to define one idea of 'experimental'. An experiment is a result of producing something innovative within defined parameters and those parameters can differ greatly." (Triggs, T., 2003, p. 88)

American designer, William S. Burroughs speaks to his process of cutting and pasting existing materials into new meaning by writing that "Cut-ups make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway" (Triggs, T., 2003, p. 109). What one can assume, is that the usage of experimentation in this way is deeply embedded into our natural states, and a case could be made for the inclusion of emotion. In addition, Barbrook states that "True experimentation comes not only from "playing," although this can produce equally valid experiments, but by being aware of the communication problems and solving them in a creative way." (Triggs, T., 2003, p. 88).

Autoethnographic Framework

Given the preliminary research, the creator will now begin the exploration process of communication design and emotional identification through auto-ethnography, which is a research method based on the one's self analysis and in this case, emotional regulation. The framework used is primarily the combination of emotional identification using the tool created in table 1 and the creator's specific creative process. A more

comprehensive aid was developed towards the end of the explorations, which can be found in *Figure 30.*

EMOTIONAL IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

STEP ONE

The creator is to identify their primary emotion. In the event that the primary emotion is unclear, they may use secondary emotions to help identify their primary emotion. Throughout the process of developing this tool, the creator found it helpful to pick 10 secondary emotions to help identify the primary. If the secondary emotions added up to a tie, they would continue to pick a secondary emotion to break the tie. If it's still unclear or feels inaccurate, the creator would continue to choose secondary emotions one by one to determine their primary emotion identification. This portion of the process required a space that was quiet and uninterrupted, felt safe, and allowed for ample time to create. Results are open to vary, but out of the 16 compositions created, the creator felt they were fairly accurate with each identification, even if it was an unfavorable one. Situations like that allowed time for acceptance and contemplation during the creation process, advancing on to step two.

STEP TWO

It is during this time that the creator fulfills a creative assignment they made out for themselves. Each composition is to use as much or as little as the same typeface, cut out of black vinyl letters at the same size. The type used is sf pro, both all caps and lowercase along with punctuation and special characters.

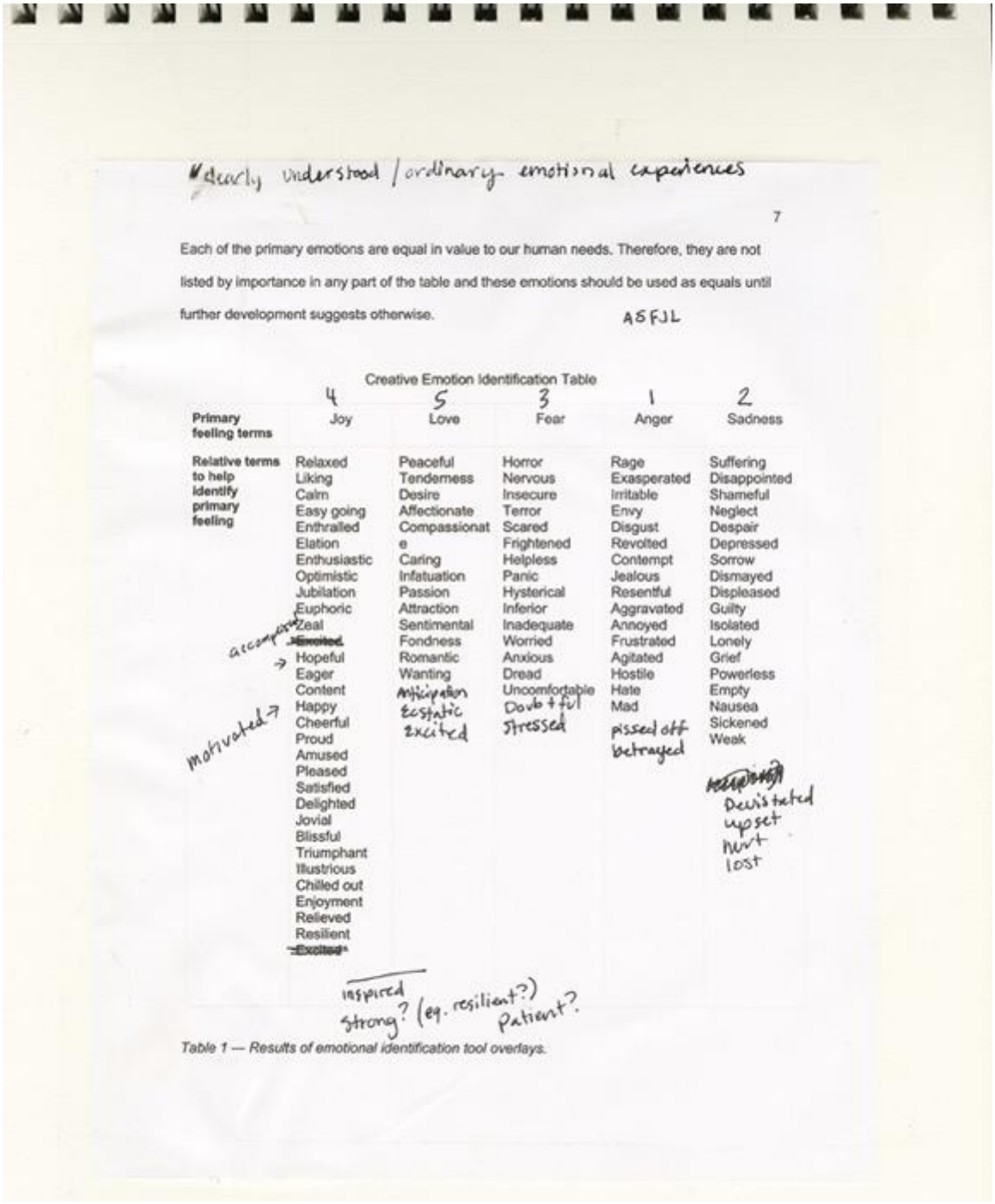
Figure 4. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Preparing Vinyl Letters for Composition Use (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

Figure 5. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition Process Using Type and Cut Up Images (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

In the end of this thesis, 17 total compositions were made using this process. The following chapter goes deeper into the explorations made and are intended to be used as reference for further development.

Final Compositions, Notes, and Reflections

At the beginning of this research, the creator was tasked with choosing a primary emotion based off of one single secondary emotion, but ultimately, they found it difficult to pick a single secondary emotion. Until a solution was found, it was thought that the progress would be made by adding more words to each column, which is why there are additional words handwritten in the columns in Figure 6. However, it was quickly found that this was beyond the ability of the creator to define what words go into which category. Not enough research has been done and it seemed as if further development in that area would require a significant amount of additional input based off of individual differences in what words were associated to what emotions. This is certainly an area for more research, but for this autoethnography you'll see the process and how a solution ultimately emerged. The chart you see in figure 00 is where the creator started for each composition. They would contemplate on a relative term to help identify my primary feeling at that moment. In the notes for October 20th, 2020, it was discovered that a visual for emotional selection would be something that would benefit them and most likely other people in the future. Possibly creating something more complementary to a wide range of visual applications, or even coded, but later realized that would require technology which was a conflict of the diverse aspect of the process.



clearly understood / ordinary emotional experiences

7

Each of the primary emotions are equal in value to our human needs. Therefore, they are not listed by importance in any part of the table and these emotions should be used as equals until further development suggests otherwise.

ASFJL

Creative Emotion Identification Table

	4	5	3	1	2
Primary feeling terms	Joy	Love	Fear	Anger	Sadness
Relative terms to help identify primary feeling	Relaxed Liking Calm Easy going Enthralled Elation Enthusiastic Optimistic Jubilation Euphoric Zeal ~~Excited~~ Hopeful Eager Content Happy Cheerful Proud Amused Pleased Satisfied Delighted Jovial Blissful Triumphant Illustrious Chilled out Enjoyment Relieved Resilient ~~Excited~~	Peaceful Tenderness Desire Affectionate Compassionate Caring Infatuation Passion Attraction Sentimental Fondness Romantic Wanting Anticipation Ecstatic excited	Horror Nervous Insecure Terror Scared Frightened Helpless Panic Hysterical Inferior Inadequate Worried Anxious Dread Uncomfortable Doubtful Stressed	Rage Exasperated Irritable Envy Disgust Revolted Contempt Jealous Resentful Aggravated Annoyed Frustrated Agitated Hostile Hate Mad pissed off betrayed	Suffering Disappointed Shameful Neglect Despair Depressed Sorrow Dismayed Displeased Guilty Isolated Lonely Grief Powerless Empty Nausea Sickened Weak Devistated upset hurt lost

accomplished

motivated

inspired

strong? (eg. resilient?)

patient?

Table 1 — Results of emotional identification tool overlays.

Figure 6. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Secondary Emotional Identification Aid Used for Compositions 1-16 (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

In creating the first composition there was an immense amount of pressure for the creator because they had not done anything like this before and identifying emotions had been a difficult journey for them. As they moved forward, they decided that initially, why certain primary emotions were selected wasn't a major concern. Rather than understanding themselves fully at this point, they decided to trust the process and allow themselves time and space to explore why they might be feeling that way through the making portion.

In a sense, the simplicity of composition 1 matches the hesitation to be confident and the energy level to create something more detailed. At this point, they were unsure if the minimal application of arrangement and materials would be a pattern of "Sad" compositions, but ultimately they were eager to explore further.

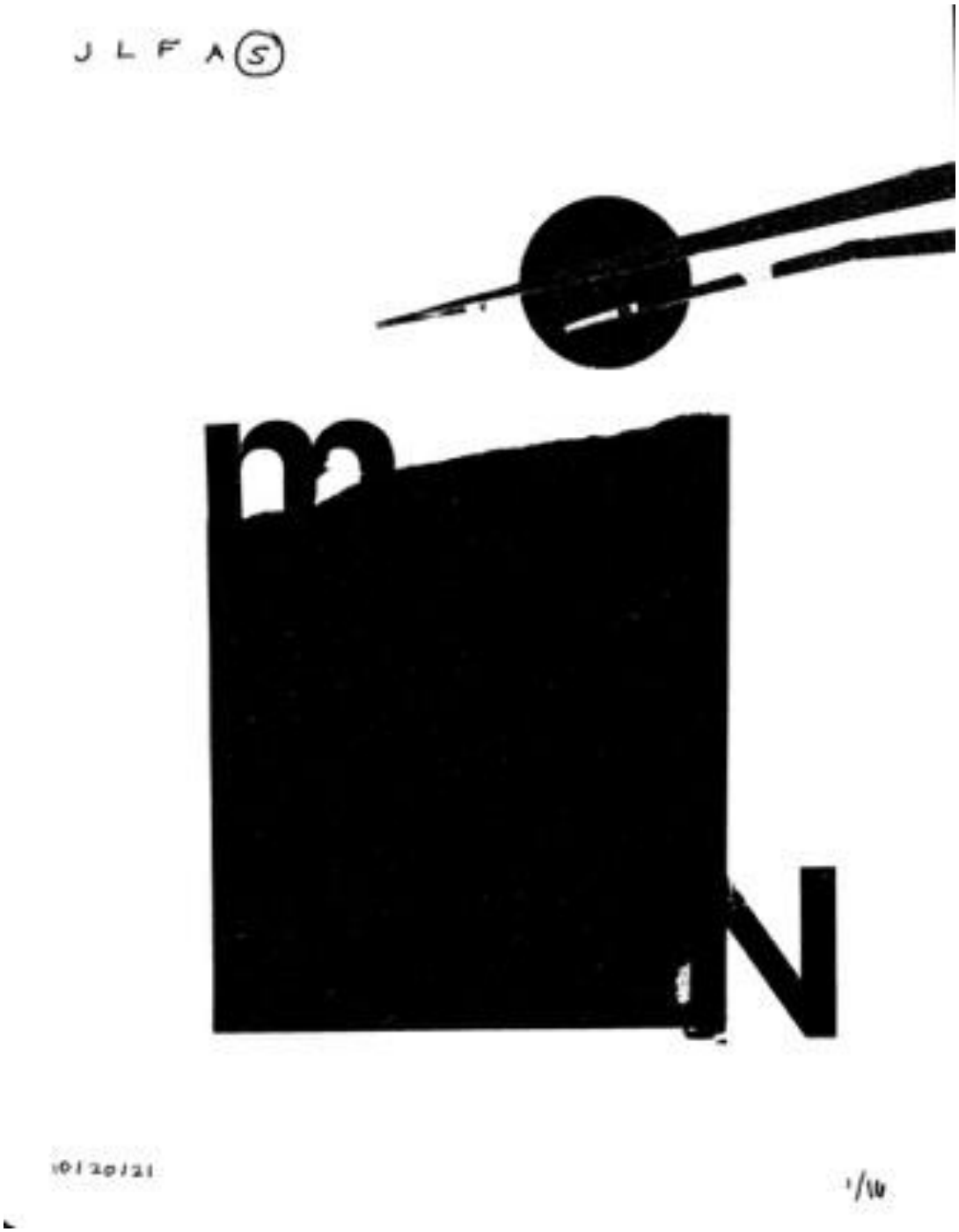
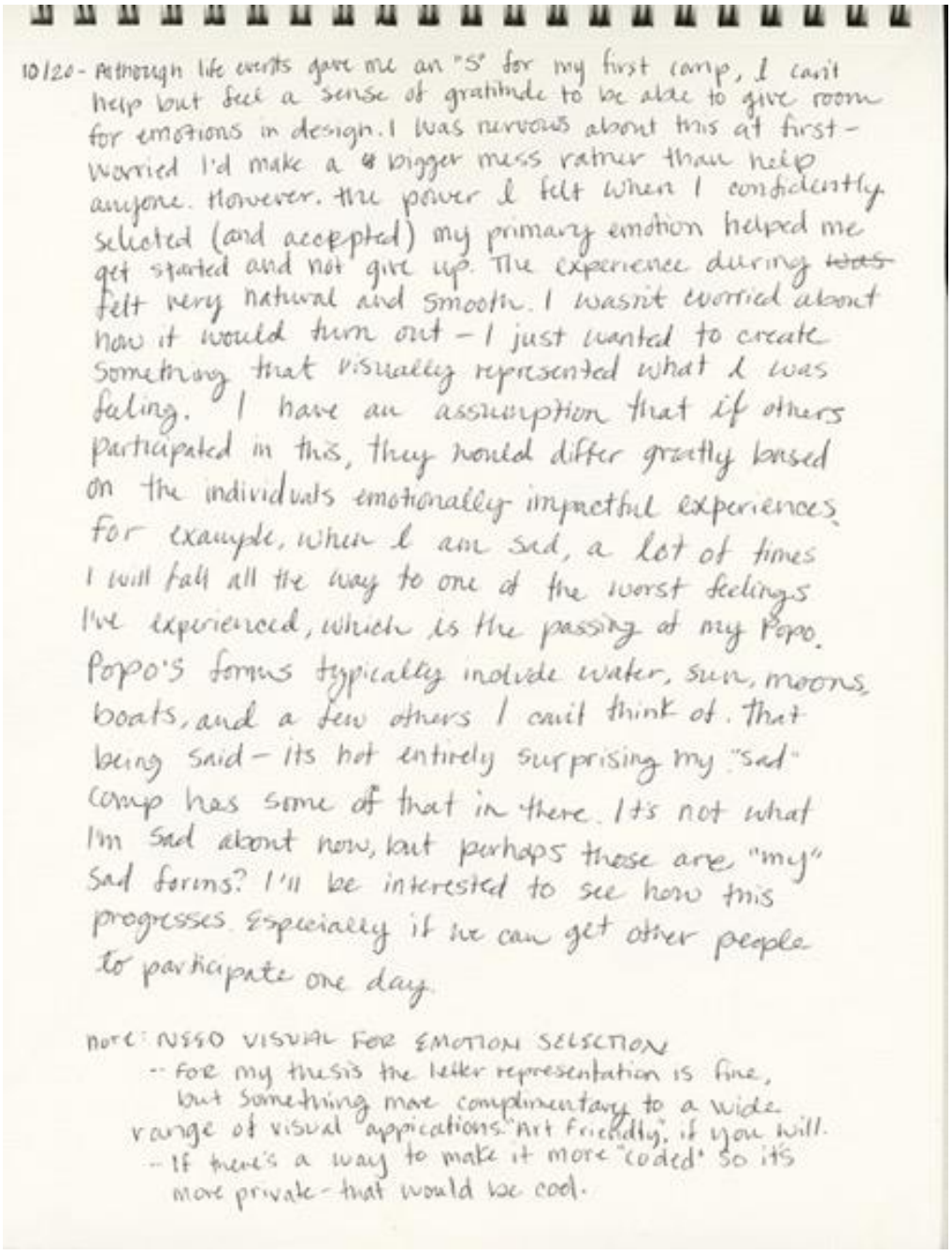


Figure 7. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 1, Created on 10/20/2021, Emotion Identification – "Sad" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*



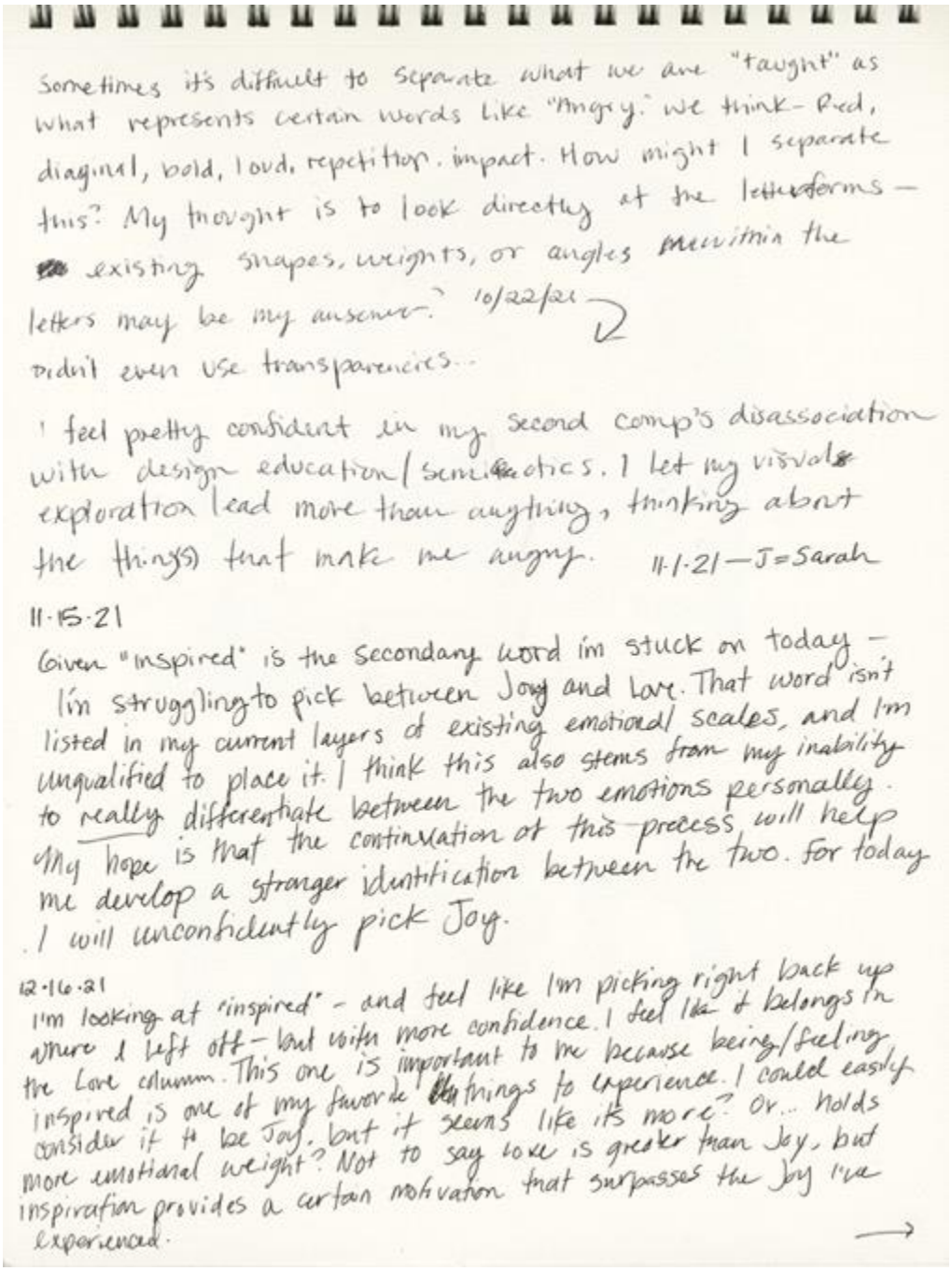
10/20 - Although life events gave me an "S" for my first comp, I can't help but feel a sense of gratitude to be able to give room for emotions in design. I was nervous about this at first - worried I'd make a ~~a~~ bigger mess rather than help anyone. However, the power I felt when I confidently selected (and accepted) my primary emotion helped me get started and not give up. The experience during ~~was~~ felt very natural and smooth. I wasn't worried about how it would turn out - I just wanted to create something that visually represented what I was feeling. I have an assumption that if others participated in this, they would differ greatly based on the individuals emotionally impactful experiences. For example, when I am sad, a lot of times I will fall all the way to one of the worst feelings I've experienced, which is the passing of my Popo. Popo's forms typically include water, sun, moons, boats, and a few others I can't think of. That being said - its not entirely surprising my "sad" comp has some of that in there. It's not what I'm sad about now, but perhaps these are "my" sad forms? I'll be interested to see how this progresses. Especially if we can get other people to participate one day.

NOTE: NEED VISUAL FOR EMOTION SELECTION
-- For my thesis the letter representation is fine, but something more complimentary to a wide range of visual applications. "Art Friendly", if you will.
-- If there's a way to make it more "coded" so it's more private - that would be cool.

Figure 8. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Page 1 of Notes in Reference to Composition 1, (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

For the second composition emotional identification was no more confidently selected, but they were admittedly a little bit more careless. Not in terms of the parameters that were set for process, but in terms of patience, placement, and overall message. They did however list in their notes that there was a level of confidence in the disassociation with design education. This was the first composition they had let go of preconceived design perspectives and truly let emotions take over the page, thinking about the things that were making them angry at the time. This is a considerably important milestone because without having let a design education mindset on how design elements are “supposed” to look, this provided a new level of freedom to explore themselves internally rather than through what should be considered good design.

Figure 9. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 2, Created on 10/22/2021, Emotion Identification – "Anger" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*



Sometimes it's difficult to separate what we are "taught" as what represents certain words like "Angry." We think- Red, diagonal, bold, loud, repetition, impact. How might I separate this? My thought is to look directly at the letterforms — existing shapes, weights, or angles even within the letters may be my answer. 10/22/21

didn't even use transparencies...

I feel pretty confident in my second comp's disassociation with design education / semiotics. I let my visual exploration lead more than anything, thinking about the thing(s) that make me angry. 11.1.21 — J=Sarah

11.15.21

Given "inspired" is the secondary word im stuck on today — I'm struggling to pick between Joy and Love. That word isn't listed in my current layers of existing emotional scales, and I'm unqualified to place it. I think this also stems from my inability to really differentiate between the two emotions personally. My hope is that the continuation of this process will help me develop a stronger identification between the two. For today I will unconfidently pick Joy.

12.16.21

I'm looking at "inspired" - and feel like I'm picking right back up where I left off — but with more confidence. I feel like it belongs in the Love column. This one is important to me because being/feeling inspired is one of my favorite things to experience. I could easily consider it to be Joy, but it seems like it's more? Or... holds more emotional weight? Not to say love is greater than Joy, but inspiration provides a certain motivation that surpasses the Joy I've experienced. →

Figure 10. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Page 2 of Notes in Reference to Compositions 2-6, (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

The third composition became opportunity to express, visually, the root of why this research is so important on a personal level to the creator. Initially, as they chose "Joy" as their primary emotion, the backstory of the visual message is rather grim. Sarah, a friend of the creator's, fell victim of suicide in 2018. Sarah's death had weighed heavy on many people's lives, the creator's included. However, the creator found, for the first time, the association of Joy with this event. Joy because she is a big part of the reason for this research and hope that this vulnerable work will help in the prevention of mental health declines. All to say, they found themselves inspired by Sarah, and wanted to make sure that she was included in this process somehow. The song "Wait on" by Hayley Williams was intentionally played throughout the creation of the composition as the line "For every birth who never flew" (Williams H., 2021) always reminded the creator of her story. This is also the first composition to use imagery. Imagery was not initially an element that was considered in the making process, but the creator felt it would communicate such an important message in a clearer way. Especially for those that may have known Sarah.

It is important to note, however, that the creator still struggled at this time with picking a primary emotion, because *inspired* wasn't in one of the columns or in the preliminary research that could be found.

Figure 11. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 3, Created on 11/1/2021, Emotion Identification – "Joy" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

In the next composition there was an attempt to solve the problem of knowing where the secondary emotion *inspired* fit withing the primary, as that was still the current state of the creator. They were, however, more confident in the primary emotion selection in comparison to the previous compositions due to unquestionable joyful life events. This resulted in the first composition to be explored using natural materials such as pressed flowers and rose petals. Therefore, the creator has built confidence in not only using type and image, but also natural materials. Perhaps to signify femininity and bridge what was happening in the natural world with this new material space, resulting in a relatively grounding experience in the end of the composition.

Figure 12. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 4, Created on 11/15/2021, Emotion Identification – "Joy" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

The creator continued to explore what *love* is, how or why they might be feeling it, and the fear that comes with it. They were, however, able to determine that love means more than romance or maternal love, as the creator is a mother of 2 and in the process of a divorce from a ten-year marriage. This encouraged them to embrace and attempt to experience "love" more outside of the compositions and their new meanings in the real world. At this point, there was still contemplation as to where *inspired* might go in the primary emotion columns and continued to struggle with choosing only one secondary emotion to determine a primary emotion. There was a thought that the solution might be adding more words to the columns, but as previously mentioned, they continuously struggled to feel confident that that was the answer in effectively choosing a primary emotion.

Figure 13. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 5, Created on 12/16/2021, Emotion Identification – "Love" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

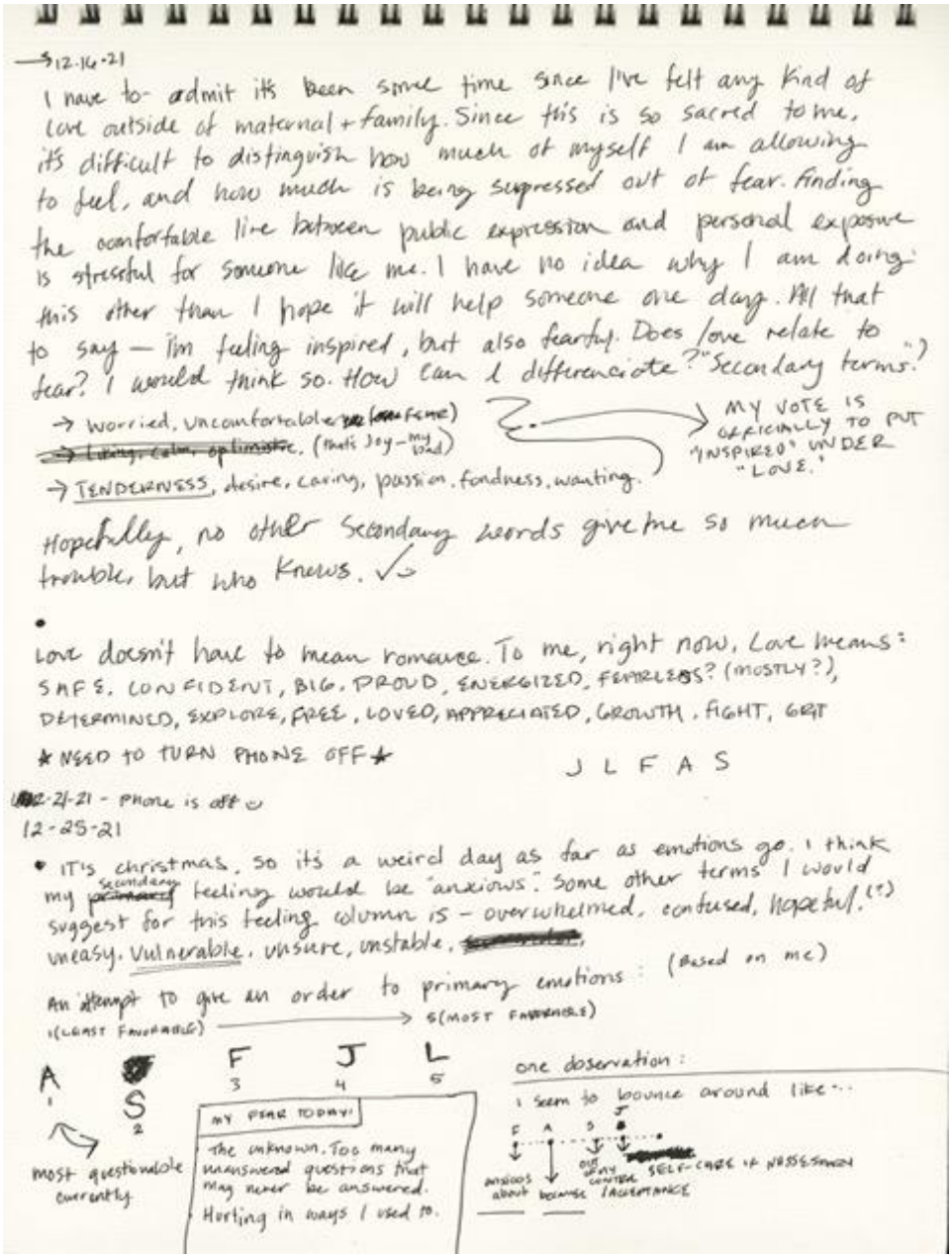


Figure 14. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Page 3 of Notes in Reference to Compositions 6-8, (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

For the next composition, it was an emotionally confusing time for the creator. So, once again they struggled to confidently pick a primary emotion. They did however, decide it would make the process a little easier to arrange the primary emotions in a way that felt like a scale of least favorable to most favorable. Therefore, it was changed for the arrangement of future comps from joy, love, fear, anger, sadness to anger, sadness, fear, joy, love. Although this rearrangement is based on their personal recommendation, they hope that further development and potentially outside opinions or experiences can help define that better. They also tried to observe if there was a pattern between what emotion was being chosen, but that exploration didn't go much further than this date. They continued to use pressed rose petals and type alone. No imagery or clear message as "Fear" ruled the next couple composition, later using only type in the seventh composition.

Figure 15. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 6, Created on 12/21/2021, Emotion Identification – "Fear" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

Figure 16. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 7, Created on 12/24/2021, Emotion Identification – "Fear" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

Also noted in regard to the couple of compositions that had no secondary imagery or materials, the creator mentions that working with only type felt “safe.” It may be assumed, that considering the lack of confidence and emotional identification, they didn't feel confident portraying anything outside of typographic arrangements, letting the letterforms really take the lead in movement.

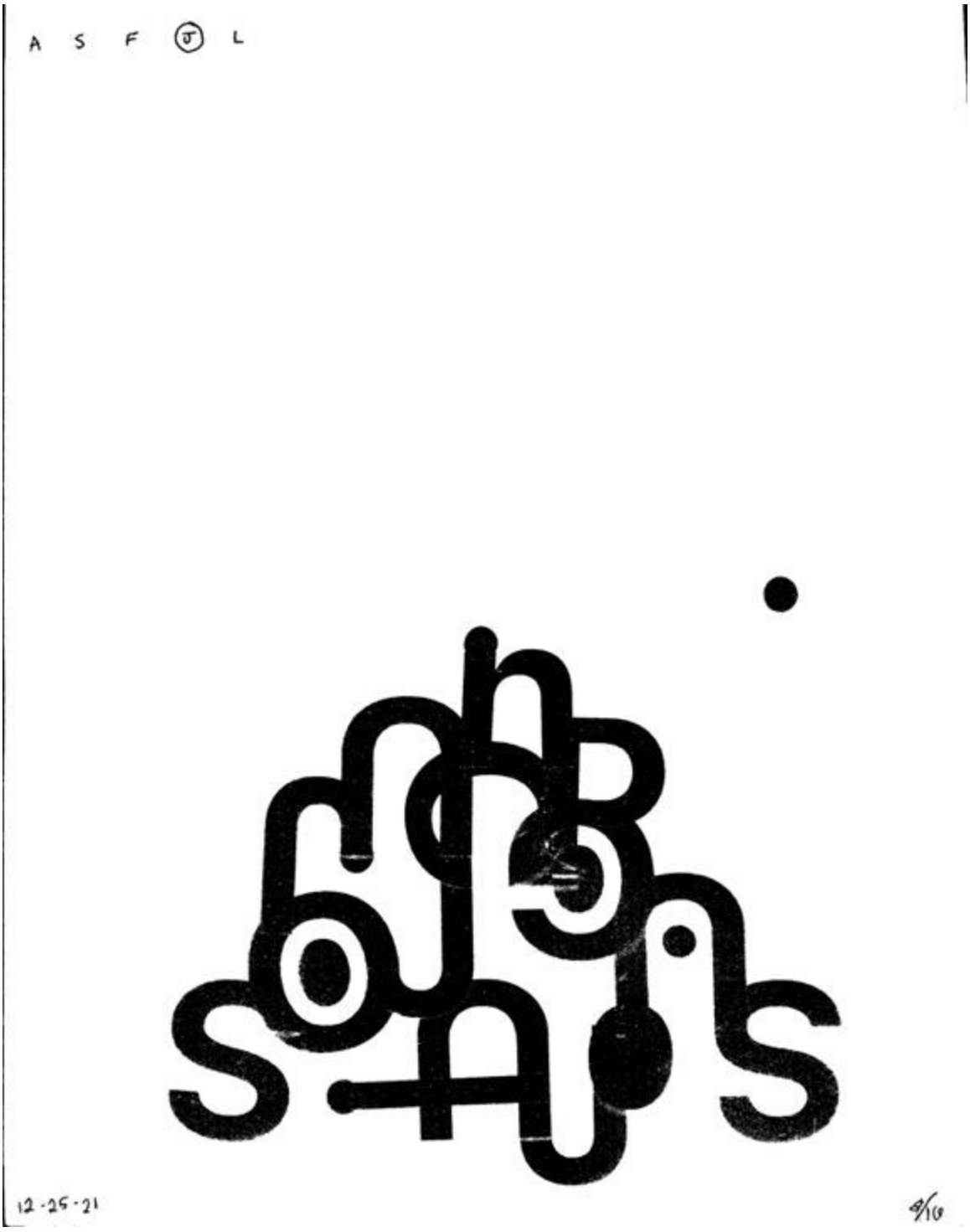


Figure 17. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 8, Created on 12/25/2021, Emotion Identification – "Joy" (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

In between compositions eight and nine the creator prepared themselves for travel with the materials needed to continue to complete these compositions. They chose not to pack secondary imagery in order to attempt and utilizing the materials around them and the environment that was being visited, in an effort to infuse current experiences into somewhat of a visual journal to remember them by. It was found that this exploration was very healing and ultimately inspired them to create while traveling, more. Also, during this time, they asked themselves a couple questions that will continue to be pondered. Such as, “What if I were to engage in the composition before determining current emotion?” Wondering if there was unexplored potential in either direction whether for design, themselves, or future discussion. They also wondered if the commitment to the chosen emotion up front would benefit or negatively impacted the authenticity of utilizing or expressing said emotion. In an effort not to stray from the design process that had been utilized up to this point, they decided to keep the current process and allow room for future explorations with those questions.

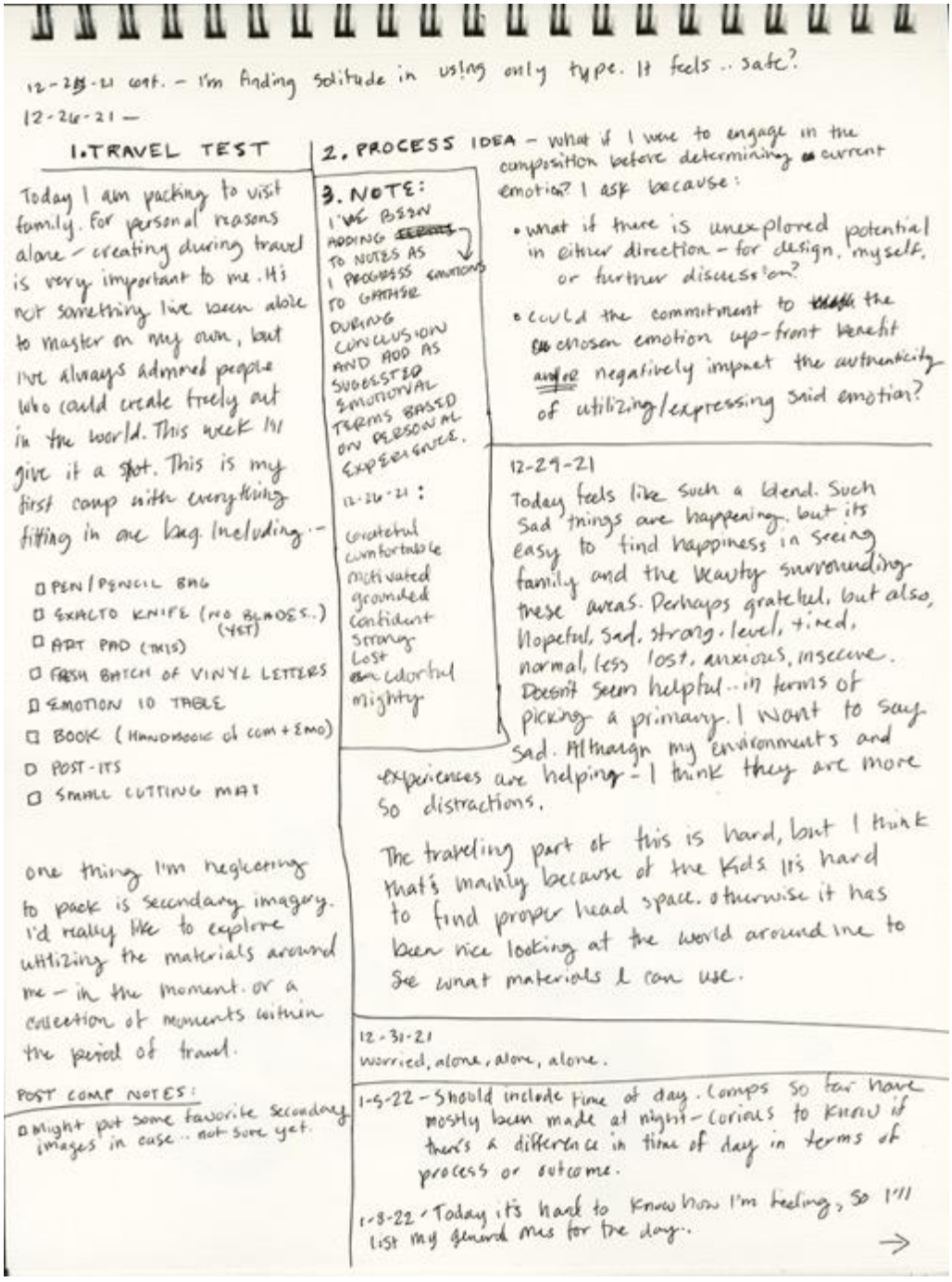


Figure 18. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Page 4 of Notes in Reference to Compositions 8-12, (Cibolo, TX 2021)*

For the 9th composition, the creator was still traveling, and still struggling to confidently pick a primary emotion. Given the personal circumstances going on, such as the rapid decline of the physical health of a close family member, this pattern was bothersome, because although they felt confident in the choosing of "Sad" they wanted to understand better as to why and if that was truly the emotion they were feeling. They still continued to move forward and ultimately felt that the emotion that had been chosen was fairly accurate. As they proceeded in the composition after choosing the emotion they contemplated further as to why that emotion might be what is being felt and at no point did the combination of what was being felt and what was expressing was unmatched in any way. This allowed them to continue to explore but keep an open mind as to how they might be able to solve this further by building confidence in identifying a primary emotion.

Compositions nine and ten were the first ones to have been created outside of the creator's home. They used printed materials from the location in which they stayed and pressed flowers near their family member's home based in Cocoa Beach, Florida.

Figure 19. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 9, Created on 12/29/2021, Emotion Identification – "Sad" (Cocoa Beach, FL 2021)*

Figure 20. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 10, Created on 12/31/2021, Emotion Identification –"Sad" (Cocoa Beach, FL, 2021)*

In the 11th composition the creator had returned home. At this point, it was realized that the majority of the compositions had been done at night. The creator had wondered if there was a difference between a night composition and a morning composition. So, they decided to from this point forward to write the time on the compositions to allow for explorations in that regard. They continued to use type and pressed flowers from their visit to Cocoa Beach, reminiscing and worrying about the wellbeing of their family from afar.

Figure 21. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 11, Created on 1/5/2022, Emotion Identification – "Fear" (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

In the 12th composition the creator discovered a major clue in a potential solution to helping identify a primary emotion with more confidence. They had been listing emotions previously by way of adding to the columns, but this time they listed them separately and decided to see what columns they were already in, tallied them up to see which primary emotion obtained the majority of the tallies. Previously they were generally listing somewhere between five and 10 emotions that they wanted to add to columns, so it was decided that picking up to 10 secondary emotions might be a logical number to start in helping determine the primary emotion easier. It was not known at the time that this would be the beginning of a breakthrough in the creator's process of emotional identification and expedite further development.

Figure 22. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 12, Created on 1/8/2022 at 8:05 pm, Emotion Identification – "Joy" (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

The first morning composition was in the 13th exploration. A couple differences had been noticed being that they had no day full of moments and experiences to guide them to an overall feeling, and that perhaps the only influence on their emotions as they wake up could be their dreams. The creator's dreams however are generally forgotten very quickly upon waking, therefore, they considered that influence to potentially be more of a subconscious, and perhaps less reliable, one. This was the last morning composition done considering these observations. They felt that they were a little too far from the creative process that had been used thus far. Still, they also continued to struggle to pick a primary emotion with the morning composition, so they used the 10 secondary emotion identifiers that was used in the previous composition. Stuck again, they came up with a tie between sad and joy. Although this seemed like a setback, after contemplating it made sense. The creator was struggling with sadness but striving to seek joy. Ultimately, this method did help them narrow down five primary emotions to two, so they felt pretty confident in the progress and simply picked one of the two, which was ultimately sad given the overwhelm of personal events.

Figure 23. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 13, Created on 1/9/2022 at 9:05 pm, Emotion Identification – "Sad" (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

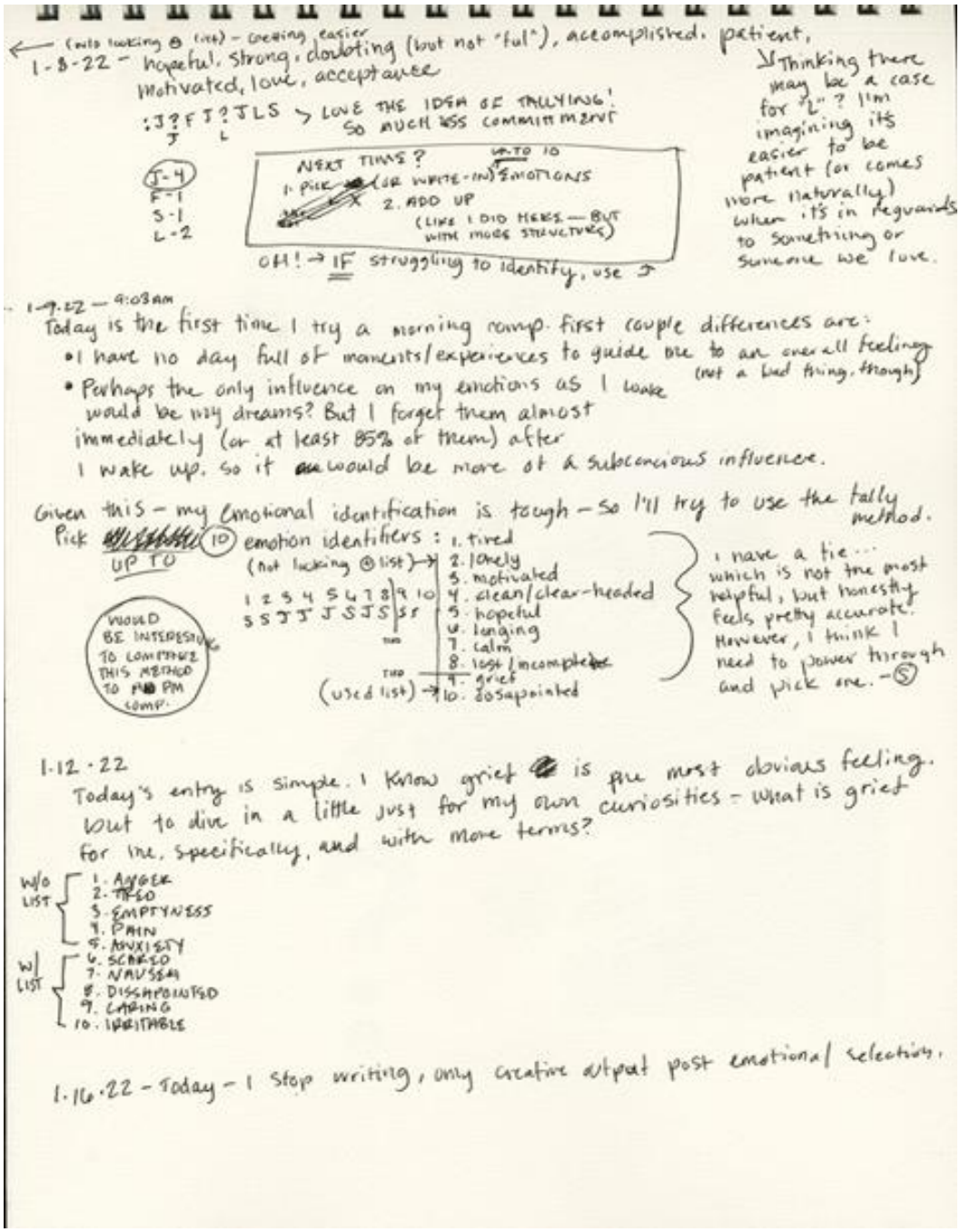


Figure 24. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Page 5 of Notes in Reference to Compositions 12-15, (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

Next, Although the creator felt confident in their primary emotion as a result of a death in the family, they considered the helpfulness of picking 10 secondary emotions and wanted to explore that further to see if it seemed like an accurate approach and explore the processing of grief. For the first five, they continued to list their own emotion descriptive words of secondary emotions, still under the assumption that building the column vocabulary might be an answer. For the second five they used the identification table. Ultimately, tallies ended up being “Sad,” which would have been the primary emotion that was chosen even without the 10 secondary emotions. Given this, they felt more confident that this was a promising direction to continue compositions in and explore this method further. Also at this point, they stopped taking notes, having felt solidified their emotional identification and making process, and focused primarily on creating comps using this method in compositions 15 and 16.

Figure 25. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 14, Created on 1/12/2022 at 4:58 pm, Emotion Identification – "Sad" (Wellington, FL 2022)*

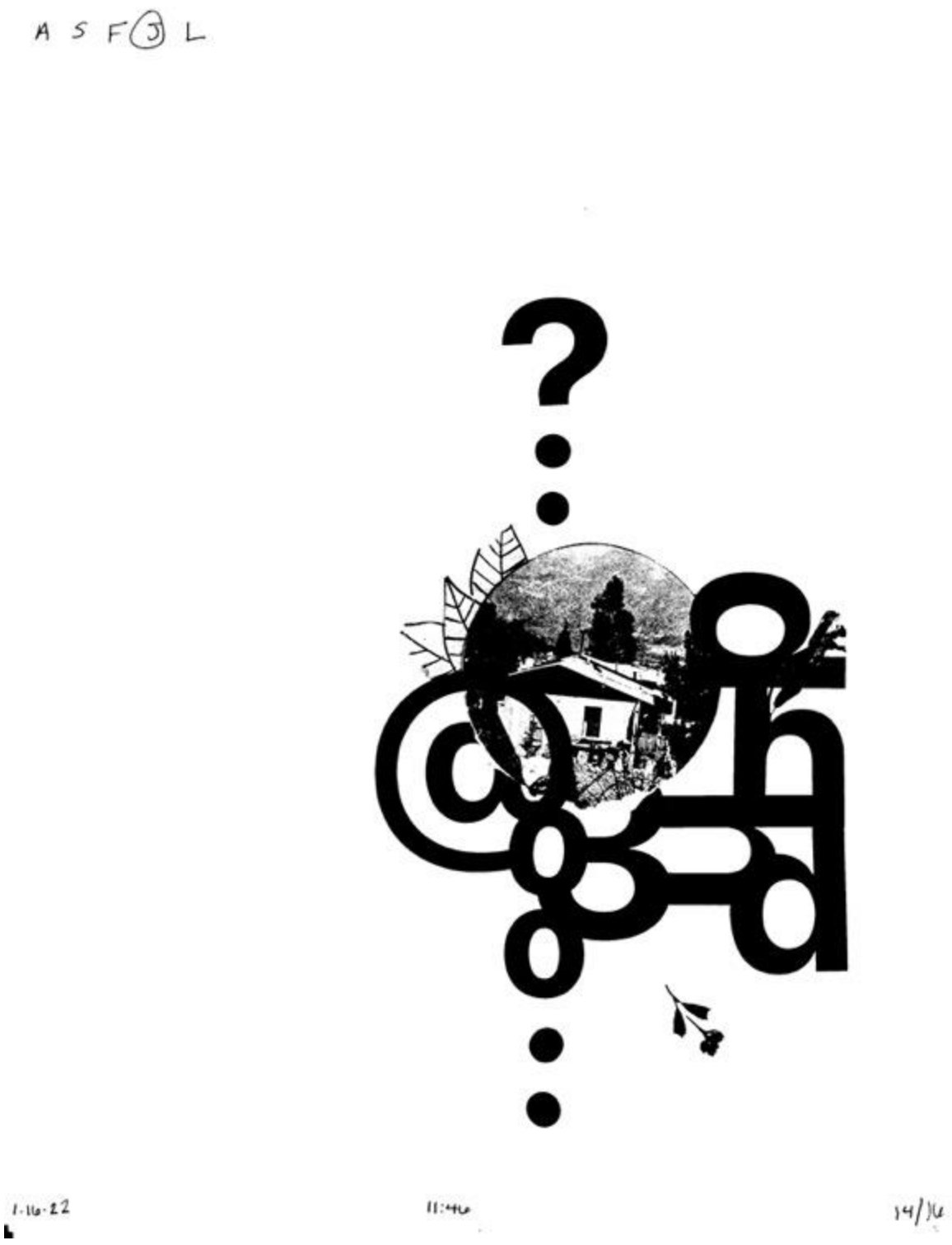


Figure 26. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 15, Created on 1/16/2022 at 4:58 pm, Emotion Identification – "Joy" (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

Figure 27. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition 16, Created on unknown date, Emotion Identification – "Anger" (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

When creating the final composition, the creator had developed an instruction page (figure00) for themselves to test this method further. Again, they found this process to be significantly more helpful in choosing a primary emotion. Even going as far as removing the obviousness of secondary emotion words from their categorized columns so that there is less subjectivity in picking an emotion. They would refer to the chart in figure 00, indicating which secondary emotions were categorized under primary emotions and tally from there. They do believe that this method will need more exploration and more user testing, but for this autoethnography they feel confident that it can help determine a primary emotion based on these explorations.

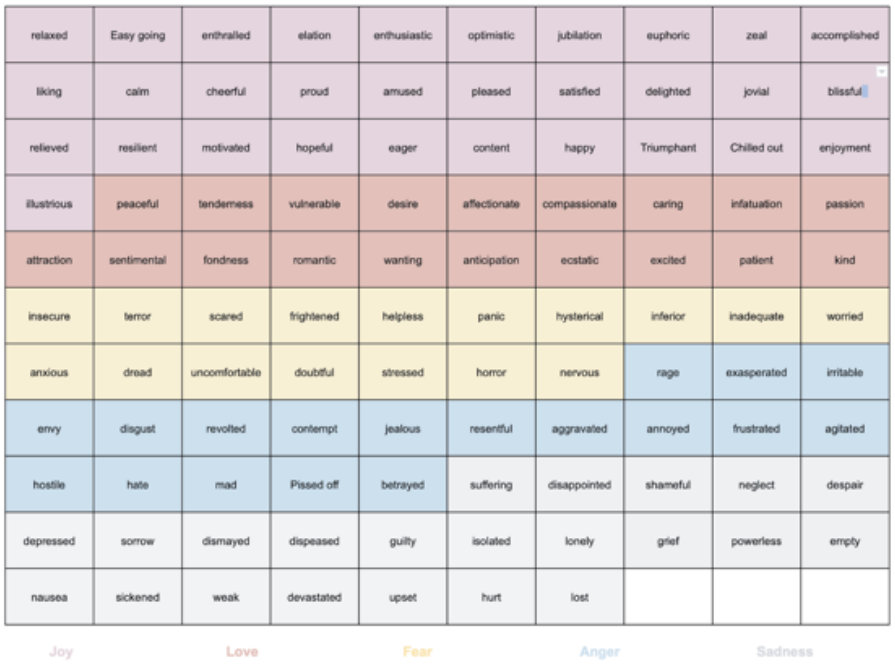
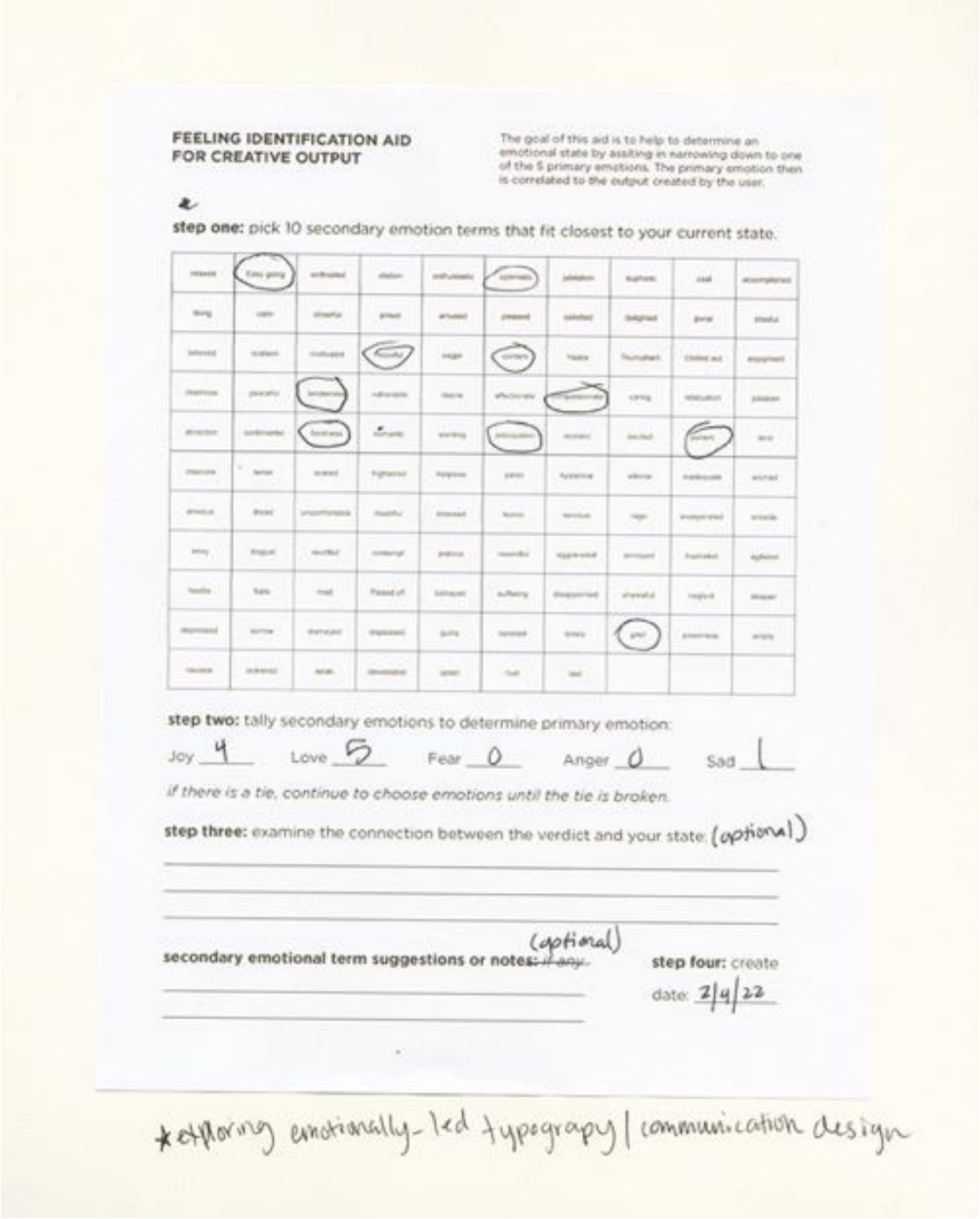


Figure 28. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Color Coded Primary Emotional Identification Tool. (Cibolo, TX 2022)*



FEELING IDENTIFICATION AID FOR CREATIVE OUTPUT

The goal of this aid is to help to determine an emotional state by assiting in narrowing down to one of the 5 primary emotions. The primary emotion then is correlated to the output created by the user.

step one: pick 10 secondary emotion terms that fit closest to your current state.

step two: tally secondary emotions to determine primary emotion:

Joy 4 Love 5 Fear 0 Anger 0 Sad 1

if there is a tie, continue to choose emotions until the tie is broken.

step three: examine the connection between the verdict and your state: (optional)

secondary emotional term suggestions or notes: ~~if any~~ (optional)

step four: create

date: 2/4/22

*exploring emotionally-led typograpy | communication design

Figure 29. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Instructions for Secondary Emotional Identification in Use. (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

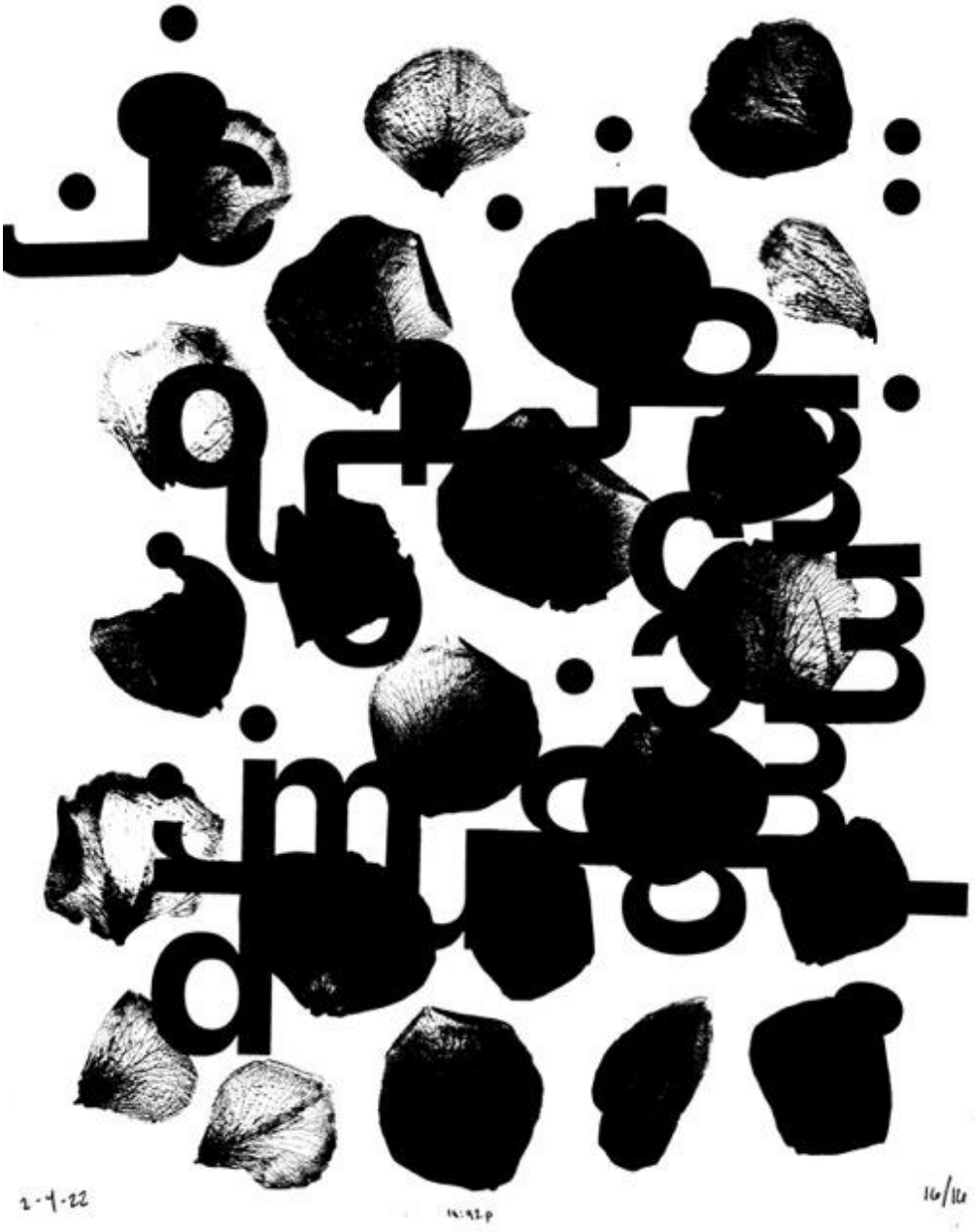


Figure 30. *Hoover, Tiana, Image of Composition Resulting in Use of Instructions for Secondary Emotional Identification. Created on 2/4/2022 at 10:42 pm, Emotion Identification – "Love" (Cibolo, TX 2022)*

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE INVESTIGATIONS

As these explorations concluded, the creator couldn't help but feel an immense amount of personal progress in identifying emotions. For this research, one's emotional and personal history has yet to allow space or the proper tools to identify emotions but moving forward the creator now knows there is something that they can utilize if struggling internally with a situation, experience, or any kind of overthinking. Allowing oneself to be vulnerable through explorative work in a public setting is difficult for some, especially those struggling with emotional stressors or adverse emotional histories. To further position the relevance of this type of exploration, in Thompson's article on emotional regulation, he states that

> "The maintenance of satisfying emotional well-being in the adult years is fostered both by an elaborate repertoire of emotional self-regulatory strategies and by the ability to regulate the extrinsic demands on one's emotional life, in the context of striving to create a more personalized, unique quality of subjective experience." (Thompson, 1991, p. 295)

Future investigations could include the use of communication design to help mend or build relationships. As this autoethnography has proven that emotional exploration is a positive exploration in determining emotions by providing meditative-like space to explore that emotion. It would be ideal to propose this type of process in society in a place where emotional identification visuals can be shared. Some examples of implication are social media hashtags or similar unified final destination systems such as

a website to upload and view creations with their respected emotion identification. This could allow research to elaborate more on the connection between emotions and visuals through a broader lens. If there was the option, like in Figure 29, to provide creators with a space to include their own secondary emotion words it could potentially build on the overwhelming task of categorizing secondary emotions into primary ones.

Other investigations that are more relative to the field of communication design could include the concept of considering how a designer feels while working. This could apply to designers or students in a workplace setting or classroom trying to complete projects while feeling strong emotions. How might we recognize and offer help in those situations to avoid mistakes and lower-quality work. Although the creator rarely made compositions while angry, it's clear that the two that are included with the identification of "Anger" are significantly more careless than others. The ones identified in "Joy" have more attention to detail and confidence in their visual message. Or, if a designer understands how they differ in process due to a specific emotion, how might one implement this in an effective way? It's encouraged that designers ask themselves to explore their emotions as they work to determine if there is a difference in the process or outcome of their work. Louise Schouwenberg also writes in her book, "The Auto-Ethnographic Turn in Design" that "I want to show how design is not an objectively executed act but a deeply personal one that emerges from an intimate understanding of the world" (Schouwenberg, L., & Kaethler, M., 2021, p. 27).

The goal of this research was to bring awareness to a community of people who are unsure or unequipped to utilize their emotions naturally and effectively, explore how communication may benefit from visual design, and have a better understanding of how one can regulate emotional stressors through practice.

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