1 **‘How To Call In Sick Proposal’**

2 ‘How to Call in Sick’ is an interactive story-choice game designed to simulate you, the employee, messaging your manager to let them know that you will not be able to come in today, due to being sick. In this case, you have suffered a server anxiety attack and suicidal ideation, and so, going to your 13-dollar-an-hour job at McDonald’s, doesn’t seem like the mentally healthy thing to do today.

3 The game starts with recounting your morning, and then presents you with three main options on how you want to go about calling in sick, with each pathway designed to be a 5-minute playthrough accounting for each sub-choices that arise in the various interactions you can have with the manager. Its digital design emulates a text message conversation, while each option is a text that is sent by you, while the subsequent manager’s messages change based on your own. This lets you, the player, change the story’s outcome, like you would in a realistic conversation to your boss, and reflect on what the true ‘good’ ending is as you play through it.

The first option is [[tell your manager about your crippling anxiety]]. In this one, you are honest, adapting your usual people-pleaser and apologetic demeanour towards your own mental illness and the fact that you cannot work despite having a very valid reason to not. A sub-choice that presents itself in this pathway is telling the manager your anxiety thoughts while still using your polite, nonconfrontational-attitude, to which they will dismiss you anyway. It ends with you either agreeing to go to work, where your objective: call in sick for work, has failed; or starting the day again.

The second option is [[keep it short because you don't owe her shit]]. In this one, you admit you are taking a sick day without letting your manager know why. The manager gets more and more frustrated with your lack of ‘honesty’ and calls you out on the fact you aren’t physically sick. You are staying true to yourself in this one, refusing to bend to a toxic work lifestyle that is putting your own mental health in jeopardy, yet your ‘insubordination’ gets you fired. You’ve achieved your objective, but at what cost? At this point game lets you play again, because maybe getting fired and having no income wasn’t the best outcome for you.

The third option is lying. You don’t think your manager will see ‘mental health’ as a valid reason to miss work, and so you tell them you are in the hospital instead. They ask for proof, for a medical certificate, or a picture of yourself in the ward, and so, you decide the only way to save your job is to actually put yourself in the hospital. You purpose break your arm, again completing your objective, but at what cost? And if you are willing to do such a thing to proves that you are sicker than you, does that not make you even more mentally worse?

4 All in all, there is no ‘good ending’ no matter how many times you replay the day and start the conversation different and choose different messages to send, despite the multiple endings. This game is designed to highlight the flaws in modern workplaces and how mental health is never seen as a good enough excuse to take time off or call in sick. Work has become the most important think in our lives because our livelihoods are entirely dependent on us earning an income. With the way our world is structured, we wouldn’t be able to live with one. It’s terrifying how far people of the system have to go to, either, a) hurt themselves further to be taken seriously by proving they are ‘sick enough’, or b) let their health suffer as a result regardless if the illness is mental or physical. Workers are forced to make this unhealthy and toxic ultimatum, because the only other choice is to lose their job, sacrificing income, housing, food, education etc. If I were to link this small choice game back to the ideology, it would be that this capitalistic-like life-revolves-around-work mentality is deeply flawed. I want to aim to highlight its absurdity, its inequality, and inhumane-nature, urging the those who have to work in these conditions to rethink how they view their own work-balance and that is affecting their own wellbeing; as well as, the ‘problem’ -- people in power who lack empathy and reasoning, and are continuing to fester this toxic ideology that work is everything at the expense of everything else.