The Bruin Review

Issue XIV

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WHY ARE YOU STILL FRATTING?

By Alyssa Murray

"Fratting" describes groups of college girls spending a night out hopping between frat houses to dance to 2000s songs, get hit on by men soaked through with beer, and hold their friends' hair back while they throw up their (likely roofied) drink. The negative reputation of frat parties conjures an image of women corralled into a sweaty testosterone den so frat brothers can 'take their pick' of the litter. Certainly, this doesn't seem like something you'd find in the 21st century. Now, it is universally understood that women deserve to be treated as people respected for more than their sexual value to men. This discrepancy between feminist values and the way women are treated within frat culture calls into question the role of the modern frat party. Even though frats' reputations aren't aligned with today's values, their parties haven't been abandoned as part of an archaic, patriarchal system. Critics of frats point to the trope of the easily-manipulated, cheap-thrill-seeking girl that gets taken advantage of, but this mindset becomes dangerous when it claims that the so-called 'party girl' willingly puts herself in danger by partying in the first place. It reifies the role of frat parties as a vessel for the mistreatment of women and shames the victims of this system rather than inspiring change. A better approach to fratting than tearing into girls that take part in it is acknowledging the meaningful role frat parties play in fostering a sense of social belonging. This more nuanced attitude toward fratting can open doors to adequately facing harmful aspects of fraternity culture.

The case for fratting hinges on understanding why frats are still popular even though they reduce girls to their sexual utility. There's social acceptance bundled up with fratting. The feeling of being part of a crowd and the bonding experience from going out with friends makes us willing to look past our moral qualms with frats when we participate in them. Humans are inherently social creatures, and evolution has genetically predisposed us to gather because of the adaptive function of being in a group. Being around other people gives us a greater chance of survival since there are more opportunities for protection and resource-pooling. Of course, in modern-day society we don't need to be worried about basic tenants of survival on a day-to-day basis. However, positive emotions are still brought up from social connection because of our evolutionary history. Going to frat parties is just another form of gathering that we use to fulfill our need for social acceptance. The basic function of a frat party cannot be invalidated just because it is contained within a system with a history of abuse and misogyny. Despite the damaging elements of Greek life that provide spaces where drinks are often drugged and girls are taken advantage of, the routine of pregaming, walking down frat row, and hopping between parties is appealing because it makes us feel like part of a group (even if we don't particularly agree with the group we're a part of).

One could argue that this basis of analysis isn't sound because it looks at fratting in a vacuum. After all, other college parties may achieve the same social acceptance needs in a safer, more engaging environment. However, it is idyllic at best to think that groups of college girls will stop going to the closest, cheapest party at their disposal. Frat parties are the easiest option for many students to engage with and are often safer than other options like clubbing and raves. Even smaller 'fundragers' that are hosted near campus are harder to find out about and usually cost an entrance fee to get in, taking away from the easy social fix that comes from frat parties. For all of frats' shortcomings, they are still free, within walking distance, and require a student ID for entrance. This dampens the danger of predatory people taking advantage of impressionable college students, a concern that is especially press-

ing in a city with such infamous parties as Los Angeles. Also, frats only letting girls into their parties lowers the chances of random guys with malintent being there: though it's a common criticism that frats don't let guys into their parties so they won't have competition for getting girls, it also keeps out strangers that could make girls feel uncomfortable. This is not a guarantee that sexual abuse will not take place, but this practice both gives girls relative confidence that everyone in a frat party is a student and places the burden of responsibility for partygoers' safety exclusively on frat members.

Trouble arises from anti-frat mindsets when they start to shift blame onto party girls. Projecting the issues with frat culture onto the girls participating in it prevents us from dealing with the problem head-on. By blaming girls who support frat culture, we shame the people that are being hurt by the system we're trying to critique. Making girls that go to frat parties feel bad about themselves creates stigma around the concept as a whole. This makes it challenging to make frats a safer, more fun space that fulfill their social purpose without putting girls at risk. Moreover, frat-shaming fails to acknowledge the adaptive function fratting serves. We frat not to feel objectified, but for a sense of social safety and belonging.

The way to stop this problem: stop saying you're too cool for frats. That's not to say that you need to spend every Friday night waiting in line at Sig Chi. But, you can skip rolling your eyes every time you hear someone talking about how much fun they had on Thirsty Thursday. Creating less judgment around frat culture is crucial for opening conversations about how to confront its harmful elements. To

stop perpetuating the negative aspects of Greek life, we need to avoid the passive mindset that these systems will always be bad and there is nothing we can do to change them. Instead, we can choose to actively hold frats accountable for the way they treat women.

So, stop blaming party girls for your anger at frats! Frat your heart out if you want to and don't if you don't want to. Frat party culture is a reality we face and calling for people to quit it cold turkey is not a feasible solution to the problem. As much as fratting sucks, the only way to improve upon it is to be more accepting of the value it has and build on its strengths rather than belittle it for its weaknesses.

COMES WITH:
- Cool Beverage
- Alo Leggings
- Stanley Cup
- Flum

Greek Life

Barbie & Ken

ΣΑΓ   KKΓ

art by Kimia Nuban

art by Alicia Leong

Weed (Ab)Use

by Amelia Baker

What if I told you that I use heroin eight times a day? Yes, I use it when I wake up because it kicks off the long day, I use before my meals because it helps me eat, I use before going out because it relaxes me, and I use before bed because I can sleep better. No matter how much money I have in my bank account, I can always spare money for just a few grams of heroin. Yes, I can quit when I want! I just choose to use whenever I can – it's what allows me to be so chill all the time. But alas, I am no addict!

A quick note: a) I do not use heroin and b) in no way am I attempting to equate the harmful or addictive properties of heroin to that of weed; instead, I hope to draw parallels between their capacity to be abused. If I were to relay this same story to my friends, replacing "heroin" with "weed", I can't be so certain that they would have the same visceral reaction. The negligent

approach mainstream society takes with cannabis addiction ignores the nuances of overuse, dismissing the gripping dependence its users face. Ascribing the term "addiction" to suffering stoners would recognize their psychological distress and address the issue as such.

The Oxford Dictionary defines addiction as "the fact or condition of being addicted to a particular substance, thing, or activity". In a generously reductive simplification, addiction refers to the act of feeling physically dependent on anything or anyone. Numerous scientific studies analyzed the effects of various drugs on the brain, identifying a dopamine surge as the "addictive" component. Ranging from sugar to heroin, addiction can be born from anything – including marijuana. Yet, modern scientists are hesitant to classify this obsessive dependence, ascribing deceivingly harmless labels like "cannabis use disorder" (Florimbo), allowing users to skate past the reality of their addiction. American soci-

ety and its inhabitants welcome the un-classification of weed as a drug because it removes both social and individual responsibility from its serious implications. As preached by many rehabilitation programs, the first step in fixing a problem is to simply acknowledge its presence in the first place – yet we are reluctant to make this first move.

Marijuana's expansive accessibility, paired alongside the power of social media, makes the swift destigmatization of cannabis a double-edged sword: medicinal savior to some and clinical tormentor to others. Whether for your anxiety, sleeping habits, or glaucoma, cannabis consumption can be medically advantageous and, all in all, make any time a good time. Dispensaries have rolled out an infinite amount of flavors: OG Kush, Birthday Cake, Blue Burst, Pineapple Express, and really, the list goes on. Not only is weed fun and hip, but there is a way to use for everyone: bud, oils, dabs, tinctures, drinks, capsules – broadening the consumer base tenfold. We take issue when vape companies roll out new flavors like marshmallow unicorn rainbow piss, but find the variety in cannabis strains silly and appealing. We take issue when cocaine users say the drug helps them with alertness and clarity, but search the ends of the Earth to find studies that identify the benefits of marijuana.

It is this rapid popularization of weed that normalizes addictive behaviors in an increasing number of individuals across America, resulting in a community of complacent addicts. Edibles don't give you lung cancer like cigarettes, joints can't transmit blood-borne diseases like needles, and tinctures won't destroy your nasal canal like cocaine does. Yet, stoner's habits elicit energy depletion, memory loss, and brain fog, and when they try to quit, insomnia, lack of appetite, and paranoia push users back. We do not recognize these symptoms as withdrawal, but rather, we dismiss them as the cutesy side effects of having a little too much fun.

"I can quit whenever I want", users scream as they are thrust further into the routine of overconsumption, and thus, the psychological dependence is born. We turn a blind eye to solo smoke seshes and constant trips to the dispensary; yet, we eagerly

dismiss their lack of motivation as laziness. Should problem users attempt the insurmountable task of quitting, loved ones only see their irritability and impatience, further discouraging their attempts as empathy is extended with grand frugality. We point our fingers at the individual, rather than the circumstances which permitted their addiction in the first place – blaming the person, not the drug.

The smiles-and-sunshine mentality with which American society approaches cannabis consumption dangerously invalidates the experiences of struggling smokers, resulting in further isolation, and the inevitably endless addiction. Even when users post to Reddit forums to try and find solace in the anonymity of the online world, they are met by individuals imbued in the false positive effects. Respondents don't consider the relationships or motivations lost to the user, instead, they write essays that reference outdated scientific articles to prove their point. It seems we so easily forget that drugs, regardless of how innocuous they appear, are still mind-altering substances that impact the physical brain.

All things in excess can be harmful, and marijuana use is no different. Considering it was only recently decriminalized in 31 states, long-term studies regarding its effects have yet to be conducted at large. Object permanence is learned in our younger years, teaching us that things not immediately present to the eyes still exist. However, we do not extend this same cognitive analysis to the effects of weed on consumers, especially the community's youth population. The absence of something does not indicate implausibility of its existence, but it seems we struggle to accept cannabis' potential for harm.

Marijuana use is complex, and the one-sided oversimplification with which we readily approach the topic results in American society failing its members. By viewing the effects of weed in a vacuum, the apathetic society finds comfort and reassurance in their distorted view of cannabis – ultimately sacrificing the humanity of the user in its wake.

Straight-Washing: The Erasure of Queerness in Queer Media
by Amanda Kang

In recent years, the rise of male-on-male or M/M media has dominated the queer romance genre in books, movies, and tv series. Outwardly, critics laud this form of media as groundbreaking representation that centers queer stories and creators. However, behind the scenes, these works are missing many important aspects that would actually deem them meaningful to the gay community. Most notably, many are not created by gay men. It is often straight, cis women who are the authors, producers, or directors of projects that explicitly seek to serve as a form of queer representation. The resulting straight gaze imposed upon these M/M stories is more than just uncomfortable or problematic. It represents a gross fetishization and projection of straightness onto queer bodies for the pleasure of heterosexual consumers.

As to why straight women create M/M fiction, Laura Baumbach, owner of MLR Press, a print publisher of gay erotic romance and fiction, gave a very straight-forward answer. "One man is good, two are better. Hotter, more fascinating to women who read this genre" (Lambda Literary).

A clear example of this dynamic is in the movie Red White and Royal Blue. The introduction of the two male romantic leads is mediated through their presumed straight female counterparts.

The two women immediately begin talking about the attractiveness of the other man imposing a straight female gaze upon the gay characters in the film. Positioned as "audience surrogates," these characters dictate the initial perspective of the viewers. Consequently, the film's opening appeal relies on the assumption that its primary audience is composed of straight women who seek to objectify the male characters.

The objectifying straight female gaze is especially palpable in gay romance novels written by straight women. Gay characters exude familiar masculine traits, portrayed as desirable to all genders, especially other female characters Take this excerpt from NYT Bestseller, A Guy Walks Into My Bar, written by popular LGBTQ romance author and straight woman, Lauren Blakely. To introduce the gay romantic lead, Blakely writes,

"He strides in [with] an effortless swagger to his movements. His large build is flanked by two women who giggle and laugh, already a little tipsy by the look of it. With inked arms and a trim beard, he has that rugged and dangerous quality she adores" (Blakely, 2).

The "effortless swagger" and "rugged and dangerous quality" reflects an idealized image of traditional masculinity. Positioned alongside two women, they function as indicators of the character's desirability within the female gaze. Therefore, this character's desirability is dependent on their proximity to straight
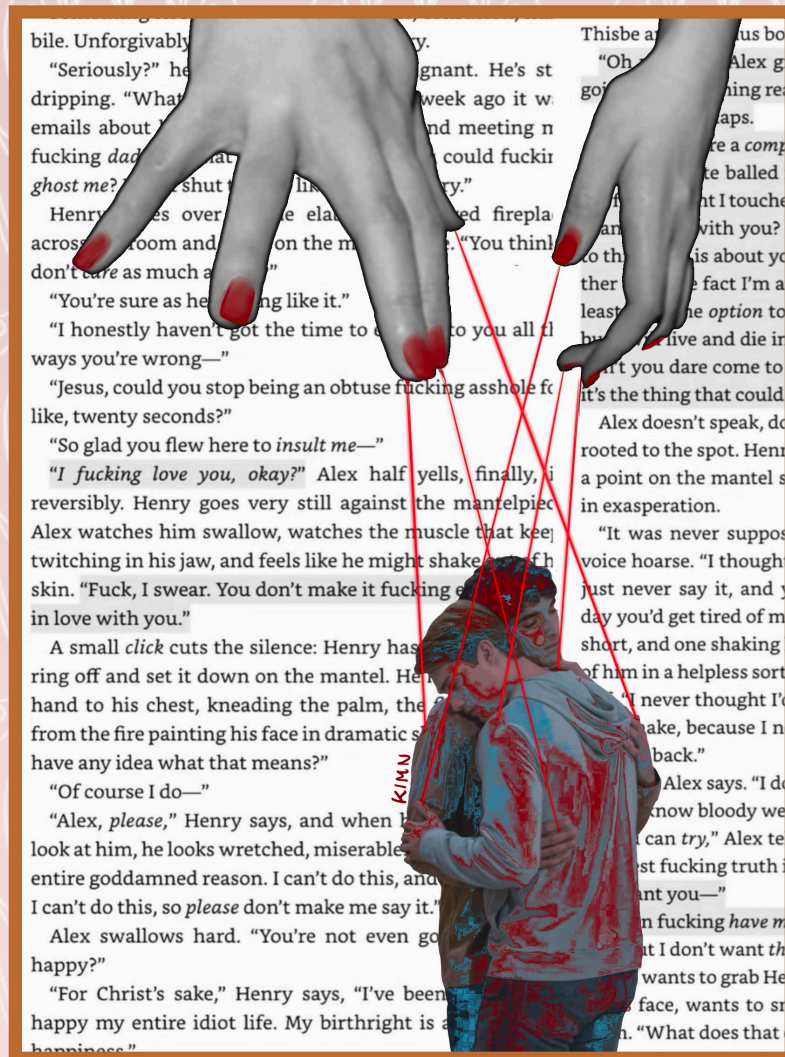
women's sexual fantasies, aiming to elicit a flirtatious response from readers, mirroring the reaction of the women in the passage.

While the unrestricted freedom to romanticize the male physique certainly contributes to the appeal of M/M, the obsession with the genre goes deeper than simply objectifying.

In M/M, homosexuality is conflated with the desire to attract and please a man. Straight women authors will approach a gay character with the belief that if the character enjoys penetration and activities such as personal grooming, traditionally associated with heterosexual women, that character is essentially a straight woman with different genitalia. This concept also helps explain why straight women are disinterested in lesbian or other queer love stories. At its core, M/M are not queer love stories, they are conduits of straight women's romantic, emotional, and sexual fantasies.

One example of sexual projection is found in "The Song of Achilles" by Madeline Miller. This novel reimagines the tragic love story between Greek mythological hero, Achilles, and his same-sex partner, Patroculous. While there are sex scenes throughout, they remain elusive and unclear. In one such scene, Miller writes,

"He went still as I took him in my hand, soft as the delicate velvet of petals. I knew Achilles' golden skin and the curve of his neck, the crooks of his elbows. I knew how pleasure looked on him. Our bodies cupped each other like hands" (Miller, 91).

These scenes draw from fanfiction tropes, creating an overidealized interpretation gay encounters more aligned with heterosexual sex scenes than queer ones. Clearly written by a straight woman from a straight audience, the sex scenes remain very inexplicit and idealized, using descriptive language to hide the messier aspects of sex. The book also sacrifices historical accuracy, portraying Achilles as uninterested in women throughout his teenage years and suggesting the two characters took each other's virginities, further prioritizing romanticism over authenticity.

Similarly, Red White and Royal Blue also leans into the trope of romanticizing gay sex. In a Variety

interview, Director Matthew Lopez shared his initial intention to depict the specifics of gay intimacy including elements such as using lubricant or taking PrEP for HIV prevention. However, these moments were cut in favor of a more romanticized version of gay sex, similar to fanfiction or smut smut authored by straight women. Despite having a gay male director, the movie still misses many key opportunities to establish a relatable connection with a queer audience. The film is keenly aware of who is consumesM/M media, prioritizing palatability over authenticity. Ultimately, we are left with a sex scene with all the hallmarks of Wattpad fanfiction without any genuine effort connected with the community it claims to represent.

Catering gay media to straight women may seem inconsequential, but its consequences are already evident in Japanese culture. The Yaoi or Boys Love genre created in the 1970s, features male protagonists in same-sex relationships. Despite its many male characters, the genre is printed in shōjo manga magazines for girls and young women. Rather than breaking down barriers, Yaoi portrays gay men as sexually obsessed and gay relationships as falling into the traditional feminine-masculine power dynamics. Furthermore, it often incorporates harmful plot devices such as rape, coercion, drug abuse, homophobia, and suicide to drive themes of lust and desire. Rather than welcoming gay men to literary and societal spaces, the genre perpetuates their isolation by portraying them as one-dimensional objects of pleasure for women.

Already many of the examples previously introduced romanticize queer tragedy and suffering to make romantic relationships appear more enticingly forbidden. Incredibly harmful concepts such as homophobia, self-harm, and violence are treated as little more than romantic trials and tribulations. This demonstrates the true danger of the straight-female gaze to trivialize the real-life dangers that queer individuals face every day.

In the end, it will be queer communities that will be caught in the crossfire of M/M media as its straight creators continue to luxuriate in the exploitation of gay bodies, safe from any consequences. While I firmly believe the female gaze is essential in creating media, that is not an excuse to claim queer stories as tools for sexual projection. In the end, the misguided attempt of queer representation that is M/M extinguishes any authenticity from both perspectives.

DEPOLITICIZE THE POLICE

BY HANNAH HABIB

When I first arrived at UCLA, located in the heart of Westwood, I expected a vibrant college town experience. My parents had lived around the area in their youth and described Westwood as fun, trendy, and called it "the Beverly Hills" of their day. I'd frequented Westwood as a tourist in my teens, associating it with places like Diddy Reise and movie premieres. It sounded like a haven for students and I was ready to believe it. However, the illusion was shattered when I faced a series of close-calls and had weird run-ins with people. One of my first encounters that shook my sense of safety in Westwood involved a stranger who approached me while I was shopping alone. Since my middle school days, I was always warned about strangers and potential traffickers, yet I never believed it would happen to me. Looking back at the incident, it was clear that the person was way older than my male peers, appeared distinctly non-local, and seemed very out of place in our university environment. However, I assumed Westwood was safe for students my age and was free from LA's notorious crime. It was a rude awakening compared to my previous visits and my parents' memories.

When the school year started, my UCLA inbox filled with at least 16 Clery Timely Warning emails alerting me to on-campus kidnapping attempts, sexual battery, and burglaries. This was not the college experience that I anticipated. Once I had to duck out of Tacos 1986 because a woman was being harassed in line and I also heard about a police pursuit near Luskin Conference Center. On First Thursdays I always stayed behind the event barriers. Even simple tasks, like walking to Insomnia Cookies, had to be adjusted for safety reasons. Better safe than sorry is in full swing, even for something as mundane and normally non-threatening as a cookie run.

The truth is that Westwood is filled with more crime than we would like to admit. To understand why, we need to look at historical context. Westwood was developed in the 1920s as a Mediterranean shopping area and expanded to a semi-urban area in the 1970s. Like my parents said, it was the place where "the beautiful people walked." They saw movie premieres, had lunch, and shopped as visitors came from all over, all dressed-up and trendy.

However, Westwood Village declined in the late 1980s when gang violence arrived in the region, and resulted in the death of 27 year-old Karen Toshima. Some believe that it is from this event that we can trace the deterioration of Westwood to, and now the Village is a shadow of itself.

The blame can also be partly attributed to California's Proposition 47, a policy passed in 2014 that classifies certain offenses, including theft under $950, as misdemeanors rather than felonies. While Proposition 47 was intended to reduce prison overcrowding, it has also created a misconception that petty crimes can be committed with minimal consequences. As a result, small businesses and individuals are now facing ongoing threats to their livelihood and personal safety. Our spaces have broken down and hypervigilance is the norm, yet nobody wants to confront these problems.

I want to speak for every UCLA student when I say it feels like we have been abandoned. Many of us rely on student loans, work part-time jobs to cover rent, save on course books, and stay with roommates to survive the high cost of living in Los Angeles. We worked very hard to get here and stay here, yet I believe the current atmosphere of Westwood is not sustainable for one of the most prestigious universities in the world. Many students feel unsafe when taking long walks back from evening classes or traveling alone without a group. As college students, crime and harassment should be the last thing on our minds. This is not an isolated incident in Los Angeles, as these issues are expanding outside of Westwood and to other areas of West LA.

Notably, these are the flash-mob robberies affecting tourists at locations like Rodeo Drive, Beverly Center, and Westfield Century City. In early November, a man was even stabbed in Beverly Hills trying to stop a bike theft. These events have hit us hard, because I and other young people frequent these locations on a daily basis. Like Westwood in the 1970s, these areas were once classy entertainment centers. Now, they've fallen to crime too. While the crime surge in upscale Beverly Hills and other areas of West LA have finally drawn

more attention to what is happening in Westwood today, I believe this is still a failure of public safety on all levels. In a mall, nobody should have to be looking over their shoulder or worrying about being caught in a violent robbery, or wondering if stopping petty thefts will cost them their life. Even then, when it happens, all we can do is record it on our phones and hope someone recognizes the criminals. However, these crimes are forgotten about as quickly as they happened. Life is like this in the new West Los Angeles.

On campus, we have our very own UCLA Police Department to protect us, and our community at large has the Los Angeles Police Department. Still, we don't feel fully safe outside, and "law and order" has become somewhat of a dirty word recently. This should not be the case.

Politicizing the police has created a deep divide in our society, but once again we have to look back at history. The concept of policing originates from the term 'polis,' which represented the ideal city-state central to ancient Greek civilization. While we consider the polis to be the predecessor of our modern city today, discussions about the police themselves and public safety have become tainted with partisan debate. This detracts from the real goal at hand, which is the security of everyone in the community. Bringing these two ideas together, the role of the police in the present day is just as important as the fire department and emergency services. The crime waves affect us all as individuals, and it makes sense that public safety should be an important concern. Every person wants to feel safe in their own town. We should be able to express this freely, and call for greater safety without worrying about controversies or political debate. Peace of mind is something

everyone is entitled to, from students in Westwood, small business owners, to tourists in Rodeo Drive.

If the issues are a lack of funding in preventing and combating the crime, then we need to advocate for more resources in our police departments and ensure they are properly equipped to handle the increasing crime surge. This includes not only funding, but crime prevention technology and training to handle the new evolution in urban crime. We can also push for closer community involvement, such as neighborhood watches and public awareness campaigns.
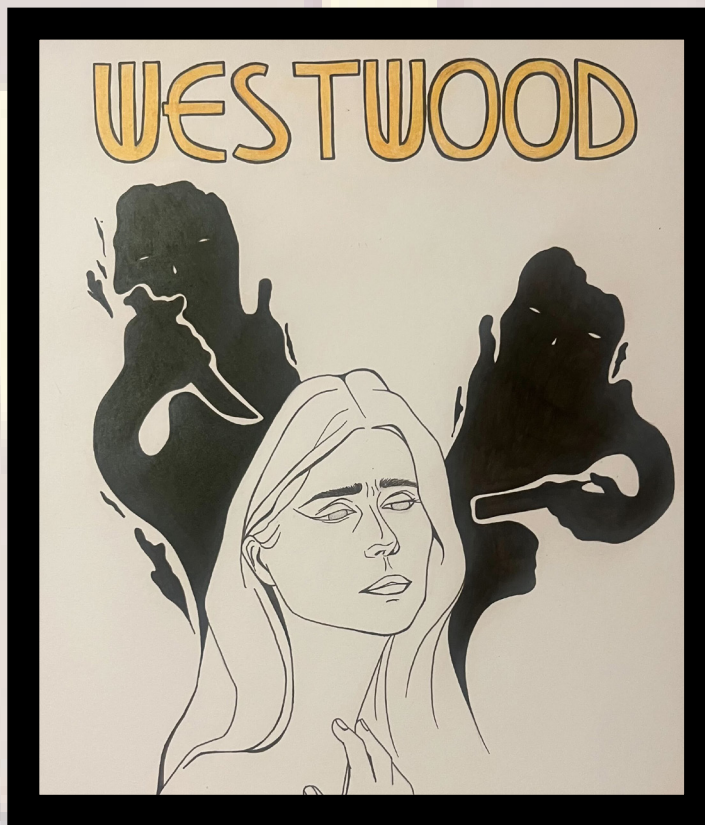
When our administrators and the LAPD can't be everywhere at the same time, all we have is ourselves. In the streets, we can walk in groups and keep an eye out for each other. Encouraging students to be proactive is also a good call, such as taking part in self-defense training and reporting suspicious activities. To support this, there are apps such as Bruins Safe, an official UCLA app designed to keep us informed during an emergency, however not many of us are aware of Bruins Safe. As students we can change this too, by promoting and educating our peers about the important resources for our safety on campus.

While the appreciation of public safety won't begin overnight, for the time being we can try to share our concerns about crime with the public, local officials and even the city government. Together we can try to restore the safe and secure environment Westwood was meant to be.

TikTok is Worse Than Smoking

by Luna Choi

I love TikTok. It's delightfully stupid and insipidly addictive. I open the app at least every other hour and I've probably deleted it about a dozen times. No matter how hard I try, it always comes back to haunt me. After years of this terrible malady, I've come to the conclusion that this Chinese software is worse than a smoking addiction. I know this because I've chain-smoked cigarettes for two years.

Yeah, sure, I suffered when I was addicted to smoking.. My anxiety increased, I was always out of breath, and my lungs probably turned darker. But you know what's worse than having cancer? Having cancer and also being an IDIOT.

Granted, smoking cigarettes isn't a particularly intelligent decision to begin with. In California, a pack of decent cigarettes is around ten bucks, and the average nicotine addict goes through a pack a day. Ten bucks everyday doesn't sound too bad at first. Then you realize it's seventy dollars a week. Translate that to two hundred and eighty dollars a month. And that breaks the bank at three thousand three hundred and sixty dollars per year.

I can think of something else that doesn't involve such a hefty financial kick in the ribs, and it has three t's in it. It costs nothing to scroll down the endless feedback loop of TikTok, with there being little to no cost to being mesmerized by the pixels on a screen. There's simply no incentive to quit the damn app, not when you're in the equivalent of a video game arcade where the figurative world is at your fingertips.

Even disregarding the financial drain, there are still some obvious downsides to smoking cigarettes that Tiktok does not contain. The seventy carcinogens in each puff come quickly to mind.

Rotting teeth, high blood pressure, risk of stroke, the horrific threat of your own lungs attacking themselves and slowly suffocating you overtime, the hellish triangle of depression, organ failure, and nicotine addiction truly encapsulates the triumvirate of pain that smoking creates.

So why do I deign to say that this terrible experience is dwarfed by TikTok? It's simple. The drawbacks of smoking are plain and obvious. We don't live in the 1950s anymore, where everyone and their mother saw inhaling tar into their throat to be fashionable and normal. Back then, Big Tobacco had the gall to say it was healthy, and more people than not actually believed it. You'd be hard-pressed to find a single person today that can say that smoking is good for you with a straight face – rather, the complete opposite.

If you light up in public, you might as well have put on a MAGA hat. Cigarette smokers are seen as the devil incarnate. You'll get dirty stares, the occasional tsk tsk, maybe even the good old spit in your face if you're near an elementary school. And God forbid you're near any pregnant women. The social stigma of smoking plays a key role in making its victims quit. Any behavior that we associate with unhealthy deviants is inevitably doomed to extinction.

TikTok, on the other hand, is a whole different story. What better way to pass your time than to scroll through memes on your for-you page. The beauty of the social media algorithm allows the consumption of content at lightning quick speeds that entertain babies and adults alike. The reason why TikTok reigns above all other media is because of the premise of the app itself: it was perfectly designed to be scrolled through quickly, which allows the app to obtain information about the user at an exponential rate. Most importantly, people don't

think you're an asshole for being on TikTok all the time, save for maybe school teachers.

The fact of the matter is, TikTok is trendy and inhaling tar into your lungs is not. You can pop up the app anywhere: on the bus, in school, near pregnant women, nobody cares! You don't look over your shoulder wondering if anyone is giving you the stink eye. You don't walk a mile around Gayley Avenue trying to find the optimal smoke spot. You just open it up and mindlessly scroll and there's no sense of weirdness because frankly, you're probably weird if you don't have TikTok.

The normalization of Tiktok is a cursed blessing. I can't tell you how many times I've deleted the damn thing and then unconsciously found myself scrolling my fingers to the empty space where the app once was; something not unlike digging your tongue in the empty space of a loose tooth. Nobody tells me that it's a problem because, if we are to be honest, it's a pretty ridiculous problem. Any

substance abusers who read this article are probably laughing their heads off at the idea that a social media app could be worse than what they smoke, snort, or inject into their body. The unfortunate thing is, Tiktok doesn't need to kill us to cause damage. It's perfectly content at making us stupid. Worst of all, we are content with being stupid, as long as we are entertained as our brain rots.

There is no happy ending to this wretched addiction, at least as of now. Smoking may have gone the way of the dodo, but I still am opening and closing TikTok as I write. One day I'll conquer this ridiculous app, but the day is still far over the horizon. To take some artistic liberty with the words of Mark Twain, quitting TikTok is easy. I've done it thousands of times.

art by Camille White

Back Away From the BBL's!: the Exploitation of Black Bodies

by Imani Davenport

When you think of BBL's, your brain doesn't immediately follow up with vivid depictions of millions of black women suffering through centuries of global hatred and degradation, only to be tolerated when the white race takes a liking to their body parts. You normally think of Kim Kardashian. After all, she did create a generational wave of desiring a little waist and big hips.

The Brazilian Butt Lift is a surgery that removes fat from the stomach or thighs and transfers it to the patient's upper and lower glutes, creating the illusion of a very natural, big butt. Kim Kardashian is the harbinger of BBL injections with a seemingly perfect caricature of a black body, which in turn appeases currently upheld American beauty standards. There has been a 90% increase in butt implant surgeries from 2015 to 2019; before that, there was an 80% increase in injections from 2000 to 2013. It is apparent that because of Kim's presence on TV, people are now starting to fall back into an ignorance of appropriation that is able to be ignored because it does not directly affect them.
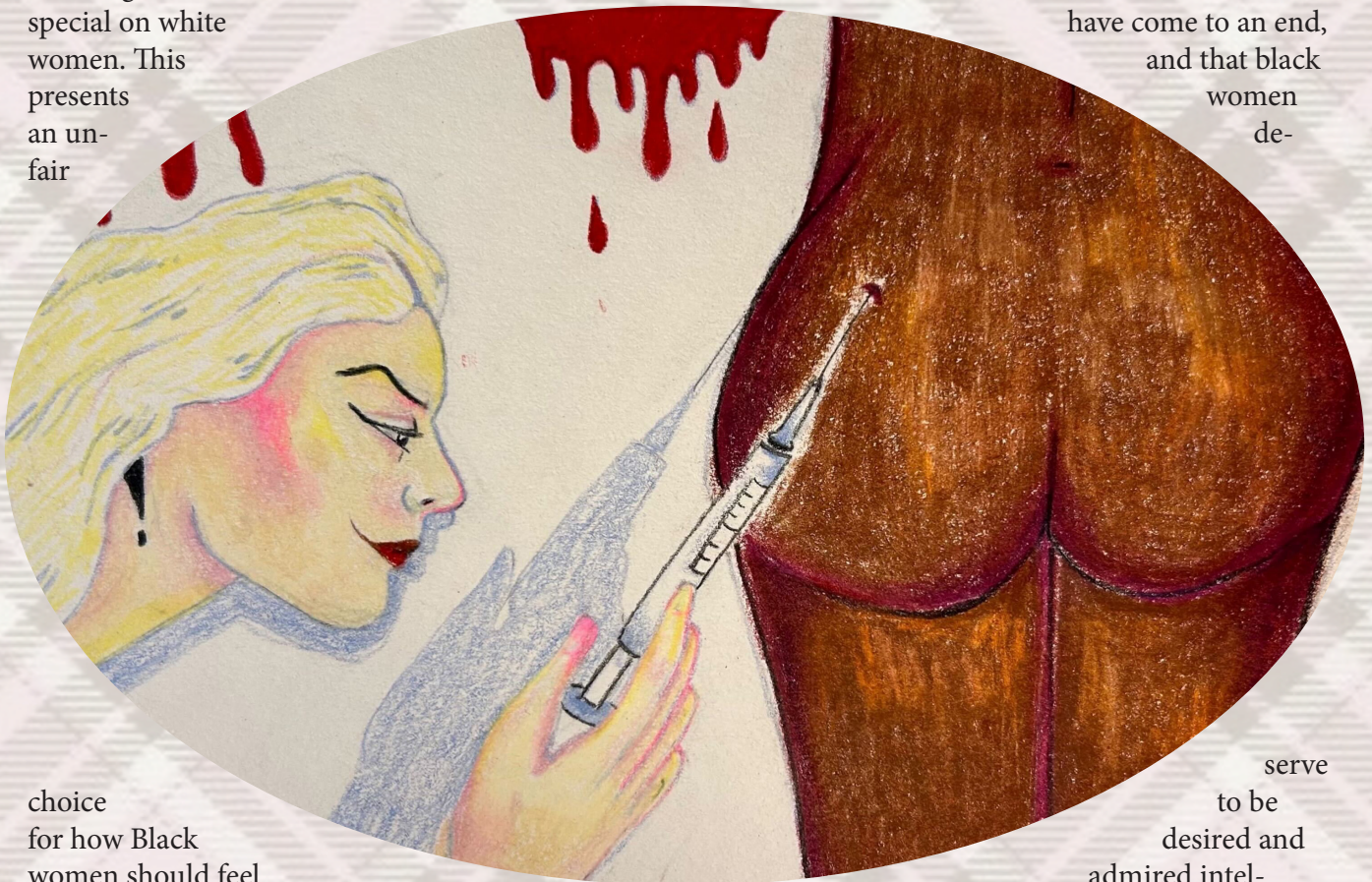
When Black women are seen with features like Kim Kardashian - that is, a big butt, big boobs, and a small waist - they are seen as "fat", or "ghetto", or "so black." Think back to "I Like Big Butts" by Sir Mix-a-Lot! In the beginning of the song, a woman mentions that a black girls' butt is just so big, and that she is just so black. For centuries, natural features on black women have been a cause of disgust and hatred from other communities. When a white woman possesses the same features, however, she is praised for her body type; suddenly she is a mogul in fashion and modeling.

Although it may appear to be so, the desire for black bodies did not stem from reality TV in the 2000's. In fact, American fashion for women in the 1870's and 1880's were intertwined with the physical features of African women and slaves. A South African woman named Saartjie Baartman was put on display at "freak shows" for her abnormally large butt (in comparison to those in France). Her body was highly desired and envied by those watching, and even after her very untimely death, her body remained on display until 1974. There are many inclinations toward both disgust and fascination in reacting to abnormality; it is appalling that someone could hate a person so much as to denounce them to a slave, but also desire their look. From this national craze and envy came, the bustle (along with other physical alterations). A bustle is a padded undergarment used to accentuate the back of women's dresses. Women were praised for this clothing, and it was a trademark of the elite. Even back then, these dresses accentuated a big bottom and cinched the waist (something similar to the wave of the ideal body type many people see today). This attire was a representation of black features without carrying the weight of actually being black.

There is something exotic and exciting about the black body, and only the black body. Black women possess features that otherwise would rarely be seen on someone of a different race, and the idea of exoticness excites people; it excites both men and women, providing space for fetishization, hatred, and dehumanization at the same time. White people perceive black women and, rather than a full completion of a human, see a body: to desire, to want, to poke and marvel at the extreme nature of her body parts. This example of the BBL and its evolution from craving Black features are just one inference of the dehumanization of black people.

Of course, not all black bodies are representative of the all desired "little waist, big butt" body type. Black women are of every body type, all of which deserve respect. My point is to say that these body types desired in today's age stem directly from black features, and specifically those for which black women were once hated. Now, people with societal influence like WoahVicky and BhadBhabie are popular because of their appropriation of Black culture, and specifically that of black women. The same features and actions that black women were socialized with and raised in are seen as ghetto on them, but special on white women. This presents an un- fair

choice for how Black women should feel about themselves. Out of the resolution leaves two options, both the extreme of each side; they could feel proud that their bodies are desired, or ashamed that the only value that the world perceives from a black woman is her body. Not her soul, not her mind; just a body.

The ideal body type will always shift from one concept to another. Just 25 years ago, someone would be completely offended if you were to tell them that they had a big butt. In fact, being thin was the ideal body type for many centuries in many different countries. Trends such as the size of a woman's boobs or her waist to leg size ratio should not stand as socially important for those that are viewing this harmful form of media influence. However, it did back then and continues to do so today. The body types of black women should not suddenly be "in fashion" when a white woman with influence makes it seem cool. It is time to understand that these procedures and ways of life rooted in anti-blackness have come to an end, and that black women de- serve to be desired and admired intellectually, rather than just physically. Black women are more than a mood board for the white woman to pull from to make herself stand out. Understanding the frustration of black women when their natural features are paraded and fetishized is the first step to becoming aware of the harm of molding a body after another race's features. Be conscious of this when considering just how "unique" Kim Kardashian's influence is on American culture.

Powell Cat (they/them): UCLA's First (and hopefully last) Non-Binary Cat

by Ella Scalabrini

Powell Cat (they/them). Believe it or not, when the notable Powell Cat passed away last Spring, these were the words written at the beginning of an Instagram caption that doubled as the cat's obituary. As a student at UCLA surrounded by others with mostly socially progressive mindsets (due to geographical location and existing in the higher education realm), this assignment of pronouns was not surprising to me. What came as a shock, however, was the subject that these pronouns were attached to. Some student behind a phone screen took it upon themself to assign Powell Cat's gender as non-binary. Regardless of whatever perceived woke standpoint this person was attempting to take, or far-reaching display of inclusion, their execution is severely misleading, and the outcome is starkly counterproductive. Aside from the absurdity of the notion, assigning non-binary pronouns to Powell Cat diminishes the internal and external battle that individuals who identify as non-binary are forced to endure.

Now I know what you may be thinking. "They" is a widely accepted singular pronoun, especially in a generic context when a gender is unknown. This is exactly right. The part that I take issue with is the assignment of the pronouns "they/them" to Powell Cat's identity, in bold parentheses representing the cat's decision to not conform to either female or male gender stereotypes.

In the context of Powell Cat, this idea is completely ridiculous. Felines do not hold the mental consciousness to be aware of their gender, let alone realize that their sex does not align with their preferred gender. Humans on the other hand do. Inner turmoil, gender dysmorphia, rejection and ostracism are all part of the challenges that individuals who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth go through. While the rights and recognition of non-binary individu-

als has improved in many parts of the country, progress is still to be made in both this country and the world at large. The ability to identify as non-binary opens the door of inclusivity just a touch wider. It allows the passage of people who previously felt socially exiled due to their non-conformity to typical gender stereotypes and expectations.

When we assign Powell Cat's gender as non-binary, we nudge this door in the wrong direction. While it is unlikely that this was the intended purpose of the pronoun assignment, it can imply mockery towards human beings who identify as non-binary. Creating a non-binary cat invalidates the lived experiences of those who actively do not conform to a gender, and therefore rely on these pronouns for a more encompassed sense of self.

Assigning non-binary pronouns to a cat is an example of liberal, woke performativity. It's like screaming from the rooftops "I'm accepting!!!" when all you really need to do is just be accepting. This type of virtue-signaling is over-the-top and problematic. Rather than authentically displaying empathy and acceptance towards non-binary individuals, arbitrarily creating a non-binary cat to emphasize this acceptance is performative. It is a ridiculous notion that demonstrates behavior that has drifted so far to the ideological pole that it has become frozen over and is cold to the touch.

It is also unsurprising that we see "Powell Cat (they/them)" on a UCLA-student platform. At a liberal campus in an equally liberal city, the bubble of ideological homogeneity can foster the display of unrelatable, out-of-touch behavior. It is no secret that political and ideological polarization taints our nation, and extreme

beliefs and behavior on both ends of the spectrum are leading contributors to this issue. Division on social issues falls along these lines of polarization, and extremity on the opposing side pushes people closer to their respective ideological poles; this is not necessarily due to strong in-group ties, but rather a passionate animosity towards the other side. As people continue to fester in their respective in-group, relating to others who fall outside their bubble of conformity becomes increasingly difficult.

Assigning non-binary pronouns to a feline is an example of this extreme behavior that results from festering. It strengthens the walls of these bubbles from soap to cement; it's like pulling a Jenga stick on an already wobbly tower.

Now don't get me wrong, ambiguity around Powell Cat's sex is totally understandable. Perhaps a good look at the elegant creature's underside was never fully achieved, or fear of calling the cat a "he" when it was really a "she" hindered the student's ability to assign the pronouns (he/him) or (she/her). In this case, my recommendation would be to fight the urge of unnecessary and inaccurate representation and withhold pronoun assignment completely.

Or perhaps you might argue that Powell Cat is an entity that transcends the constructs of gender. For those who don't know, Powell Cat is almost a spiritual figure here at UCLA; a homeless, stray cat that climbed the rankings and got taken under the wing of 30,000 pet owners. Powell Cat's home was a comfortable, 419-acre piece of pristine property in sunny Los Angeles with ample playing space and a surplus of food scraps to choose from. Not all cats have achieved this God-like status, and therefore maybe Powell Cat deserves this noble ranking of non-binary nirvana? Not. As a cat, Powell Cat inherently transcends the constructs of gender and therefore does not need pronouns attached to its name suggesting otherwise.

Despite what Powell Cat's obituary seemed to claim, in Powell Cat's long and fulfilled lifetime, there was no indication that the cat did not conform to a specific gender. This is because Powell Cat is a cat. I am scared for a world where we as humans take it upon ourselves to inflict our gender constructs on the animal kingdom.

art by Ming Chen
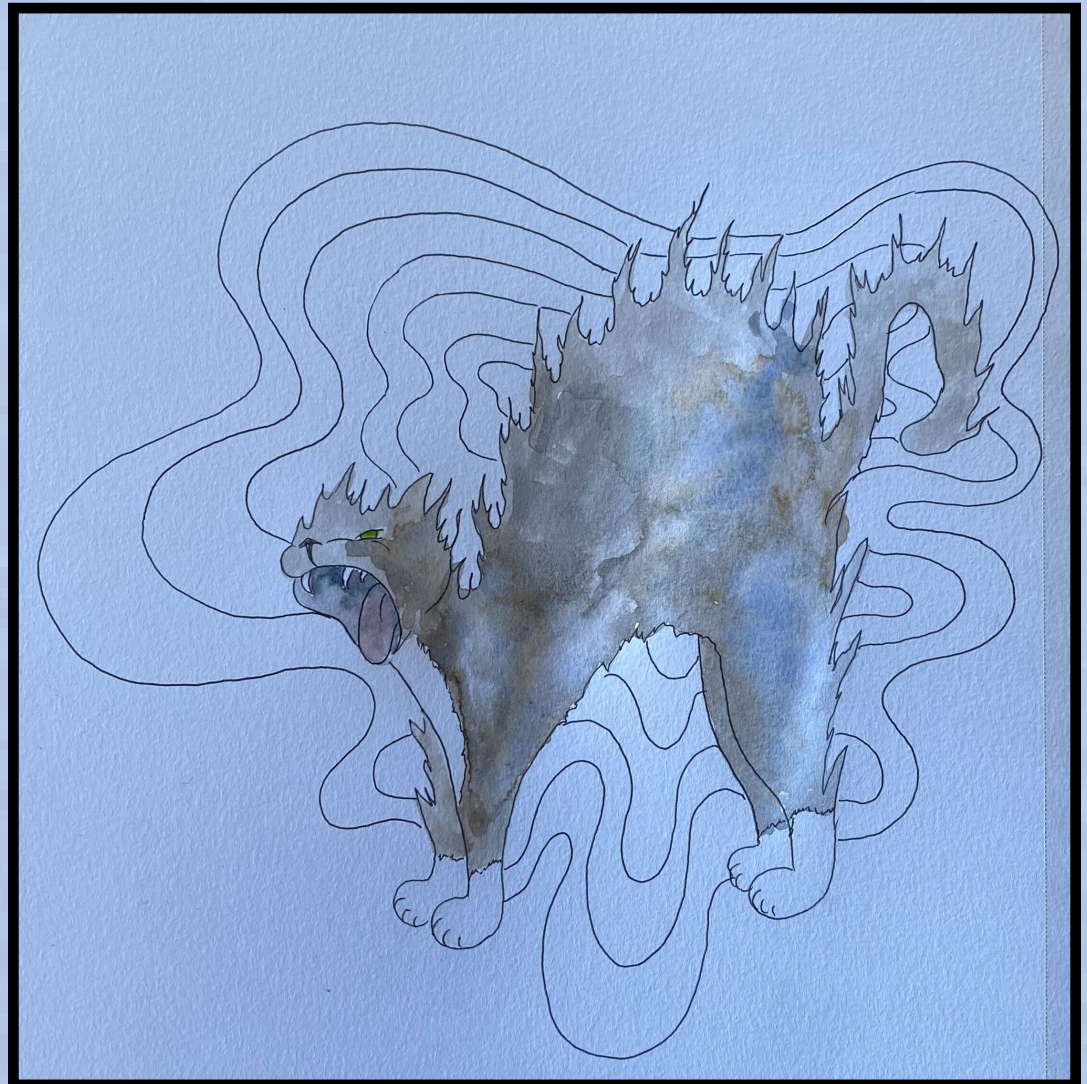
Save Your Therapy-Speak for Your Therapist

by Ben Hant

Trauma. Toxic. Codependent. Self-care. We've heard it all before. Therapy-speak, the rapid importation of psychological terms into personal contexts, invades the way we speak to each other. Social media, especially TikTok, promulgates this linguistic tick most of all. These big words give us a veneer of intelligence and rationality with which to explore our personal issues, but it carries real consequences for ourselves and the way we interact with others.

First, therapy-speak is a method of labeling our feelings in conversation with others. It's a toolkit for communication, but a limited one. The set of words imported from psychology into interpersonal vernacular is inherently restricted, meaning that our use of these terms is over-general and often misplaced as we continuously recycle the same words despite describing entirely new and different circumstances. If the only tool we have is a hammer, everything becomes a nail. That's why therapy-speak communication—often in the form of several-paragraph-long texts or midnight confessions—feels repetitive and derivative.

Therapy-speak, similar to other forms of communication derived from academia, presents a unique masquerade of credibility to our conversations. This credibility, however, interrupts the listener's ability to challenge the speaker. For instance, if your friend tells you that something hurt them, you want to inquire more to learn why. However, if they tell you that an issue caused them trauma, the situation immediately becomes too serious to pry into. Even if the situations are identical, the overuse of words like trauma in a colloquial context makes the conversation overly serious. Therefore, it is a tool to shut down a conversation, a verbal weapon to be invoked when communicating from a defensive position. Whoever uses therapy-speak automatically views themself as the victim, making whomever they are speaking to, or about, the oppressor. Real-world dynamics, however, are much more complicated, and therapy-speak prevents people from seeing that.

Many such defense mechanisms exist, but therapy-speak represents a unique missed opportunity, as people most often invoke it when they feel emotional and require the support of others. However, when people use it in the name of emotional vulnerability, it functionally ends the conversation and limits their ability to actually connect with the other person. This vocabulary masquerades as emotional vulnerability but, if anything, is quite the opposite.

When we pose issues in cookie-cutter vocabulary, we fail to see the nuance of the situations we address. When labeling others as toxic and misconstruing all unfortunate occurrences as "trauma", we resign ourselves to distancing our closest friends for situations that could've maturely been discussed. These conclusions should come after numerous sessions of actual therapy, but when people learn these terms from popular culture, they begin to label their issues immediately—a conclusion that is just as often wrong as it is satisfying. Without the proper education on psychological terms, these conclusions become sacrosanct, and any opposition to them becomes "gaslighting", even if it exists to reach actual understanding.

Without knowing what these terms mean, dramatic labels lead to an unnecessarily dire consequence. Namely, they tell us to cut off our friends and even family for the slightest misgiving. That, in my eyes, is far too high a price in the name of mislabeling our feelings. On TikTok, we've seen the rise of general and vague statements about the overarching prevalence of trauma in everyday life. In the nebulous world of therapy-speak on the internet, people label attending school, parental punishment, or even the mere act of being born as trauma. There is no doubt that traumatic events can drastically change our lives and perceptions, but the overuse of such a term trivializes true trauma.

On the largest scale, overuse of these words drains their meaning. The more frequently people discuss the "co-dependency" of their partner or how they engage in "self-care", the more nebulous and vague the meanings of these words become. The roots of

art by Emily Drekmeier

self-care lie in acts of service that help strengthen our bonds with the people and communities around us, but now it means everything from being alone to putting on a facemask to casual substance use. Where its meaning was initially specific and clinical, its popularized meaning describes actions that we merely enjoy doing regardless of whether or not it's actually healthy.

The desire to use therapy-speak is understandable. We, as knowledge-seeking humans, desire to gather information, and naming our feelings is one step forward in that process. However, when that name is misguided and wrong, it diminishes meaning, sows division, and limits our ability to actually connect with the people around us.

So what may the solution to this etymological epidemic be? Well, like most things, it helps to listen to the people who practice the application of these terms for a living. In other words, go to actual therapy. A therapist—a good one, anyway—can help you discover that you may be using these terms wrong and that it may be hurting your relationships with the people around you. While plenty of people still weaponize what they learn in therapy, learning from professionals is the best chance for us all to learn to better communicate with each other and feel comfortable enough not to put up our verbal defenses. Otherwise, lean into your instinct to cringe when you hear people use vague platitudes to describe their emotions and encourage yourself to be honest and vulnerable. Avoiding these words altogether isn't a surefire way to repair your connections with others, but it's a first step toward open and non-confrontational communication.

If I hear therapy-speak, I normally have no choice but to hold my tongue. But if I hear one more person say that the person they are talking to is toxic, that the class they are in caused them trauma, or that their self-care is half a bottle of wine, I might need to actually talk to my therapist about it.

The Muck, Mires, and Magic of Marriage

by Jake Snyder

Glamorous, scandalous, and alluring, the stars of Hollywood's "Golden Age" captivated the American public with their beauty, talent, and their penchant for entertainment both on and off the screen. On-screen, they dazzled audiences with their captivating performances; off-screen, their personal lives and relationships were devoured by hungry fans. Elizabeth Taylor had eight marriages, (including a remarriage to Richard Burton), and other Hollywood stars like Cary Grant, Gloria Swanson, Rita Hayworth, and Judy Garland all had at least five marriages. While these sensational marriages certainly fed the public's hunger for drama, they also served as a way of realistically portraying marriage, divorce, and the modern-day "happily ever after". This portrayal becomes relatable to the average person as we realize that any relationship, including marriage, is full of ups and downs, as well as struggles and strengths, that must be endured in order to make them work.

The pressure surrounding marriage is colossal. The idea of marriage stresses some people out, and has others running for the hills! From the fear of whether or not someone is a "perfect match" to the fear of things not working out, it's daunting to think about long-term relationships, much less the lifelong commitment of marriage. Elizabeth Taylor may have been married eight times, but each of those marriages demonstrates her desire to find happiness and attempt to overcome the challenges of marriage. Instead of worrying so much about the negative, society needs to relax the pressures put on this concept and allow us to focus on what's at the heart of it: love.

art by Emily Drekmeier

The kind of love that grows and adapts with a relationship, something full of positivity.

The biggest inhibitor of allowing ourselves the freedom to take risks and be bold is the emphasis placed on finding "the one". However, this idea of "soulmates" is just as ludicrous as marrying five times! Soulmates don't exist. With nearly eight billion people on this planet, there's no way that your "soulmate" is someone from your high school of three hundred kids. There's a whole wide world out there for you to explore, so why aren't you exploring it? With the future uncertain, you can never guarantee forever. Life gets messy. While it's important to plan ahead, we should also allow ourselves to focus on the present and enjoy relationships without overcomplicating them, and embrace the messiness of our lives like Elizabeth Taylor did.

I'm not proposing jumping into a marriage when you know you're not a good fit. Marriage itself just needs to be made less daunting. After all, there's a reason that divorce exists: to serve as the final way to solve marital problems. If we can promote marriage as being a leap of faith that sometimes works out, but sometimes doesn't, there will be less pressure to avoid picking the wrong person and then attempt to mend a broken marriage. Life is about taking risks and learning from mistakes, which isn't something we can do if we never muster up the courage to try. The intimidating nature of marriage is further compounded by the astronomical fees that go into it. Marriage shouldn't be about spending thousands of dollars to express our love for one another. If we can eliminate some of these stigmas, we have a better chance of letting the love in marriage shine through.

While marriage seems far off for many of us in college, it still seeps into our dating lives. Whether it's the long lists of criteria for someone to be "the one," or the fear of getting into relationships that require effort and work, we are already setting ourselves up for a difficult road ahead.

Furthermore, this is complicated by pressures placed on us by our families or the media to get married and strive for this future. Seeing happy couples in your life or being fed the status quo can add to our already stressful lives. With our futures, careers, and education already on the line, we don't need the added stress of love too. Instead, we need to embrace the experiences provided for us and welcome these novelties.

While one may have certain understandable qualms about rushing into relationships and taking risks, I'd argue that you won't get to live life without being bold. Even if you're not getting married, you can still opt to take a risk and put yourself out there. Instead of being afraid to commit to marriage, one should be striving to bring the happiness to their life that marriage entails. Reevaluate that list of criteria you have when dating. See what really matters and what can be overlooked or could be changed through mutual growth.

What people loved about following Elizabeth Taylor's marriages was the idea of her finding love. Marriage was sensationalized, and the spin placed on it where only the good is focused on drew people in and still does. We chase this beautiful and delusional idea of perfect wedded bliss. While relationships are not nearly as perfect and easy as they are portrayed to be, I think we need to bring some of this delusional thinking back. No, you shouldn't ignore some of these red flags, and this certainly isn't the article encouraging you to do so. I simply mean the less harmful delusional thoughts: embracing moments of love and happiness, focusing on them more, and opening ourselves up to making mistakes and learning from them. Embrace the magic of life and bring some romance to it, because after all, there's nothing wrong with being a little delusional.

The Neglected Rape Epidemic: Assault Among Straight Men

by Julianne Lempert

"Title IX sucks." We hear that all the time, from all kinds of people, for all kinds of reasons. It comes from a survivor whose paperwork mysteriously disappeared, a perpetrator whose dad could not buy him out, or an annoyed student with a Study List hold due to a forgotten training. Not surprisingly, I do not come here to praise this institution, but rather to advocate for a neglected population. While Title IX discourse typically centers around survivor invalidation or low investigation rates, examining their administered trainings is just as important. Title IX trainings overlook the rampant assault among straight men in hyper-masculine college spaces like fraternities and sports. This omission reflects a fundamental misconception of rape by presenting sexual assault as an act motivated merely by sexual desire.

UC students are required to complete sexual assault prevention training. The Vector Solutions course, which appears to be identical yearly, features educational content paired with practice scenarios. The three scenarios in the section "Consent, Coercion, and Bystander Intervention," involve an opposite-sex friendship, a gay male couple, and a straight couple. In the friendship, Eva tells Jake she wants consent before hugging, and Jake later invalidates the importance of this boundary. In the gay male couple, Dai pressures an intoxicated Ben into sex. And in the straight couple, Monique pressures an uncomfortable Byron to try a sexual activity.

To their credit, UCs are intentional about inclusivity in their examples. There is absolutely no issue with the presence of these situations, but more so with the absence of other overlooked ones. Almost comically, none of these scenarios intended to teach about "consent and coercion" include a man raping a woman—the most common occurrence. Yet it's particularly harmful that there are no examples of men assaulting men outside of gay relationships.

Title IX needs to show the statistical reality of assault. Ninety-nine percent of female victims and eighty-five percent of male victims have male perpetrators. We must refocus the discourse centered on women as victims with the conversation of men as perpetrators, regardless of sexual orientation.

Sexual assault against men frequently happens among straight men, whether it's hazing, jokes, or outright bullying. In the context of a fraternity, we talk about female rape victims without thinking of the sexual abuse during hazing (which is ostensibly banned at UCLA). Stories speak for themselves: a Northwestern football team restraining then humping their new players, an Indiana University fraternity forcing pledges to sleep with a stripper on camera, high school hockey players held down and sodomized with broomsticks. A BBC article that chronicled the horrors of sports initiations described the need for "#MeToo in the locker room" given how swept under the rug these instances are. "Sexual hazing law firms" dedicated to addressing sexual abuse inside fraternities and sports teams highlight the issue's salience.

It's important to deconstruct any practices, whether they're hazing or not, that involve nudity, sexual touching, or even extensive joking about people's intimate body parts. Masturbating in the presence of other men might seem like no big deal, but circle jerking without explicit consent is a violation. We shame men who make rape jokes about women yet allow "don't drop the soap" jokes. We treat teasing men for their penis size as a funny aspect of bro culture, not as sexual harassment.

The 2014 "comedy" Neighbors, intended to humorously juxtapose the frat lifestyle to the millennial suburban one, contains several sexual assaults, something both unacknowledged by its viewership and intended to be funny. The star, Dave Franco, jeers to his brother, "Last night we put a dick in your mouth," followed by the nationally notorious "elephant walk," a gang rape

practice against fraternity pledges already prosecuted at Sacramento State, Penn State, and the University of Vermont. This is not just "frat culture" – it's a crime.

Neighbors is not exclusive in its comedic downplaying of male survivors, whether it is Chandler and Ross from Friends laughing at Joey's tailor groping him or Michael Scott in The Office forcing his male coworker to kiss him, harmful media representation reaffirms the status quo. In media and in practice, society applies a "boys will be boys" sentiment to rape among straight men.

The lack of attention to these male survivors reveals an overarching, systemic misunderstanding of rape. Because Title IX only shows perpetrators of sexual assault against men as straight women and gay men, they portray rape as something only about attraction, and thus only people attracted to men would assault them. But rape is also about power and indifference to human suffering.

Assault by men is a part of a broader societal issue. Female perpetrators are unequivocally just as bad people, their actions just as wrong, and their individual impact just as painful. Yet, I argue that these are personal character failures. Women do not have historical precedent or systems of power behind them like men do. In the same way we distinguish someone getting bullied or beat up from an ideologically-motivated hate crime, we must apply that same nuance here.

Rape is a systemic issue built on male entitlement to bodies, whether that body is female or male. Apart from sexual attraction, rape is driven by a violent, desensitized masculine culture, exhibited by the prominence of rape in settings of masculine violence like war, genocide, and slavery. Rape is not just taking advantage of an intoxicated woman—rape is a weapon of war, a power trip, a tool, a punishment, a form of bullying, and psychological torture. The hundreds of thousands of women assaulted in The Rape of Nanjing and the Rwandan genocide were not individually selected and pursued

based on sexual appeal. The role of rape in American chattel slavery, the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, and the Uyghur genocide further distinguish rape from unreciprocated sexual desire – it was a systematic, indiscriminate attack strategy to brutalize the population.

Title IX's trainings reflect and promote this misconception and therefore require an amended version with more instances of straight men assaulting women and also other straight men. This adjustment may sacrifice their inclusivity aims and deduct "woke" points, but their objectives ultimately harm this campus. As students, we have to reorient conversations that present rape as a monolith and misdiagnose it as a mere product of sexual frustration. We have to contextualize rape as both a crime that can happen to anyone and by anyone and also as a violent practice that extends beyond interpersonal dynamics and into other facets of public life. Through this daily reframing, we can hopefully engage in assault prevention that Title IX fails even to attempt.

art by Stephen Kim

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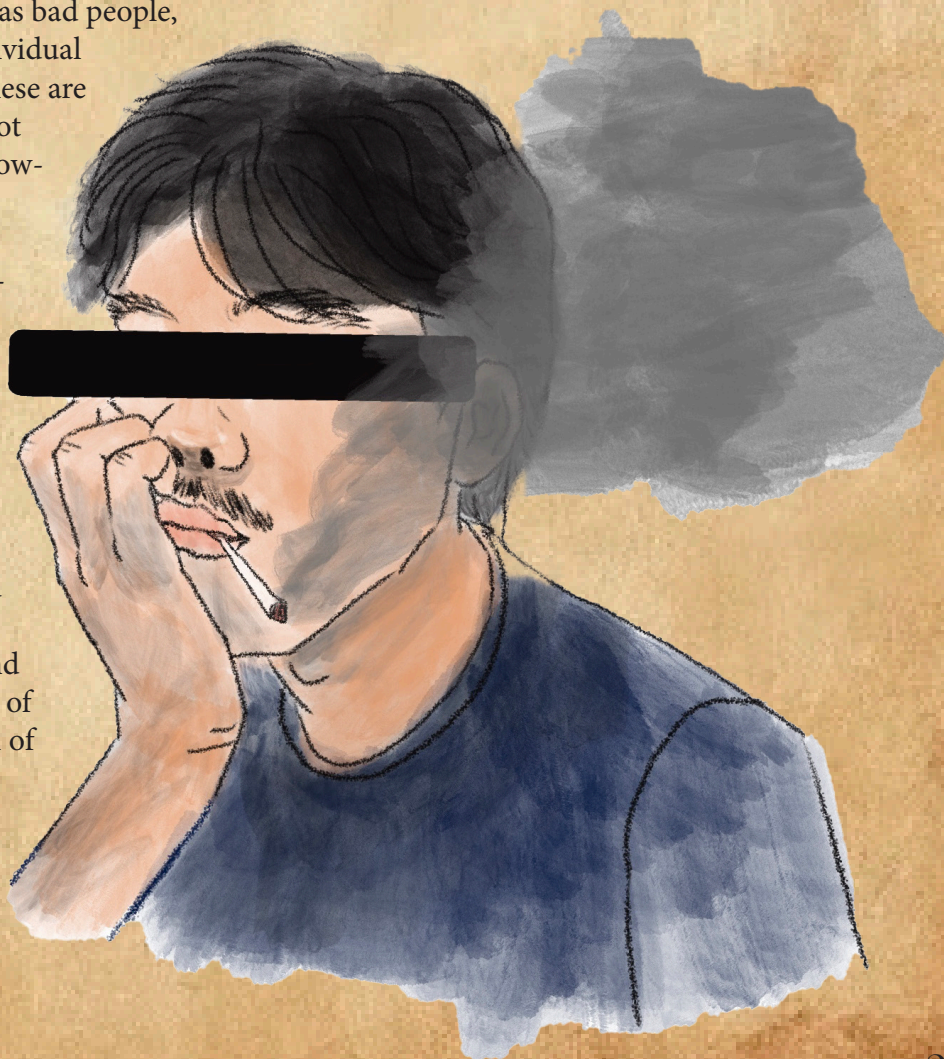
Call Now If You or a Loved One Has Lost Faith

by Anthony Nash

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a simplified explanation of the struggle of the human condition. It explains that people need to fulfill basic needs in order to explore higher ideals. This is the basis that our modern society is structured around, fulfilling physiological needs so that one can move on to greater purposes. Our society is founded on this idea, allowing people relatively reliable access to food, water, and shelter. Then we move on to fulfill psychological needs by ourselves, because unlike physiological needs, psychological needs are left for each of us to address on our own. When left to fulfill these basic psychological needs on their own, people begin finding very strange ways to do so. Ignore people's physiological needs, and society collapses. Ignore their psychological needs, and things get, for lack of a better word, weird.

Religion serves a crucial psychological service for every person who accepts it; it provides a source of faith. Faith can be defined as the trust that a good force has some guiding influence in a person's life, and is an important basic psychological need. Since the beginning of humanity, people have believed something greater than them is working for the benefit of them, or for all people. Everything from divine rulers to higher education represent where we put our faith. We need to believe that our systems, some power beyond the individual, will make our lives good and right. Religion streamlines faith by creating systems involving divine being(s) who actively have our best interests in mind. I believe that society's duty is to fulfill one's basic psychological needs, and this means giving everyone the ability to access religion.

This is why religion should become a part of all public education. People should not be left to psychologically fend for themselves. By being given access to education regarding all five major world religions, people would not only make more educated choices

art by Emily Drekmeier

regarding their faith, but would be more understanding of other religions. Religious education does not involve forcing anyone to join a religion. This addition to general education would be to simply explain what the religions are and what they believe, as well as what it is like to participate. This would, in turn, give people a broader framework to approach their own, and other people's, faith.

For most of history, religion was the main factor fulfilling the psychological need for faith. Recently, though, religious affiliation has been dropping, reaching new lows every year. Under normal circumstances, people would find faith in other ways. Faith in politics, in neighbors, in capitalism: these are common American outlets of faith. Since the counterculture movement of the 1960s, though, people have been steadily losing this faith. People lose jobs, watch loved ones die, see the failures of the system, and their steadfast faith wavers and collapses. This is called a crisis of faith, and it usually applies to when a religious practitioner loses faith in their religion. The term applies equally to a civilian who loses faith in their civilization. So now there are lots of people desperately attempting to fulfill their psychological needs without support.

Which is where things start getting bizarre. Enter agnostic extremists. These are people who have lost faith in modern religion as well as modern society, and instead, have replaced both with conspiracy theories. Rather than believe in anything organized, they believe in a secret functioning of the world that only they know. These are not your average conspiracy theories, such as a faked moon landing or planned assassination. These involve a complete reframing of rationale, restructuring the person's beliefs until they stop being recognizable as reality. I call them agnostic because they do not have direct religious ties, instead having hazy spiritual beliefs that justify their new reality.

A typical religious extremist is someone who has lost faith in some aspect of the world and is led to believe that an evil threat is the cause of this. This perceived threat, usually meaning non-believers or sinners, gets connected to their loss of faith and

these people thereby require conversion or punishment. Once they are dealt with, the world will become good again. Agnostic extremism takes this idea and goes wild with it. The threats range from interplanetary beings to humanoid lizards to normal politicians who are, for some reason, unspeakably evil. Like religious extremism, these threats have been deeply intertwined with a loss of faith. Agnostic extremists do not have faith in religion, and they do not have faith in society, and so they create threats that explain this. The threat of the rich being evil lizard people is a way of expressing the feeling that the rich seem so alienated from the lives of the poor that they barely seem human. Agnostic extremists then have faith that, once these threats are defeated, their crisis of faith will be over and the world will become good again. The problem is that these threats represent warped forms of reality, and can't ever produce positive tangible results because they're merely reflections of fantasy. This problem needs to be addressed at its root, which is the crisis of faith.

When people suffer a crisis of faith, they are being starved psychologically. Much like a starving person would lash out for food, a psychologically starved person will go to dangerous lengths to feel faith again. When many different religions are taught at an early age, they act as a buffet of faith, with the variety lending strength. The better one understands religion, the more support they will have when their known faith falters. Many people believe that religion is a crutch, and faith should be found for one's self without the aid of religion. I think this is as true as calling food a crutch. Like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, people need some kind of basis before they can become their best self. Proper religious education provides people a reservoir of faith that can sustain them in the dark moments of crises of faith. Religious education is not about indoctrinating people so they become devoted for life. It's about giving people a resource from which they can build a foundation to grow towards their own self-realization.

Side Effects May Include Death:

by Julia Torres

Advil, Benadryl, Claritin, DayQuil, Execdrin. Pain-killers line the insides of drawers and cabinets in nearly every home; it is an inescapable aspect of living. And we, as consumers, are addicted to the instant pleasure that they provide.

Every dull ache and sharp pain can be easily settled with the aid of a few colorful pills and a glass of water. Within 30 minutes, normalcy resumes. Pleasure on demand. Minor inconveniences are no longer bothersome, they are easily curable with at-home remedies.

These small bottles that we carry around with us contain labels with lengthy lists of chemical properties that are unfamiliar to most. Also listed are possible side effects that your body may inadvertently have to the medication. Many times, this includes grave outcomes such as death.

Potential severe reactions that may lead to fatalities do not cross our minds as we take our usual medication. As consumers, the desire to assuage our discomfort overrides the potential of irreparable harm. Who are we to think we know more than our doctors? Who would dare to make a mockery of the prestigious medical field?

Our consistent decision to take calculated risks with our medication is far more nuanced than simply defending the honor of the healthcare field. It is also more pervasive than crafty pharmaceutical marketing and sales tactics, which lead us to create subliminal positive connotations with medication.

It is true that we live in a sue-happy country, where companies must legally disclose medical side effects no matter how negligent the data may be. Yet, the underlying sentiment is that as a younger generation, we have been raised to reject the possibilities that extreme situations are a possibility for us as individuals. We are desensitized to worst case scenarios, which will always surely be inapplicable. We are neither the lower nor the upper 1%. We all get participation awards, never a podium trophy or the shame of coming in last place.

In terms of our health: we are not part of the marginal data that will have a volatile reaction to our daily intake of medication. This thought does not cross our mind, not even once.

Let me offer an interpretation of this phenomenon: Gen Z's mindless consumption of medication in the face of any nuisance is representative of our dismally low threshold for discomfort and suffering.

When any pain arises, no matter how minor it may be, we will take any and all steps necessary to avoid the pain of suffering. We would rather immediately take a painkiller than face the inconvenience of sitting in our discomfort and learning how to deal with it. Unfortunately, this mentality transfers to how we take on challenges in our daily lives. We would much rather cut corners than undergo the pruning process of achievement and growth. We will do anything to shield ourselves from the painful realities of life.

We desire short term alleviation – the shallow patching up of symptoms, while the sickness inside of us evolves and spreads.

Gen Z does not know how to deal with pain. Because we never learned how to win, we never learned how to lose. Anything that cannot be solved with an Advil immutably discourages us. We have been indoctrinated by the entitlement of pleasure.

However, regularly taking medication comes with high costs. Our bodies create tolerance to our remedies, forcing us to take higher doses over time. A reliance on painkillers to solve our issues comes with a greater dependence on temporary solutions, as we treat the symptoms and not the source of the issue.

Our discomfort with discomfort is one that is a disservice to us. Often, we refuse to go through the character arc associated with hardship since an easy way out is

Our Discomfort with Discomfort

readily available. Our generation is characterized by avoidance.

It is easy to associate pain, both literal and figurative, with failure. Due to the emphasis placed on aesthetics and performance, suffering has become synonymous with what we have done incorrectly. From a young age, we have been told that we are the bearers of our own destinies; all achievements are within our reach if we invest enough effort.

However encouraging this advice may be at face value, it often has the opposite effect when put into practice. This mindset that has been drilled into our malleable, young brains has told us that every failure, therefore, is made by our own hand. Both our highs and lows point back to characterizations of ourselves, our efforts and abilities.

It should come as no surprise, then, that we will do anything to run away from this feeling. Our "medications" take many shapes: lying, endless justifications, a lack of self-accountability, ghosting, and

indifference among others. We will point to any scapegoats rather than sit with ourselves and take full ownership of our actions. Instead of changing our work ethic when producing inadequate work, we would much rather claim that we had an inexplicable illness or a family emergency.

When given the opportunity to evade a difficult situation, we run with it.

However, this begs further inquiry. This mindset may very well be working for you as an undergraduate student, but how far will it truly take you?

We are being raised as a generation that refuses to address the root of the issue. Critical thinking, emotional intelligence, logical reasoning, and compassion are no longer at the top of our lists of priorities. I will be the first to claim that this generational disease has a poor prognosis.

So, continue taking your prescribed medication with delusional bliss. Chances are, it will never harm you.

But, at the end of the day, perhaps it will.

art by Norah Lee

Age Restricting Social Media to Protect Children

by Lucas Pichardo

Over the past decade, social media platforms have lost their exuberance and innovation. Their original promise of connection and accessibility has faded, and these platforms have become America's biggest threat to children. The convenience, prevalence, and addictiveness of social media has turned them into money-hungry giants, who disregard their effect on users, especially children. Forty-one percent of teens have reported negative experiences resulting from social media, and two thirds of parents reported seeing harmful effects on their children. Congress' passage of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act set an age restriction of 13 for social media use, which has been an ineffective roadblock in protecting children; nearly 40% of children ages 8–12 use social media. It is alarmingly apparent that American youth has an unhealthy relationship with social media–a stricter age barrier of eighteen should be established to prevent a future generation of melancholy, socially awkward zombies.

Children are gullible, so expecting them to have the level of maturity necessary to filter and interpret mindless digital content is absurd. Social media platforms have set unrealistic standards because of their highlight reel nature, causing three out of four children as young as twelve to dislike their bodies and being embarrassed by the way they look. It's also no surprise that adolescents who spend more than three hours a day on social media face double the risk of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Poor mental health leads to poor physical health: children who spend too much time on social media are more likely to have health problems because of their sedentary lifestyle and suffer from fitful sleep. The tracking of likes, comments, and views leads to competition–another negative outcome. Children compete with

each other for attention, leading to unrealistic standards, creating an endless cycle of unhealthy competition.

However, is it fair to assume that all social media content can potentially harm our youth? No. But, regardless of the content shown, the short-form format at which this content is consumed solidifies the need for a stricter age-restriction. Punchy content has exploded in popularity; TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, X, Facebook, and YouTube Shorts promote an algorithmic, snackable approach to media, creating two major problems for American youth: decreased attention spans and increased addictiveness to social media.

While the notion that humans have a shorter attention span than a goldfish has been debunked, the average attention span has decreased by 103 seconds over the past twenty years; this has occurred simultaneously with a 75% percent increase in social media use. The biggest accelerator of this epidemic is short-form content, which is designed to require a decreased attention span. They utilize algorithms, which show content that gradually builds to, but never reaches, the user's pinnacle of desired content, ensuring constant consumer demand and engagement. Acknowledging the link between shorter attention spans and increased social media use suggests kids are at even more of a risk to develop the aforementioned mental and physical health problems. As the most malleable demographic, children are the most susceptible to these problems, which is why a harsher age restriction needs to be put in place.

My own relationship with social media speaks volume to the potential benefits that are associ-

ated with decreased use. After realizing that social media was negatively affecting my mental and physical health, I decided to delete all my accounts at the end of my freshman year of high school (this included Instagram, Tiktok, and Snapchat). And while the degree at which I hit the reset button was a bit extreme, I am beyond thankful that I did. I felt more present, more focused, and happier than ever, and saw these feelings translate themselves into concrete evidence; my grades improved dramatically, and I got to spend more time with my friends and family. And to my surprise, my social life did not suffer, as I still went out frequently and met new people. I truly believe that because I pulled the plug on social media, I've had the opportunity to write this article at this amazing and prestigious school.

It is extremely important for me to mention that deleting my accounts was an independent decision. My parents didn't influence me, as they had no idea how much time I spent on social media or the content I was consuming.

While I don't want to give myself too much credit, I don't think it's realistic to expect other kids to make the same decision I made. It took a lot of research and willpower, which is why I think many people that think about deleting social media don't actually go through with it. It is because of this that I think parents are extremely important in ensuring an age restriction. We are responsible for the generation that follows, meaning our children's mental and physical well-being should be of the utmost importance. If future policymakers fail at regulating social media platforms, then it is our respon-

sibility to do it ourselves. We are slowly beginning to see the results of generations that grew up in the digital age, which I hope only further motivates you to be cautious of your children's social media use, because these effects are sure to increase and intensify if the current usage pattern continues. Don't let your kids become victims of an epidemic, and instead put them in a position to embrace real, tangible life, free from the heavy shackles of the monster that is social media.

art by Amanda Tam

The Perils of a Birthday Crier

by Ananya Devanath

I've always been a birthday-crier. Whether it be from mourning the could've been's of the past year, a fear of growing expectations, an unwillingness to accept change, or simply out of tradition, I've always become a more melancholic, reflective version of myself on my birthday. But this particular June, as I waited for the clock to hit 12, I was hit with an unusually severe sense of loss. I was turning twenty. T-w-e-n-t-y. Meaning no more safety net of "teen" at the end of my age, no more pretending I'm not an adult, no more escaping responsibility. And it doesn't end here: every birthday from now on comes at a cost. At twenty-two, I'll grieve the unrivaled carefree independence of my college years. At twenty-five, my fully-developed brain will finally question my reckless behavior, which, I'm sure, will zap all the fun out of life. At thirty, I die, probably. Or at least exist in some weird routine-loving "Happy Monday!"-spewing zombie-human hybrid form, incapable of sentient thought.

I'm sure I'm not alone in my shock at the abrupt end to our coming-of-age, especially when it feels like we've just started. Sure, maybe we're all experiencing a typical early-20s-quarter-life crisis, but I'd argue that this reluctance to grow up is more than an overwhelming fear of "real adulthood." The idolized teenage dream represents a time we're told to cherish, an undeserving pedestal placed on our high school and college years. There's a reason so many popular shows and media center around high school: the allure of young naivety and the escapism of endless possibility, of second chances and do-overs, of knowing you can evolve, of having the luxury of time. It's our chance to jump off cliff sides, marvel at the unending universe, and break each others' hearts, to be stupid and impractical and self-indulgent without repercussion, before our roles are cemented and

art by Norah Lee

our choices narrow. However, I'd argue that the true teenage dream is an unattainable destination, an unnecessary yet ever-present countdown clock on our happiness.

On a larger scale, being a member of Gen Z has meant constant bombardment by impossible expectations and disproportionate responsibilities. In perhaps a reflection of our country's own relative adolescence, we have unwisely turned to youth as our solution. After all, our generation is the one who hasn't yet ruined the world, the one who will be better than older, out-of-touch boomers, the one who isn't scared to do what's right. We are ill-equipped heirs of a rapidly deteriorating planet, piled with the hopes, dreams, and ambitions of every person before us, all because we made the grievous error of unabashedly craving progress.

But as we've grown older, our efforts have proven to be futile, unheard cries in a cruel and indifferent vacuum. Our time in the limelight is coming to a close, our potential to foster change seemingly slipping away, just as they did with the millennials before us, and Gen X before them. We too will soon leave college and become cogs in the same American industrialist machine we once so viscerally protested. The pressure to be young, and especially young and accomplished, is why thirty feels like a death sentence. It's why we're expected to spend three-fourths of our lives wishing we could go back to a time when we could be anything, anywhere. Even if you're lucky enough not to feel that pressure, it will inevitably begin to crush you: tiny little "what-ifs," a growing doubt, an intensifying desire to take life by its shoulders, shake it around, and scream: "Mean something! Mean anything!".

Can you tell that I'm spiraling a little?

For the last couple of weeks, this piece has sat on my laptop, stopped right about here, the blinking text cursor taunting me. After all, there's really nothing more to be said. The world is a dark and depressing place, nothing we do matters, nihilism shall rule the universe, and so on and so forth. But alas, I've always prided myself on being an optimist. This can't be where it ends, where we give up hope merely a fraction into our lives.

It's easy to blame our problems with aging on societal expectations. We're told that with age comes disappearance: our achievements become less admirable, our ideas less intriguing, and our passions, desires, and stories all devalued as we exit our twenties. But doesn't it all sound a bit ridiculous? I've grown into a much better person than I was at the height of my teenage years: more knowledgeable, more secure, more patient. Any ideas I have today will be so much more coherent and informed than they once were. And I'm sure upon revisiting those ideas ten years from now I will have that much more life experience to draw from.

I could name hundreds of important and well-known people who became successful late in their careers, but that isn't quite the point. This unhealthy obsession with youth puts unfair pressure on people both within and past that ideal timeframe, on a generation expected to somehow repair the damages of all those before them. It retrospectively tells us that our teenage journeys were vessels of lost potential instead of what they truly represented: one small point in our lives.

So as we sit on the precipice of true adulthood and watch a more youthful generation enter the limelight, I encourage us to rejoice in where our journeys have brought us thus far. Our relationships with the people around us will change, our views will turn less black-and-white, and our lives will be weighted with more responsibility. But this is only a loss if we view it as one. As much as I glorified being a teenager, I can confidently say that it was not my peak, nor should it have been. We still have so much time to grow and evolve, to make mistakes and learn from them. To say that our journey stops at 30 is to deny ourselves the opportunity to experience life in all its complex, nuanced beauty. As for being a birthday crier, well… at least 21 is supposed to be fun.

Young Professionals, Read More Poetry

by David Egan

Who do we picture as the average poetry reader? A head-in-the-clouds hippie, a pretentious ass-hole, or an English major like me, possessed of melancholia? Whoever you picture, they stand in stark opposition to the average young profession-al: a twenty- or thirty-something college graduate in a high-paying, often difficult white-collar job, who probably read poetry in high school English class, but since then may only encounter it, as Ben Lerner points out in The Hatred of Poetry, at wed-dings and funerals. Young professionals need not make poetry part of their identity or personality. But a serious engagement with poems, especially the best poems ever written, may be an untapped source of pleasure and fulfillment––and yuppies (young urban professionals, though I also speak to non-urbanites) may be especially suited for it.

Although it is neither surprising nor a problem per se, our idea of the young professional and our idea of poetry seem to mix as well as oil and water. Poetry requires an openness to the irrational–– emotion, spirituality, the workings of the uncon-scious––and is impractical: good for little more, in my opinion, than aesthetic pleasure and contem-plation. The fast-paced world of corporate Ameri-ca, meanwhile, running on coffee and a Protestant work ethic, requires rational, practical thinking. Feelings, existential dread, a dreamy disposition: check these at the door, thank you very much. There will be no inner turmoil on the trading floor. Young professionals are straight shooters, dealmakers, movers and shakers; they are efficient; they get stuff done. At the same time, they may be pleasure-seekers, partying hard on weekends to grasp at the vestiges of youth. There's nothing wrong with pleasure. Consider poetry a difficult pleasure, which rewards those who invest the time. Saturday night drinking can scramble and rejuvenate your mental and physical modus operandi. Sunday morning po-etry can do the same for your verbal relation to the world. Seek what Rimbaud calls a "systematic derangement of the senses."

A willingness and ability to take action in the world ought to be applauded, but it is not the only attitude one can adopt toward the world. Poetry asks you to invest nothing but your at-tention, and gives you only immaterial returns, though these can be significant: delight, awe, the sublime, or even a cessation of loneliness. The young professional's goal, at the end of the day, is to make money, for themselves and their people. They are, during the workday, gears in the engine of capitalism. Poetry offers a temporary escape from profit-motives and power games, a mil-lennia-old corpus of text written by people who want to write it, for people who want to read it. No one gets rich off poetry. Indeed, the co-opting of poetry by corporations––who speak of their "vision" and "mission," or who may dabble into poetry to inspire their ad-copy––might be best avoided.

While the business environment may not be conducive to a poetic sensibility, the young pro-fessional's strong suits match the requirements for reading a poem. First and foremost, yuppies are skilled practitioners of the English language. Equipped with strong verbal fluency, young professionals can wield and employ language to make deals, dispense advice, articulate prob-lems, offer solutions, and otherwise ensure that the business day runs according to plan. They have strong vocabularies and recognize that phrasing the same idea in two different ways can render vastly different effects. Yuppies are sil-ver-tongued, able to use the right words in the right order to accomplish their goals. This is all well and good. God smiles on every lucid, true, and beautifully crafted sentence,

written or spoken, whether it's in a memorandum, a product description, or a Pulitzer Prize-winning poetry collection.

On the other hand, poetry offers the articulate young professional an opportunity to bring their intelligence to bear on a work of art, rather than a contract or report. Reading poetry is still work, requiring close attention to diction, syntax, meter, tone, and structure. Poets use the same language we do and are aware of its standard rules and regulations. As such, every diversion from convention or lapse into abstraction, every bizarrely organized chain of signifiers, should be read as intentional. Poems teem with meaning, every punctuation mark, line break, and word choice containing significance. Everything is there for a reason. Young professionals, then, are as capable as anyone in finding meaning in a poem, to come to an understanding of how the parts come together to make a coherent whole.

Poetry should not be reserved for special occasions, nor does it have to be sentimental pablum, nor is it written by people much different from professionals. We must try our best to avoid seeing poetry-reading as something weird, deep, intellectual, or pretentious. Like any piece of entertainment or art, poetry is nothing more than something created by someone else for our enjoyment. Like a workplace deliverable, poems require time and effort, a tinkering with language. As with any discipline, some practitioners are better than others. We can view poets more like mechanics than stoners or angsty adolescents; they sit down and work on their craft; they seek to evoke feelings through form. Oscar Wilde said that all bad poetry is sincere, that it "springs from genuine feeling." Us amateur poets with Notes app oeuvres can confirm.

Regarding non-amateurs (professional poets, oxymoronic though that sounds) some major poets of the 20th century split their time between writing verse and advancing their careers. T.S. Eliot was a publisher at Faber and Faber, Wallace Stevens a lawyer and insurance executive, and William Carlos Williams a physician. As far as recommendations go, I point to those poets, as well as others discussed in Langdon Hammer's 2012 Yale course "Modern Poetry," available on YouTube. The work of Harold Bloom, who for all his staunch traditionalism was a great literary popularizer, is also a gold mine for the interested rookie.

art by Omri Ratzkoff
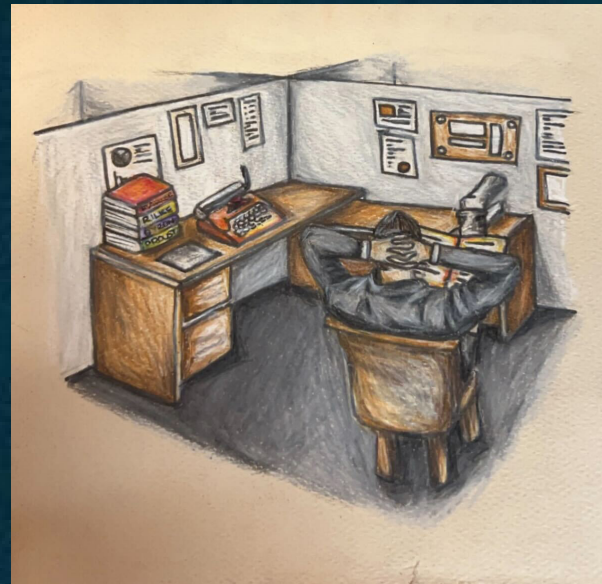
The average poetry reader and the average young professional may seem vastly different, but the truth is that we are, all of us, both of these people. Inside me there are two wolves; one seeks aesthetic pleasure, the other seeks to get rich. We are all both softies and hardos, irrational and rational, Dionysian and Apollonian, liberal and conservative, with both poetic and professional capacities. While those drawn to read or write poetry don't need to professionalize and enter the corporate world (and to the best poets I beg: please don't), it would be beneficial for young professionals––and all people––to begin a serious engagement with poetry, and experience a Stevens line: "And there I found myself more truly and more strange."

Big Pharma Is Watching You

by Daisy Klink

Imagine this (though many of you likely won't have to). You have anxiety preventing you from focusing on anything during the day and keeping you up at night. You decide to see a doctor for some expert advice on potential treatments. Your prescription: not therapy, behavioral changes, support groups, or meditation; nothing but a feel-good pill. You, like many others around you, are now part of an increasing statistic in America's drugged-up generation. Kids who seemingly have every advantage in life are developing debilitating mental illnesses in increasing numbers. Over-pathologizing the American youth has led to hyper-medication and a new age of hedonism. Moreover, we are allowing big businesses to profit from this overindulgence with little regard for our welfare.

The origins of potentially harmful neo-parenting techniques can be traced back to the psychodynamic perspective in psychology. This theory suggests early childhood experiences are deeply ingrained into our personalities and behaviors as adults, providing a potential basis for psychological damage. As we continue to find evidence supporting this philosophy and against authoritative parenting, parents turn to softer methods to best prepare their kids for a harsh world. But anything in excess is harmful; initially beneficial gentle parenting approaches were morphed into the unprecedented notion that every challenge inevitably leads to grippy socks and white-painted asylums. Hence, exorbitant efforts to insulate and indulge children emerged seen through participation awards, iPhones in the pockets of pre-teens, and the abolition of the time-out. Giving in to your child's every desire coupled with a lack of real-world consequences has created a generation of adults deathly afraid of adversity and blind to their own character defects.

While it is important to recognize the rising rates of mental illness in recent years, what many individuals and doctors consider health conditions can often be traced back to a lack of self-care. People attribute fatigue and inattentiveness to insomnia and ADHD, rather than sleep deprivation and overstimulation from doom-scrolling on TikTok all night. Instead of simply stopping the problematic behavior, we look for a 'solution' that enables us to continue it. This is the backward

art by Omri Ratzkoff

logic used to justify prescription drugs; self-neglect confused with diagnoses distorts vitamins into poisons.

Self-sabotage is supplemented with sensualism. As Philip Rieff says, the "psychological man is born to be pleased." The notion "if it feels good, do it" was previously looked down upon (see the hippies of the 60s), but is once again the road more traveled. While this ideal can be beneficial when leaving a toxic relationship or indulging in a little post-dinner treat, this modern maxim also encourages harmful pleasures, such as ChatGPTing your final project or chain-smoking a pack of cigarettes. Nearly everything has become a vehicle for our own well-being. This pursuit of pleasure is further capitalized on by corporations looking to sell market-indulgent commodities such as addictive social media algorithms and Passionfruit Guava Mango Bubblegum-flavored cancer air.

Our push toward instant gratification has led to our striving to escape suffering. We've simulated a fashionable version of Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," where pain is considered dangerous as it leaves unhealed neurological wounds. Doctors are expected to eliminate any and all discomfort to succeed in their role as healers, satisfying a medical model of disability that suggests a 'normal' and 'abnormal' state; any aspect straying from the former is a flaw that must be cured. Through this rigid lens, neurodiversity is a major threat.

To meet the demands of this new paradigm, doctors in both the physical and psychological realm turn to the easy fix: medication. Each year, enough opioids are prescribed that the odds of dying from an opioid overdose are higher than those of dying in a car crash. Similarly, about 25% of adult Americans take a psychiatric drug daily, with more than 1 in 10 on SSRIs—the most widely used class of antidepressants. Unfortunately, the lasting effects of these prescriptions are often overlooked. Long-term effects of antidepressants range from emotional numbness, low libido, and the persistence of withdrawal symptoms up to nine months after use.

So why is it that doctors are pushing this medicated agenda so hard given the availability of less harmful alternatives? Pharmaceutical companies reap unimaginable profits off patients' pain. Also known as Big Pharma, the industry historically has a culture of corruption, which has gone so far that Americans' spending on these drugs increased 50% in just 8 years. Lucky for you, payments from drug companies to physicians to promote their products are quite common, making your 'best interest' the question of a dollar sign. Beware of these commodified 'cures' when making a treatment decision; weigh the risks and benefits while considering your personal values and reasonable cost.

While prescription medications are certainly abused by contemporary society, this is not to say that they can't be properly utilized. As a psychology major, I've spent much of my time researching and learning about effective mental health interventions. I've been on antidepressants myself, and my journey coming off them is what sparked my skepticism toward them. The question is not whether we should use them, but when, for how long, and if they're the right option for you. SSRIs aren't meant to be a long-term solution, and when they produce more problems than they solve, consider a different method instead of piling on another prescription. Furthermore, we must meticulously examine the motives behind those advocating for these types of treatments and how they are advertised. Neurodivergence is not something that needs to be "fixed." How you approach your personal issues should be your personal preference, not the preference of a profit-seeking pharmaceutical company or an obtruding neurotypical observer. Psychiatric drugs should not be regarded as some sort of panacea. Maybe the reason we're all so miserable is because we're trying so hard to avoid it. Stop running from yourself and be; pain in moderation might just be self-actualizing.

Unleashing Female Rage
by Lena Brooks-Kelly

From millions of young girls and women screaming their hearts out at the Eras tour to wiping away tears at America Ferrera's speech in the Barbie movie, "girlhood" has taken 2023 by storm. By definition, girlhood is a state of being a girl, either past or present. However, platforms like TikTok have quickly transformed this definition into a title that describes anything remotely sentimental and reminiscent of the female experience. "This is girlhood" can equally describe something as simple as exchanging shoelaces for pink ribbon to a drunken compliment in the girl's bathroom at a bar.

Despite its name, girlhood is relevant for a range of ages, from pre-teens to mothers and from all backgrounds. The new definition of "girlhood" rejects the submissive, incompetent, and pining female archetype of the past. Most notably, it reconfigures today's experience of young girls and women in an optimistic light.

Unruly, chaotic, and aggressive, however, are not part of this new era's lexicon. They contrast the desirable and pretty package in which we have situated our imagined idea of a girl's existence. Consequently, "girlhood" often still relies on the complacent and submissive connotations associated with domestic and maternal expectations of the 1960s. Girlhood is hopeful and sweet, but it exists as a fantasy. More importantly, it does not acknowledge female rage, a distinctly paralyzing and strong force: an emotion often felt but rarely recognized.

Greta Gerwig's Barbie, this past summer, gave rise to the nostalgic and hopeful definition of girlhood we have become accustomed to. Fortunately, we are more advanced than Gerwig's Barbies, who just learned what the patriarchy is. Nonetheless, similarly to Barbies, women are expected to act within a socially acceptable definition of anger. This definition expects anger from men but punishes women for it. Gerwig's Barbie takes initial steps to highlight such double-binded expectations but does not explore them at the necessary length.

For example, towards the end of the movie, Margot Robbie sits at the end of her bed and explains to Ken in excruciating detail, all the while in a soothing tone, that she's just not that into him. She does not raise her voice, scream into a pillow, or punch a hole into a wall. In fact, she remains collected for the entirety of the movie, and even as she sheds a tear, she is perfectly composed. Meanwhile, Ken immediately slaps himself in the face upon rejection.

While I appreciate the satirical element of this scene, we could all benefit from a more unfiltered glimpse into Barbie's mind. A scene that replaces sympathy and understanding with genuine anger and frustration.

Our modern depiction of girlhood reflects how a woman is often taught to use her voice but rarely told to raise it. TikTok clips depicting "girlhood" do not feature anguished cries, violent outbursts, or harsh words, as they are not welcome in public or private spaces for women. Nevertheless, this does not negate their historical or current existence. The anger of the Stonewall Riots culminated in an important wave of political activism and participation in LGBTQ+ movements and organizations. Such a movement was not inspired by gentle words or subtle acts of resistance. It was fueled by the rage of activists like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, who threw some of the first "bricks," Molotov cocktails (fuses attached to glass bottles), during the Uprising. When Rivera herself was excluded from speaking at a Gay Pride event in '73, she grabbed the microphone and exclaimed, "If it wasn't for the drag queen, there would be no gay liberation movement." More so, without such irrefutable acts and words of rage, women across an entire spectrum of gender and sexuality would be excluded from our modern understanding of women's rights.

Women's rage has undoubtedly shaped some of the most critical moments in liberation movements and will continue to do so. Then why do we proceed to ignore it?

Even in everyday life, cries of rage and ire are transformed into bitter tears of frustration. When a girl lashes out in genuine exasperation, her rage is conflated with being "over-emotional," "unhinged," or worse—a "pick-me" girl. She is not allowed to exist as a girl with a range of human emotions. Rather, she is expected to assume a certain identity or even aesthetic—one that is either the "nice girl" or the "angsty and unapproachable."

On the other hand, unfiltered portrayals of female rage have slowly found a space in mainstream media. For example, Emma Seligman's recent film Bottoms, released alongside Barbie this past summer, places female rage in its full complexity at the forefront. The film follows a female fight club with the leading duo characterized as "loser lesbians." The pair quickly find themselves fawning over the two popular straight-presenting cheerleaders. This counteracts the painfully straight-cis-hegemonic presentation of masculinity embodied by the jock football players of the school. The girls of the fight club soon find themselves victims of the jocks' abuse in varying forms (cheating, name-calling, etc.), culminating in their decision to egg the leading man's house. One girl, Hazel, decides toilet paper is not enough and escalates the situation through the detonation of a homemade bomb under his car.

While this scene serves as a literal shock factor, it also alludes to something more important: that these women are angry––not simply in the context of high school, but because these women have historically been ascribed a script that only allows them to be a "cheerleader" or "angry lesbian." Seligman effectively deconstructs this narrative and creates characters who are allowed to be sexy, gay, and full of rage. While I do not condone attaching self-made bombs to our exes' cars, I do think we deserve to be angry and cute.

Girlhood should be beautiful and hopeful and simultaneously ugly and angry. Moreover, it should not only be reserved for sentimental moments but also disruptive ones. When we deprive women of their right to fully exist, to express rage, we effectively deprive them of a reflection. The altered, rosy version we give women in exchange silences the strength that exists within us all. Knowing this, we should actively expand our definition of girlhood and incorporate its meaning into our everyday experiences. Scream from the rooftops or start a riot! Raise your voice so loud it is impossible to keep ignoring it. In doing so, the reflection the girl sees in the mirror will start to look more like herself.

art by Omri Ratzkoff

Why English Will Never be the Tower of Babel

by Ania Sokolowska

"Whatever, let's just speak English," is the punchline of a popular Nordic joke: their languages are intelligible, but people tend to prefer to communicate in English. This phenomenon of Anglo-centrism becomes increasingly prevalent with the globalization of social media platforms that cater to English-speaking audiences. In Europe, where locals roll their eyes and respond in English to tourists' attempts to speak the local language, the widespread reach of English seems inescapable.

The most spoken language in the world is English–– by no small margin. While English has 300 million more speakers than Mandarin, there are almost a billion more native Mandarin speakers than native English speakers (Statista). English dominates the world as a language learned later in life, not as a mother tongue. The idea that English literacy is a stepping stone in a successful career has increased since the 20th century. Where my grandparents learned Russian or German as a second language, my parents learned English. Of course, growing up in Iron Curtain-era Poland, my mom also learned Russian. However, while Russian was the forked tongue of the oppressor, English was an opportunity.

Dr. Kingsley Ugwuanyi explains how English has been precisely that—an opportunity—for Nigerians. He explains how Nigerian English is an "outer-circle" or fringe form of English that Nigerians feel immense pride in due to its contributions to academia in re-introducing forgotten English words. Dr. Ugwuanyi argues that its ability to adapt sets English apart from languages of former empires, a contributing factor as to why English is so widespread today. While this example of the evolution of linguistics and the need for international communication in academia is positive, treating English as a monolith is damaging on a global level.

Speaking English is not the issue: the nature of the language is. Nigerian English is introducing Nigerian scholars to the forefront of academia, but the ultimate reason Nigerians need to innovate to be included is that they were—and remain—excluded from international academic circles. Nigerian English is a consequence of the over-exploitation of the global south. It is as if Western Europe set the starting line for the race back for Africans, and now everyone is cheering that they "caught up." One can celebrate the achievement of an "even" playing field, but it would be an act of indiscriminate violence to not consider that

art by Sofia Nyez

the very idea of inclusion began with the concept and act of exclusion.

As with the continent of Africa, the British Empire colonized India, renaming places for the ease of the colonizer's tongue. After India gained independence, many place names were reverted or de-anglicized; the North East Frontier Agency was renamed to Arunachal Pradesh. To this day, English fluency is the mark of the intelligentsia, learning, and status in India. Liberation may be written on paper, but the invisible chains of language's influence on status remain. This idea of renaming is evident not only in English colonialism but Western Eurocentrism. Many people have never heard of Maria Skłodowska but have heard of Marie Curie. One name is Polish, the other French. Both names belong to the same person. This erasure of cultural personhood prioritizes what is often solely the comfort of the outsider and is inherently xenophobic.

Many people with an ethnic-sounding name will be familiar with the dreaded beginning-of-the-year roll call where their peers expect them to materialize a nickname out of thin air. Why should one's peers bother to learn new sounds if they can uproot the linguistic representation of their identity? Some may argue that immigrants should assimilate into the culture they immigrate to, but there is a difference between adapting to local values and erasing one's culture for the sake of fitting in. To parrot the concept of assimilation to people whose cultures have been forcefully assimilated by outsiders is willful ignorance. Accommodation is only ever considered for those for which the system is created and maintained.

The United States is a unique case where there is no official national language. Here, the idea of "assimilation" of immigrants places English on an undeserved pedestal of superiority that does not reflect the melting pot of reality. In other geographical areas, language often has strong patriotic ties. In Poland, which Germany and Russia partitioned multiple times, speaking the national language is imperative in participating in the national culture. For Americans, English is merely a consequence of settler colonialism. As British religious refugees and economic opportunists, American colonists spoke English and imposed it upon the indigenous population. English was never

a point of unique patriotic or nationalistic pride, only a tool of aggression against others. The perception of the English language as "American" is accurate in the worldview where suppression of cultural identity and oppression of minorities are American values.

Languages evolve, and in a country with the sheer square mileage of the United States, the formation of dialects and regional accents is a given. Brits enjoy laughing at the American accent, claiming it is "simplified English." The recurring focus of these jabs is the generic American accent, but in practice, the actual joke involves vocal crutches, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), queer slang, and accents. When pressed for examples of what annoys them about an American accent, people will present instances of regional linguistic practices.

Vocal crutches such as "like" and "um" may be subjectively annoying, but they allow the speaker a train of uninterrupted thought in a society where the opportunity for marginalized groups to speak is a manufactured scarcity. AAVE may break conventional grammar rules, but it fosters a sense of belonging and shared cultural significance. Linguistic diversity naysayers support the idea that English should have a particular sound to it, that deviation from the established norm is a shameful and negative practice.

Once again, societal expectations prioritize the listener's inflated sense of self-righteousness over the speaker's comfort. The concept of otherness, that one is not privy to every word to escape someone's lips, is a disease encroaching on American rights to. . . their idea of America.

The English language's grip on the world is not going anywhere. I am writing this article in English, and you are reading it in English. The world will not suddenly stop speaking English (nor should it), but the way the world approaches learning English should change. English is a fantastic tool for collaboration, but that does not take away from the beauty and necessity of maintaining other languages for both individual countries and immigrants. Acceptance of foreign accents, local dialects, and the natural evolution of language will be necessary for English to stay relevant. However, English will not, and should never, be the only solution.

THE ANCIENT CULTURE OF UCLA
BY LEVI FRENCH

On an airplane thousands of feet in the air, there sits in front of you the pattern of animal skin imprinted on faux leather surrounding a low-resolution screen. This encounter isn't something that stands out in our everyday life, but its existence is somewhat intriguing; pieces of our ancient history breakthrough and persist in spite of measures taken to modernize our lives, through new technologies and artificial materials. This is a concept touched on by many theorists who specialize in historical materialism, but a quote by Kamala Harris caught my attention as the most straightforward: "You think you just fell out of a coconut tree? You exist in the context of all in which you live and what came before you." There are numerous things in my life and in the lives of my friends here at UCLA that are a part of an extensive and mutual thread of history, where a commonality exists between all of our cultures, even those cultures that may seem less closely attached to tradition.

While the leather airplane seats themselves represent a long descending aesthetic taste among humans, they don't form a strong thread of cultural history alone, but rather act as a catalyst for this idea of threaded history. The true thread of these seats is how I, being human, over-examine them as though their existence in today's world is some grand revelation into the truth behind culture and aesthetic. Overthinking things is one of the most ancestral things we can do as humans. Overthinking increased our chances of survival in the wild, as well as led to the development of religion, mathematics, and eventually the university system as we know it today. This is the thought process that I had inherited from all those who came before me.

This concept of an inherited mind, or collective unconscious, was theorized by Carl Jung in the early 20th century; this would be the "what came before you" aspect of Kamala's quote. He describes five main instincts which humans possess: hunger, sexuality, activity, reflection, and creativity. It is these instincts which form the collective unconscious. The first two are more obvious to us, since it is through our need to survive and procreate that any of us exist today. But connecting ourselves to the latter three instincts reveals the historical thread which passes through.

By extrapolating Jung's ideas to the non-traditional college culture, it becomes more apparent how we fit into all of this. Every Thursday and Friday, many of us here descend the Hill to the frats and apartments in search of release, and very little accomplishes this more than loud bass and a copious amount of drinks. Picture, then, a celebration some 10,000 years ago; after a long and difficult hunt, we return to our humble village with our spoils and release our tensions with dance. An animal skin drum loudly resonates akin to an ancient "Like a G6", and just for a moment can we forget that it starts all over again in just a few days. To dance and celebrate is our instinct for activity. Likewise, on lonely Sunday nights, we might find ourselves staring at the ceiling, waiting for some sign that the path we've taken is the right one, that the major we chose wasn't the incorrect choice, and hoping that there is something bigger out there that will even out the mistakes we make. This is our instinct for reflection

and searching for meaning, something that is found in virtually every religion on Earth.

Most of this connection-making is unspectacular. Many people, especially at a place as diverse as UCLA, can easily trace their cultural threads, such as a traditional dance or song passed down to them, the spiritual practices of their religion, or a combination of spices in a traditional dish. This thread of history and mental lineage, however, is distinct from any specific culture; it is less so how we do something, and more so that we do it in the first place. As part of the American cycle of assimilation, many of us have lost track of our ancestral threads; our cultural identities either were mixed into the melting pot or were given up/suppressed in the name of a unified American culture. It may be comforting to know that participating in apparently inconsequential culture which seems to only exist in modernity and is unlinked to any historical practices is still equivalent to participating in human culture. While we may have forgotten the practices of our ancestors, we can be almost certain that they would have danced and celebrated to music, or fallen in love at a party. They would have imagined what their purpose for living is, just as we might do on a Sunday night while questioning our choice of major or career path. It is an undeniable part of the human experience which exists in a mental plane independent of our nurture.

It is important to recognize nurture, rather than nature, as also sharing responsibility in our actions which derive innately from our minds. The way in which your parents raised you, the music that you listened to as a child, the places and cultures you grew up around, these are the far more specific aspects of living that dictate our selves, our tastes, and our personalities. These, however, are constantly changing as trends rise and fall, and are the result of a broader inherited human unconsciousness. The hardware has changed, yet the software has stayed the same. Even as time passes at an uncomfortably fast rate, our human culture will remain strong. Even in the post-apocalypse, we'll still love music.
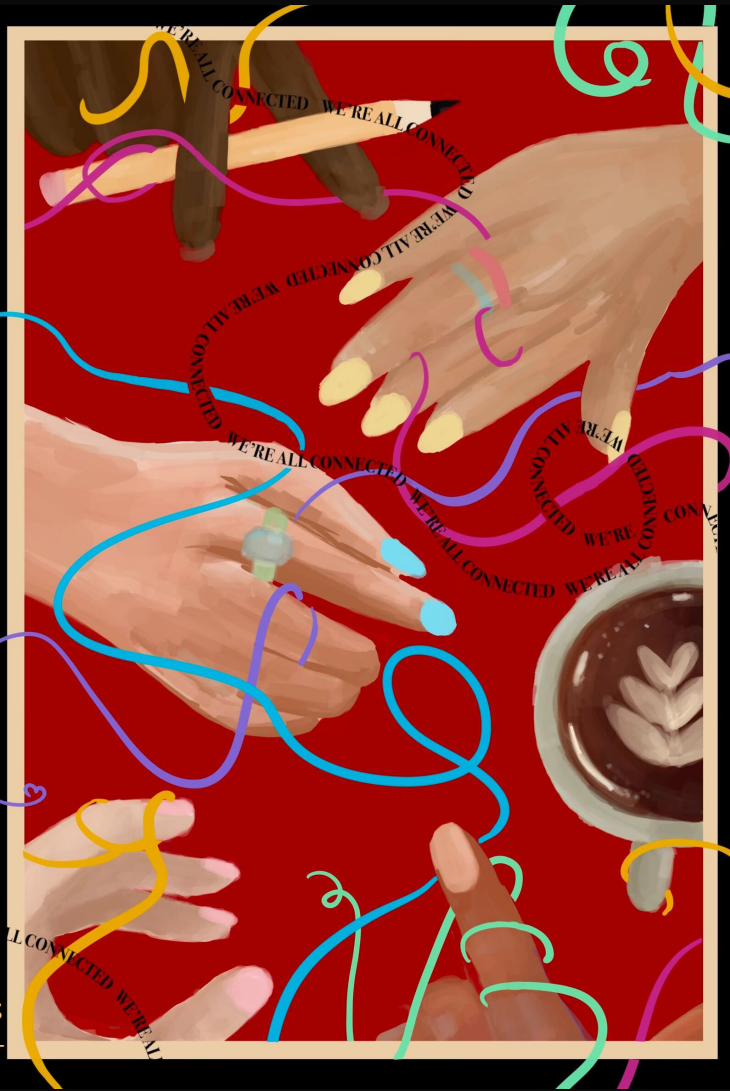
Microtrends are a Good Thing

by Sofia Nyez

Fast fashion is destroying our world. Microtrends are ruining fashion. Will clothes ever be the same again? These are phrases we've heard more and more recently, but are microtrends truly a bad thing? In the environmental and fashion community there is a hysteria over the pattern of current fashion trends. Fast fashion, an industry that pumps out cheaply made clothing using abhorrent methods violating both human rights and the environment. It is the leading cause of microtrends, fashion trends spanning an extremely short period of time, lasting as short as one season. In previous decades, trends have followed a mostly consistent timeline of about twenty years. Now, thanks to the internet, fashion culture has changed. Influencers spread trends en masse at an instantaneous rate, making our knowledge of what counts as "chic" more accessible. Fashion includes a strong element of exclusivity: if everyone is dressing like it, it's not cool anymore.

This quick dispersion of advice takes away that exclusivity from the fashionistas of the world, and suddenly, those cut of jeans that were so "fashion forward," become so "last season." Items become old news, and new ones take their place faster and faster. Some estimates say that trends last about an average of three to five years instead of the usual hallmark twenty year period. Take a trend of old: Bennaton sweaters that dominated the majority of the 80s and spanned nearly a decade in terms of being "in style." Compared to the more recent microtrend, the House of Sunny green dress that was all the rage among TikTok influencers last year. These days the dress is nowhere to be found. This quick turnaround created by our internet culture is only perpetuated by fast fashion companies, because the more new trends come and go, the more products they can push onto giddy consumers. It's all about money, baby.

And although this all seems like sorrow and woe, that the ever-quickening trend cycle will careen us into a fashion apocalypse, perhaps there is a silver lining. The way I see it, this could even be good for fashion. Because the way the culture is now, trends are never truly too far out of style. The timelines are less stable now; there are less rules for us to follow. Those capri pants from the mid-2000s that were so incredibly ugly to all your friends a year ago? They're back in style. The Uggs you wouldn't be caught dead in? Pop those babies on, it's giving Paris Hilton. Juicy Couture tracksuits? Please, so camp, we love. Soccer kits? So vintage! We're living in a world where one can wear both high-waisted and low-waisted jeans and be considered "in-style." And isn't that a beautiful thing? (I would advise against wearing skinny jeans, but hey, they might make a comeback. Never say never.)

The fashion police seem to have less power over us: even if you're dressing "out of style" you could make the argument you're just being ironic. The most fashionable people are the ones being different, after all. Plus, with the internet, there exist so many subcultures of fashion that fit into hyper specific "aesthetics." Prep, y2k, disco, sporty, grunge, athleisure, ballet, old money, indie, goth, the list is endless. Put anything into Pinterest and you'll find a niche. You could even combine these and find you'll still be in style. So literally wear whatever you want. Whatever makes you happy. Wear what you feel beautiful and confident in, and congratulations, you're fashionable. And because of this wide array of possibilities, you can be unique in your style. Thanks to microtrends, if you say it's fashion, it's fashion.

While what I've just described seems like a purely positive take on this new pattern, there are some

downsides to this culture. The environmental and human rights impact of microtrends and the fast fashion industry are contemptible. Fast fashion companies often use workers in developing countries, undercompensating them and forcing them to work in terrible conditions. These conditions include long hours, unsafe environments, use of minors, and restriction of unionization. These companies also produce their clothing using cheap and harmful chemicals that the workers usually handle without any safety precautions. The environmental factor plays a huge role in the negatives of microtrends as well. Because of cheaply made and distributed clothing that quickly goes out of style, consumers don't feel bad throwing away their clothes at the drop of a hat. As trend cycles shorten, so does the lifespan of the clothing. PBS estimates that Americans throw away thirteen tons of textiles every year, much of which is fast-fashion clothing.

My preferred solution to this problem is buying clothing secondhand. The environmental foot-print for the clothes themselves is zero, because no new clothes had to be made for you. Thrifting can vary, but there are plenty of affordable options that are better than fast fashion. Plus, it's super fun. Thrifting and vintage shopping are an activity, an adventure, and finding a unique piece can have such a payoff. I will always remember the time I found an unworn pair of red Calvin Klein pumps for $10. Plus, with trend cycles coming and going so quickly, you're bound to find something on trend at the store. There are plenty of low-waisted jeans and rhinestone studded tops to fill your y2k desires. If you're out shopping in LA, I recommend Melrose avenue as a place to find secondhand clothing at a range of prices. You can participate in microtrends without worrying about supporting fast fashion.

Microtrends are a small way to make a big statement. Fashion shouldn't be scary, it shouldn't have all these rules. It should be fun, a way for someone to express themselves. And if you look at microtrends in the right way, maybe you'll learn to love them.

1980 **1990** **2000** **2010** **2020** **2023**

THE FOLLY OF THE OBJECTIVE 10/10

BY ANTON STOVER

If you consume basically any media––music, movies, you name it––you're bound to look at some lists of the "best" of the media. In my recent conquest to listen to an album a day, I've seen my fair share of Pitchfork and Fantano reviews, RateYourMusic lists, /mu/ threads, TikTok accounts, and Instagram comment sections, all discussing the best albums of both this year and of all-time. I apply the word "discussing" generously, because much of this conversation focuses solely on numerical ratings. Whether five out of five, nine out of ten, or even 97.34 out of 100, numerical ratings have proved to be one of the most efficient means of getting across a media opinion in the era of short-form content. Yet, this simplification, while easy to scroll past in between Family Guy clips, is ruining modern media discourse.

Good media discussion ultimately revolves around a critical conversation. One person tries to convince another to listen to a new album or watch a specific film. Or, if both people have already seen the media, the discourse is meant to come to a collective consensus (or at least partial consensus) based on individual opinions and experiences. In its purest form, media discourse encourages people to legitimately think about and justify their opinions on the media they consume. Crucially, through this conversation (and it is a conversation!), both individuals emerge with a deeper, more nuanced opinion on the media; they might have even altered their original opinion.

However, this ideal conversation is often different from what actually occurs. More often, it follows

art by Camille White

that Person A puts out a score for an album, giving it a nine, crowning it as "almost perfect." Then, in the comments, Person B says that Person A is a tasteless moron who doesn't understand music, and the album is clearly a 10. Someone else then responds to that comment, calling Person B a fanboy (or some other unpublishable term) and saying the album is definitely an eight. They may argue for a couple more comments, but most conversations end there. These arguments have no real commentary, or, in the case of a Pitchfork or an Anthony Fantano review comment section, the commentary is scrolled past by the public who skips to the part with the numerical rating. By the end of the argument, both people's opinions about the media are unchanged. At best, they walk away with a different opinion about someone halfway across the country based on their view of the new Drake album.

Regardless of the exact conversation, many discussions about numerical ratings encounter the problem of the balance between subjectivity and objectivity. Everyone has a different idea of what a 10 or 9 is, resulting in one person with 500+ 10/10 pieces of media and another person with only five perfect pieces of media ever (and I mean ALL forms of media). This is part of the problem with Fantano reviews, as he is just one person, and Pitchfork reviews, as they are a collection of writers, all with different opinions. Thus, it is impossible to judge albums completely by number, because art is, at the end of the day, subjective. The range of experiences in media consumption cannot be forced into small boxes, numbers or otherwise.

Even with this fact, many try to hide a subjective opinion behind the argument of objectivity. In other words, people who have never made music in their life complain about the objectively bad, "overly simplistic" mixing in the 20-minute cloud rap mixtape from some teenager in Slovakia that ends up being the critic's top listened-to album of the year. Objectivity is typically weaponized to justify a subjective opinion. Read any thread about the newest mainstream pop album and you will see someone in the comments who condemns its popularity, claiming it to be "too generic" or "too manufactured." The same person will admit that other media, especially hip-hop albums or B movies, cannot be over a six or seven because even though the media is enjoyable and fun, it lacks technical standards or complex lyrics. This is not to say that enjoyable pop albums cannot be highly rated (e.g. Thriller, CRJ's EMOTION, Daft Punk's Discovery), but these cases are few and far between. These albums are indeed lauded for their technical merit, but denying enjoyment of many albums solely because it does not have some irregular time signature or a 20-minute complex guitar piece is ridiculous.

This combination of subjectivity and objectivity often results in two separate ratings: one for actual enjoyment and one for a public, "true" rating. Thus, people's actual opinions and enjoyment of an album get muddied behind a veil of so-called high-brow critique. Awards shows further complicate these ratings, where an album with many awards might be considered good by some because it won awards, while others believe an album only won an award because it's mainstream. With music especially, the anger at awards shows prioritizing lower-rated "safe" albums over niche, higher-rated "experimental" albums illustrates the divide between the average consumer and critic, worsening the ability for common ground in discourse (as seen in every year's Grammy criticism). As more albums are discussed, the cyclical debates become polarized into online yelling, and the conversation is no longer even about the album.

My point is not that we should abolish all numerical rating systems. I would never have listened to the Brazilian classic Clube Da Esquina without seeing it on the RateYourMusic top 100, or learned about Klimov's Come and See without seeing the highest-rated films on Letterboxd. However, the trend to boil down a creation that took hours upon hours of work into a simple number without having a real discussion makes decent media consumption impossible. This turns discourse into a simplistic shouting match. Lists can remain, and so can the endless array of forums talking about the best tracks of the day, but rating systems should not be the end-all-be-all. Plus, if you disagree with me, then you clearly don't understand that this article is objectively perfect. If you say it's mid, then you just cannot grasp its complexity, you moron.

You Could Be Curvy, Or You Could Be A Pilot
by Elizabeth Marmer

For the past two months, all I've heard is "Barbie" "Barbie" "Barbie." The Barbie movie has made quite the impact on everyone around me. My big confession is: I haven't seen it. But I am aware of how successfully it has rebranded the Barbie franchise in everyone's eyes, and there are a couple of facts everyone seems to have forgotten.

I grew up, like many of my peers, playing with Barbies. My Barbie was a blonde, skinny, white doctor - and though a couple of my friends had Barbies of different races, their dolls were generally all the same. In 2016, Barbie begins to lose their corner of the doll market to competitors, and they decide it is time to move with the trends and create 3 new body types: petite, tall, and curvy. The original doll poses an unrealistic standard attained only by Victoria's Secret angels, and the curvy doll does not do much to change that. Her hips are slightly wider, with marginally larger arms and calves and the smallest bit of abdomen fat. In other words, she is still very skinny, now with wider hips that tailor to the male gaze more than anything else. Is Barbie really sympathizing with women, or is the brand's main intention simply to maximize profit? Their lazy rendition of a body-positive doll speaks to their central motive: profit.

Not only is the curvy doll only vaguely curvy, she also has less clothing options than the regular Barbie. She is, above all else, just a category, an accessory even. Pick your choice: pilot Barbie, doctor Barbie, mother Barbie, or curvy Barbie! It is curvy Barbie's job to be curvy, just like it is pilot Barbie's job to be a pilot. On the websites of Target and Toys R US, two of the most popular Barbie retailers, there are many original Barbies with a million different outfit options. However, there are only 5 curvy dolls. Out of 200! The curvy dolls are just a different "career", a different "type". You could be curvy, or you could be a pilot, but you can't be both. This perpetuates the idea that larger women cannot accomplish the same tasks that skinnier women can, and

that they are somehow not equal to skinnier women. Unfortunately, this is not the only group Barbie categorizes – a couple of other unconventional Barbies that come to mind are Down syndrome Barbie, prosthetic limb Barbie, and wheelchair Barbie. The stark and unequal differentiation between "normal Barbie '' and every other Barbie proves that Barbie as a brand is simply selling "woke" dolls in order to maintain consumer demand. It is all about staying up to date on trends, and right now the trend is to be inclusive. This follows the modern obsession with using human differences as fads and monetizing those differences, rather than appreciating differences for what they are. Barbie is doing just that, using this curvy doll as nothing more than a trend, a marketing tool to maximize profit.

Barbie was mainstream when I was growing up, and it remains mainstream today, especially with its glamorization post-movie. The problem is, Barbie understands how instrumental they are to the lives of children––how much they, as a brand, have a hold on an entire generation. The Barbie board of executives sees the body-image issues of our world like never before with the rise of social media. They have done the bare minimum to stay relevant, their version of the curvy doll clearly displaying how they do not care to genuinely change the beauty standards that they, to a degree, created. Negative, body-oriented beauty standards affect us starting from our earliest days, and if Barbie's inclusivity ends with their poor attempt at designing a curvy doll, children will inevitably grow up internalizing that as the largest possible body that is still acceptable.

In collegiate level economics classes there are two driving factors for businesses: utility (overall happiness of a business) and profit, utility in most cases stemming almost entirely from maximizing profit. By this logic, Barbie, as a corporation, focuses exclusively on maximizing profit, so there is no way their main intention is to empathize with women. Take

Aerie, a brand at the forefront of the body positivity movement. Starting as early as 2014, they committed to stop retouching model images. Yet, Aerie is owned by American Eagle, a company that has done far less than Aerie to move towards body positivity. Inclusivity is just a weapon to increase Aerie's profit. It is clear that their mother corporation, American Eagle, is not committed to body positivity in the same way, and they use Aerie as their personal "woke" branch. Hence, the company as a whole is not using body positivity to make women feel better about themselves, but rather as an effective marketing strategy.

Barbie is not trying to be inclusive, instead trying to stay relevant and reach the greatest possible consumer base. Barbie is not the only brand that operates like this. There are a few possible steps Barbie could take to ameliorate their brand values. First is to widen the variety of sizes that the Barbies come in. The curvy doll cannot be the most plus-sized… Next, Barbie could create all the same outfits and career paths for all the different sizes, instead of only providing a few select ones for their curvier dolls. In a perfect world, Barbie could also eliminate the way they categorize groups of people by simply selling dolls by careers and randomizing the size, race, and other factors of the doll. This may never happen, but it would help eliminate biases in customers, perhaps even changing the mindsets of the individuals behind this corporation and in turn perpetuating healthy stereotypes.

Brands, as a whole, cannot really care about the wellbeing of the individual. Firms want more money and that's about it, and for some reason, their bare minimum contribution of doing just enough to stay "body-positive" is enough for us to look past their shortcomings and support them. If we continue to allow brands to get away with this, they will continue doing it. And yet, we are all products of the very marketing that we try to debate, with commercial jingles and clever advertisements shoved into our brains from birth. It is an endless cycle: we egg them on and they egg us on. There is no clear solution to this issue, but I don't think glamorizing Barbie is the way to go.

Professionalism (n): Suits, blouses, concise responses, and three key points within those responses. As we understand it today, the rigid code of conduct known as professionalism is deeply problematic. While it serves as a means to enhance productivity in the workplace, it can inadvertently target the vulnerable, particularly those from the middle and lower classes, compelling people to suppress their originality and personalities. Consider someone you know at work. What image comes to mind? Is it someone wearing slacks and a button-up shirt or blouse? Chances are, it is. If you excluded those from the service industry, that's because of conditioning the

Talk to Me. Don't Evaluate Me.

by Christian Cabral

capitalist- productivity regime and that is for another article. Who gets to decide what the archetype of the business person is that you just conjured up? It definitely is not those with creativity and cultural backgrounds.

Let's rewind to the dawn of human communication, well before hieroglyphics. Sight and sound were the only senses available to convey messages. We were our raw vulnerable selves. There was no rigid conduct that we followed and we still evolved to be the advanced creatures we are now. Our ancestors were just as productive as we are now but there was no front that they put on for the sake of order and authority. Let's express ourselves in an authentic way, even if it means saying "ummm" during interviews. It is not human nature to always know precisely what to say, let alone collect your thoughts five to ten seconds after hearing a question. Simply taking a moment to collect thoughts and formulate a response does not diminish or devalue the thoughts themselves. We strive to hit zero hesitations, innovative thoughts, and diverse vocabulary when speaking to others in a professional setting. This although is almost impossible for many, unless one was surrounded, growing up, by highly educated adults and an education that implements public speaking classes. But, beyond that bubble of the top 10 percent, a majority of the population is not conditioned for quick thinking, and it takes most people time to formulate their sophisticated and cohesive thoughts.

There is also the paradox of employers needing to know their employees, yet only confining them to time limited meetings, requiring them to compete with a pool of people, and evaluating their wardrobe, vocabulary, and physical upkeep in the lens of professionalism. Just let us be ourselves! If employers seek insight into our lives, they may better understand our personalities and daily communication style, which the erasure of professionalism would lead to. They should see who we truly are, not just the persona we adopt from 9 to 5. With the removal of professional jargon and archetypes, employers could more effectively spot problematic behavior and see one's true motives. In American Psycho, Patrick Bateman progresses through his career because there was already an ideal businessman archetype to follow. He did not have to be humane, sincere, nor personable because he knew what the ideal canatide in the business world looked like––and Patrick Bateman made it far into the industry. Now let's take the example of Patrick Bateman and analyze why he's a perfect candidate for a business man as well as a psycho. He is a cisgender, heterosexual, white, upper class man. This exact archetype reduces diversity of color, sexuality, and gender in the workforce. When going into an interview, the exact euphemisms and vocabulary that you are probably using are identical to the euphemisms that were in rotation a century ago and the vocabulary that your father used when interviewing for his corporate job. An employer will always want to "leverage" with you. The lower class self-starter may be so confused when their boss says this to

them that they look it up and see that it means to exert force. On the other hand, the upper class newly to the workforce individual recognizes that euphemism from their childhood when their father would say that the individual needs to leverage with someone. Thanks to the creativity of diverse groups, there has been developments in the vernacular people use when conversing in an 'informal' setting. These updates to the English language often happen in major metropolises where these corporate settings are also taking place. It is just because of ignorance that these corporations don't acknowledge and embrace the language. Professionalism bans any form of linguistic creativity, indicative of the dearth of any creativity in the workplace other than in marketing, where creativity's goal is to to maximize profit.

Many jobs nowadays––in marketing, law, medicine, analytics, and administration–– have adopted a new form of interviewing after COVID. Now even the little personable quirks of the professional world have turned virtual and more superficial. There is now a system of AI interviews––not solely for interview practice, but for employment. These are huge companies that may not have time to be personable with their hirees such as Amazon, Macrosoft, and Unilever. This new system allows there no room for individuality in the interviewing process. There is now a rubric for interviewing. So if you don't keep that eye contact, have short and concise answers, and don't have a clean room, then you are definitely not getting the job. Your dazzling personality surely will not save you.

Systematically, through the enforcement of professionalism, individuals from the middle or lower classes are often pushed to the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, while the well-resourced upper class continues to ascend. The upper classes quite literally get more classes: in public speaking, analytical reading and writing (where they learn their jargon-filled vocabulary), and networking opportunities with elders in fields of high regard, whereas an aspiring self-starter is meant to continuously struggle. These classes teach the upper class the old-fashioned and formulaic vernacular, while the lower classes are only acquainted with the words and phrases in rotation today, inadvertently putting the two on odd playing fields.

I recently faced a moral question: "What is your writing style?" While the standard answers like "narrative," "persuasive and concise," or "expository" might be what a publisher prefers to hear, I considered my family's perspective. How could they best grasp my writing? I embraced an anti-professionalism and anti-jargon approach as my response. As I write this article, I'm communicating as if I were discussing this topic with a friend. And you understand me, right? If I had written this in a 'professional tone,' it would have hindered people's comprehension of my thesis and reduced the number of potential readers. Isn't the purpose of writing to persuade as many people as possible with your words?

On Selective Suffering
by Kimya Afshar

This postindustrial capitalist world of deep polarization, entrenched corruption, and vapid consumerism seems only to be descending into a quiet, commercial tomb. As time progresses, we stray further from our social fabric, our gods, and our state of stasis and sustainability. This earth's habitability is withering beneath our feet as we recede further into the intellectual and individual work that our society demands, as our collective discourse has been poisoned by the ubiquity of social media. These circumstances beg the question of the morality of our hedonistic pursuits in the face of this wasteland– how meaningful is our individual behavior while we undergo this continual snuffing, our best efforts rendered moot by the strength of this terrible momentum?

This world has seen the vast decimation of our natural environment, the complete disregard for human life at the will of industry, and the increasing ubiquity of technology– something that has furthered polarization, division, and isolation. It seems we have far surpassed the point of no return: a sociopolitical Chernobyl that continuously dissolves our moral fabric and collective sanity. Despite our compostable straws and reusable cups, the oceans flood with plastic, species disappear without goodbye, and huge plots of biodiverse forests disappear under the churning gears of endless production. Our efforts now are only the desperate acts of the eleventh hour– consider the peace of relinquishing responsibility and opting for the selfish hedonism which presence entails.

As a society, we are no longer able to effectively engage in collective discourse, and no longer able to gather in communion via productive conversation and empathy. People construct shields and swords from their identities to use against the weather of the internet; others neglect critical thinking to fulfill their human need for belonging to hate-championing communities. Our con-stant inundation with information is an impossible atmosphere to productively participate in. Already we must contend with the tumult of our own busy heads— it seems impossible that the modern media's huge arena of disarray can productively supplement our search for meaning, order, and happiness in these little lives we've been gifted.

Purpose, challenge, and belonging are all essential ingredients in the recipe for human happiness– we aspire, we yearn, we seek challenge, and we derive worth from hard work and success. There is too much hurt to feel in this world and our human condition is too great a condemnation; every day we must wake up, put on our blinders, and move forward. Our parents sentenced us to years of plight and existentialism on this planet– now ostensibly we must also atone for the collective sins of generations past. This deterministic damnation is a choice, however– for if we simply focus on our immediate sphere, deriving gratification from our own actions and simple successes, we can find fulfillment for ourselves. Perhaps renouncing our

We are trying to repent for our sins: some of us are writing in magazines that promote discourse, while others opt for veganism– but still, our cries for change have fallen upon God's eternally deaf ears. For every altruistic action and attempt to heal this fractured world, we seem only to be confronted by more chaos– a crescendo of calamity unto the quiet scythe.

How, then, can we contextualize our own quest for meaning in the midst of all this entropy and chaos? If we really desire to defend our last bastion of hope in this dying world, then surely it is our onus to pursue only that which directly wards off the tangible doom closing in on us. Yet, curiously, the vast majority of us students are scrolling on Instagram and chasing de-

art by Camille White

grees that will only neatly prepare us to perpetrate these very systems of destruction and plunder.

This willing absence from our moral obligations is indicative of an inevitability that we must embrace– there is nothing that you or I can do that will fix this mess. Instead, we will continue to peddle products for big industries and work tedious hours, all in the name of egoistic, individualistic gratification.

The seemingly pointless, and even ignorant institution of professional and academic development is the hedonistic treadmill that many of us so excitedly ride. Our long hours spent on homework, essays, exams, internships, and coffee chats are all ostensibly the path to the promised land– a future in which we are able to peddle our own ignorance and fuel our self-serving egos, while only virtue-signaling our care for the happenings outside of our own sphere.

This, however, is simply a manifestation of the unavoidable human condition. We're creatures confined to the perimeter of our skulls, grappling with a brain designed

to survive the treachery of natural selection. I urge you, reader, to lean into this jail sentence– though we live in a perilous world, there is still hope for good fortune in your own slice of consciousness.

Our prayers for purpose and direction have been answered – the promised land is upon the horizon. Our only responsibility is to ourselves, and the narrow spaces we occupy in this world. We must focus on the tangible things we can control– our relationships, the people we love, and the things we love to do. Ultimately, this precious gift of limited consciousness is a fragile, feathered thing. It is our own responsibility to nourish this majesty with all the sunlight and splendor we can. If this means riding the highs of academic validation and Linkedin supremacy, relish in it. This human condition is an inescapable thing: there is no need to supplement our already bountiful sorrow to resist it. We must live these small and brilliant lives and hope the apocalypse will finally reign after our last trip around the sun.

In Defense of

by Rithwik

I did a complete 180 only after I watched The Wolf of Wall Street on a tiny airplane screen. Were these brokers passionate about what they were doing? Perhaps, they were passionate about money.

Disgusted, I took out my notebook and jotted down "Passion is everything." What I study, what I pursue, and what I explore, is all because I want my work to be my passion, irrespective of money. I think back to high school, where we filled out "career quizzes" which only asked us what we were passionate about. I think of the extent of which the concepts of individualism and entrepreneurship are ingrained in American culture, both frameworks that call for focusing on your passion. Heck, as I'm browsing company websites on a never-ending internship hunt, I see pages of laughing faces in the "About Us" sections. Such is the mentality that American society propagates with cliches like "Do what makes you happy!" And if someone like Jordan Belfort in The Wolf of Wall Street has a different point of view, we judge them.

Alas, It was a long flight, so I had time to ponder. A lot of time. And as time went on, I took my notebook out once again and added "not" before "everything." To believe that passion should be the chief consideration of college students and job-seekers is a privileged, and even dangerous, point of view.

Those who graduate college and enter the workplace with money as the primary motive of their employment journey often fixate on jobs that provide financial security. Although there are a variety of lucrative industries, they often fall into a few bins: STEM, law, medicine, and management. Coincidentally, these positions are what

American society regards as "get rich" careers, the holders of which many of us college students criticize as being "only in it for the money".

There are also those who graduate college and enter the workplace with passion being their primary driver. The hypothetical Venn diagram of potential professions and lucrative industries does not fully overlap: all lucrative fields have jobs but not all jobs are lucrative. Thus, it follows that these individuals may not always envision themselves entering a vocation that provides the most financial incentives. The prevalence of this perspective

art by Christie Vu

Securing the Bag
Narendra

increases among younger generations. A survey by McGraw-Hill found that only 20% of millennials said it was important to find a job that paid well.

Not everyone falls into these two boxes. In fact, both money and passion are drivers for most individuals when planning for their future. However, we look down upon those who prioritize a fiscal safety net, which provides some explanation for the low figure reported in the McGraw survey. American society, and college graduates, incorrectly believe that financial security will be a natural consequence of attaining a degree, and thus, they can focus solely on pursuing what they are enthusiastic about. In fact, sociologist Dr. Erin Sech found that college graduates "presumed that a college degree would provide a floor of economic stability below which they were unlikely to fall, regardless of the degree they pursued." If tickets of financial opportunity were available to everyone, then I would readily jump on the passion train.

But our world is such a world only for some. Those who occupy the upper socioeconomic strata already have the safety net, connections, and springboards to commit to their passions, an exploration that is often financially risky. Working-class individuals may be equally hardworking and driven to pursue their passions as their financially well-off counterparts, but the similarities stop there; the latter will succeed at higher rates. With a safety net already in place, the graduates in the upper class can readily pursue careers that aren't an amalgamation of money and their passion and are instead free to focus on what they love, regardless of the price tag. Dr. Sech found that compared to the upper and middle class, first-generation and lower-class graduates who attempt to follow passion-based career paths "were more likely to end up in jobs that were precarious, distant from their passion, or misaligned with their education level, or all three." Therefore, when we advocate for people to do what they love, we're calling on them to embark on a dangerous and uncertain journey.

Then there's the refrain that those who are "in it for the money" aren't doing work that's meaningful for them–they're just self-indulgent. However, I'd argue that it doesn't matter if one's work is meaningful to them. Pursuing a career in a sector in which someone is passionate ties their identity to their profession, a dangerous connection in our profit-driven society. You may love what you do, but from an employer's perspective, you're just an economic contributor, or worse, an economic liability. It's equally self-indulgent to only do something if you care about it when society's collective needs are more pressing. After all, your contributions to society could be magnitudes greater if you pursued something based on your skill rather than your passion.

Passion's etymology offers further hints as to why it can be dangerous. Passion is derived from the Latin root word pati, which means to suffer. Over time, it has come to mean the thing that sustains us while we suffer. Jordan Belfort came from nothing; he literally could not afford to suffer. He chose money, and for that, I can hardly blame him.

Truth Through Discourse