

issue no. 5

DUALITY



at the core

VULNERABILITY + DESIGN PUBLICATION

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editor's letter:



Personal. Emotional. **Reflective.**

The written work in *Duality* extends past the person people see me and know me as. It is introspective for both readers and for myself. Each is a journey to navigate, pick at, and comprehend what shapes me, and what guides me forward. The sentiments in my writing are the thoughts that keep me up, yet simultaneously the feelings that fuel my passions and my core being. It felt fitting to release this fifth issue on my birthday when I routinely reflect on my progress over the last year, and also offer a different level of vulnerability than some of my writing prior.

I haven't published in awhile. Since my abroad program, my writing has felt irrelevant, unimportant, and forced. It wasn't until recently I had the idea to do a collection of reflections to clear my head, and regain confidence in my writing.

For this issue, I am joined by an incredible artist. Someone I deeply respect, but also the only person I can envision doing this issue. Her style is subtle, reflective, and powerful beyond words. She needs no explanation (although I'll give her one on the next spread), but I am so grateful for how meditative the process has been to create with her.

Thank you, Lauren for the collaboration, and for you as a reader.

**ibbyday**  
writer & editor

# lauren song

cover art & page illustrations

## about the collaboration:

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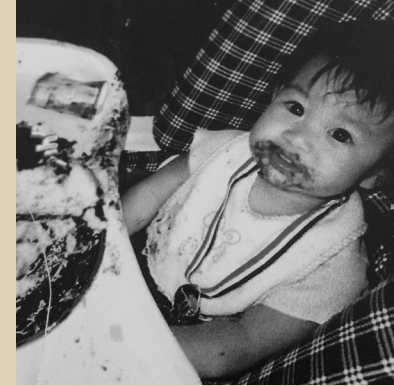
I remember seeing ATC come to life for the first time - reading the excerpts, seeing the work, and wanting to be a part of it someday. I never thought I would be asked to collaborate on an issue before I asked first. But when Ibby first introduced her overall idea for the issue it really hit me deeply because duality is something I have also been navigating through recently, or maybe all of my life, really. Circumstances in my childhood caused me to always engage in escapism to cope, and it eventually affected my ability to grasp my identity and place in the world by the time everyone around me seemed to have gotten the hang of theirs. Art was definitely a way for me to figure myself out a little better, but conversations with people like Ibby are what really keep me grounded and motivated in wanting to grow. I think Ibby caught me at a serendipitous time, because while this was a way for her to reflect on her year, her life, and to process it all, I have also finally come to discoveries about myself that have really allowed me to express myself through my illustrations without holding back too much anymore. This issue reminds me that even the people who seem to have it all together are occasionally lost, in the process of healing their own wounds, and that is what makes us human. Reading through Ibby's words was heartbreaking, healing, and comforting. She somehow writes such short bodies of text that hold the capability of putting you through a whirlwind of emotions. Her writing really shows you the layers of her that I feel anyone can relate to or find solace in in some way. And I can only hope that my work does any of it justice.

Lauren Song

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Lauren and I have known each other since freshman year of college. We actually tried to room together, but it didn't work out for our group. However, we connected again in 2019, when we had the opportunity to work together on ACSG. In all honesty, we didn't talk much aside from work, but that changed in 2020 when we both got re-elected and shared a class in the Spring of 2020. Over the last few semesters, I've gotten to know Lauren and it's been an honor. Lauren is kind-hearted, aware, and a hardworking individual. She's become more than just a colleague, but a friend, supporting me in all the challenges that have come with this year so far. We've shared so many jokes, rants about the state of the world, and of course feedback about our work in ACSG and in our studies. It was very clear to me when I started to plan this issue that I needed to ask Lauren to do the art. She was the ideal person both because she's talented as hell, but also because our conversations are emblematic of the overall sentiments in each of the pieces I wrote. Friendships with people like Lauren remind me that people are multidimensional and that everyone is more than what we assume of them. That we as humans need to try harder to build connections with others that take time while still making sure we take care of ourselves.

Ibby Day



### reflection one

1 yr old, august 1999  
minneapolis, minnesota

## why I'm serious, but actually not

One of the hardest aspects of being my friend is that I'm serious. Serious about everything. I'm not usually the friend you go to for laughs or a lighthearted time, although I do have my moments. I'm the friend you go to for advice, comfort, or honest conversations. Surprisingly, few people have actually told me I'm serious, but it's not something I would be surprised about or upset over because I know this about myself.

Honestly, I like and accept being this type of person. Reliable, or so I'd like to think. The thing that bothers me is sometimes people imply that I should lighten up and they haven't stepped back to understand why I am this person, but also remarkably not.

I've always been the "mom" friend. I think it started when I realized I was gay. I did everything I could to hide my sexuality, like building the image of strength so that no one

could challenge me, including myself. Being closeted for five years does that to you. When no one else is there, you need to rely on yourself. Pick yourself up on the days you feel alone and prove you're not the outlier when your mind and society tells you that you are. I think we can all relate to that sentiment in one way or another. Sometimes I don't know how I managed to present myself as stable when I was everything but that. Good grades, a good athlete, and a good social life. Exceptional some might say. It was in part to build a persona but also a secret plea to fit in. I wasn't succeeding despite what people thought. I just kept myself busy.

My friends growing up were always conventionally attractive, and mostly white. They all are really great people too, so I'm not at all surprised how many guys liked my closest friends. But I think the lack of attention I got relative to them dented my own self-worth, and also made me want to be white. The only thing I became good at was being a reliable friend. It's what I excelled at, so I accepted that role. As I got older, I fell into the role of looking after everyone, and I was fine with it because I wasn't interested anyway (if you know what I mean hah). I focused so much on other people and what I could do for them but over time I think I started to realize how that wasn't in my own benefit to let people take advantage of me like that.

I often question if this desire to feel wanted connects to my adoption. As a child, I didn't think much about being adopted, but perhaps I subconsciously want to prove a point: that someone wants me. That I am needed. And more personally, that I wasn't a mistake. I feel like part of me is always trying to show that I wasn't an accident by helping to improve others' lives and make others feel valued because some days I think I was.

I think all these factors make it really hard to let down my wall and drop the serious act because my upbringing trained me to fit this persona of strength at a time

I was completely drowning. My identity has always straddled the line of privilege and disadvantage, and I've always felt inclined to recognize both. It's in my system now, and I can't convince myself that responsibility and childishness are not mutually exclusive.

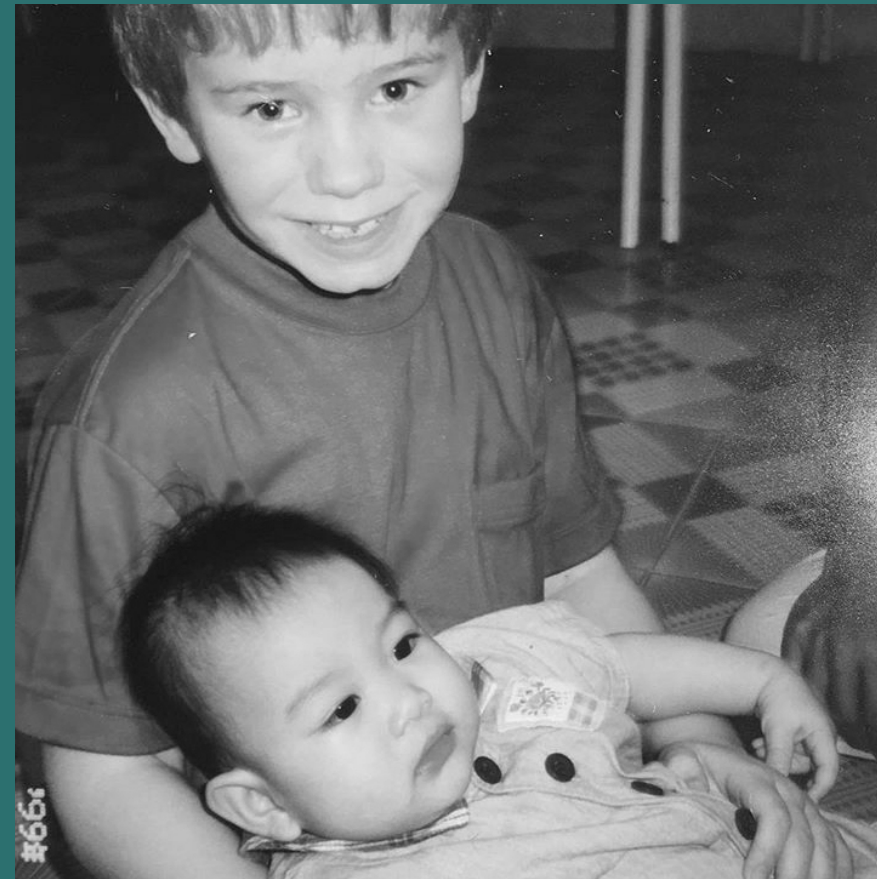
However, not being able to balance both capability and childishness has been painful too. My inability to let my "serious wall" down has been the destruction of several relationships in my life that might've ended because of it. I can't seem to connect on that light-hearted level, especially with people I get close to quickly, which is sort of ironic. But I guess I tell myself that these relationships weren't compatible and that it's for the best that I kept that wall up.

But that's the thing I think the people in these relationships got wrong about me. I am incredibly goofy. I always have been, but the only people who see it are my family, my partners over the years, and a couple of friends I've known for most of my life. I can be the most ridiculous person in the room, but it depends on who's in the room with me. It's something I'm still trying to figure out but I think it's interesting to analyze because I think it goes back to adjusting my personality to others. I accommodate for most people and I don't mind. It's not that I feel burdened or even as if I'm doing it for a purpose, I simply choose to. Perhaps it's that I need to be sure someone is permanent in my life to let my guard down around them. But I am both serious and goofy, and I only hope I can be perceived as both without having to prove it.



12 yrs old, july 2010  
london, england

6 months old, march 1998  
binh thuan, vietnam





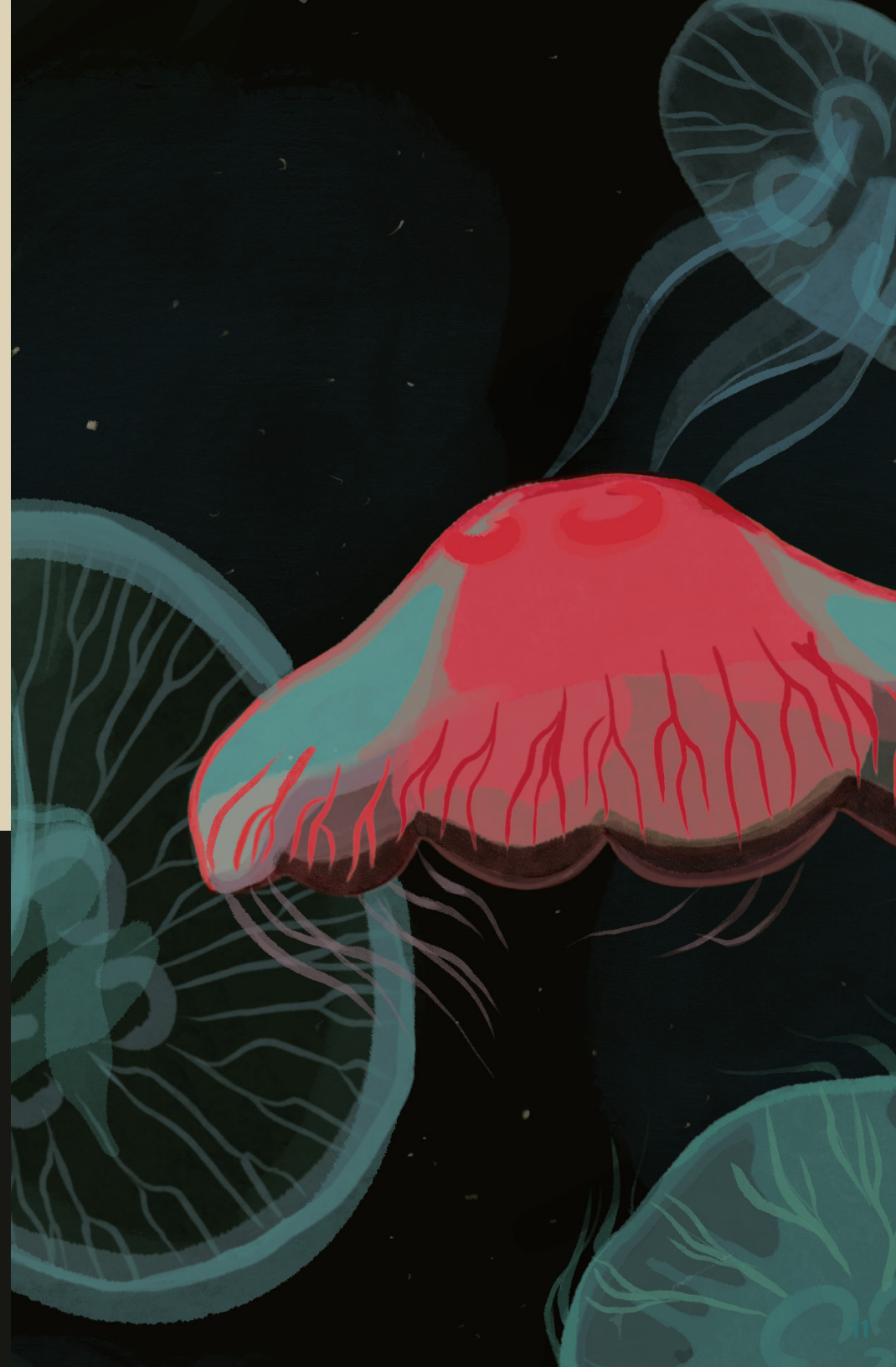
### reflection two

8 yrs old, september 2006  
minneapolis, minnesota

## what was left behind

When I was younger, I would walk to the bus stop every day with my older brother to see him off to school. Eventually, it was my time to step onto the big, daunting yellow school bus. At the time, my brother and I were total opposites. He was outgoing, and I was shy. He was funny, and well... I was shy. Nick was (and is) a great older brother so he would sit next to me

every day even though all his friends rode the same bus. He introduced me to them and they would include me in their conversations even though they were the "cool" 8th graders. But there was one, in particular, I developed a fondness for. She lived on the same block at the opposite end of the hill our houses were on. Her name was Samantha Hastings.



She always had a smile on her face, and constantly made sure I wasn't nervous on the ride to school. She asked to sit with me one day and from there on out, I exclusively would sit with Samantha. My brother didn't mind cause it meant he got to goof off (he was that kid that the driver had to yell at for not sitting down). I started looking forward to school because I got to talk to Samantha. She was kind, and it was such a natural instinct for her. Even at that age, I knew that she was someone with a genuine heart.

One day I came home and went to sit at the kitchen table and my mom walked up to me and leaned against the counter right next to my wooden chair. I looked at her and she put her hands on my shoulders, massaging them lightly. "Ibby, there's something I need to tell you". I remember looking up at her, not saying anything as I watched tears form in her eyes as she gently attempted to smile at me. "You know the Hastings family down the block?" I nodded, my youth obstructing my inability to process what came next. "I just got off the phone with Trish, the mom. Their family got in a car crash. Samantha died in the crash, and her husband just passed in the hospital".

This event had a profound impact that I don't think I can articulate well in writing because I only remember being silent. Not just after my mom told me the news, but silent on the way to school, too young to really understand what I was feeling. Not being able to cope with loss but also feeling unexplainably off. I remember feeling sad for Catherine, her younger sister, who was only a couple years older than me. I remember the announcement at the all-school meeting about the loss

in the community. I remember that the sadness eventually felt less heavy, but the impact Samantha had on me did not.

Just the school year prior, the school had awarded Samantha the Leadership Award at the annual End-of-the-Year celebration. I remember thinking to myself that I had the coolest friend in the whole world. I was beaming with pride and happiness. How it felt to have that level of admiration for her kind actions. I feel it as I write this. I think it is naive to say I modeled myself after Samantha because I was not that forward-thinking at 7. I just knew I wanted to be the type of person she had been for me, a friend. Not just any friend, but the friend who felt like family. The friend to anyone that needed one because I wanted everyone to be extended that same kindness I was given when I was scared, quiet, and unsure of myself. I truly believe Samantha would've been the best leader this world has seen in a while, just because she was kind. I hope that I can match even an ounce of the impact she had on me.

And I've sure tried to have that impact as best as I could. Since I was seven I've pursued a lot of roles in leadership, and I've encountered a lot of leaders along the way. But, in my opinion, the strongest leaders are unfailingly kind people first, just like Samantha. Especially those who are reserved, and unassuming. More so than the most vocal, organized, and highly capable people.

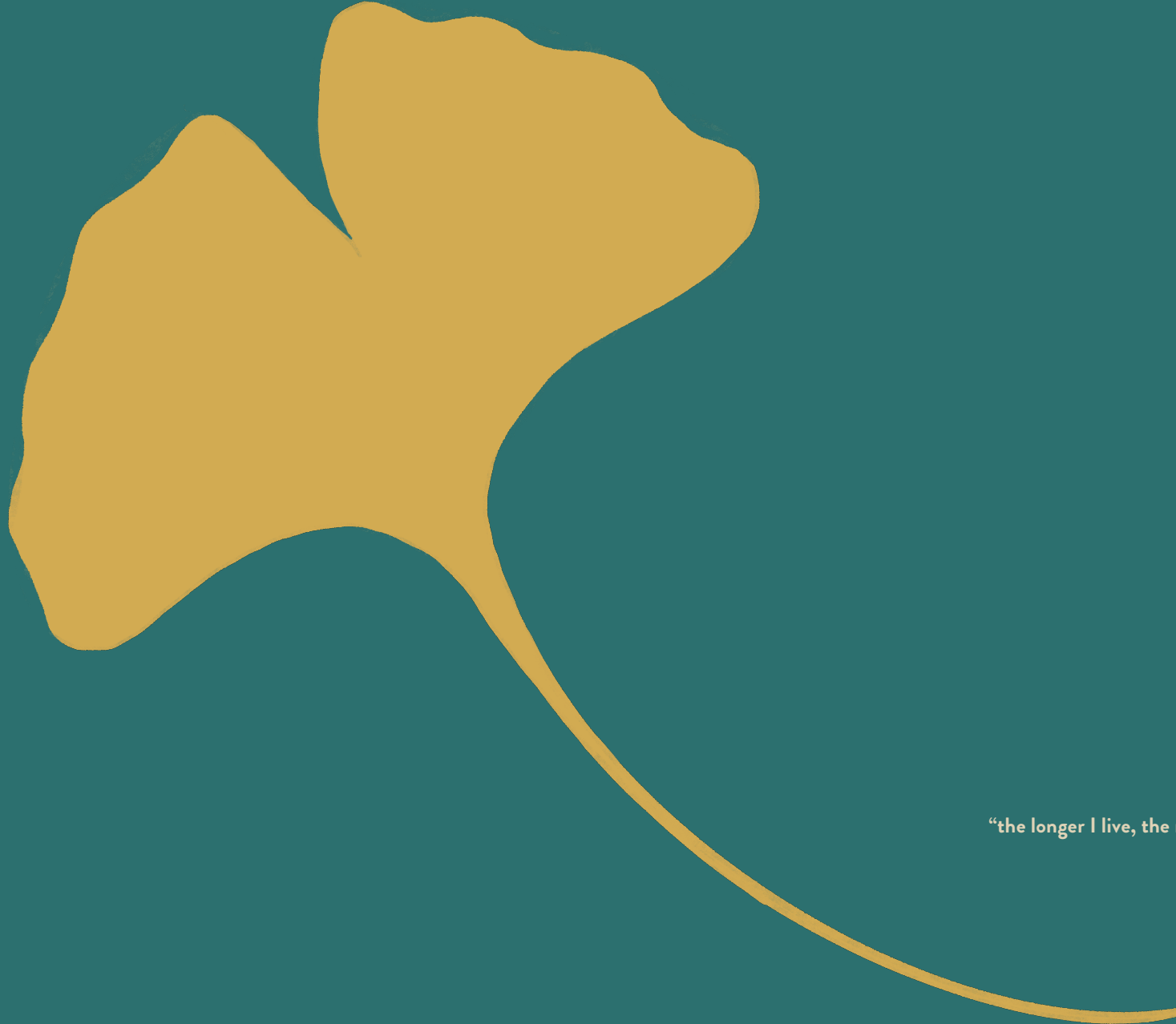


6 years old, september 2004  
minneapolis, minnesota

I mention kindness because recently I had a discussion with my girlfriend who expressed to me that she disliked nice people, and how it differs from kind people. It got me thinking about certain types of leaders who I think fall in the nice realm. I've seen some really great leaders, some pretty poor ones, and ones that are right in between. I've also seen leaders fluctuate because as always, people invariably are in motion. I've also seen firsthand how power and ego can quickly turn great leaders into poorer ones (I've been there). But something that is pretty consistent is that kind people always make great leaders. It is their inherent instinct to show empathy, and act upon it purely because it moved them. That above leadership, there was a desire to be a friend. Leadership was not their passion, it came because people appreciated them and their genuine care for the well-being of others. That they did not calcu-

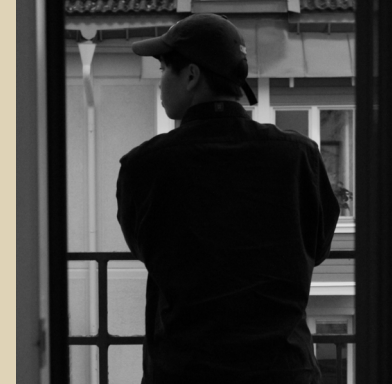
late (consciously or not) which projects or meetings could benefit them, or converse with people for the sake that down the road it could benefit their chances of employment. That they didn't study and train (again consciously or not) how to be a good leader.

No amount of speakers, workshops or acquired knowledge can teach someone how to be genuinely kind. I think trying to learn to be kind can often defeat the purpose, if not create a bigger problem. I truly believe that. I will always be in the belief that the best leaders have something that only occurs in the purest of souls. That good leaders are nice people, but kind people are great leaders. There is no formula, and if you came to this piece for advice or found yourself searching for the answer while reading this, you're likely going down the wrong path. I do not have an answer, nor can anyone else truly crack the secret to kindness because it isn't about how it's done, it's about how it feels. But I sure think we all should strive to be kinder, and model after those who have the purest hearts.



“the longer I live, the more beautiful life becomes”





### reflection three

21 yrs old, december 2019  
kalmar, sweden

## the model society

A year ago on my 21st birthday, I was up at midnight eating Funfetti cake with my girlfriend and my closest friend. I was happy to be with two people I cared about so deeply, but I felt sadness as I sat at the table. In less than 5 hours I would have to wake up and go to the airport to hop on a 20-hour plane ride. The journey

in total was 24 hours, but to me, that just meant 24 hours to miss home for the next 5 months.

Despite the endless crying I tried to hide from the old lady who sat next to me on the flight, many people know this type of decision as very characteristic of me. I love meeting new people, having exciting

experiences, and challenging myself to try unexpected things. When I selected my study abroad I wanted it to be the exact opposite of what felt comfortable. I love big cities, I've always grown up in them, so I chose a small city. I attend a small art school where I'm surrounded by other creatives, so I chose a big university with a range of majors. My original plan of going to Japan began to feel safe, so I chose Sweden.

Another huge factor that influenced my decision was a growing interest in global affairs and schooling about the subject I received growing up. I was constantly told by teachers (and textbooks) that Nordic countries were the countries to strive to be similar to in order to achieve equity. I wanted to see for myself what equality felt like so that I could come back to the states and apply it to my art, and my job...turns out I felt more oppressed in Sweden than America.

It must be universal knowledge by now that my experience was not glamorous or insightful in the way I intended. Throughout, I noticed some "red flags" of sorts but shoved them off thinking this

## *"expectation of assimilation is a modern form of imperialism"*

was just culture shock, hoping I would adjust. I began to question if it was fair of me to critique certain things that bothered me, or if I should swallow my inner American and keep quiet. I chose the latter for the first half of the program. You can read another snippet of the story on my Medium blog, but I want to talk about the catalyst for the more vocal side of me to emerge because it actually wasn't that one classmate I wrote about.

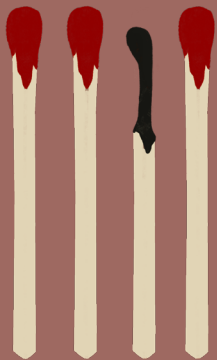
The moment that changed my opinion and perspective on Sweden was when I found out one of my classmates was adopted. We had a six-hour conversation over fika about our identities and experiences. It was my first time meeting a foreign adoptee and the first seemingly deep conversation I had with a classmate. At one point during the conversation, this classmate told me that in her three years knowing the same classmates, she had never mentioned she was adopted. I was surprised since the class felt like such a tight-knit group to me, and she was not someone who is embarrassed by her adoption. But what she said next really caught me off guard..."people don't really talk about these things, everyone is always afraid to offend others so most people keep to themselves, it's quite lonely".

After she said that, I couldn't see my

surroundings the same. Everything clicked for me and I just felt sad. Sad because I realized that none of my classmates actually knew anything concrete about me, but more importantly, that I didn't know anything about them. It felt like their society was so afraid to express their feelings as to avoid conflict that the solution was to normalize silence, even silence about the things that make us as humans, seem human.

I wanted to research more about this type of dilemma, so for the next project, I researched conformity to ultimately make the argument that an expectation of assimilation is a modern form of imperialism resulting in cultural erasure and control of populations. Sweden was not as progressive as American textbooks made it seem, and I became highly critical of the society in my later half of the program. It was not received well. One of my professors asked me if I was arguing that America was better than Sweden and that I should be careful. It was a little threatening and a bit laughable. During my time I found myself defending America, not because I desperately love America, but because the European out-

look on America is very skewed, just like every country's history books. I am very critical of Sweden, but I am very critical of America and everything else. It's something that college has taught me. How to take critique, but also be critical about my surroundings. It's taught me to challenge how we engage in spaces and inspired me to work towards a better society for everyone on a global scale. I never meant for the battles I fought to be America vs. Sweden. I think America is much worse off than Sweden, but to ignore some very crucial differences in our societies that enable some systems to be effective in Sweden and not in America (and vice versa) is elitism and I will challenge them just as I do in my own country. No country is ideal, and the nationalism we all have as residents of our various countries prohibit us from seeing the duality we could achieve.





#### reflection four

17 yrs old, april 2016  
palo alto, california

## wielding duality

I am not grateful I was adopted. Adoption is not about saviors rescuing me from something worse off, and it's a wild misconception that society has perpetuated. I'm grateful for my family, and the opportunities I've been given, but I am not grateful for what people assume to be an escape from a miserable life full of poverty which doesn't equate to unhappiness.

Before traveling to Vietnam, I'm not sure I would've said this. The way Western history displays the Global South (the non-offensive term for "Third World" in case you didn't know) constantly implies that these impoverished countries need Western help. That these societies need clean water, technology, and infrastructure handed to them on a silver





plate. There's a grotesque belief that Global South societies are too illiterate to understand how advanced the West is. Having been adopted at 6 months old, and going to school in rich, white neighborhoods, I bought into my schooling and this ideology. I nodded submissively when people said that my parents did a brave thing and a really good deed for me often spouting something about saving me from the Vietnam War (which doesn't even make sense because the war was from 1955–1975 and last I checked I wasn't between the ages of 45–65). It wasn't until my trip to Vietnam and even college that I started to fully understand and challenge the harm that this narrative can bring to Global South nations and to my perception of myself and my Asian-American identity.

“Give a person a fish, and they'll feed for a day. Teach them to fish, and you feed them for a lifetime”. I love this quote because I think its message is deeply accurate yet extremely flawed due to its nature of being a quote. The problem with this quote, and most quotes, is that a phrase will never match our highly complex world and all the subtleties

of language and communication. To me, this quote can commonly be skewed and people will see themselves only as the teacher, and never the student. They'll pat themselves on the back for being the teacher or even volunteer to be the teacher in this narrative. But once the lesson has been taught, they will continue to lurk and make sure their student never forgets how to fish, instead of trusting them with this knowledge and allowing them to use it freely without a presence.

It's important to be critical of how we engage with other communities, and it's something I find myself constantly thinking about given my career interests in global and social affairs. I want to help communities because I fall into a lot of communities, and even though it can cause me a lot of stress some days, I wouldn't trade all the amazing spaces I get to be a part of. I am happiest when I get to engage and work with others. I get to be an environment where I always feel that rush of energy. The surge from being challenged in my learning, while making memories with different types of people. But I know that this work requires me to be hyper-aware of the privilege I do hold so I can engage in these spaces correctly. I may be adopted from a Global South country, but I grew up in a white, upper-class family. I've been given access to things I likely wouldn't have had, and that's not necessarily something to be overly grateful for, just conscious of. My education is what allows me to be

interested in global and social affairs in the first place. I can't afford to ignore my past because it influences both my future and the future we leave behind.

But the thing about privilege that makes it hard for me to wield is that I am disadvantaged by definition. I am gay and a woman of color. People underestimate me, and my range of capabilities because they don't see me, and assume based on my appearance. Other times people overestimate me and I quickly become a token of diversity, but I don't have the mental energy or will to answer every call. Stereotypes can define me in an instant, but I need to consider my privilege even if society is not in my favor.

That's because, my identities constantly battle. I'm female but I look male so I get the benefits that come with appearing that way. I don't fear walking outside at night and it certainly can be a privilege to be listened to and seen as someone with power with those who don't know my gender. The privilege of being a man shouldn't fall on my shoulders because I am not one, but in some spaces it does, and that's because passing privilege is still a privilege, and must be understood and used appropriately. The same goes for my sexuality. I think at this point in my life, most people know I'm gay, but I grew up hidden in the closet. I adapted to white culture and straight culture, and it's a

very natural part of me that hasn't gone away. Most of my close friends are heteronormative, and I don't really engage with queer culture (I should, and I'm trying) but it's something I've normalized in my life because I never wanted it to be a big deal. Perhaps I feel this way because I have a subconscious unwillingness to give up the culture I have assimilated to, but I'm still doing a lot of reflecting on this.

I know I don't always like to accept my disadvantages, but part of me knows I have to accept them because I can use the privilege I do have to change perceptions of those who don't have that luxury. On the other hand, I see a lot of people playing the minority or victim card in the wrong spaces, and I always want to be conscious that I'm not harming communities in that way either. It's a delicate balance but I'm still navigating and writing about to understand myself better. Everyone should take time to address passing privilege because I don't think it's talked about enough and I truly believe our society has evolved past the standard definition and recognition of privilege. It's important to evolve with our own understandings and challenge ourselves to comprehend why we choose roles in global and social affairs, and how we got to this point. In order for this type of work to exist, there needs to be a “problem” that persists. Something social impact and justice workers need to get comfortable with is the idea that in the perfect world, we wouldn't have these jobs we love so much. Is that something you're comfortable with, or are you perpetuating a system that allows for one person/group to always hold more power?

