

# Designing a self-inquiry toolkit (in the form of a Board Game) for Performing Artists to Explore the Hero's Journey in Their Personal and Professional Lives

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# INTRODUCTION

This project aims to design a self-inquiry toolkit as a form of a board game, tailored for performing artists, using Joseph Campbell's concept of the Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1949) as a framework for transformation and self-inquiry. There are unique mental and emotional pressures faced by performing artists, including the pursuit of perfection, fierce competition for employment, stress resulting from deadlines and job demands, and stigma related to health issues (Barker et al., 2009). By exploring the various steps and archetypes of the Hero's Journey, this toolkit helps performing artists navigate these hurdles, overcome obstacles, as well as sustain and promote their creativity. We collaborated closely with mental health professionals, including psychotherapists, Jungian analysts, counselors, and social workers, as well as directly with performing artists from various disciplines—musicians, actors, singers, circus performers, etc. This ensures that the toolkit is finely attuned to support the self-inquiry and self-discovery processes of a diverse range of artists, empowering them to navigate personal and professional challenges.

## Background

### Why Performing Artists?

Performing artists face numerous mental and emotional pressures in their personal and professional lives, which can significantly impact their overall well-being. Performing artists are frequently confronted with the shifting professional demands that require a wide range of skills, including finding a balance between working both independently and collaboratively, keeping their creativity, and managing various uncertainties in their careers (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). These expectations significantly influence their mental and emotional well-being. Another study conducted in North America by Barker et al. (2009), highlights that artists' contributions to society are usually underestimated, and this undervaluation has led to heightened competition for employment opportunities, underselling, survival work, and stigmatization; all of which affect artists' self-esteem and financial well-being. Due to the job demands that trigger various critical appraisal processes, artists are also at a high risk of facing psychological stress including perfectionism (having the pressure of being perfect all the time), vulnerability (fear of being easily replaced), isolation, and judgment (being criticized by the public) (Barker et al., 2009).

In addition, performing artists are at high risk of developing performance anxiety. Factors such as internal pressures, external performance situations (like competitions), and task difficulty contribute to the development of performance anxiety in artists (Clearman, 2020). When a person experiences performance anxiety, they tend to act in anticipation of potential threats, thus initiating a defense mechanism (Zhang et al., 2018). Performance anxiety can lead to physical symptoms such as shakiness, increased heart rate, and sweating, as well as psychological symptoms like cognitive anxiety that disrupt concentration, impacting performers' focus (Walker & Nordin-Bates, 2010).

Moreover, the irregular working hours and extensive periods spent away from home inherent in artistic careers, along with the stress from performances, negatively impact performing artists' romantic relationships (Szabó et al., 2022). And individuals dealing with challenging relationships face an increased risk of developing mental health issues, including anxiety and depression (Gorbeña et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the level of fame an artist achieves introduces an additional layer of complexity. Depending on the artist's level of fame, they may have to cope with constant public scrutiny leading to a lack of privacy and significant emotional and mental pressures (Heinzman, 2019). Public attention and judgment affect their self-image, personal relationships, and mental health, adding an extra layer of stress to their careers. A study done by Kakko & Isotalus (2023) showed that fame, for music artists, can make their romantic relationships harder by bringing more public attention, making them feel pressured to keep up a certain image, and sometimes causing unequal power dynamics that affect trust and closeness.

Performing arts students also show higher levels of anxiety, (Spahn et al, 2004) and depression (Brandfonbrener, 2009; Rickert et al., 2015), compared to their peers in other academic programs. Given the prevalence of health issues among performing arts students during their university years (Spahn et al., 2004), early intervention to address and prevent well-being challenges is crucial (Lee et al., 2020). Studies indicate that integrating instruction on healthy behaviors into university curricula yields tangible improvements in mental health among performing arts students (Zander et al., 2010). The recent study done by Wright & Layman (2020), claims that performing art students see mental health as closely connected to everyday life challenges (not just about the absence of mental health disorders) and want to understand mental health from a practical and sensory perspective, not just theoretically.

In summary, artists face unique mental and emotional pressures inherent to their profession, significantly impacting their well-being. These challenges underscore the critical need for tailored interventions, addressing both primary and secondary prevention measures.

While psychotherapy and counseling are invaluable resources for addressing mental health challenges and seeking self-realization, several barriers prevent individuals from accessing these services. Financial constraints, limited insurance coverage, and lengthy waiting lists for therapy sessions often hinder individuals from seeking professional help. Additionally, unconscious inner defenses and apprehensions about therapy may further deter individuals from pursuing psychotherapeutic interventions. Furthermore, some individuals may feel equipped to navigate their challenges independently or may prioritize personal growth and self-actualization without facing severe obstacles in life.

Recognizing this gap, there is a need for a stepping stone to self-inquiry that bridges the accessibility and affordability barriers commonly associated with traditional therapy methods or serves as a complementary method alongside psychotherapy. In response,

we have turned to the Hero's Journey framework developed by Joseph Campbell. This structured and holistic approach guides performing artists through personal and professional challenges, drawing parallels between the stages of the Hero's Journey and artists' experiences to create a comprehensive toolkit tailored to their needs. It is crucial to recognize that this toolkit is designed to foster resilience, support personal growth, and empower artists to overcome unique obstacles; it is not intended to replace professional treatment but rather to complement and supplement self-inquiry and prevention efforts. Through the Hero's Journey framework, artists can find inspiration, guidance, and practical tools to navigate the complexities of their careers and enhance their overall well-being.

## Why Board Game?

We drew upon research findings that underscored the effectiveness of board games as engaging educational tools (Bayeck, 2020), aligning with our goal of creating a self-inquiry toolkit that blends learning with enjoyment. Recognizing the potential of interactive mediums to foster deep personal insights, we concluded that an engaging board game format would best serve our objectives, ensuring active participant involvement and effective learning outcomes.

Moreover, our decision was informed by research indicating that re-storying within the framework of the Hero's Journey can significantly enhance well-being and foster a sense of purpose (Rogers et al., 2023). To leverage this insight, we sought to empower performing artists to reshape their narratives by providing a tangible and visually compelling representation of the Hero's Journey.

## Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of this project is to design and develop a self-improvement toolkit based on the Hero's Journey framework tailored specifically for performing artists. This toolkit will be designed as a form of an engaging single-player board game that serves as a comprehensive resource aimed at addressing the unique mental and emotional pressures that artists encounter in their personal and professional lives. Our objectives include:

- **Facilitating Psychological Growth:** We aim to provide artists with the means to understand and overcome the emotional and mental pressures they often encounter in their artistic journey. By following the Hero's Journey steps, artists can foster resilience, self-awareness, and personal transformation. They can gain a fresh perspective on their challenges, learn from their experiences, and develop strategies to overcome perfectionism, vulnerability, isolation, and judgment more effectively.
- **Promoting Identity and Self-Discovery:** The Hero's Journey offers a powerful narrative framework for artists to embark on a journey of self-discovery and identity formation. Within the creative process, artists frequently grapple with questions of self-identity and how they fit into the world. We aim to empower

them to explore their unique voices and narratives, enabling them to create art that authentically reflects their innermost thoughts and experiences. This toolkit will address issues related to self-esteem, self-image, and personal growth and help the artists become the heroes of their own journeys.

- **Addressing Challenging Work Contexts:** The Hero's Journey, with its emphasis on overcoming obstacles, can serve as a source of inspiration for artists to navigate the external challenges they face. This toolkit aims to equip artists with tools that will help them tap into their inner heroes, harnessing their inner strength and creativity to maintain their mental and emotional well-being.

## Positionality Statement

Informed by a decade-long personal journey, my research draws from a rich tapestry of experiences spanning therapy sessions, psychological workshops, and deep engagement with Jungian theories. This exploration, conducted at esteemed Jungian institutes in Iran, delved into concepts such as the Hero's Journey framework. These experiences, coupled with my role as a health designer for a digital mental health startup since 2020, have underscored the profound impact of self-realization frameworks on personal growth. My commitment to designing an empowering toolkit for performing artists is grounded in a blend of personal insight, academic learning, and entrepreneurial ventures. Collaborating with The Al & Malka Green Artists' Health Centre at the University Health Network (UHN) under Dr. Shelly-Anne Li's guidance further enriches the research process, ensuring a comprehensive and credible exploration of the topic.

## Hero's Journey Framework

The Hero's Journey is a timeless and cross-cultural story narrative framework that is seen as a symbolic representation of growth and transformation, where individuals confront challenges, learn from their experiences, and return as transformed individuals. It follows a cycle of stages and archetypes that guide individuals through personal growth, challenges, obstacles, and ultimately self-realization. This framework, derived from Carl Jung's theories, gained prominence through Joseph Campbell's influential work, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" (1949). Campbell argued that the monomyth, or hero's journey, was a common structure present in mythological narratives across different cultures and time periods. The monomyth consists of several steps organized into three main categories: Departure, Initiation, and Return. This framework can be seen in famous movies like Star Wars and The Matrix, as well as in literature such as The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter.

The Hero's Journey is also applied in clinical settings and can serve as a comprehensive roadmap that informs clients about their progress, expected challenges, and the necessary steps to advance their stories and address their life problems (Williams, 2019). Additionally, the outcomes observed in different clinical settings using the Hero's Journey framework are profound, with some clients experiencing shifts from passivity to empowerment (Duffy, 2010). Some embraced valuable lessons from

challenging experiences and reframed their issues as integral parts of their transformative journey toward increased self-efficacy (Hartley, 2010; Williams, 2019). As part of this process, individuals become able to let go of their old, potentially detrimental, and limiting beliefs and perceptions about life and themselves as they are encouraged to cultivate fresh insights and attitudes that empower them to approach life with a more constructive perspective (Lawson, 2005). The application of the Hero's Journey proved to be a powerful tool in fostering personal growth and self-awareness, supporting individuals on their transformative paths to healing and growth, and in many of these examples, the therapist is referred to as a mentor to the client-hero (Williams, 2019).

Furthermore, the Hero's Journey can serve as a valuable self-inquiry and self-realization tool for individuals seeking personal growth on their own terms (Sommer, 2010; Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009). This framework emphasizes the critical role of self-awareness in mental health and effective coping with life's challenges. By fostering an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, individuals are better equipped to navigate complex social interactions and difficult situations, enhancing both personal and professional growth (Jayashree, 2013). Self-awareness also plays a role in mental health and successful transitions by influencing how individuals perceive themselves through self-enhancing evaluations, such as positive social comparisons and reflected appraisals (Kwan, 2003). Furthermore, highly self-aware individuals (those with high private self-consciousness) are more adept at recognizing their emotional and physical responses to stress, leading them to take practical measures to mitigate or enhance their reactions to stressors (Mullen & Suls, 1982). Building on the foundational importance of self-awareness, the Hero's Journey framework provides a structured approach to deepen this self-knowledge through storytelling. As demonstrated in eight comprehensive experiments by Rogers et al. (2023), the framework significantly influences individuals' perceptions of their lives, providing a narrative structure rooted in ancient myths and archetypal patterns. Each stage of the Hero's Journey represents a key element in the storytelling process. By encouraging individuals to view their life as a Hero's Journey, the framework prompts them to engage in a process of storytelling where they reinterpret their personal narratives. This process, often referred to as re-storying (Kenyon & Randall, 1997), enables individuals to reshape their life stories in a way that aligns with the narrative structure of facing challenges, overcoming obstacles, and experiencing personal growth. Through the art of storytelling, individuals can find meaning, resilience, and a greater sense of purpose, as evidenced by the positive outcomes observed in Rogers et al. (2023) study.

## Main Steps of the Hero's Journey Framework

The following framework illustrates the main steps of the Hero's Journey rooted in Joseph Campbell's work, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" (1949). Inspired by Campbell's exploration of mythologies from various cultures, these steps outline the transformative journey that a hero undertakes, from the familiarity of their everyday world to the profound depths of the supernatural (Image1). Each stage, from the initial call to adventure to the triumphant return, contributes to the hero's growth and the

timeless resonance of their story.

- **Everyday (Ordinary) World:** The hero begins in a familiar environment, immersed in their everyday life. This setting establishes the baseline for the hero's character, showcasing their normalcy and providing a contrast for the transformative journey ahead.
- **Call to Adventure:** The hero receives a compelling call or push that disrupts their ordinary life, prompting them to step out of their comfort zone and embark on a quest. This call is often a pivotal moment that sets the hero's journey in motion. At this stage, the hero encounters a mentor or receives supernatural assistance, including tools or guidance. This aid equips the hero with the necessary resources and knowledge to navigate the challenges that lie ahead, emphasizing the supernatural or extraordinary nature of the quest.
- **Refusal of the Call:** At this stage, the hero hesitates or rejects the call to adventure due to fear or doubt, resisting leaving their familiar world.
- **Meeting a Mentor:** At this stage, the hero encounters a mentor or receives supernatural assistance, including tools or guidance. This aid equips the hero with the necessary resources and knowledge to navigate the challenges that lie ahead, emphasizing the supernatural or extraordinary nature of the quest.
- **Crossing the Threshold:** The hero crosses a significant threshold, transitioning from the familiar world to the supernatural realm. This symbolic step marks the hero's commitment to the journey, signifying their departure from the known into the unknown.
- **Road of Trials:** The hero faces a series of trials and challenges that test their courage, determination, and newfound abilities. These tests serve to shape and strengthen the hero as they progress on their transformative journey, each trial contributing to their growth.
- **Abyss (deepest fear):** The hero reaches a critical point, often a moment of intense crisis or confrontation, where they must confront their deepest fears or face a formidable adversary. The abyss represents a profound challenge that demands the hero's inner strength and resilience to overcome.
- **Apotheosis (deep transformation-usually internal):** After confronting the abyss, the hero undergoes a profound transformation. The hero achieves a state of divine understanding or realization, often reconciling with a paternal figure. This stage represents a higher level of consciousness and a harmonious resolution of the hero's internal conflicts, further solidifying their transformation.
- **The Ultimate Boon (rewards):** As a reward for their journey, the hero gains the ultimate boon — knowledge, experience, or a significant insight that contributes to their personal growth. This boon serves as a powerful catalyst for the hero's return to the ordinary world.
- **Return and Share** The hero approaches the threshold between the supernatural and ordinary worlds, preparing to return home. This marks a crucial transition point where the hero reflects on their journey and anticipates the challenges of reintegrating into their familiar environment. The hero returns home, to the new ordinary world, sharing their newfound wisdom and treasures with their community, marking the completion of their quest.

Through the Hero's Journey framework, we understand that with some help, it is possible for everyone to overcome great challenges and face their fears, learn from them, and grow their personality. As a result, they can also have an impact on the world around them.

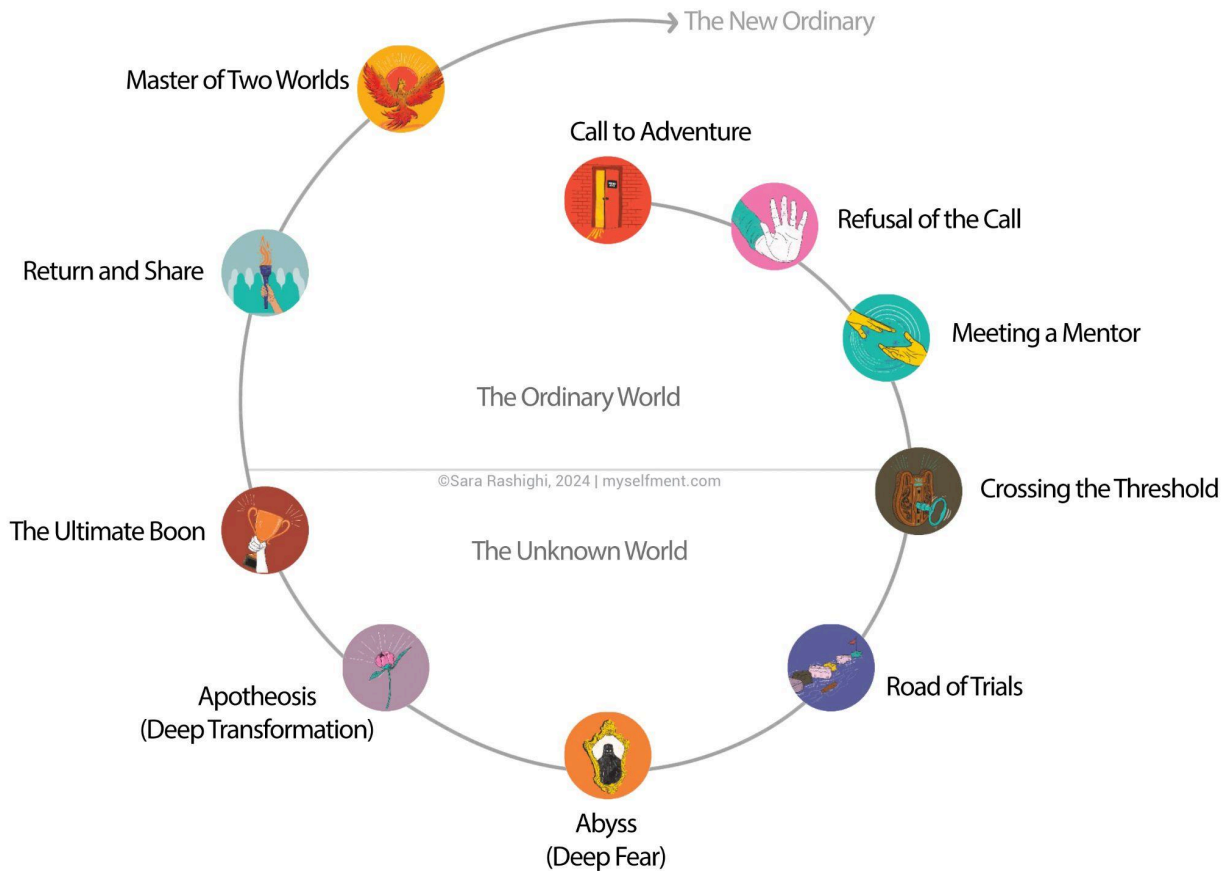


Image1: The Hero's Journey framework.

## METHODS

### Research Questions

How might we design a self-inquiry toolkit (in the form of a single-player board game) that promotes mental and emotional well-being for performing artists by incorporating the Hero's Journey framework, addressing their distinct challenges and experiences?

Sub-questions:



- How does the application of the Hero's Journey framework impact the self-identity of performing artists, particularly in terms of redefining or reinforcing their personal and professional identities?
- How can the Hero's Journey framework enhance the mental and emotional well-being of performing artists?

## Methodology and Framework

### Research Design

After literature review, in order to develop an efficient self-inquiry toolkit that can truly benefit the performing artists, it was crucial to have a participatory approach that involves diverse perspectives and lived experiences. Therefore, Phase I included online individual informational interviews with performing artists and mental health professionals with the aim of learning more about the challenges performing artists face and gathering the key foundational concepts for the toolkit (game board) design. Phase II consisted of co-designing the content of the game with mental health professionals, and Phase III was an online usability testing session with performing artists to allow them to provide feedback on the toolkit (game board) prototype aiming to assess and improve the feasibility, acceptability, usefulness, and appropriateness of the toolkit. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University under REB number 2023-83.

### Phase I: Interviews

#### Participants and Sampling

Participants were artists from a diverse range of performing arts communities (including musicians, dancers, singers, comedians, circus performers, actors, etc.) and mental health professionals (including Jungian analysts, psychotherapists, clinical and counseling psychologists, social workers, and researchers) experienced in working with performing artists and/or familiar with the Hero's Journey and Jungian approach in psychology. To ensure a comprehensive and diverse representation of the target population, the research employed a combination of sampling techniques. 'Maximum variation sampling' was intentionally used to select participants from a wide spectrum of perspectives and experiences (AncaVitu et al., 2007). Non-probability sampling methods were employed, specifically 'convenience sampling', which prioritizes participant accessibility and willingness to engage (Stratton, 2021), and 'snowball sampling', where potential eligible individuals were suggested to the researcher by existing participants (Stratton, 2021). Furthermore, 'criterion sampling' was employed to select participants based on specific criteria that align with the study's objectives (Sandelowski, 2000). This multi-faceted approach ensured that a broad range of voices and experiences were included, enriching the depth and richness of the research insights.

Eligible participants included professional artists, arts workers, art students, and arts educators in the performing arts community who have been in their role for at least 2 years, have no barriers to verbal communication in English, and are willing to participate. No specific demographic criteria were imposed to achieve maximum variation in sampling. Eligible mental health professionals included those with a minimum of 3 years of experience working with performing artists and/or the Hero's Journey framework, who have no barriers to verbal communication in English, and who are willing to participate.

## Recruitment

Participants were recruited through multiple channels, including arts organizations, mental health associations, social media platforms, and relevant online communities. Participants involved in the research received a token of appreciation for their time and valuable contributions. This compensation was provided in the form of gift cards, with a value of \$25 for individual interviews.

## Data Collection

In the first phase, we conducted a total of 16 online semi-structured interviews with performing artists (n=7) and mental health professionals (n=9) to gain insight into learning more about the challenges of performing artists face and gathering the key foundational concepts for the initial toolkit (board game) prototype design. The participant characteristics are displayed in Table1. Semi-structured interviews are a data collection method that combines open-ended and structured questions, allowing for in-depth exploration while maintaining flexibility for follow-up inquiries (Adams, 2015).

[Click to check Table1:](#) Demographics characteristics of research participants.

|                   | 7 Performing Artists                                                                                                                       | 9 Mental Health Professionals                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Background</b> | Movie Actress<br>Musical Theatre Performer<br>Dancer and Singer<br>Musician (Classic and Hip-Hop)<br>Stand-up Comedian<br>Circus Performer | Jungian Analyst<br>Jungian Researcher and Mentor<br>Psychotherapist<br>Counselor (specialized in performing arts)<br>Social Worker<br>Psychiatric Nurse |
| <b>Age</b>        | (18-29): 4<br>(30-45): 2<br>(45-65): 1                                                                                                     | (30-45): 4<br>(45-65): 3<br>(+65): 2                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Location</b>   | Canada (Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal)<br>USA                                                                                               | Canada (Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton)<br>USA<br>UK<br>Iran                                                                                    |

Individual interviews were conducted virtually on Microsoft Teams, where participants can discuss their personal experiences openly and privately. Conducting interviews online was accessible to a broader range of participants who might be otherwise

inaccessible due to physical distance constraints. [Interview questions for performing artists](#) were grounded on the Hero's Journey framework and explored topics related to the artists' journeys focusing on their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and any past engagement with psychological methods for support. [Interview questions for mental health professionals](#) explored topics related to their experiences with applying the Hero's Journey framework, insights into common psychological and emotional challenges faced by performing artists, effective evidence-based strategies in supporting artists' mental health, and the role of storytelling and narrative in mental health support.

## Data Analysis

We used qualitative inquiry, which is a research method that seeks to deeply understand people and their experiences (Marecek & Magnusson, 2020), to analyze the interview data. To ensure the consistency and high quality of qualitative research, rigor is necessary (McBrien, 2008). Therefore, we implemented several key strategies: 'Prolonged Engagement', building strong relationships with participants to establish trust and deeper understanding (Creswell, 2016); 'Member Checking', reviewing our findings with participants to ensure dependability and credibility (Long & Johnson, 2000); 'Peer Debriefing', engaging in discussions with peers not directly involved in the research to gain valuable external perspectives (Given, 2008); and a 'Reflexivity Strategy', applying the same critical analysis to our own practices, ensuring awareness of potential biases and their influence on our research (Hadi & José Closs, 2016).

To initiate data analysis, video recordings from the interview sessions were transcribed into text. The next step involved identifying recurring patterns within the transcribed data, a process often referred to as coding (Elliott, 2018). Coding enabled us to systematically categorize and organize the data, allowing for a deeper understanding of the information present (Burla et al., 2008). Delve software (qualitative data analysis software) was used for the process of coding the data. To enhance the reliability and validity of this coding process, we involved a second coder to help reduce the potential for bias and errors. This collaborative approach not only expedited the analysis but also brought diverse perspectives to the interpretation of the data. The intercoder agreement played a crucial role in ensuring that multiple researchers were interpreting the data consistently (Burla et al., 2008). Once the coding process was underway, we gradually transitioned into thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2023), which is identifying overarching themes within the coded data. Themes represent patterns, recurring ideas, or insights that emerge from the disassembled data, providing a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study. Thematic analysis was used as it aligns with the complexity of the research objectives, offers flexibility in addressing research questions, and emphasizes the identification of core themes within the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Finally, findings were documented in a comprehensive report, using narrative descriptions and data excerpts to discuss implications. Interpretation of the findings helped in gathering the key foundational concepts for designing the initial prototype of the toolkit (game board).

## Interviews with Performing Artists

We implemented a deductive coding approach for analysis. Analyzing qualitative data with deductive coding involves applying preexisting theories or frameworks (Tsang, 2019; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Our coding strategy was rooted in the stages of the hero's journey framework, with interview questions and pre-defined codes aligned with these narrative steps. Two coders analyzed the first half of the interviews separately, reconciling their coding decisions in a consensus meeting. This process repeated for the next half of the interviews, concluding with a final consensus meeting to solidify coding decisions. This systematic approach ensured a consistent interpretation of the data within the hero's journey framework, enhancing the reliability of our qualitative analysis. Following coding, thematic analysis was conducted to extract key themes from the coded data. Selected themes include:

1. Starting Point-Call to Adventure
2. Meeting a Mentor
3. Crossing the Threshold
4. Road of Trails
5. A Deep Transformation or Realization
6. The Ultimate Boon
7. Return and Share

### **Interviews with Mental Health Professionals**

We adopted an inductive coding approach to analyze the data from interviews with mental health providers. This method allowed us to identify emergent codes and themes without relying on pre-existing theories or frameworks (Tsang, 2019; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Thus, further explanation of this approach will be provided in the findings section.

## **Phase II: Co-Design**

### **Data Collection**

To complete the initial toolkit (board game) prototype's design, we decided to co-design some playing cards with the help of mental health professionals. Co-design method is aimed at fostering collaboration among participants, each contributing their unique backgrounds and expertise to develop innovative solutions (Zamenopoulos & Alexiou, 2018).

Due to time constraints and the busy schedules of the mental health professionals, we encountered challenges in scheduling a traditional co-design session. To address this, we innovatively transitioned to an online approach, creating a [shared document](#) to facilitate their involvement at their convenience. In this document, we presented a series of reflective questions aligned with each step of the Hero's Journey, derived from our comprehensive literature review and prior interviews. Participants were instructed to review these questions, retaining those they deemed beneficial and removing any they found less relevant. Additionally, they were asked to contribute new questions or suggestions to enhance the self-realization journey for performing artists. We involved 6

mental health professionals and Jungian analysts in the co-design process. This group included both participants from the initial phase of our research and new contributors. Participants involved in the research received a token of appreciation (\$35 gift card), for their time and contributions.

Despite the initial challenges, this approach effectively engaged the professionals in co-designing the reflective questions for the game's playing cards, contributing valuable insights and feedback to refine the board game's design.

## Phase III: Usability Testing

### Data Collection

The usability testing session was designed to evaluate the engagement, clarity, and impact of the board game. Participants include 6 performing artists across a range of disciplines, including comedy, classical and hip-hop music, musical theatre, dance and acting. Participants involved in the research received a token of appreciation (\$35 gift card), for their time and valuable contributions.

The session was structured around a series of guided activities and aimed to gather qualitative feedback on the game's design along with gameplay. The testing focused on the "Call to Adventure" step of the game, examining participants' interactions with the main elements of the game which are Reflective Question Cards and Scenario Cards, and gathering their detailed reflections. Participants were asked to open an online form including the Reflective Question Cards and the Scenario Cards relating to the "Call to Adventure" step of the game and pick 1 or 2 cards that resonate with them most and respond to that by typing in the field provided. In conclusion, the usability testing session provided valuable insights for refining our board game, confirming its engagement potential, and identifying improvements to enhance its effectiveness.

## FINDINGS

In this section, we summarize the findings gleaned from each phase of the research process.

### Findings Phase I: Interviews

#### **Findings from Interviews with Performing Artists**

Here we present the findings in accordance with the Hero's Journey framework:

#### Theme 1: Starting Point-Call to Adventure

The quotes vividly illustrate the diverse experiences of artists reaching their call to adventure. The selected quotes reveal diverse experiences, from life changes prompting a return to artistic pursuits to initial uncertainty about pursuing performing arts as a long-term career. Some interviewees discuss personal challenges, such as

alcoholism, isolation, or the struggle to find the right artistic path. Whether prompted by life changes, personal realizations, or external encouragement, each artist has a unique starting point. Some face challenges in their previous careers, others find unexpected paths through personal interests, and some follow a passion that organically evolved. The narratives unfold a range of ordinary worlds disrupted by a call to adventure, with artists reflecting on their decisions and contemplating the potential changes ahead.

*When I had my son, I had to get a regular job and I didn't have the skills. I got into recruitment for an agency. And then that led me to drink a lot because it was a very high burnout turnover. It's like you have a client. You have candidates and you gotta put bums in seats or else you're out... So this is 8 years of being hired and fired and I was at one of my son's dance competitions and I had the butterflies that I'm like... It dawned on me "I'm not too old to be an actor" like I was living in survival and now I'm starting to see the light. And I'm like, Oh my gosh. And with my therapist, I'm thinking about going back. "What's the worst?" She said. "What's the worst that can happen?" "What if I get a gig? What about this other recruiter job?" and then that snowballed. So I've only been back in the industry, but six years. (Emily, Actress)*

## Theme 2: Meeting a Mentor

The insights gathered from the quotes under the "Meeting a Mentor" theme underscore the profound and varied impact of mentorship on the artists' journeys. These mentors have diverse roles ranging from teachers, coaches, and tutors providing technical expertise, motivational encouragement, and assistance in navigating doubts and decision-making, therapists guiding mental and emotional well-being, to AA sponsors offering support for recovery and personal growth. Additionally, friends, family, and role models contribute significantly to emotional and mental support. These diverse mentorship experiences collectively highlight the indispensable role of mentors in fostering resilience, skill development, and the overall personal and professional growth of artists within the performing arts.

*I have someone who is an old guy and back in the days he was doing comedy. I couldn't afford to hire someone who could coach me at the time. So, I became friends with this guy here. He guides me on how to create good content, and how to remain professional, and he has been of so much help. You can get an opinion from a professional point of view and that is very important. (David, Standup Comedian)*

## Theme 3: Crossing the Threshold

The insights gleaned from the quotes within the "Crossing the Threshold" theme underscore pivotal moments in artists' journeys as they navigate transformative phases. The identified thresholds encompass artists embracing therapy to confront suppressed issues, exposing themselves to crowds and performing especially in the first performance, confronting audience reactions, taking on new roles in their performances or collaborating with unfamiliar groups, and leaving their home country and family. These pivotal moments represent symbolic departures from the familiar, involving significant commitments and confrontations with the unknown. The artists share their transformative journeys, acknowledging the challenges and fears associated with stepping out of their comfort zones.

*Another instance of stepping out of my comfort zone was when I had to work with the older people who had gained ground in the profession; more experienced people. I was a bit tense and shy. It was more like having a presentation in a school maybe in front of everyone. I was just so concerned about my performance and whether it would be good enough because they were more experienced than I was... In the beginning, I didn't have an option but to start working with them. I just had to tell myself: "I can do it as long as nobody will beat me! Yeah, Nobody will beat me up for doing anything!" I was like, OK, if these people are actually more experienced than I am, they will be able to correct me if I'm wrong or if I'm doing anything that's not in line... (Jessica, Musical Theatre Performer)*

#### Theme 4: Road of Trials

The artists share a common thread of facing and overcoming diverse challenges in their artistic journeys. These challenges encompass personal struggles, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, self-doubt, isolation (as individuals navigate the misconception that all artists lead joyous lives), and having been committed to suicide. External hurdles, such as financial constraints, discrimination, and the intensely competitive nature of the industry, further shape the narrative. Some quotes illustrate how these individuals navigate through their trials, often using adversity as a catalyst for personal and professional development. The journey is marked by a continuous process of learning, adaptation, and the pursuit of artistic excellence despite the hurdles encountered along the way.

*There were several challenges, I kind of left my family when I was 12, It was an opportunity where I cast and I got hired in a famous circus and it was an opportunity that I couldn't let down because that is something that a lot of people want. So I joined the team. But that being said, I had to be separated from my family from a very young age. Because joining a circus is like more than a full-time job. And then I needed to adjust myself to the high standards and act professionally because it wasn't no longer just a performance or competition. It's a strict standard and I needed to keep up with it while I was there, so at the beginning, definitely, that was a bit challenging because I was the youngest of the group, I was like a baby in the group, and at the same time my English wasn't great as well also it was my first time leaving my home country, leaving my parents and kind of living with my colleagues. So I think that adjustment was a bit of a challenge, but I was young at the time and I think I adapted pretty quickly and it definitely helped me in the long run in my adulthood, I think it's definitely shipped to who I am today. (Jennifer, Circus Performer)*

#### Theme 5: A Deep Transformation or Realization

Artists from diverse disciplines undergo profound shifts in their self-perception, artistic pursuits, and understanding of the world. Moments of realization act as catalysts for transformative journeys, breaking through barriers like self-doubt, addiction, or societal expectations. These revelations often lead to newfound passions, resiliency, and self-acceptance. The artists highlight the importance of embracing change, overcoming fears, and recognizing the significance of personal growth. Whether it's finding a platform for self-expression, gaining confidence on stage, or grappling with the reality of their chosen path, these stories collectively reveal the power of self-awareness and the continuous evolution inherent in the artistic journey.

*At first performing is always about entertainment, getting people to like you, to impress your jokes. But after a while, you realize that at some point you are also given a chance! Because not everyone gets a chance to stand in front of people, make fun of things, and teach people about those things. So I also get to educate the society, also get a chance to interact with the people and understand how life is with other people. When you are involved, you'll get to learn things you didn't know. So I also get a chance to learn... I think as an artist you need to realize that as much as it's about something that you're giving out to society, it is a self-actualization journey, you get to know yourself better and deeper. So that is not just about those people that you are giving out to. It's about yourself. What you are, how you can express your views, and who you are as a person. So I think art is not just for the audience. It's for you, for yourself, and it also builds you as much as it also builds the others. (David, Standup Comedian)*

### Theme 6: The Ultimate Boon

As these artists navigate the challenges of their respective fields, they discover the ultimate boon, not only in personal development but also in tangible achievements in the external realm. The resilience cultivated through setbacks becomes a stepping stone to success. For some, it's the realization of their artistic voice and the impact they can make on society. Others find it in the form of accolades, acknowledgments, or opportunities, such as prizes and victories in competitions, that not only validate their artistic pursuits but also serve as milestones in their journey. This duality of inner fortitude and external triumph illustrates the multifaceted nature of the artistic hero's journey, where the ultimate boon intertwines personal fulfillment with tangible, worldly accomplishments.

*I must say that now I see myself 10 times better than my previous self, there is a huge difference. And also I think my passion for stage performance has also increased. My approach to proper preparations for gigs has improved because I no longer see myself as a small-time artist anymore. I see myself as somebody who is gradually becoming the next rated, I must say, so I have to make proper preparations. (Daniel, Dancer and Singer)*

### Theme 7: Return and Share

What emerges from the quotes is a collective theme of artists embracing the "Return and Share" step of the hero's journey by imparting wisdom, experiences, and insights gained from their artistic journeys. Whether it's advocating for the importance of training and technique to excel in one's art, championing diversity and inclusivity in storytelling, or sharing personal stories of overcoming adversity, these artists recognize the value of giving back to their communities. They express a desire to inspire and motivate others, whether through mentoring, educating students on the importance of self-belief and resilience, or simply sharing the joy found in the performing arts. By embracing their roles as mentors, educators, and storytellers, these artists contribute to the collective growth and enrichment of the artistic landscape.

*I am an educator, so I just share my experiences with my pupil. Like if you want to step apart, if you really want to be recognized and known, you have to own up to it. You have to come out of that show. You have to make the world know that this is who you are. This is my gift, This is my skill. You have to own it. If you don't own it, no one's gonna own it for you. So*



*when you believe in yourself, when you actually believe in your abilities and your skills, that is when the world will actually see the good in you. (Robert, Hip-Hop Musician)*

The summary of findings from the data analysis from interviews with performing artists can be located in three tables. In Table2, identified themes and codes from the performing artists' interviews concerning each step of the hero's journey framework are detailed. Table3 provides a comprehensive overview of each performing artist's experience corresponding to each step of the hero's journey framework. Additionally, Table4 presents a summary of the points mentioned in performing artists' interviews related to each step of the hero's journey framework. These tables offer a structured representation of the insights gleaned from the interviews, aiding in the organization and synthesis of the qualitative data obtained from the participants.

[Click to check Table2:](#) Identified themes and codes from the performing artists' interviews.

| Starting point call to adventure                 |                                | Meeting the mentor                    | Crossing the threshold           | Road of trails                                     | A Deep Transformation or Realization (Apotheosis) | The Ultimate Boon                        | Return and Share                          |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Call to Adventure (Initial Motivations to Start) | Early Artistic Talents         | Teachers, Professors, and Coaches     | Fear and Doubt                   | Emotional and Mental pressures                     | Self-discovery and Acceptance                     | Validation and Recognition               | Personal Storytelling                     |
|                                                  | Intrinsic Motivation           | Psychotherapy as a Form of Mentorship | Professional and Personal Growth | Financial Struggles                                | Ongoing Nature of Transformative Experiences      | Opportunities for Growth and Advancement | Educational Engagement and Mentorship     |
|                                                  | External Motivation            | Role Models and Inspirations          |                                  | Discrimination and Diversity Challenges            | Societal Impact                                   | Personal Fulfillment                     | Artistic Expression as Knowledge Transfer |
|                                                  | Hobby to Career Transition     | Friend, Family, and Peer Support      |                                  | Criticism and Being Judged                         |                                                   |                                          |                                           |
| Refusal to call (Initial Doubt)                  | Doubt, Fear, and Survival Mode |                                       |                                  | Immigration, Leaving Family, and Language Barriers |                                                   |                                          |                                           |

[Click to check Table3:](#) Summary of each performing artist's experience relating to each step of the hero's journey framework. These has been used to design the 'Example Cards'.

|                                          | Starting point-call to adventure                                                                                                                                    | Meeting the mentor                                                                                                                              | Crossing the threshold                                                                                                                                                   | Road of trails                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | A Deep Transformation or Realization (Apotheosis)                                                                                                                                                                                              | The Ultimate Boon                                                                                                                                                | Return and Share                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Short description Of the code</b>     | Signifies the transition from their Ordinary World to the pivotal Call to Adventure, including any initial reluctance                                               | Signifies pivotal encounters with guiding figures shaping artistic quests                                                                       | Symbolic departure into the unknown, marking a commitment to transformation                                                                                              | Challenges and fears on the artistic journey                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Profound moments of transformation and realization (often internal)                                                                                                                                                                            | Highlighting significant achievements and realizations (often external)                                                                                          | Returning to the community and sharing wisdom gained on the journey                                                                           |
| <b>Emily Actress</b>                     | The call to adventure is realizing the possibility of returning to acting and embracing change.                                                                     | Found valuable mentorship in her AA sponsor, gaining strength and grounding, also in the therapists and a casting director                      | Sought a trauma therapist, symbolizing a departure from denial and the unknown realm of suppressed emotions.                                                             | Faces industry biases like limited opportunities, discrimination, and stereotyping, questions her identity, and battles financial pressures that forced her into a regular job                                                                       | Rediscovered acting, embraced sobriety, and found strength in self-care. Focused on breaking stereotypes through art and learned to be present and accepting in every moment.                                                                  | Embracing trauma, newfound sobriety becomes the ultimate boon, reigniting passion for the arts and inspiring diverse, meaningful content.                        | Promoting diversity, resilience, and mental health advocacy through storytelling for societal impact.                                         |
| <b>David Standup Comedian</b>            | Initiated by friends suggesting a talent and the subsequent step-by-step process of developing comedic skills                                                       | Benefited from the guidance of an older performer and a supportive circle of friends and family                                                 | Reflects on the challenges of performing and audience response, pushing them to constantly reevaluate and improve, a journey involving self-realization.                 | Faces challenges with audience feedback, self-doubt, financial constraints for proper training, and a struggle to gain support as a beginner in a field where personal opinions heavily influence content reception.                                 | Realized beyond entertainment, a comedian found a chance for self-actualization and societal education. Recognized his ability to connect with people during performances and gained valuable insights about himself in the process.           | Resilience in adversity, fostering personal growth, and transforming setbacks into opportunities for entertaining, educating, and interacting with the audience. | Encourages aspiring comedians to persevere and stay consistent in pursuing opportunities and views performances as educational opportunities. |
| <b>Robert Hip-Hop Musician</b>           | Started with a passion for music and explained the gradual progression from a lack of support to making personal progress                                           | Looked up to role models in the industry, the guidance of mentors, and support from family, friends, and coworkers                              | Overcame the fear of stage performances and stepped out of his comfort zone through regular exposure and personal growth                                                 | Faces hurdles in gaining recognition due to a competitive market and the difficulty of selling their work to make a living, underscoring challenges in self-promotion and overcoming stage fear at the beginning                                     | Experienced an epiphany on stage, leading to increased confidence, a shift in identity, and the understanding that belief in oneself is crucial for the world to recognize one's talents.                                                      | A journey from timidity to confident self-discovery, embracing achievements, and finding fulfillment as an impactful artist amidst industry challenges.          | He is an educator, shares experiences to inspire self-belief, teamwork, risk-taking, and self-care.                                           |
| <b>Jessica Musical Theatre Performer</b> |                                                                                                                                                                     | Had a guiding mentor for the performance. She also appreciates the role of therapy and meeting role models in the field.                        | Describes the experience of working with more experienced professionals, a situation that demanded a departure from their comfort zone.                                  | Encountered challenges including a disastrous first performance, stress management during the initial months, and coping with the impact of nighttime performances on sleep, leading to headaches.                                                   | After a couple of performances, she underwent a remarkable change, overcoming timidity, and realizing her worth, leading to a newfound confidence on stage.                                                                                    | Confidence, born from success, fostering joy and meaningful connections with industry role models.                                                               | Sharing personal stories to inspire confidence and talent exploration, already engaging with friends and peers.                               |
| <b>Daniel Dancer and Singer</b>          | Expresses the passion for dancing and singing since childhood, leading to a decision to become a dancer                                                             | Relied on a school tutor for guidance during performances, and values collaboration with peers for personal and professional development.       |                                                                                                                                                                          | Faces financial constraints, limited time for acting, racial challenges, securing gigs, dealing with long travel distances, and overcoming unexpected events                                                                                         | Shifted from a small-time artist mindset, now approaches performances with increased passion and meticulous preparation, viewing himself as an artist on the brink of broader recognition.                                                     | Profound personal growth, heightened stage passion, and enhanced professional skills propelled him from a novice to the next-rated aspirant.                     | Engages in sharing experiences with colleagues, reflecting on collaborations and their impact on personal growth and artistic development.    |
| <b>Sophia Musician Classic</b>           | Describes the journey from playing music as a hobby to realizing the potential for a future career. Reflects on the pivotal decision-making process in high school. | Supported by professors through competitions and the decision to study music abroad.                                                            | Shares the fear associated with starting a music career and immigrating alone to a new country to study music, both requiring a significant commitment to the unknown.   | Shares her experience with the emotional toll of competitions, grapples with self-doubt amid performance stress, and confronts loneliness and language barriers while immigrating for music education.                                               | Transformed from self-aggrandizement in competition to humble dedication, leading to success. Shifted mindset, focusing solely on the music during performances, detaching from audience opinions.                                             | Transforming competition losses into growth experiences, fostering future success, and refining cello-playing skills.                                            |                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Jennifer Circus Performer</b>         | Shares the transition into the circus world, not initially planning a long-term performing career but joining due to talent since childhood                         | Grew up with peers in the circus, benefited from a caring coach who provided valuable life advices, and shaped personal and professional growth | Discusses leaving her family at a young age to join the circus, a transformative experience involving adaptation and performing roles beyond their initial comfort zone. | Faced challenges including separation from family and adapting to high professional standards at a young age, coping with language barriers during world tours, managing a demanding workload in the circus, and juggling academic responsibilities. | Realized performing wasn't for her after 8 years, faced identity shifts relating to independency, learned the paradox of anticipated happiness, and recognized the value of providing an imaginative escape for audiences through performance. | Financial independence, prizes, circus success, fueled by hard work and gradual progress                                                                         | Recognizes the transformative power of performing arts, highlighting escapism, spontaneity, and past performances' impact on audiences.       |

[Click to check Table4:](#) Summary of the points that were mentioned in performing artists' interviews relating to each step of the hero's journey framework that has been used to design the 'Scenario Cards'.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Call to Adventure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissatisfaction with current job leading to search for fulfillment.</li> <li>• Realization of untapped potential and desire for change.</li> <li>• Questioning status quo and considering new possibilities.</li> <li>• Inspiration from friends suggesting artistic talent.</li> <li>• Positive feedback and encouragement from peers.</li> <li>• Actively seeking opportunities to showcase talent.</li> <li>• Recognition of passion and desire to pursue despite obstacles.</li> <li>• Introduction to art form during formative years.</li> <li>• Gradual realization of passion and talent.</li> <li>• Deliberation over career path and commitment to passion.</li> <li>• Childhood experiences shaping interest and skills.</li> <li>• Introduction to discipline and skills through training.</li> <li>• Long-term commitment to art form despite initial motivations.</li> <li>• Positive feedback and enjoyment indicating alignment with passion.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p><b>Refusal of the Call</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immersion in alternative career due to necessity.</li> <li>• Coping mechanism of drinking to handle burnout.</li> <li>• Resistance to returning to artistic pursuits.</li> <li>• Hesitation or self-doubt about pursuing performing arts.</li> <li>• Fear of rejection or failure.</li> <li>• Need for external validation.</li> <li>• Acknowledgment of industry challenges.</li> <li>• Doubt about the feasibility of a performance career.</li> <li>• Inner conflict over career choices.</li> <li>• Initial motivation not aligned with long-term goals.</li> <li>• Resistance to rigorous training.</li> <li>• Reluctance to fully commit due to uncertainties.</li> <li>• Pursuit of other interests before embracing a particular performing art.</li> <li>• Ambiguity or hesitation about career priorities.</li> <li>• Transition from hobby to profession without a plan.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p><b>Meeting the Mentor:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending psychotherapy sessions.</li> <li>• Making connections in the industry (with agency representatives and...)</li> <li>• Being mentored by older performers.</li> <li>• Relying on family for mental wellness.</li> <li>• Developing a small support group.</li> <li>• Relying on support from peers and colleagues.</li> <li>• Receiving advice during uncertainty.</li> <li>• Finding guidance through AA program.</li> <li>• Acknowledging team support.</li> <li>• Guidance in navigating the industry.</li> <li>• Finding support from school tutors.</li> <li>• Receiving mentorship during performances.</li> <li>• Collaborating for career growth.</li> <li>• Mentorship in competitions and decisions.</li> <li>• Encouragement during stressful times.</li> <li>• Transitioning to new mentors for each step.</li> <li>• Coach offering tailored advice.</li> <li>• Deepening relationships for personal growth.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p><b>Crossing the Threshold:</b></p> <p><b>Fears and Doubts Faced:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confronting past traumas and seeking therapy.</li> <li>• Facing self-doubt about talents.</li> <li>• Facing doubts about pursuing performing arts professionally.</li> <li>• Facing stage fright and self-doubt in auditioning.</li> <li>• Stepping out of the comfort zone despite the nervousness.</li> <li>• Confronting fears about the future.</li> <li>• Making big decisions like immigration to pursue the performing art profession</li> </ul> <p><b>Growth After Facing Fears:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening the door to personal growth and self-discovery.</li> <li>• Receiving encouragement and validation, reinforcing commitment.</li> <li>• Gradually overcoming fears through exposure and experience.</li> <li>• Embracing challenges and opportunities for self-improvement.</li> <li>• Embracing the journey despite uncertainties, driven by passion.</li> <li>• Adapting to performing lifestyle and gaining confidence and resilience.</li> <li>• Experiencing growth and personal development through facing challenges.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Road of Trials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of opportunities in the industry.</li> <li>• Family's undervaluation of the importance of training.</li> <li>• Struggles with mental health and loneliness.</li> <li>• Financial instability and lack of benefits.</li> <li>• Discrimination based on race, age, and gender.</li> <li>• Balancing artistic pursuits with financial stability.</li> <li>• Overcoming ingrained fears and self-doubt.</li> <li>• Fear of performing and audience reactions.</li> <li>• Crafting material that resonates with audiences.</li> <li>• Financial limitations hindering access to resources.</li> <li>• Initial struggle to gain support and recognition.</li> <li>• Difficulty making a living from art.</li> <li>• Competition and oversaturation in the market.</li> <li>• Lack of sponsorship and recognition.</li> <li>• Overcoming stage fright and fear of judgment.</li> <li>• Coping with stress and sleep deprivation.</li> <li>• Facing setbacks and failures.</li> <li>• Financial challenges related to education and equipment.</li> <li>• Time constraints affecting performance quality.</li> <li>• Experience of racial and ethnic discrimination.</li> <li>• Coping with stress and anxiety.</li> <li>• Facing competition and uncertainty.</li> <li>• Balancing academic responsibilities with performance training.</li> <li>• Dealing with criticism and learning from feedback.</li> <li>• Managing workload and exhaustion.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Apotheosis:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realization of personal and professional growth.</li> <li>• Prioritizing self-care and well-being.</li> <li>• Challenging stereotypes through art.</li> <li>• Recognizing performance's educational potential.</li> <li>• Discovering personal growth through performing.</li> <li>• Epiphany moments leading to increased confidence.</li> <li>• Overcoming performance anxiety with authenticity.</li> <li>• Transitioning from low self-esteem to confidence.</li> <li>• Acknowledging personal growth and perseverance.</li> <li>• Learning from setbacks and embracing improvement.</li> <li>• Transformation from anxiety to confidence in performance.</li> <li>• Realizing the need for personal change and growth.</li> <li>• Reflection on identity shifts and self-sufficiency.</li> <li>• Understanding the impact of performances on audiences.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>The Ultimate Boon:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing personal growth through adversity.</li> <li>• Advocating for diversity and representation.</li> <li>• Creating meaningful and educational content.</li> <li>• Rediscovering passion and curiosity.</li> <li>• Achieving self-acceptance and confidence.</li> <li>• Learning resilience and consistency.</li> <li>• Educating and impacting society through art.</li> <li>• Building capacity to withstand challenges.</li> <li>• Embracing authenticity and self-belief.</li> <li>• Finding happiness and fulfillment in art.</li> <li>• Gaining confidence and self-worth.</li> <li>• Expanding social connections in the arts.</li> <li>• Professional growth and passion.</li> <li>• Improved performance quality and collaboration.</li> <li>• Drawing inspiration from audience energy.</li> <li>• Learning from setbacks and improving skills.</li> <li>• Developing confidence and concentration.</li> <li>• Cultivating discipline and time management.</li> <li>• Embracing opportunities for personal growth.</li> <li>• Experiencing shifts in self-identity and independence.</li> <li>• Winning competitions and prizes.</li> <li>• Getting the opportunity to work in good and famous projects.</li> <li>• Gaining recognition and becoming well-known in the industry.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                               | <p><b>Return and Share:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting diversity in entertainment.</li> <li>• Breaking stigma through personal stories.</li> <li>• Integrating personal experiences into art.</li> <li>• Motivating new performers.</li> <li>• Using performance for social impact.</li> <li>• Educating aspiring artists.</li> <li>• Emphasizing self-belief and resilience.</li> <li>• Advocating for self-care.</li> <li>• Inspiring confidence in performers.</li> <li>• Sharing personal experiences for encouragement.</li> <li>• Networking for growth in the arts.</li> <li>• Reflecting on the value of entertainment.</li> <li>• Recognizing the impact of performances.</li> <li>• Advocating for live entertainment.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

## Findings from Interviews with Mental Health Professionals

We employed an inductive coding approach for analysis. Initially, we read three transcripts without preconceived codes, allowing emergent themes to surface without relying on pre-existing theories or frameworks (Tsang, 2019; Fereday& Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Subsequently, two coders generated codes and engaged in a discussion to establish the overall coding direction. We then analyzed the first half of the interviews

separately, reconciling our coding decisions in a consensus meeting. This process repeated for the next half of the interviews, concluding with a final consensus meeting to solidify coding decisions. This systematic approach ensured a consistent interpretation of the data, enhancing the reliability of our qualitative analysis. Following coding, thematic analysis was conducted to extract key themes from the coded data. Selected themes include:

1. Techniques and Approaches
2. Challenges Artists Face
3. Helpful Strategies for Artists
4. Storytelling and Narratives
5. Hero's Journey
6. Suggestions for Design

### Theme 1: Techniques and Approaches

The quotes under this theme reveal a nuanced and holistic approach to therapy, guided by principles of creativity, Jungian psychology, and tailored interventions. Mental health professionals utilize a variety of creative tools such as letter writing, dream work, and active imagination to facilitate self-expression and exploration, emphasizing the importance of accessing and understanding the unconscious mind. Therapeutic interventions are tailored to meet the unique needs of each client, with an emphasis on depth-oriented exploration to uncover underlying emotional patterns and experiences. Building rapport and trust is seen as essential, with professionals employing empathy, humor, and gentle exploration to create a safe space for clients to explore sensitive issues authentically. Overall, these insights highlight a comprehensive and individualized approach to therapy, integrating creative techniques with evidence-based modalities to address the complex interplay of psychological, emotional, and developmental factors in clients' lives.

*One of my teachers described it as, whatever you are trying to work on in therapy, for example, anxiety or fear of rejection, or whatever, you can't go right through it, right? Because that's when all the defenses come up. People get scared. As a therapist, you can't say 'Tell me about your anxiety. What's going on there?' So you have to work at the edges, you have to be more subtle and gentle and empathic ways. (Christopher, Counselor for artists and a former musician)*

### Theme 2: Challenges Artists Face

While performing artists share common human experiences and encounter similar mental and emotional challenges as others, they also contend with unique pressures inherent in their profession. Typically, performing artists do not seek therapy solely because of their careers; however, the demands of their work can introduce distinctive difficulties. Rejection, self-esteem issues, anxiety, and depression emerge as recurring themes, highlighting the intense scrutiny and vulnerability artists face in their pursuit of success. Moreover, the intertwining of self-identity with artistic achievement and the societal lack of recognition and support for artists exacerbate these challenges. Despite their creative talents, artists must navigate a complex landscape of personal and

professional struggles, making it crucial to address their mental well-being with understanding.

*One of the things I try to do is to help performers realize that they are not their work. Because with many artists, especially performers, start out as kids by doing something well and getting a lot of attention and validation. And so not only is it something that they do, but it feels like it's something that they are (it becomes part of their self-identity). So, it gets very difficult for them to separate it. (Christopher, Counselor for artists and a former musician)*

### Theme 3: Helpful Strategies for Artists

Although each individual is unique and requires personalized treatment, a notable theme emerging from the insights derived from the quotes is the emphasis on self-realization and introspection. Experts advocate for practices that encourage artists to delve into their inner world. These creative exercises serve as avenues for artists to confront their thoughts, emotions, and self-perceptions. Moreover, therapists highlight the importance of utilizing imagination and versatility inherent in artists' craft to facilitate deeper self-exploration. By encouraging artists to recognize their resilience, perseverance, and responsibility in navigating their careers, therapists aim to foster a greater sense of self-awareness and empowerment. Ultimately, these strategies guide artists on a journey toward uncovering their true selves beyond the confines of their artistic pursuits, leading to a deeper understanding and acceptance of their identities.

*To be honest, a lot of it is just validation, that anyone in that situation would feel rejected or would feel sad or disappointed that they might not have gotten a role that they wanted to. But since we're doing depth work, we can take it further and ask "When else did this happen in your life? When else have you felt like this?" It's very natural to feel sad or disappointed when you've been rejected, but often they trigger things that have deeper roots, they trigger past rejections. (Sarah, Psychotherapist and Art Therapist)*

### Theme 4: Storytelling and Narratives

Insights from the quotes underscore the profound impact of storytelling and narratives on mental health. Experts emphasize that understanding one's own story is pivotal for self-awareness and healing, regardless of whether the narrative reflects factual truth. Through the process of recounting life experiences, memories, fantasies, and desires, individuals gain insights into their identity, emotional triggers, and recurring patterns. This self-reflection enables them to recognize the roots of their struggles and understand how past experiences shape their present behaviors. Furthermore, storytelling serves as a therapeutic tool, offering individuals a means to articulate their feelings, make sense of their experiences, and gain a sense of agency over their lives. By engaging in narrative therapy, individuals bridge the gap between their emotional experiences and cognitive understanding, fostering insight and personal growth. Overall, the quotes highlight the transformative power of storytelling in fostering self-discovery, resilience, and mental well-being.

*Storytelling is central to mental health support. To me, narrative, telling your story, is the central thing that we do with talk therapy as opposed to medication ketamine treatments or*



*all the other EMDR, which I think is valid. (Christopher, Counselor for artists and a former musician)*

### Theme 5: Hero's Journey

Insights from the quotes on the Hero's Journey highlight the diverse interpretations and applications of this archetypal framework in personal development and therapy. Experts emphasize that while the Hero's Journey offers a widely recognized pattern for understanding narratives and transformations, it is not the sole model available. Various individuals may embark on distinct paths of self-discovery and growth, with their journeys sometimes deviating from the traditional hero narrative. However, the framework's flexibility allows for interpretation based on individual circumstances and preferences, indicating that resonance with the Hero's Journey may vary from person to person. Furthermore, practitioners note that the Hero's Journey archetype often intersects with other psychological concepts, such as Jungian individuation, existentialism, and gender identity, contributing to a richer understanding of personal narratives. Overall, the quotes underscore the importance of adaptability and openness in utilizing the Hero's Journey framework effectively within therapeutic contexts.

*The Hero's Journey is an archetype inherent to the human experience. It represents a universal pattern of personal growth and transformation, yet its interpretation can vary widely depending on individual circumstances. It's like saying that all humans have noses; the nose is an archetype. We're not specifying the type of nose, noses can vary in shapes, sizes, and colors, but all humans have noses. Similarly, everyone experiences some form of the hero's journey on their own terms. (Michael, Jungian Analyst and Researcher)*

### Theme 6: Suggestions for Design

Insights from the quotes regarding suggestions for design reveal a consensus among experts on the potential efficacy of utilizing games as tools for self-reflection and personal growth, particularly within therapeutic contexts. There's an acknowledgment that a stepping stone into self-inquiry is beneficial, as most people initially engage with books before seeking therapy sessions. However, it's recognized that books may not appeal to everyone, thus emphasizing the necessity for innovative approaches. Additionally, suggestions for design underscore the value of flexibility and inclusivity, recognizing that different individuals may resonate with diverse approaches based on their unique psychological journeys and preferences. Moreover, the idea of incorporating reflective elements post-gameplay emerges as a significant aspect, allowing players to delve deeper into their experiences and insights, thereby enhancing the overall educational and therapeutic benefits of the game.

*As long as the game invites the person to connect to themselves more than to connect to something outside, it can be useful. If the questions along the way can be answered out of their own responses and there is no right answer, then yes, that can be helpful. Because the hero's journey is not something that's outside of us, so if the game invites a certain self-questioning, I think it can be a very good idea... Most people start with reading books and then we end up in psychotherapy sessions. It doesn't need to be books. It could be a game, it could be many things, but it's a sort of stepping stone into self-inquiry and, in that*

*sense, the games are a very good idea. (Peter, Jungian Analyst and former professional dancer)*

The findings from the data analysis of interviews with mental health professionals are summarized in Table5, which presents the identified themes and codes. Additionally, the design features based on the interviews with mental health professionals are presented in Table6.

[Click to check Table5:](#) Identified themes and codes from the mental health professionals' interviews.

| Techniques and Approaches           | Challenges Artists Face             | Helpful Strategies for Artists          | Storytelling and Narratives           | Hero's Journey                    | Suggestions for Design            |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Integration of Creative Tools       | Rejection and Acceptance            | Creative Practices for Self-Exploration | Self-Exploration Through Storytelling | Interpretive Flexibility          | Self-Reflection and Connection    |
| Jungian Influence                   | Self-Esteem and Self-Identity       | Harnessing Imagination and Versatility  | Agency and Insight                    | Self-Discovery and Transformation | Openness and Flexibility          |
| Tailored and Depth-Oriented Therapy | Anxiety and Depression              | Resilience and Responsibility           | Archetypal Exploration                | Indirect Approach in Therapy      | Concrete and Practical Approach   |
| Building Rapport and Trust          | Perfectionism and Procrastination   | Therapeutic Alliance and Rapport        | Trauma Processing                     | Use of Metaphors and Stories      | Psychoeducation and Guidance      |
| Holistic Approach                   | Social and Developmental Challenges | Self-Identity and Validation            | Therapeutic Benefits                  | Acknowledgment of Diversity       | Post-Game Reflection              |
|                                     | Career Longevity and Transition     |                                         |                                       |                                   | Differentiated Versions           |
|                                     | Societal Support and Recognition    |                                         |                                       |                                   | Integration with Therapy Sessions |
|                                     | Therapy and Self-Expression         |                                         |                                       |                                   |                                   |
|                                     | Over-identification with Success    |                                         |                                       |                                   |                                   |

[Click to check Table6:](#) Design features based on interviews with mental health professionals.

| Quote from a mental health professional                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Design feature                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Whatever you are trying to work on, you can't go right through it. Because that's when all the differences come up. So you have to work at the edges... (Christopher, Counselor for artists and a former musician)</i>                                                                                                                 | Through an indirect approach using metaphors and storytelling in the Hero's Journey framework, we navigate nuanced emotional exploration.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <i>It is wise to include some open-ended questions instead of telling the player to take some specific actions or do something... As much as the game can help the player to reflect on their own journey, I would think it would be helpful. Include reflecting questions... (Peter, Jungian Analyst and former professional dancer)</i> | We featured open-ended questions on the playing cards for each step to encourage reflection rather than prescribing actions, fostering a personalized and introspective experience. Additionally, a dedicated notebook called 'The Journey Journal' (Image1) empowers players to journal insights and personal reflections throughout their journey. |
| <i>Not every question is going to connect with every person. So. It's almost like, you need to have a number of questions and, ask the individual to find the question that resonates with them. And answer that question... (William, Jungian Analyst)</i>                                                                               | The game features varied questions on playing cards, letting players choose what resonates. They can skip or revisit, ensuring customized engagement. Emphasizing in the guide booklet that questions are open-ended, meant for thoughtful exploration, not quick responses.                                                                         |
| <i>As long as the game, invites the person to connect to themselves more than to connect to something outside, it can be useful. If the questions along the way can be answered out of their own responses and there is no right answer, that can be helpful... (Peter, Jungian Analyst and former professional dancer)</i>               | The questions on playing cards will prompt responses based on personal experiences. Emphasizing in the guide booklet that there are no right or wrong answers, no winning or losing, we aim to create a space for meaningful self-discovery and reflection.                                                                                          |
| <i>...and consider an opportunity like after they played, for some reflection...you know, as a post reflection, I think it's important. (Elizabeth, Social Worker)</i>                                                                                                                                                                    | We included a 'My Story Book' for players to write their narratives at the end of their journey. Additionally, 'The Journey Journal' allows them to write down concise notes for each step, adding a personalized touch to the game (Image1).                                                                                                        |

In summary, the data analysis from both the interviews with performing artists and mental health professionals provides invaluable insights that guided the tailoring and design of the Hero's Journey board game for performing artists. The themes that emerged from the artists' interviews helped in crafting each step of the game, in the hero's journey framework, to resonate with the needs and experiences of artists, ensuring authenticity and relevance. Specifically, the results from interviews with performing artists were instrumental in designing the 'Example Cards' (Table3) (Image3), and the 'Scenario Cards' (Table4) (Image3), making these elements of the game deeply reflective of the artists' real-life experiences, challenges and triumphs. Additionally, the data from mental health professionals' interviews informed the game's design to facilitate self-reflection, self-realization, and mental well-being among artists. By incorporating therapeutic techniques, addressing challenges faced by artists, and promoting self-expression and growth, the board game aims to be a valuable tool for artists on their journey toward self-discovery and professional development. Furthermore, insights from mental health professionals guided the selection of game components (Table6) (Image2), ensuring that the game provides meaningful support and guidance to artists as they navigate their artistic careers.

## Findings Phase II: Co-Design

The collaborative effort with mental health professionals in the co-design process yielded valuable insights and contributions, reflected in Table7. This table presents thoughtfully crafted reflective questions for each step of the game. Incorporated into the 'Reflective Question Cards' (Table7) (Image3), these questions serve as a pivotal component in guiding players through their self-realization journey, enriched by our contributors' collaborative effort.



[Click to check Table 7:](#) 'Reflective Question Cards' that have been co-designed for each step of the game with mental health professionals.

|                               |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                               |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Call to Adventure             | What new opportunities have emerged recently?                                                             | What dreams or aspirations have I been holding back on pursuing?                                                                         | How do I envision my artistic journey evolving from this point?                                                             | Who or what inspires me to embark on this new adventure?                                      | What changes or challenges am I facing in my life right now that could be signaling a need for growth or transformation? | What am I most curious about at this time?<br><br>What has been increasing my energy these days? Or, where is the energy in my life? | When I consider a certain direction, what does it feel like? Scary? excited? Or just a feeling like it is something I must do?                                             |
| Refusal of the Call           | What underlying fears or doubts are causing me to hesitate in answering this call to adventure?           | How do I envision my life unfolding if I choose to ignore this call to adventure?                                                        | Have I encountered similar challenges in the past, and if so, how did I overcome them?                                      | What is distracting me from answering the call? Responsibilities? Worries? Assumptions?       | What do I gain in not undertaking this adventure? What do I lose in potentially reaching my goal?                        | What are my fears and doubts trying to teach me?                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Meeting the mentor            | What specific areas of my artistic practice do I feel would benefit most from mentorship or guidance?     | Who are the individuals in my life that I look up to or admire for their expertise or guidance?                                          | How do I approach seeking mentorship, and what steps can I take to establish meaningful connections with potential mentors? | How do I navigate the balance between seeking mentorship and maintaining my autonomy?         | If I could have any mentor in the world (alive or dead), who would it be? Why?                                           | Beyond the artistic sphere do I nourish the spiritual sphere?                                                                        | Do I feel that I deserve a certain mentor? Am I willing to step out of my comfort zone to reach out to the mentor?                                                         |
| Crossing the threshold        | What specific fears or doubts am I grappling with as I step into this new phase?                          | What internal or external factors do I believe are holding me back at this stage?                                                        | Can I recall a time in the past when I stepped out of my comfort zone, and what was that experience like for me?            | What personal/internal resources will help me to cross the threshold? What external supports? | What am I most afraid of as I step into this new phase? How can I help myself embrace the unknown?                       | What could support my transition from the known to the unknown? Would a ritual help me with letting go of the known?                 |                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Road of trials                | What are some possible challenges and obstacles in your journey?                                          | What are some internal barriers, such as self-doubt or fear of failure, presenting challenges to my journey?                             | When have I encountered similar barriers in the past, and how did I navigate through them?                                  | Is there a metaphor that describes the challenges I am facing?                                | Is there an important phrase, or image that can help me as I go through the road of trials?                              | As I confront these trials, what will help me to stay the course?                                                                    | When I have overcome some challenges in the past, what did I learn?<br><br>How do I embrace a challenge? How do I recognize its teaching?                                  |
| Abyss (facing deepest fears)  | What are the deepest fears or insecurities that I'm facing as I confront this critical moment in journey? | How do these fears manifest in my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and how are they holding me back from fully embracing my potential? | In what ways do these fears reflect underlying beliefs or assumptions about myself, my abilities, or the world around me?   | Is there something I must let go of in order to move forward on this journey?                 | What is it that makes confronting my fears worthwhile? What do I hope to achieve?                                        | What beliefs or habits or actions are no longer serving me? What will help me to let go?                                             |                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Apotheosis (deep realization) | What internal shifts or realizations have I experienced on this journey that impacted my sense of self?   | Do I see any significant changes or shifts within myself or my approach to life as a result of this journey thus far?                    | In what ways have I started to see beyond the surface of my experiences, gaining glimpses of a deeper reality?              | Can I recall specific instances where I felt this shift in perspective?                       | What image represents the feeling of transformation for me?                                                              | What other characters in movies, plays, or books have had deep realizations? Which characters do I feel connected to right now?      | What perspective have I gained as part of this journey?<br><br>Does this realization invite me to take a certain life direction? Have I been provided with a life purpose? |
| The Ultimate Boon             | What skills, knowledge, or insights have I gained that now seem invaluable to me?                         | How has this journey changed my understanding of success and fulfillment within my art?                                                  | How have the obstacles I've faced changed my artistry or my view of the world?                                              | How has my relationship with my art transformed?                                              | What do I want to take away from this adventure? What is the greatest gift this journey has given me?                    | What do I wish I could have told myself at the beginning of this journey now that I am at its end?                                   | Have I develop a renewed understanding of my limits and potentials?                                                                                                        |
| Return and Share              | In what ways can I use my experiences to contribute to my community or the broader art world?             | How do I want my art to influence or inspire others?                                                                                     | What message do I hope to convey through my art now?                                                                        | How do I want to support others who are on their own journey?                                 | How do I balance supporting others and supporting myself?                                                                |                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                            |
| New Ordinary                  | How am I different from when I began this journey?                                                        | Which part of this journey was the most meaningful to me? Which part was the most challenging? The most enjoyable?                       | How has this journey changed my inner story about myself?                                                                   | How do I view my art and the world differently now than before my journey began?              | How will I integrate the things I have learned into my daily life?                                                       | What is new in the way I approach my art?                                                                                            | Which challenges do I recognize as my own? How do I envision my future while considering these challenges?                                                                 |

## Findings Phase III: Usability Testing

This section presents the results of the usability testing session and includes the recommendations for enhancing the game's design.

### Common Themes and Insights:

Based on participants' card selections and their responses, these common themes emerged:

- **Challenges and Transformation:** All participants identified challenges in their current situations, ranging from financial issues to adapting to new environments. This aligns with the game's intention to stimulate reflection on personal challenges as catalysts for transformation.
- **Future Aspirations:** There's a common desire among participants to leave an impact, whether through teaching, performing, or simply trying their best. This

demonstrates the game's efficacy in encouraging artists to articulate long-term goals and visions.

- **Encouragement and Support:** The importance of encouragement, either from self or others, is a recurring theme among responses. This suggests the game successfully prompts reflection on the role of support in pursuing artistic passions.

### **Specific Feedback and Possible Improvements:**

- **Engagement with Cards:** While most participants engaged deeply with the 'Reflective Question Cards', there was a mixed response to 'Scenario Cards'. Jessica, the musical theatre performer claimed that the 'Scenario Cards' were the most engaging part for her while by reviewing the collected responses after the session we figured out that for Daniel, the dancer and singer, some 'Scenario Cards' didn't resonate, indicating a need for more general scenarios that can appeal to a wider range of artists. In response to this feedback, we also added the 'Custom Adventure Card' (Image3) for each step of the game, allowing players to craft their own scenarios based on their unique experiences. This flexibility acknowledges that each individual has a unique life journey, ensuring that the game remains meaningful for all players.
- **Engagement and Emotional Connection:** When we asked the participants how they felt after playing the game, they expressed positive sentiments, noting that it was fun and engaging. One participant specifically mentioned that it evoked meaningful memories. This underscores the game's potential for deep emotional resonance and personal reflection.
- **Ease of Participation:** No participants reported challenges or limitations during the exercise, indicating the game's accessibility and user-friendly design at this stage.
- **Inclusion of Visual Elements:** One participant suggested adding pictures to enhance engagement, a feature planned for the final design to enrich the game's visual appeal and immersive quality (Image2).
- **Clarification on Scope of Reflection:** During the session, there was a question about whether reflections should focus solely on professional challenges or include broader life experiences. This feedback emphasizes the importance of providing clearer guidance on considering all aspects of an artist's life in the game's narrative. We will address this by providing clarification in the guide booklet accompanying the game.

## **DESIGN DEVELOPMENT**

This section highlights the development and refinement of our board game, illustrating how we integrated theoretical insights with practical design elements. Our goal was to create a game that is both engaging and reflective, providing a deep, meaningful experience for players. We detail the key design choices that transformed our conceptual framework into a unique educational and therapeutic tool, focusing on the game's fundamental components and their roles in enhancing player interaction and

self-discovery. Table8 and Image2 showcase the various pieces of the game, offering a visual representation and detailed breakdown of each component.

[Click to check Table8:](#) Components of the board game and their functions.

| Piece               | Description                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spiral Staircase    | Represents different steps of the Hero's Journey.                                                                                                                                             |
| Pawn                | As players progress, they move the pawn along the staircase.                                                                                                                                  |
| Board               | Depicts the 'ordinary world' of the Hero's Journey framework, symbolizing the busy everyday life before starting a new journey.                                                               |
| Box                 | Accommodates all game pieces for easy storage and transport.                                                                                                                                  |
| Playing Cards       | Main elements of gameplay, offering examples, education, reflective questions and scenarios based on the Hero's Journey framework, facilitating self-discovery and growth (Table9) (Image3).  |
| The Journey Journal | A notebook for players to record their reflections on the playing cards, enhancing self-awareness and personal growth.                                                                        |
| Guide Booklet       | Provides instructions on gameplay and Hero's Journey.                                                                                                                                         |
| My Story Book       | Allows players to write down their own Hero's Journey narrative after playing the game, promoting self-reflection and potentially inspiring artistic creations based on personal experiences. |



Image2: Final prototype of the game, complete with all included pieces.

## The Spiral Staircase

Through our literature review we learned that a nuanced understanding of the Hero's Journey was more than a mere cyclical narrative. Rather, we envisioned it as a dynamic process of continuous transformation, akin to ascending a three-dimensional spiral staircase (Image2). This conceptualization informed our decision to use the spiral staircase as the central motif of the game, symbolizing the hero's journey of self-discovery and growth. Complementing this structural metaphor, we figured a need to develop corresponding playing cards for each stage of the journey, allowing players

to interact dynamically with the game's narrative elements and deepen their engagement. As the player progresses along the spiral staircase, on each step, they encounter a set of corresponding playing cards (Table9)(Image3). Players are encouraged to write their reflections on each card in the 'Journey Journal' (Table8)(Image2). The essence of this interaction is that the cards are not merely to be read and set aside; they serve as profound opportunities for deep reflection. In this way, the game transcends traditional gameplay, acting as a powerful tool for self-inquiry.

## Playing Cards

Playing cards are the most important element of the board game. Each game step comprises approximately 20 playing cards, distributed among six distinct types, designed to engage players in the intricacies and wisdom of each stage. As mentioned before, the process of developing these cards leveraged insights from various stages of our research, ensuring a rich and immersive experience. Table9 displays the six types of cards designed to enhance the player experience, detailing the source of the card content and the purpose of each card type (Image3).

[Click to check Table9:](#) Playing card types, sources of design and purposes.

| Card Type                   | Source                                                | Purpose                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                 |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-Step Explanation Cards    | Literature review                                     | Provide a clear explanation of each Hero's Journey step, helping players understand its importance and implications.                                                                        | Facilitating Player Understanding of the Meaning of Each Step   |
| 2-Example Cards             | Artists interviews (Table3) and literature review     | Use real-life artist experiences and well-known narratives to make each step relatable and understandable.                                                                                  |                                                                 |
| 3-Quote Cards               | Literature review                                     | Offer wisdom and insight through relevant quotes, enriching the player's journey.                                                                                                           |                                                                 |
| 4-Reflective Question Cards | Co-designed with mental health professionals (Table7) | Engage players in self-reflection through carefully crafted questions, enhancing their journey toward self-realization.                                                                     | Facilitating Players' Understanding of the Meaning of Each Step |
| 5-Scenario Cards            | Artists interviews (Table4)                           | Present players with scenarios they might face as a performing artist, guiding reflection on their own experiences.                                                                         |                                                                 |
| 6-Custom Adventure Cards    | The playe                                             | Encourage players to imagine and reflect on their own scenarios by acknowledging that each individual has a unique life journey, ensuring that the game remains meaningful for all players. |                                                                 |





Image3: The six types of playing cards included in each step of the game; these examples are for the 'Meeting a Mentor' step.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to develop a self-inquiry toolkit in the form of a single player board game for performing artists, focusing on exploring the Hero's Journey in their personal and professional lives. Through an extensive literature review and participatory research involving performing artists and mental health professionals, we refined the toolkit's design across sequential phases. Insights from literature and research phases guided the development process, while usability testing ensured the toolkit's practical effectiveness. This comprehensive approach led to the creation of a self-inquiry board game that helps performing artists to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of their personal and professional journeys.
- Identify and navigate the challenges and obstacles they might encounter.
- Develop resilience, self-reflection, and self-awareness.

- Explore their creative potential and explore new artistic directions.
- Cultivate a holistic approach to personal and professional well-being.
- Connect with a supportive community of artists on similar journeys.

## Strength of the Study

This section explores the broader implications of our study within practical, research, and design contexts:

- **Practice:** Our research findings have significant implications for practitioners in the fields of performing arts and mental health. By understanding the transformative nature of the Hero's Journey framework and its application in self-inquiry, practitioners can adopt similar approaches in their therapeutic interventions and creative practices. The incorporation of narrative-based interventions and visual representations, such as the spiral staircase model, can enhance the effectiveness of therapeutic processes and promote personal growth among individuals.
- **Research:** Our study contributes to the existing body of research by providing insights into the intersection of narrative therapy, self-inquiry, and board game design. The utilization of a multidisciplinary approach sheds light on new avenues for exploring the therapeutic potential of storytelling and gamification in promoting psychological well-being and resilience. Future research could delve deeper into the long-term effects of engaging with self-inquiry board games on individuals' mental health outcomes and creative expression.
- **Design:** The design implications of our study underscore the importance of creating engaging and user-centric tools for self-reflection and personal development. By integrating elements of storytelling, visual representation, and interactive gameplay, designers can facilitate meaningful experiences that resonate with users and foster self-awareness. Furthermore, our findings emphasize the value of co-design processes and user feedback in refining prototype designs to meet the diverse needs and preferences of target audiences.

## Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights gained from our research, several limitations warrant consideration.

- **Data Collection:** The self-report nature of the data collected through interviews and usability testing may be subject to biases and social desirability effects, which could affect the accuracy of the findings.
- **Sample Size:** The sample size were limited, affecting the generalizability of our results. Future studies could benefit from larger and more varied samples to enhance the robustness of the research outcomes.

- **Co-Design Collaboration:** Due to time constraints and the busy schedules of mental health professionals, scheduling traditional co-design sessions proved challenging. As a result, an online approach was adopted, which may have limited the depth of collaboration and the breadth of perspectives represented in the design process.
- **Usability Testing Environment:** The user testing session was conducted online, not with the physical board game, which might have influenced the interaction dynamics and user engagement.
- **Usability Testing Session Duration:** The testing session duration was only 1 hour and 45 minutes, whereas the game is designed to be played over extended periods, potentially spanning days, months, or even years. This is crucial since self-inquiry is a prolonged and continuous journey that cannot be fully explored in a brief session.
- **Prototype Validation:** While our prototype underwent iterative refinement based on user feedback, further usability testing and validation studies are needed to assess its effectiveness in achieving therapeutic outcomes and promoting self-reflection.
- **Framework Limitations:** Although the Hero's Journey provides a robust framework for self-discovery and transformative experiences, it is not the sole path to such insights. As there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution in personal development. This model may resonate deeply with some individuals, while others might find alternative narratives or frameworks more aligned with their personal experiences and needs.

By addressing these limitations and building upon the strengths of our research, future endeavors can advance our understanding of the potential of self-inquiry board games as innovative tools for self-discovery, personal growth and psychological well-being.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our research and design project aimed to create a self-inquiry toolkit based on the Hero's Journey framework to facilitate self-reflection and personal growth among performing artists. Through an iterative process informed by literature reviews, interviews with both performing artists and mental health professionals, co-design, and usability testing; we developed a prototype board game that offers a tangible and engaging way for performing artists to explore their life journeys. By integrating mental health professionals' expertise and real-life experiences of performing artists into the game's design, we sought to create a tool that resonates with its target audience, providing them with a platform to reflect on their challenges, triumphs, and aspirations. While acknowledging the limitations of our study, our project represents a meaningful step towards empowering performing artists in their personal and professional journeys. Moving forward, we envision continued refinement of the toolkit based on feedback from a broader and more diverse audience, as well as collaboration with mental health professionals to validate its therapeutic benefits. Ultimately, our goal is to provide

individuals with a transformative tool that facilitates deep self-reflection, growth, and well-being.

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