BRUIN REVIEW

13

EXTRA

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ONLY 26

FEB·MAR

table of contents

No. 13

ART CREDITS

F.G.Co.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Thank you for picking up a copy of the Bruin Review. We are an independent publication founded in January 2019, dedicated to promoting truth through discourse on the campus of UCLA. We encourage free speech, intellectual debate, and contrarian opinions, and we believe that communicating with and listening to others can help us understand the world and our place in it.

Our writers are diverse, representing every year at UCLA (freshmen through seniors), a variety of majors (both humanities and STEM), and a variety of intellectual perspectives. But the Bruin Review is not focused on questions of policy; in this magazine, you will see new ways of thinking about sociocultural issues, rather than endorsements of political candidates or platforms.

You will find opinions about art, media, and advertising: articles on pop music, country music, K-Pop, stoner movies, and Euphoria director Sam Levinson, as well as critiques of the "First Sip Feeling" slogan on Starbucks drinks and of the snap judgments we make about people on the internet. These writers ask us to be more conscious of the content and messaging we consume on a daily basis.

Some writers tackle technology: iPad babies, the inauthenticity of Instagram, and digital privacy. Others look at the academy: how education may cause bookworm death; how UCLA students may have an entitlement problem; how academia may need more diversity, equity, and inclusion; and how college students may have a hard time finding "home." We have two articles on artificial intelligence: one critiquing AI ("Artificial Intelligence Is Stealing Your Education") and one in defense of it ("AI Will Take Your Job: Rejoice!")

Read opinions about the social world we all inhabit: on being alone, on being basic, on talking to yourself. Read about the body: on how dieting and exercising can be taken too far, and on how the philosophy of "body positivity" may have its own pitfalls. Other articles analyze the relationship between science and religion; between the "dissociative feminist" and the "girlboss feminist"; between the suburbs and violence; and between climate change and other apocalyptic threats.

Issue XIII of the Bruin Review offers a survey of opinion pieces by UCLA students––a window into the interests and concerns of young people today.

Thanks for reading, and consider following us on Instagram, @bruinreview.

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SLAUGHTER HOUSE AMERICA

The suburbs dream of vio-   lence.
Asleep in their drowsy villas, sheltered by benevolent
shopping malls, they wait patiently for the nightmares
that will wake them into a more passionate world.

- J.G. Ballard, Kingdom Come

Massacres loom large in generational memory of those
born around the turn of the millennium. Long before
we were handed our first iPhones and began exploring
social media, the defining experience of 'Generation Z'
was the school-shooting lockdown drill, and while the
national trauma of the 9/11 attacks remains primarily
second-hand for those of us who were still learning to
walk at the time, each and every school shooting that
has made the nightly news for the past decade has been
seared into our minds by a Smith & Wesson branding
iron. Newton, Parkland, Uvalde -- whole towns have
been transformed into symbols of slaughter, names
now associated only with tragedy and death. Faced with
such savage brutality erupting in the very core of the
ostensibly peaceful American heartland, politicians have
retreated to the abstract realm of partisan bickering
and cultural warfare, where much is said and little
accomplished.

Central questions such as WHY DOES THIS KEEP
HAPPENING have been thoroughly absorbed into
this reified cultural debate and have been accordingly
disconnected from reality, with typical explanations
ranging from violent video games to the National Rifle
Association. The problem with such answers is that
they are far too easy: even if the widespread availability
of firearms explains the how of mass shootings, it does
not explain the why. To understand why this keeps
happening, why young men keep taking up arms to
butcher their peers, a holistic social analysis is required,
one that accounts for both cultural and material factors
without falling into the rote patterns of the existing 'Gun
Control Debate'. Correspondingly, our analysis of today's
slaughterhouse America must begin in its isolating,
fearful heart: the suburbs.

For all its ostensibly idyllic peacefulness and seclusion,
the suburban mind has always been obsessed with
violence. From the meteoric rise of bloody slasher films
to the explosive spread of high-tech home security
systems, fears and fantasies of home invasions have long

stalked the quiet streets of suburbia
like a mental Michael Myers.
Such structural paranoia has
afflicted the American
psyche since the
nation's colo-
nial inception:
historian
Richard J.
Hofstadter fa-
mously traced
this   paranoid style
of politics from   late 18th century
Illuminati panics in New England through the fanatical
anti-communist hysteria of the suburban John Birch
Society in the mid 20th century, and today online con-
spir-
acies
such
as
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and
the
'Great
Reset'
have
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ilarly
found
fertile

ground in suburbia's carefully manicured lawns. Even
among those suburban reactionaries who have yet to
buy wholesale into such conspiracies, violent paranoia
reigns in the forms of gun fetishism and racist "Not In
My Back Yard" homeowners associations. While para-
noia is not at all unique to suburbia, the suburbs have
created an environment that structurally encourages
paranoid thinking – Hofstadter (1964) explains that
"certain social structures...may be conducive to the
release of such psychic energies, and to situations in
which they can more readily be built into mass move-
ments" (86). The suburbs create a psychosocial envi-
ronment defined by isolation and suspicion, in which
individuals and families are atomized within their
home-fortresses and turned against anyone viewed as
an outsider. When viewed through the fish-eye lens of a

Ring doorbell, everyone looks like a threat.

Of course, the suburbs are not singularly responsible for America's modern mass-murderer epidemic: by the time Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold began firing upon students in the parking lot of Columbine High School, it had been nearly fifty years since racist whites had first fled the cities en masse for William Levitt's suburban ethnocracies. While these fearful suburban impulses have always resulted in violence, typically expressing themselves in racist attacks, the form that such violence takes has changed significantly: whereas previously, racist suburban violence was typically expressed through collective actions such as lynchings or homeowners associations, today it increasingly manifests as the isolated 'lone-wolf' attacker. It is not

to address their economic and social grievances, urban Black youth turned to gang violence to release their resentment and anger. While white suburbanites' racist paranoia is not as morally or empirically legitimate as Black anger against oppression, it psychologically serves a similar purpose by creating a perceived injustice that individuals grow to resent, and when all collective avenues for remedying such perceived injustice have disappeared, the individual's only recourse is isolated action.

The death of collective outlets for political expression, such as workplace unions or community organizations, has combined with suburbia's racist, isolating paranoia to produce a new generation of angry, lonely and violent youth with easy access to tools of slaughter. Faced with an indifferent society and no popular mechanisms through which to try and change it, these young men take up arms as a rebellion of last resort against whomever they perceive to be their enemy, whether that be their classmates, immigrants, or Black people. While severely curtailing firearm access would certainly save lives by lowering the lethality of such attacks, the growing prominence of vehicular attacks indicates that America's anti-social violence problem will not be solved by gun control alone. Nor is mere 'mental health' support adequate: researchers from institutions such as the American Psychological Association and Columbia's Center for Prevention and Evaluation have repeatedly found that the vast majority of American mass shooters are not seriously mentally ill and would not be considered legally or clinically insane at the time of their attack. Rather than being mentally unstable outliers who just 'snap', mass shooters are more typically motivated by seeking vengeance against perceived harm and are better categorized as terrorists instead of psychotics. Such a fundamentally social problem requires a social solution: beyond simply limiting gun access and improving mental health resources, we must rebuild our isolated communities through anti-racist solidarity that empowers individuals to participate in politics through collective action, leading them away from lone-wolf rebellion and towards healthy social involvement. Of course, weaving a new political and social fabric in a country torn to shreds by racism and atomization is no easy task; moving away from isolated paranoia and hopelessness will require not just cultural shifts, but also revolutionary changes to our political and economic lives. Perhaps, in the meantime, we can begin with an easier reform: bulldoze the suburbs.

coincidental that this atomization of violence has occurred parallel to the wider atomization of politics and society undergone by America in the neoliberal era, and it hasn't been limited to just racist violence. In his masterful history of Los Angeles City of Quartz, Mike Davis (1990) outlined how the brutal repression of the Black Panther Party by the LAPD and FBI (including the murder of Panther leaders Carter and Huggins on the UCLA campus in 1969) created social vacuum that would only be filled by the hyperviolence of the Crips and Bloods: "the decimation of the Panthers led directly to a recrudescence of gangs...at a time when economic opportunity was draining away from South Central Los Angeles, the Crips were becoming the power resource of last resort for thousands of abandoned youth" (298-300). Lacking a collective political outlet through which

AVA ALLAM

Movies like American Pie and Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle seem lost to the America of the late 1990s and early 2000s, an era that facilitated the creation of stoner comedies and raunchy coming-of-age movies that now probably couldn't be made. Sean William Scott, who acted in movies such as Dude, Where's My Car?, American Pie, and Road Trip, stated in 2022 that he doesn't believe a movie like American Pie could be made again. According to William Scott, people just don't have "the appetite for those kinds of movies anymore." While William Scott isn't wrong, I believe he made an oversimplification in his reasoning. The comedy of the 2020s cannot exist on its own without being sold as a part of an action, romance, family movie. Even dramedies have become more common, impairing the ability of comedy to stand on its own as a movie genre. Comedy represents a lightheartedness and self-awareness within our culture that we must try to preserve. As a culture we must realize that not all movies need a larger intellectual, political, or monetary goal beyond simply entertaining their audiences, and that as our culture has developed, so too can our dumb comedies. Even when American Pie came out, it was criticized by the Boston Globe as "gross and tasteless." However, it was also called "cheerful and hardworking and often funny" by Pulitzer-prize winning film critic Roger Ebert. I'm not saying that I disagree with Seann William Scott. If American Pie were made today, I'm sure many people wouldn't like it. More importantly though, there would be people who would. Just because audiences are more open to receiving smart humor in recent years does not mean that they can't still appreciate the comedies of the early 2000s that were sometimes raunchy, sometimes stupid, and sometimes completely stoner-inspired.

I believe the last thriving era of comedy in film started around 1998 and ended around 2014. There's Some-

thing About Mary was an important beginning for the era of feel-good, slightly embarrassing movies with loveable main characters and questionable moments. It continued on with genuine stoner movies like Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle and Murphy's Law comedies like Meet The Parents proving everything could go wrong, and matured into the comedies of SNL alums like Jason Sudeikis and Adam Sandler such as We're The Millers and Grown Ups. However, a lull began around 2014, marking the beginning of an era when pure comedy simply wasn't being written or marketed in the film industry as often. Comedies had to be attached to other genres like coming-of-age stories or action movies, like Central Intelligence or Booksmart.

There are a couple of possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, people are afraid to make raunchy, slightly offensive comedies like the ones that were made in the late 20th century and early 2000s because of the increased likelihood for backlash with the rise of social media and the stride towards political correctness in American culture. Though these are mostly positive developments, sometimes phenomena like cancel culture can negatively affect the potentially incendiary and controversial messages and themes often iterated in comedy. There should be freedom within the comedy genre to explore difficult topics in a respectful and non-offensive way, and I believe that through trusting one's audience, those involved in the comedy genre can successfully do so. Even in 2004, the writers of Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle were able to tackle themes like racism and xenophobia. Second, no one can make money off of comedies anymore unless they're action-filled. These modern action comedies - including movies like Central Intelligence, the recent Jumanji reboot, Ride Along, Free Guy, The Adam Project, and Deadpool - largely star Ryan Reynolds, Kevin Hart, and Dwayne Johnson. If the movies aren't action packed,

MAKE MOVIES GREAT AGAIN

they're either family-oriented, like the latest Puss in Boots installment, or artsy, like Booksmart. In fact, besides these artsy films, most action and family movies are watered-down comedies now.

Another factor in the decline of "dumb" comedy is that comedy largely moved to Vine and YouTube, and then transitioned to social media sites like Instagram and TikTok. The dumb comedy of the past now exists in the form of 10 second to minute long videos that often achieve the same goal as old comedies. The market for these comedies has gone out the window, as people can create their own at home or watch the multitude of cookie-cutter comedies being pushed out by streaming services such as Netflix.

As a culture, we need movies that we don't have to think much about. These are not the appeal-to-lowest denominator modern Hollywood movies that get churned out each year, but the movie where effort was put in to make it relatable, funny, ridiculous, and maybe even witty. These are movies made with a purpose, not just to sell out movie theaters or reach a profit margin. We can watch these movies without feeling the need to overanalyze it, but we can also appreciate them as movies we can rewatch over and over again, still finding some new aspect of them to enjoy each time. We don't need movies with wild effects or a gargantuan amount of action, we just need movies made by people hoping to create a movie as an end to itself, not as a means to a greater end like profit or some movie quota that must be reached in Hollywood. There is a need for the film industry to once again allow the ridiculousness of older comedies into the environment again, without those movies necessarily needing to achieve some greater goal of societal awareness concerning intellectual, political, or social issues like those being produced by A24 most recently. These movies can be self-aware enough to know when they say something

offensive without being insensitive. Though comedy can work within any genre, it should be free to continue to exist on its own, without necessarily being an aspect of a larger dramatic or romantic story.

There is no doubt that our culture needs comedy to survive, as the genre can subtly illuminate socio-economic or political issues where other genres cannot. Even though these movies may be dumb, they must be well done in order to reflect the culture of the time. It aids us in the realization that not everything is so serious, and it helps people in looking at their own

pasts and reframing those experiences in another light. Each of these movies, whether it be American Pie 2 or Step Brothers, stands on its own aesthetically. Although they are made to be somewhat mindless experiences, they are not made mindlessly. They reveal little pieces of social norms and cultural phenomena that would otherwise be lost in history whether it be slang phrases and popular music or general societal attitudes of the time. We are able to watch these movies and be fully immersed in the universes that they create. Unlike other genres, we are able to learn something while watching comedies even if we don't mean to. Comedies are able to present social and cultural information in a very subtle and timeless way, and they prove to be vital to the human experience in that they reinforce the universal trials and tribulations of living.

Filmmakers can trust that the market for the 'dumb' movie will never fully disappear, and if they can push past the fear of reentering the comedy genre, there is the potential for a revitalization of the genre to the peaks it reached in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Sure, these movies might be dumb, but if you look back at even the raunchiest stoner comedies being made twenty years ago, you find that there is truth, hilarity, and authenticity in each and every one. Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle was one of the first movies to star two south-Asian leads, and though American Pie's male characters were often entirely gross and uncouth, there still emerged strong female characters played by the likes of Alyson Hannigan and Jennifer Coolidge. I do not propose that we remake these movies, or copy the tropes present in them. I believe that we should take inspiration from these movies, considering the social progress of the past twenty years and the prevalence of social media, and create new ones that are just as dumb and just as able to serve as a cultural representation of this decade.

BRING BACK HUMANNE

While it's nifty that ChatGPT can do your homework, you've probably realized that ChatGPT could do your job too. The release and popular uptake of ChatGPT has created a lot of attention for artificial intelligence and forced many of us to confront how close we are to making thinking machines that are "smarter" than humans. A program that can operate without direction and perform all the same tasks as a human is called Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). In recent discussions of AI, it seems people are either 1.) in denial that AGI is possible or 2.) terrified of a post-AGI world. It is naive to deny AGI's feasibility and arguments for this position reek of anthropocentrism. Those in fear of AGI are correct to predict total workforce automation and humanity's obsolesce. When we create AGI, businesses will have access to easily replicable machines capable of top-notch work at bargain-basement prices.

And that means we're all losing our jobs, but we should not fear this inevitability. Instead, we should embrace it as an opportunity to rethink the value of human life and what we want to achieve as a society.

Deniers of AGI's feasibility erroneously assume that a human brain is anything more than a type of complicated thinking machine. They envision a workforce of AI and human collaborators, asserting that humans will always be necessary to supervise and direct the machines, because an AI can't innovate or be creative or do some other task that's "uniquely human." But there is no such task. The human brain consists of electrical signals sent through gates that combine and interact to recognize complex inputs and create sophisticated output. A "neural network," the fundamental architecture of modern AI models like ChatGPT, does the same thing.

And this is no coincidence–the neural network was modeled after the brain.

Even innovation and invention, which we've always esteemed as a uniquely human trait, isn't safe from AI replication. Most of human innovation is a recombination of old patterns to make something new, which a computer can replicate by adding the numeric representations of two concepts together.[1] Anyone can see this AI form of innovation by asking ChatGPT to write a poem, or prompting Dall-E to recreate a famous work of art in a new style.

But what about "completely original" ideas? Maybe AGI can't match a human's ability to produce an entirely new thought. But if this type of innovation is not just a reconfiguration of old ideas, then the idea must be the result of some kind of randomness. What we consider the "spark" of human ingenuity is nothing more than random noise that the brain processes, leading to the creation of a new pattern. But computers can generate essentially random numbers, and an AI can entertain the wildest randomly generated ideas at a rate thousands of times faster than humans. Thus, to the extent that true originality is born from randomness, AI has the potential to surpass us in this regard as well. As we continue to examine the brain, we must face the unfortunate realization that our intelligence is just as "artificial" as the machine's. We are biological machines, and as we develop AI further, we must grapple with the idea that we may be creating thinking systems surpassing our evolved meat-minds.

So AI will be better than us at just about everything– what happens to humanity? Many prominent thinkers are predicting labor's doom: total unemployment as every human worker is replaced by a lower-cost AI. They conjure Depression-era imagery of Hoovervilles, soup lines, etc., but even more widespread and drastic. And as of today, this might be the future towards which we're speeding at breakneck pace. However, a post-AGI world could be a utopia: provided we start valuing human life for more than its economic output and generally reprioritize what we're living for. AGI looks like apocalypse only because we consider this future through the lens of capitalism. But our current system of economic organization is simply incompatible with the future of advanced artificial intelligence. Capitalism's response to AGI would be to throw out human workers like trash, useless outdated equipment as they are. But perhaps a more humane

1 A small simplification. See "AI language embeddings."

approach would be to give all employees permanent paid leave. After all, AGI would almost infinitely increase humanity's production capacity—certainly spawning a generous surplus to humanity's needs. With AGI's immense potential, even somewhat equal distribution of the technology's fruits could support a modest (even borderline-extravagant) lifestyle for all. Such an egalitarian perspective seems counter to the justice we perceive in meritocracy. However, it wouldn't matter who's the most talented or the hardest working when everyone's ability is far outmatched by a machine's. In a post-AGI world, humanity exists in the care of its AI and nobody can really do anything to deserve anything greater than the common lot.

Without the need to labor in order to survive, humanity would have the opportunity to correct the ways in which American individualism and greed has corrupted our lives. Most people talk about losing their jobs like it is the worst thing in the world. In capitalism, it is. But really, nobody wants to do his/her job, which is why workers are paid. In this light, replacing people in the workforce with intelligent machines frees up a lot of people to do, well, whatever they want to do. While human economic output would no longer be able to compete with that of artificial intelligence, our lives are not necessarily degraded. Philosophers like Epicurus and Rousseau recognize that the "good life" is simple and built around relationships and authenticity. Post-AGI, humans could focus on finding meaning and fulfillment through art, community involvement, and other aspects of social and emotional well-being. While it's human nature to find new problems to replace those we solve, I believe AGI could give us the opportunity and the time to solve some of our important, but often back-burner problems. In this way, removing humans from the economy could make us all the more human.

AI WILLL TAKE YOUR JOB... REJOICE!

SHUT UP AND EAT

As with many former high school athletes, after moving to UCLA, I found myself longing for the structure and adrenaline that went along with organized sports. In lieu of an outlet to burn off my energy and stress, I began lifting weights. Impressed with the rapid increase that I saw in my muscle mass and definition, I decided to research deeper into healthy eating and fitness. After surviving for two years on solely avocado toast and fruit salad, the introduction of basic protein consumption into my diet proved to be revolutionary. I created a daily gym routine and stuck to it.

Soon, my TikTok algorithm picked up on my newfound interest. My ForYouPage became filled to the brim with fitness inspiration—fitspo—from itemized meal plans to daily workout routines. Video after video revolved around the macronutrient content of rice cakes and how to activate your deep core. Along with the meticulous routines of dieting and exercise swarming my feed, I began to get "motivational" fitness content. Typically, this consists of a muscle-tee'd gym bro telling me that my morning routine promotes laziness if it does not begin before the sun rises or Jordan quotes—complete with reverb—played over truly terrible EDM. While I typically scroll past these videos, one in particular caught my attention.

"People always ask me how I get myself to work out every day. What do you mean? No one wants to get up and go to the gym. We just do. Stop thinking about your feelings. Just shut up and work out."

Now, there's a lot to unpack here, but one phrase struck me the most—shut up and work out.

I was so drawn to this phrase because, for quite a long time, that is all I did—I shut up, and I worked out. I have battled body image issues for as long as I can consciously recall perceiving my own body, but the rigidity of high school athletics forced me to maintain a fairly strict, yet healthy, eating and fitness schedule. However, entering 2020 locked in my room with nothing but a mirror and a yoga mat led to a less-than-ideal progression in my relationship with fitness. Many college-aged women are no stranger to the at-home fitness craze which became popularized during lockdown, but unfortunately, my issues did not start or end during Covid, but rather persisted throughout my young adult life. Although lockdown did not cause my disordered fitness habits, it did provide the isolation needed to foster them.

For years, I was stuck in a vicious delusion of what I perceived to be health—tracking everything I ate, down to the calorie; spending hours exercising, believing that my sole purpose in life was to hold a five-minute plank; reducing myself to a shell of who I once was in a constant effort to achieve some distorted illusion of perfection. Clearly, I was unhealthy. However, the issue with eating disorders is that those suffering often don't believe themselves to be suffering. Anorexia nervosa is one of the most externally apparent mental illnesses, and yet those in the midst of the disease can wholeheartedly believe themselves to

be fine. When I was at my lowest, I did exactly as the motivational video suggested: I stopped thinking about my feelings. I stopped thinking about what I wanted or what my body was telling me to do. I shut up, and I worked out.

This sentiment—hating your life in the name of fitness—is not isolated to this particular video. The internet fitness community is built on this stoic mentality. Meal prepping weeks worth of unseasoned chicken and rice because "food is for fuel, not pleasure." Waking up at 5:00 A.M to work out because "the grind never stops." Forcing yourself to consume thousands of calories one day and cutting down to half the necessary amount the next. Sacrificing all means of happiness in the name of "health."

Health is more than the absence of disease, it is a state of complete physical, social, and mental wellbeing. The idea that a person can somehow strip their life of all things which bring them joy and push their body to the brink of collapse while somehow still promoting health is not only paradoxical, it is delusional. Worse, those inside the fitness community have become so embedded in this fallacy that they no longer have the ability to objectively address the flaws in their behavior. Just shut up and work out. Ignore the times your body is begging for more food, or less food, or food that isn't just un-seasoned grilled chicken and rice; ignore the fact that you don't even know if you like working out anymore because it has just become something you

have to do; just shut up, and do it. But, at some point along the way, you lose what you have been doing this for—health.

For many women struggling with eating disorders, crit-icism is not hard to find—every person who has taken AP Psych in high school jumps at the chance to put on their psychiatrist hat and play nutritionist at the sight of a struggling anorexic. Gym bros, on the other hand, publicly praise these same maladaptive eating patterns with none of the same backlash. For many fitness influ-encers, meal prepping takes the form of an obsession. Every recipe promoted has at least two scoops of added protein powder and the exact vitamin/nutrient count listed before you even get to hear what food you will be making. Shockingly, the ability to name the precise amount of macronutrients in your break-fast bagel is not a sign of healthy eating behavior. We need healthy fats in our diets. We need rest days to repair our muscle strength in between exercises. Most of all, we need joy. Health can-not exist without psychological wellbeing, and to achieve that, we need to experience happiness and pleasure in what we do. There's nothing wrong with pushing your body to work out when you're feeling tired, but we need to recognize the line between exertion and exhaustion. Work out and eat healthy, but know that a cookie (with no added creatine) won't kill you, and that you should want to work out more often than not. Our bodies are smart. When we eat a lot, our body responds by increasing our basal metabolic rate and our drive to burn energy. The reverse happens when we skip a meal. Our body is constantly sending us signals—we just have to listen. Just shut up, and eat.

RAINA JAIN

The Marginalizat

It's okay to be basic! As a UCLA undergraduate in 2023, I have noticed a shift in what it means to fit in as someone "cool." In the past, this may have been associated with conforming to the expectations of mainstream culture often perpetuated by wealthy white cis men and women. The concept of "alternative," meanwhile, developed amid the 1960s in direct contrast to these ideas and grew into myriad subcultures. It became a way for artists, activists, and young people to diverge from these restrictive and homogeneous ways of accumulating social capital. Being alternative meant existing as a group separate from the majority and embracing the outcast title. Today, being cool is not predicated on divergence but on suppression. In order to be cool we must reject anything and everything deemed basic, encouraging a performative lifestyle. Both the individual performances of alternative or basic risk the loss of a true sense of self within the process. If we strive to embrace every part of ourselves, including those that are basic, we can become more authentic.

In our growing disdain towards what we deem basic, we have simultaneously replaced alternative with "alt." In doing so we transformed alternative's goal of authenticity into a restrictive process of curation. Alt is believed to encompass a large range of styles, passions, and identities that basic does not. This is simply not true. Being basic has unfairly been diminished to a singular archetype who likely wears simple outfits, imagine athleisure for example, and is incapable of having original ideas. In reality, basic is the shared enjoyment of many different aspects of popular culture constituting a much larger range than alt.

Alt presents itself as being diverse and unrestrictive. Still, its definition is constantly changing, making it difficult to develop a set of interests over time. Maybe it was acceptable to praise Phoebe Bridgers in 2017, but do not dare to play "Motion Sickness" on aux in the year 2023. Instead, you are expected to actively search for the next equivalent artist. This is an artist who is relatively underground, has a vaguely indie sound, and is niche but still up-and-coming (think of Clairo's "Pretty Girl" circa 2017). This active search is done in hopes these artists and songs do not become a viral TikTok sound, or worse, subject to exploitation by the normies. I often found myself assuming the role of the gatekeeper and matching this exact mindset. I would become annoyed at seeing the song "Brazil" trending online five years after I saw Declan McKenna perform the song live in a dingy, tape-on-the-wall venue. I felt I could not truly enjoy these types of entertainment if they were shared among a larger audience. This toxic mentality has become a way to reinforce one's sense of superiority through the rejection of anything that has become mainstream. More significantly, it exemplifies that in order to be alt you must feel oppressed by those who are basic.

This ideology applies to other aspects of one's identity as well. Today, the line between unique style and mainstream trend has become blurry. Big brands like Urban Outfitters frequently mimic alternative styles making it difficult to set yourself apart. However, alt style often recreates or resells thrifted pieces on apps like Depop for increased prices- a crocheted bolero should never be $75. In fact, many aspects of the Gen-Z alternative style absorb micro-trends as quickly as they reject them. We cannot critique basic for being materialistic if being cool silently does the same thing. Both alt and basic as we know them today are modes of mass consumerism. They can facilitate self-expression
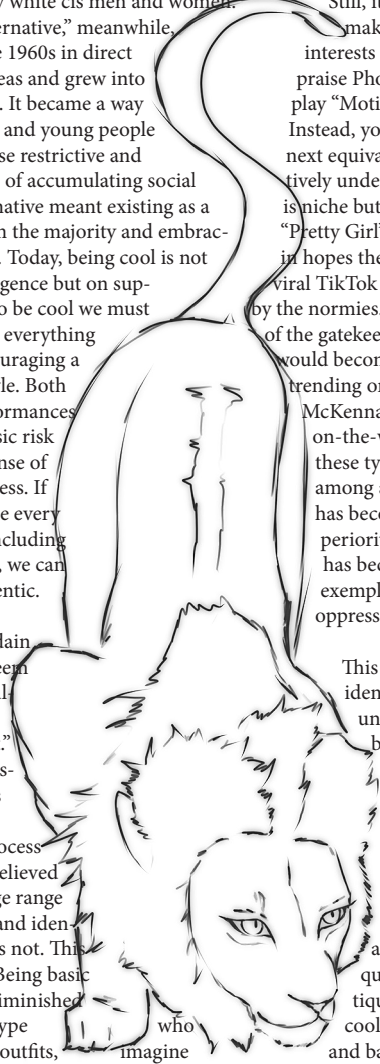
...tion of Being Basic

or show aspects of one's personality but are nonetheless rooted in products that can be bought.
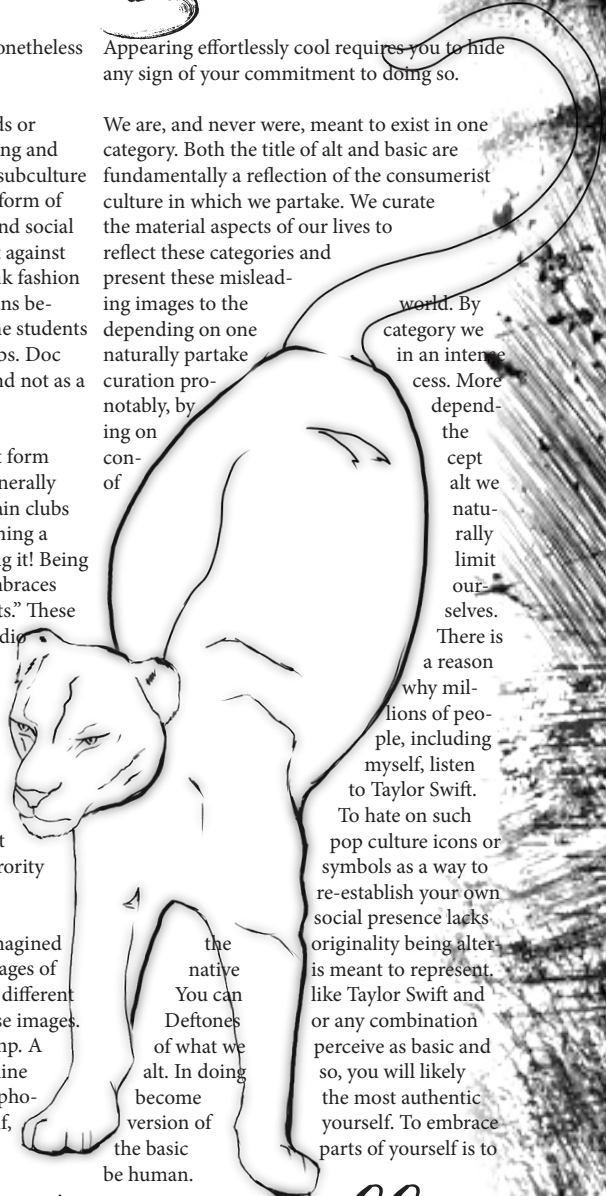
The short-lived quality of many alt-style trends or music is symbolic of how this identity is fleeting and unstable. Punk, on the other hand, was a 70s subculture that emerged as a genuinely gritty and grimy form of expression. Punk was imbued with political and social messages by preaching anarchy or lashing out against authoritarianism. Following this attitude, punk fashion usually consisted of torn shirts and ripped jeans because those who participated were low-income students or people who did not occupy white-collar jobs. Doc Marten boots were worn out of practicality and not as a $100 fashion statement.

At UCLA, Greek life is not the only dominant form of social life. While overlap exists, we have generally separated and categorized ourselves into certain clubs based on being cool or basic. Basic means joining a sorority or fraternity, and even worse, enjoying it! Being cool rejects Greek life as an institution but embraces what we have come to refer to as "campus cults." These are often large clubs like Campus Tours or Radio that do not inherently possess the capacity to increase one's social standing. However, participation in them has come to become a way to gain social status on campus. By glorifying the social element of these organizations, our alliance with them begins to become the criterion for how we are perceived. Campus cults decorate one's Instagram bios in an exact manner someone basic may show off their sorority or frat.

Subcultures of the 60s and 70s have been reimagined as aesthetics based on presenting different images of ourselves. It has become too easy to assemble different clothing items, music, or clubs to cater to these images. Take, for example, the concept of a photo dump. A photo dump is meant to show what is real online amidst thousands of edited and manipulated photos. While I have partaken in this trend myself, in doing so I discovered it encourages us to document every aspect of our lives creating more effort and attention to detail than less.

Appearing effortlessly cool requires you to hide any sign of your commitment to doing so.

We are, and never were, meant to exist in one category. Both the title of alt and basic are fundamentally a reflection of the consumerist culture in which we partake. We curate the material aspects of our lives to reflect these categories and present these misleading images to the world. By depending on one category we naturally partake in an intense curation process. More notably, by depending on the concept of alt we naturally limit ourselves. There is a reason why millions of people, including myself, listen to Taylor Swift. To hate on such pop culture icons or symbols as a way to re-establish your own social presence lacks originality being alter- is meant to represent. like Taylor Swift and or any combination perceive as basic and so, you will likely the most authentic yourself. To embrace parts of yourself is to

the native You can Deftones of what we alt. In doing become version of the basic be human.

ena Brooks Kelly

Science can't sa

Humankind seems to be the hapless pawn of an impersonal, apathetic juggernaut we have deemed the cosmos. Surrounding this enormous, existential experience is lexical abstraction, semantic debate and philosophizing; fundamentally, we are only contending with our neurochemical limitations, trying to uncloak the gloved puppeteer who is saddling us with this burden of consciousness. Whatever this force may be, people flock to explanations offering order like moths to a flame: stuffing our existential void with worldly explanations to quell the interminable background buzz of experiential anxiety. Organized religion has begun to dissolve into smaller, more individualized and consumer centric forms of worship- increasingly more people are searching for consolation in things like astrology, yoga practices, meditation retreats, and forms of westernized eastern religion. This is coupled with the constant onslaught of news and information, leading people to believe they are participants in a more objective, information-centric understanding of the world. With the decline in the potency of religion in people's lives, and the increase of information, we are only seeing a shift from one deity to another. People, devoid of the intimacy and community offered by the now dissolving presence of the church, are further looking for consolation in the incomplete navigational apparatus of science- which much like a god, is at the mercy of human idiosyncrasy and stupidity, and is a tool used to control our collective consciousness. Science has come to replace the dogmatic and devotional void that has been left by the decline of organized religion in the west, leading to a further isolated and insecure social landscape.

Exposure to institutionalized religion - once a fundamental facet of the standard American experience - has been in decline, especially in the past century. As American society has developed from being mostly agrarian to industrial and knowledge-based, there has been a reduction in the dependence on and thus obedience to the church as a pillar of life. Coupled with the development and dissemination of technology, people are becoming more and more secular, allowing the church as a facet of community-building, political control, and social mobilization to slowly become obsolete. Adherence to religious dogma has been a historic form of subscription to an intimate type of social contract, in which social expectations are imposed upon the subjects of the church in exchange for community, security within the church, and an answer to the existential dilemmas of the human condition. This is a direct parallel to the social potency of scientific subscription; advocating for, and adhering to the newest issue of objective information- present in the 10,000 steps rule (which is

an entirely arbitrary marketing scheme initially created to sell the pedometer), or our dietary habits- there is power in mindless devotion to scientific creeds. This unique type of social control borne from the collective adherence to unquestioning devotion- whether of science or the church- is manifested in the legitimization of social hierarchies, cultural boundaries, and collective goals. While guilt and sin have been used as arms of the institution to perpetuate outgroup scapegoating, political cohesion, and rigid thinking justified by a creed based on some omnipotent authority- so has the objectivity cult of scientific thinking that has fabricated science for exclusionary purposes, and capitalized off people's appeal for ethos.

Our slow exodus from a social and familial life guided by religious dogma hasn't implied progress towards a more scientific or objectively grounded society. Rather, this void in the shape of a god has relieved us of our collective respite from this secular, material world, and forced us to contend with our mortality on our own privatized quest. The remaining vacuum from the decline of religious adherence has allowed for a new form of social control to take the place of the coherent institution. Now, in the fragmented wasteland of a sociopolitical landscape without the flawed compass of dominating religious beliefs, we are left to search the rubble as refugees stuck in an anarchic purgatory- with scientific thinking as the response of the new age. Science has filled this gaping void for a guiding authority, and in our individualized quest for existential certainty, the misleading certainty with which we wield this tool continue content_id:233284878 s to divide, isolate, and radicalize people. A dogmatic adherence to science has replaced the fervent devotion to a god; and much like the creation and formation of gods themselves, science is an imperfect human creation, and fundamentally is a tool at the whim of human flaws and faults. Science can be manufactured, forged, and falsified- as demonstrated by gasoline and cigarette companies funneling billions of dollars into phony science in order to convince generations ofconsumers of their positive influence on human health and social progress. Information coined as objective science has radicalized people against vaccines, has justified racial hierarchies and racist violence, and continually traps us in sociopolitical echo chambers justified with objectivism.

Science has filled the god-shaped hole we've borne as a result of our growth past the total necessity for the dominance of organized religion. Instead of worshiping our gods as idols, we've progressively begun to rectify metaphorical, immovable statues of the establishment

VE YOU   KIMYA AFSHAR

of science as a social and political force that can do no wrong. This has turned the institution of science into a tool for social control and dogmatic devotion, satisfying the human desire for a north star to guide us through the nether of existence.

Historically, science has been a pursuit of groups in power- namely middle and upper class white men, who have used this medium to confirm their beliefs and biases, while targeting women and other marginalized groups to reinforce their inferiority. Scientific racism exemplifies the use of objectivism to perpetuate existing social and racial hierarchies. This scientific framing of information makes it impersonal, instills it with ethos, and imbues the public with a sense of responsibility to it, much like the framing of religious teachings. Racist ideology backed with the ethos of science, for example, is present in the once commonly accepted and understood eugenics movement- historically fueling campaigns of compulsory sterilization and racial discrimination- and this as recently as the mid 20th century.

Presently, the danger of unquestioning devotion to the newest scientific realizations threatens to further the chasm of social division and irrationality. Pseudoscientific information spread with the conviction of gospel appeals to the social trend towards objectivism, and manipulates people into believing, threatened by isolation if they do not. This is not a lament over our increased reliance on scientific reasoning. Rather, this is a prayer for a community established not upon a shared devotional undertaking, but rather an unwavering sense of mutual acceptance that does not require homogenous worship as currency for membership.

Where once God would deny access into the bounty of the heavenly afterworld, now a dissent from the clearest, newest, and most relevant scientific information can put you at the mercy of living a life not optimized by science, and isolated by your peers. The trend away from religion has only created a further fragmented, isolated society which strives to worship this world, only now wielding the imperfect compass

of scientific dogma.

Academia impedes Latine American and Indigenous knowledge production. I am a fourth-year undergraduate and a first-generation, working-class student from the Inland Empire. I am Mexican-American of mixed indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican descent. My paternal grandparents were from the State of Puebla, Mexico, and spoke Nahuatl, one of 68 indigenous languages spoken in Mexico. Our culture has been erased by individual shame and self-hatred. My father, for example, refuses to speak his native Nahuatl, one instance of the systemic erasure of indigenous customs and philosophies. The violence of colonialism doesn't end at the sword or my father; I see it daily in my studies.

I came to UCLA's philosophy department hoping to connect with my roots within this hub of intellectuals. I assumed this institution could comfortably and swiftly provide ease of exploring any school of thought, even those outside the Western domain. I've encountered passive indifference and general apathy toward non-Western and Indigenous philosophy within academia in my four years. When I tried carrying out a research project that compared Western metaphysics and the Mexica Metaphysics that survived the Western gaze, I found a lack of support from the department. It seemed the department felt secure enough to dismiss a body of work, and the entire culture, because it was irrelevant to their Western framework. In light of book banning and the demonization of AP African American studies in U.S. high schools, this same passivity dehumanized the original people of the Americas and continues to be weaponized today against BIPOC folk.

I bitterly accepted the apparent rejection from the philosophy department and found refuge in comparative literature. A professor from the English department, Professor M. was kind enough to take me on as a mentee; I was relieved. A research paper is a big step toward graduate school, and this was my chance to prepare myself. The philosophy department was unwilling to have a professor from outside the department be a mentor for a research (199) independent study course. I had to cancel this agreement with Professor M. and abandon non-Western philosophy.

I am not the only person with this experience; my case is part of a broader discussion on the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) problem in universities and workplaces across the U.S. EDI seeks to support groups who have been marginalized and discriminated against within educational and workforce institutions, by recognizing erroneous and biased hiring procedures for tenureship and faculty positions that contribute to the field's low demographic diversity and monocultural pedagogy. Academia's EDI problem is as old as Aristotle's pedagogy. Philosophy is, and always has been, the foundation of the humanities and sciences in the West. This began with Aristotle's seminal work On the Soul, which informed and inspired the work of philosophers, academics, scientists, and theologians throughout the centuries. On the Soul defined a hierarchy of all living things, which placed the Western God at the top and all non-humans at the bottom. This anthropocentric worldview, called the Great Chain of Being, became a bloody doctrine that assaulted the Original peoples' bodies and minds by deeming them non-human. Aristotle's seemingly innocuous idea poisoned European institutions and influenced the barbaric ideology of the early colonial empires.

Today, this assault manifests itself as seemingly innocuous. Yet, it perpetuates the erasure of Indigenous scholarship, whose consequences relate to our climate crisis and the seizure of the Los Angeles River from the Tongva tribe. Once known as Paayme Paxaayt (West River), the Tongva understood a harmonious relationship with the river and adapted to its volatile environment. Urban developers in the early 20th century saw the unpredictable river as an obstacle to profit. A series of floods led to its cementation in 1938 by the Army Corps of Engineers. Today, the river's poor management, pollution, and climate change threaten the health and well-being of the local Los Angeles riverside communities. In urban development, the immediate response to the LA River was grounded in the assumption that the geography and ecology of Los Angeles could be at the whim of urban greed.

Indigenous scholarship, specifically in Mexica thought from Central Mexico, understands that our health, social and urban structures are intertwined with the world's ecology. The ancient Mexica utilized the chinampa system (floating gardens) to build the city of Tenochtitlan on a small island in Lake Texcoco; instead of draining Lake Texcoco, like the Spanish eventually did to create Mexico City, the Mexica built on top of the river. Even within Mexica theology, unorthodox in Western theology, the spirit is known as a duality between the living organism itself and ecological forces through the encompassing force of teotl (God).

Aristotle's error is in the assumption that we homo sapiens are at the top of some hierarchy of all living organisms, resulting in severe consequences as an academic and societal pedagogy. Our global ecological crisis comes from this belief that humans are above the environment - 'gods of the dirt' - and they see themselves not as part of the global world but as its masters.

Intercultural philosophy is crucial in academia. It recognizes that cultures are never purely insulated; there is always some transfer of customs and ideas. Mainstream narratives tend to ignore this reality. Academia showed me how to undermine non-Western thought and taught me how to feel inferior. At times, I felt like this was my failure; I clung to the idea it was my ignorance. Academia showed me why my father refuses to speak his native language.

I no longer feel like this institution can help or represent me in my academic pursuits. The philosophy department, and all others like it, insulates itself to maintain the purity of Western analytic philosophy, rejecting anything else as non-academic. There really are BIPOC Bruins, and if the University is serious about its diversity goals, it will begin where it matters. In philosophy, that starts with three simple steps—

One, expand staff, visiting staff, and class offerings from feminist, Latine, and non-Western philosophy.

Two, the philosophy department must extend coopera-tion with other UCLA departments to allow for a proper liberal education.

Three, allow faculty to aid students in research projects outside their "expertise." If a faculty member is unwilling, a student needs academic liberty and support to find mentorship outside the department.

Of course, these goals will not make UCLA a paradise of academic equity, but it's an important place to start. It will finally allow academia to build Indigenous and Latine American knowledge production, if nothing else.

AGAINST ACADEMIA

Bryan Valerio
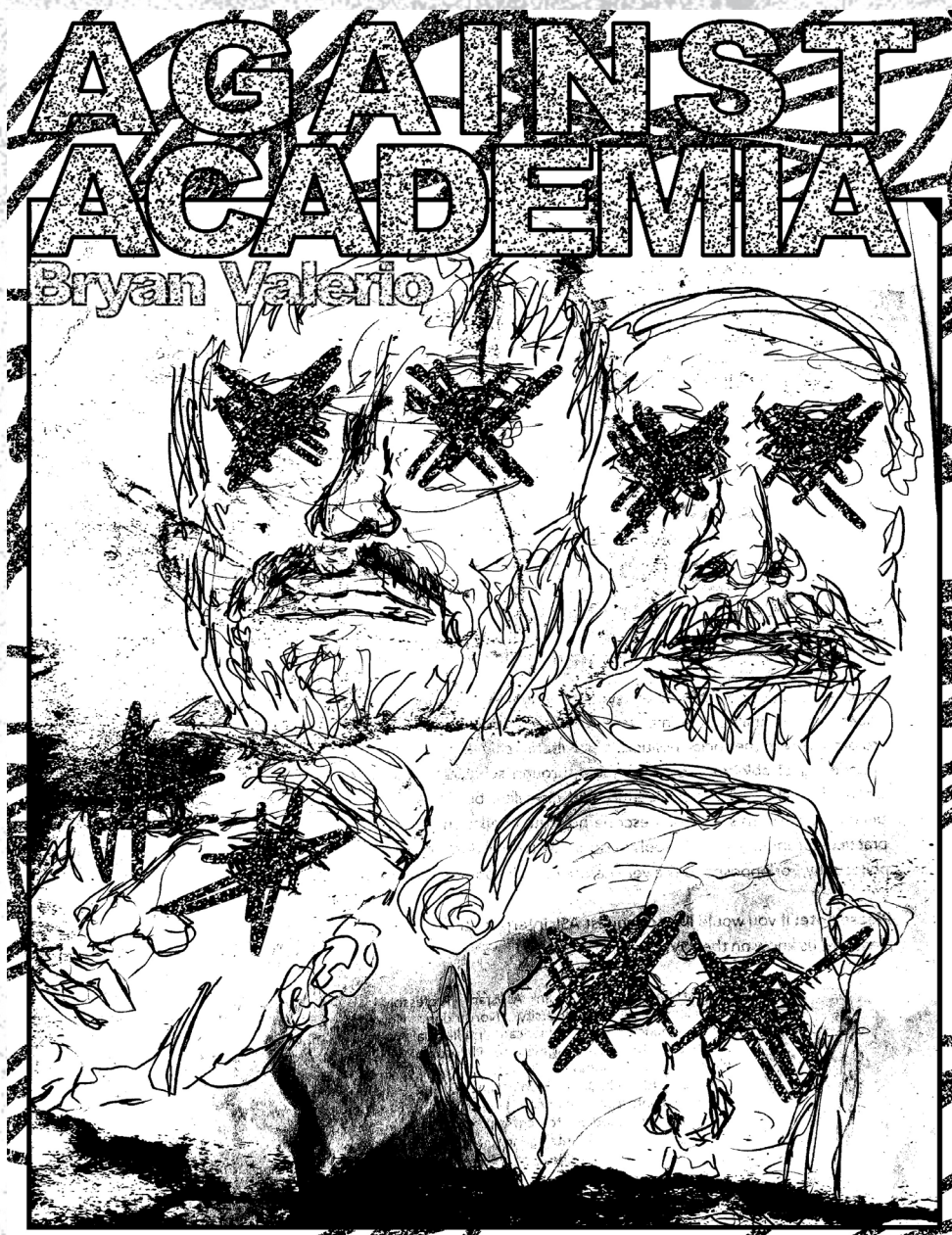
RIDE
YOUR *HIGH*
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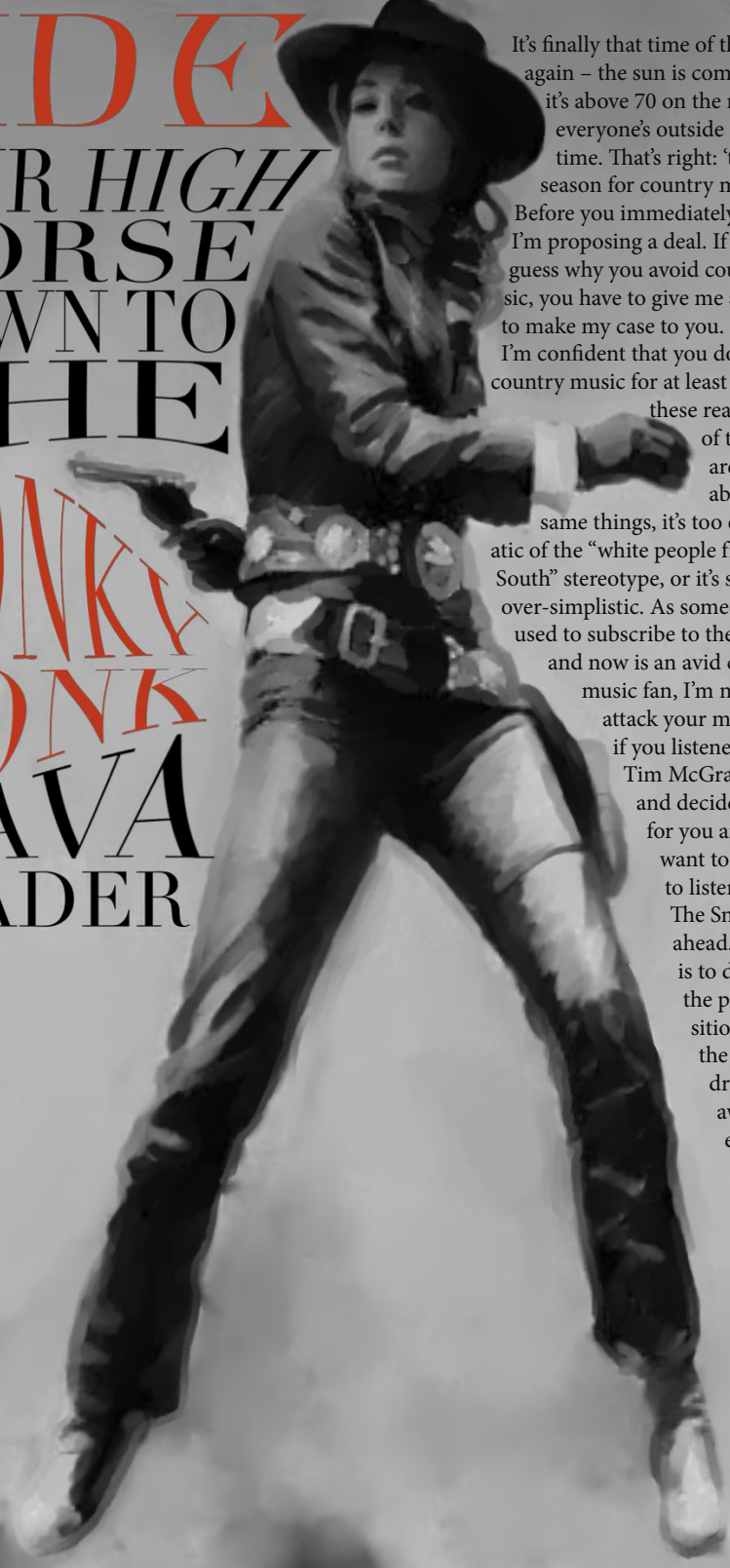
It's finally that time of the year again – the sun is coming out, it's above 70 on the regular, everyone's outside all the time. That's right: 'tis the season for country music. Before you immediately object, I'm proposing a deal. If I can guess why you avoid country music, you have to give me a chance to make my case to you.

I'm confident that you don't like country music for at least one of these reasons: all of the songs are written about the same things, it's too emblematic of the "white people from the South" stereotype, or it's sonically over-simplistic. As someone who used to subscribe to these beliefs and now is an avid country music fan, I'm not here to attack your music taste; if you listened to a Tim McGraw album and decided it's not for you and you want to go back to listening to The Smiths, go ahead. My goal is to dispose of the presuppositions about the genre that drive people away from even giving it a chance.

The main critique of country music is that it's overly repetitive, and I concede, there is some truth to that. While you should absolutely listen to the genre-defining country artists I'm sure you've all heard of, like Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, and Dolly Parton, I'm here to argue on behalf of the Luke Bryans and Florida Georgia Lines of the genre. The lyrical territory of mainstream country music typically falls into three categories: love, beer, and small towns. The same few chord progressions are used for almost every song. Mainstream music will always be repetitive, no matter what genre; your favorite artists, whether it be Drake or Harry Styles, aren't doing anything revolutionary, either. The music might seem repetitive, but the storytelling is not; the light lyrical themes and basic chord progressions are emblematic of each artist's nostalgia for the simplicity of a small town lifestyle. But don't turn the page just because most of y'all, I'm willing to bet, have not experienced this way of life – it can teach you something (I know this from experience). Country music is an ode to living simply (even if only for the duration of the song) and appreciating the little things in life.

Many of you have fallen into what I call the "Spotify Wrapped" trap, or the need to listen to the "best," deepest, dare I say pretentious music just for the purpose of proving you listen to "good" music, and saying that your favorite artist is The Beatles for clout value. But what if you gave yourself a little break from that? Not everything that is enjoyable needs to be nuanced, and country music is the best example of that. Put on "Chicken Fried" (I know you like that song, everyone does) and as the song goes on, you'll notice a smile start to grow on your face, your worries will start to fade, and by the time the song is over, you'll be sad that feeling doesn't last longer. Country music teaches you, in its simplicity, to appreciate the little things in life, and not take yourself quite so seriously. So yes, mainstream country is repetitive, like every other mainstream song, but it's catchy. Hopefully this "radio music" will put an earworm in the heads of the masses, charming them to live an unapologetically candid life – maybe even try a little line dancing.

One of my favorite things I've heard someone say is that they're afraid to listen to country music because it makes them "inherently racist." I know a lot of y'all are thinking it, so let me clear your conscience – you're not woke for choosing not to listen to country music. Treat it as you treat every other artist: if you're not a fan of their morals, don't listen to them. Take a second to reflect on your thought process. The Rolling Stones have a good number of songs on their discography that glorify racism, misogyny, and sexualizing girls under the age of consent, but you're not going to stop listening to them on those grounds because it's only a couple of songs and it was the 70's, right? I mean, they're The Rolling Stones. And then you go and listen

to Kanye. No matter what, you're still not going to listen to country music and suddenly, you're politically correct again. Using this logic, it's absurd to assume every country artist is racist and will portray racist themes because they're from the South. It's true that the country music industry as a whole has been known to silence artists who take a political stance (especially a more liberal one), including The Chicks (who you might know as the Dixie Chicks, although they changed their name to make sure they didn't appear pro-Confederate) and Taylor Swift; but that's precisely the point. The musicians aren't the problem, the industry is. Many of the most famous mainstream country artists are publicly socially liberal, including artists like Tyler Childers, who even wrote a ballad in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. They're just in the unfortunate position of doing what they love under an industry they have no control over. The point here is that you won't know a country musician's ideological leanings by just listening to their music, because the industry veers them away from such heavy subjects as those; instead, the musicians write about what makes them happy. I mean, really, what's wrong with a little appreciation for grabbing a beer and driving a huge pickup truck?

The next time you take your trip down to the beach, I want you to kick back, put on "Before He Cheats," and live in the moment for a second. Then, maybe, that'll teach you to ride your high horse all the way down to the honkytonk.

IT'S TIME TO EM-BRACE — NOT REJECT — THE INAU-THENTIC-ITY OF INSTA-GRAM

MAYA VIBHAKAR

I was eleven years old when I first downloaded Instagram.

It was 2013, only three years after the app launched, but I was joining the 150 million users who were already sharing their photos on the platform. I immediately got to posting snapshots of my 5th-grade life: A closeup of a dandelion. A collage of my dog. Pictures of movie tickets, selfies with friends, a photo of a snowman I built with snow emojis as the caption.

Even though this Instagram feed may seem like a normal depiction of the eleven-year-old lifestyle, it wasn't just me who was posting whatever recent photos happened to be in my camera roll. Just about everyone on Instagram during its early years didn't give much thought as to what photos they were sharing with the world. You would scroll and see someone's lunch, someone's pet, someone's view from their bedroom window. It was a lawless space, without rules as to what people should be posting because, frankly, nobody cared. We were just having fun with a cool new app. Instagram didn't feel inauthentic, because it wasn't. Not yet.

But over the next few years, the rules began to form. Gone were the miscellaneous pictures of whatever people spotted throughout their day. As the idea of maintaining a 'perfect feed' emerged, only certain types of photos became acceptable posts. Selfies, photos with friends, and solo shots were a must. Anything else? Deleted.

Suddenly, every photo looked like it was scrutinized, airbrushed, scrutinized again, had a filter slapped on it, and then posted. "Let's take photos!" was a frequent phrase among teenagers. After all, when hanging out with friends, it was unusual if there wasn't at least thirty minutes dedicated to taking not just any photos, but Instagram photos specifically. During this era of Instagram, it was abundantly obvious that users, especially young ones, were chasing this look of the perfect lifestyle. There was an almost cartoonish villainy attributed to the app — it was easy to see that something wasn't right when 16-year-olds were posting multiple nearly-identical, highly edited swimsuit photos with the hopes of breaking 500 likes. By 2017, articles began to pop up with headlines like "Instagram is supposed to be friendly. So why is it making people so miserable?" (The Guardian) or "Is Instagram Ruining Our Lives? Millennials and the 'Perfection Anxiety'" (Vogue). The inauthenticity of Instagram was obvious; we were obsessed with self-obsession, and nobody was trying to hide it.

But now, over a decade after Instagram first launched, a new aesthetic has arisen. If you were to go onto a college student's Instagram feed today, there's a good chance you would see the 'photo-dump,' a new trend consisting of unrelated photos seemingly thrown together and posted without much thought. All of a sudden, you're seeing someone's lunch, someone's pet, someone's view from their bedroom window — it's like you're back in 2013. After all, the whole concept behind the photo-dump was to "make Instagram casual again," a cry for the social media platform to return to the genuine, wholesome state.

But are these photo-dumps truly genuine? Are they even casual?

Sure, the photos in these compilations are convincing in their supposed spontaneity. In some, nobody's looking at the camera. Others are blurry. Each looks like they were snapped and posted without a second though. However, underneath this spur-of-the-moment façade, the photo-dump is yet another side of Instagram's obsession with perfection and presentation.
Even though these dumps may look casual, at a closer look, it is clear that users must have scoured their camera roll in order to piece together the perfect photos that emulate this effortlessly aesthetic vibe. After all, every picture somehow pushes the narrative that this user is cool, this user is classy — and they're not even trying! There is none of the unfiltered awkwardness of 2013; instead, there is this fabricated version of informality that is still in line with Instagram's inauthenticity.
In a way, this new trend is even more sinister than 2017's airbrushed, filtered, photoshopped atmosphere. While that era of Instagram made it easy to see the app's inauthenticity, the photo-dump masters the casual-adjacent look that makes us think, Wow, I guess that's just what everyone's lives are like. A key feature of the photo-dump, for example, is that few of the pictures within it were taken at the same time. This gives the impression that this post isn't indicative of just a single moment in the user's life, but rather a window into the user's constantly aesthetic lifestyle.

So what now? Should we renounce the photo-dump? Should we close our eyes and post the last five photos of our camera roll in attempts to emulate 2013?
Of course not. Social media has evolved into an environment meant for manufactured idealism; it is impossible to go back to that early, untainted era of Instagram. Though perhaps we should be attempting to remove these apps from our lives altogether, for many college students, Instagram's role in our social lives makes that a goal few will adhere to. Instead, we should embrace the inauthenticity. The photo-dump itself is not necessarily what needs to be fixed, but rather our mindset around it. In order to use a space like Instagram healthily, we need to constantly acknowledge that the content we consume on the app is not an accurate depiction of individual lives. Trends like the photo-dump can be fun and artistic, even, but only as long as we maintain this self-aware mentality.
So post those photo-dumps. Relish in the fabricated perfection. Just remember that, when it comes to Instagram, we are all inherently inauthentic.

You probably remember the last time you looked in the mirror. But do you remember why?

With the rise of social media and the corresponding increase in communication, it's easier than ever to see what others are thinking, saying, doing, and, most dangerously for our self-perception about our image, look like. Social media has created a world that is increasingly connected, a world where attention, whether it be views, "likes," or external validation from strangers across the planet is valued. Such a society rewards those who fall into the perfect body cookie cutter. Filters have popularized unrealistic appearances, each more egregious than the last, taking advantage of our obsession with online comparison. More often than not, this comparison damages our self-esteem, hurts our relationship with our body, and negatively influences how we view ourselves and those around us.

In recent years, a new movement has emerged, one that aims to grasp the beauty image standard by the horns and drive it in an entirely new direction. The goal of the body positivity movement is to promote the appreciation of body diversity—your body is beautiful, and so is everyone else's. Modern-day beauty standards have largely failed to diverge from their Eurocentric roots, a notion the body positivity movement claims to directly address by expanding the definition of beauty to encompass a more diverse range of individuals. The movement has successfully marketed itself in a libertarian-esque way: you don't need to rely on other people to know if you're beautiful; you should love your appearance, just the way it is. It goes without saying that such a message has resonated and connected with more people in our generation, especially as the number of people we can compare ourselves with has increased. Yes, the body positivity movement has successfully challenged the status quo when it comes to body diversity, appreciation, and beauty. But to achieve these changes, the movement has reinforced the same standards it sought to counter.

To the body positivity movement's credit, it has correctly identified some negatives related to body image and beauty standards, including but not limited to its mental health consequences and exclusivity. What the campaign has failed to achieve, however, is to diagnose the cause of these harms. This root is the fact that we, for some reason, place immense value in appearance and external images that we cannot genuinely control. This factor is what propels body negativity, and it is also why I will never be able to embrace body positivity, as it perpetuates the notion that our appearance is worth more than other qualities that we also cannot control. There is danger to putting our happiness into something that is inherently outside of our control. Admittedly, the body positivity movement attempts to put a positive spin on the uncontrollable. But let's not overstate the fact that it's not feasible to always have a positive mindset. If it's easy to fall in love with our body,

it's probably just as easy to fall out of love with our body, especially if we stick to the notion that our body's external qualities have inherent value. And our emotions aren't the only things that aren't stable. Our external appearance isn't either, and this increases the likelihood that our short-term positivity subsides. At its best, body positivity makes us feel good about ourselves for a while, until that feeling wavers and we slide back into body negativity. At its worst, the movement makes us feel even worse about ourselves: "Everyone is telling me to love my body, but I just can't; there must be something wrong with me."

It's worth it to take a step back and figure out how we got here in the first place. Why, exactly, did we respond to the status quo with body positivity? Perhaps because its proponents, from companies to influencers, astutely observed that body positivity also facilitates comparison, just in a more marketable way. Companies and influencers can still sell body positivity because you're given a reason to hate yourself, whether it be because you still can't feel good about yourself or because negative comparisons persist.

Body positivity in the media and in popular culture has made our relationship with our body less of an individual one. Posts that call for body positivity or show individuals feeling positive about their shape online paint a picture of body positivity that's rooted in external validation. This external validation, if it's even there in the first place, is temporary. But that's besides the point. External opinions should only be sought for things that impact other people.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't appreciate our bodies. Maybe it's the bio-major in me speaking, but I think the body is amazing. It innovates constantly and never ceases to amaze. But we should focus more on what's inside, the things we can control, like the quality of our character. We owe it to ourselves to put our self-worth, love, and appreciation into something we have cultivated, whether it be our personalities or interests, rather than into our external appearance.

I call for body neutrality, not because I want a middle ground between body positivity and negativity, but because I recognize body positivity for what it is: a shiny way of thinking, that ironically, is as dark on the inside as the darkness it attempts to combat. Let's remove our appearance from the picture; it shouldn't matter how we feel about our body because our self-worth and happiness should not be tied to our shape. I'm all for positivity. I just want to invest it in the right place.

RITHWIK
NARENDRA

NOT SO
POSITIVE
ON BODY
POSITIVITY

A LOVE LETTER TO EATING ALONE
LEAH JOHN

Lonliness

After an eternity of drought, it's been a particularly rainy year here in California, and rain at UCLA means getting food is far more difficult. When my social battery has run out for the day I usually find myself opting for a takeout option, however standing in a long outdoor line on a stormy day is far from ideal. All this to say, that a month ago when it was too rainy to stand in line for a food truck, I ran into Epicuria, wrapped two slices of pizza dripping w grease in a napkin, and sprinted back to my room just to avoid sitting in a

dining hall ALONE. My fear of sitting alone had less to do with actually eating without company and more to do with being perceived as someone who is lonely. Our collective obsession with looking like we are not lonely inspires us to jump through elaborate hoops in an attempt to impress a nonexistent audience of people who in reality, are too preoccupied with themselves to judge the social status of others.

Humans are innately social beings; evolutionarily the ability to communicate and work together is what allows us to survive and thrive. Therefore a healthy dosage of fear surrounding being alone is innate. Yet, loneliness seems to be on the rise with 79% of Americans between the ages of 18-24-year-olds reporting feelings of consistent loneliness and 43% of young adults expressing an increase in feelings of chronic loneliness over the past 5 years(Petri, 2023). The factors contributing to this trend are varied be it social media consumption, the pandemic, or generally higher rates of depression and anxiety. We may be more connected than ever through modern means of technology and communication, but internally, we remain isolated. However, while it is true that general loneliness is no doubt increasing, the phenomenon that contributed to my fear to eat alone was different than just the general gnawing sense of loneliness. Instead of an internal battle, this dilemma is far more connected to how we are perceived by others. In short, it's not about whether one is in fact actually lonely when they are alone in public places and is instead about the social perceptions tied to engaging in social spaces without company.

When one is forced to be seen without company we use our phones as social lubrication in an attempt to improve our public perception. Look at any of the hundreds of lines on UCLA's campus and you will find that although almost everyone standing in them is alone, they all have their heads buried in their phones. There is simply no way every single individual is constantly texting a friend every second in the 30-minute period it takes for their order to come out. Putting the screen down, however, runs the risk of signaling to others that no one is keeping you company, either physically or digitally. In order to soothe our worries we attempt to look busy be it due to the pressing work we just have to get done right this instant or the hilarious message from our lively friend group that must be replied to as soon as possible. Whether our reasons directly relate to looking popular or being busy, both stem from wanting others to believe our life is one in which we always have things to do, people to see, and places to be. Without the physical company of another validating one's worth, proving that you are a "cool person with friends" our phones are the only thing communicating to others that we aren't just lonely losers, a label that even in a crowded lunch line, must be avoided at all cost.

The self-obsession that fuels these strenuous loneliness-avoidant practices is the very reason that they are unnecessary in the first place. Everyone else in that line, in that cafeteria, in any public place we fear being judged, is far too busy thinking about how they are perceived to worry about who looks like they have the biggest social circle. Moreover, if we bothered to look around instead of getting stuck in our heads it becomes clear that most of the people in social spaces are alone as well. Doing tasks alone, be it mundane like getting lunch or elaborate like going to a concert is a unique experience that is special in its own way just as going somewhere with company is. Being alone is not the anthesis to having a good time. If we stop perceiving acts of solitude as ones that only take place when there is no other option and instead as a conscious choice, occasionally being without company becomes a blessing instead of a worst resort.

Perhaps the most exciting opportunity this dilemma presents is to re-find and enjoy again the excitement of freshmen year, not the anxious part, but the part where you have access to a wealth of new connections. When everyone looks occupied, no one is encouraged to introduce themselves to each other. If one is brave enough to sit alone, others have an indication that the person in question could potentially use some company. In the first few weeks of our freshman year, when the expectation to already have friends is nonexistent, we are far more comfortable openly sitting alone. In turn, freshman year is filled with spontaneous conversations and constant new connections. Yet as the pressure to have solidified relationships sets in, we stop actively sitting with new friends and seeking connections. If we still desire friends, then it doesn't make much sense to act like we are already too popular to want them. Reaching out to others shouldn't be a phenomenon reserved for a singular 5-week period in our entire time at college, yet without openly signaling to others that you want company you won't receive any.

Despite the stats telling us how common of an experience it is, admitting you are lonely still comes with social stigma. However, refusing to do anything alone just so no one else thinks you could possibly be lonely, is not only excessive but counterintuitive. Admitting you want to make new connections is not embarrassing and actively enjoying being alone is not impossible. Although it is easier said than done, becoming an iPad kid in dining halls and endless lines does not have to be the only solution, and the more of us that buy into this mindset the easier it will get for others to join. While I still have yet to sit in a dining hall alone, I have weaned myself off my phone while standing in line. Hopefully, with time, I'll get to a point where I can sit alone and enjoy my greasy Epicuria pizza on a real plate instead of a soggy napkin.

Sources: Petri, Alexandra E. "Surgeon General Warns Loneliness, Isolation Are an Epidemic - Los Angeles Times." Los Angeles Times, 2 May 2023.

MORNING AFFIRM

As high school students, UCLA was the ultimate destination. For a lot of us, it was hard to envision what came after college. The truth is, we assumed UCLA harbors the methodology for surefire success. The sacrifices we made previously were supposed to mean that we wouldn't have to make any more.

There is a severe complaint culture here at UCLA. There is a distinct sense of entitlement and a heavy semblance of desperation when it comes to taking responsibility. The relationship between a professor and a student has been tainted—perverted into a mere transaction. The quality of the class and the professor is weighed and measured by how easy it is to get an A. If it's not easy, the student's fear of failure gets projected onto the "completely unqualified professor", the "shitty education here at UCLA" and everything else that is wrong with the world (the UCLA archetype). After an especially challenging exam, as though by cue, there arises a group of bullies. Falling into formation and feeding off of each other's suffocating self-importance, they become relentless in the battle for a comfortable struggle. Unknowingly, they are crippling themselves with the belief that the only way to reach success is for the conditions to meet them at their expectations. Using mob mentality, mass emails and pressure to close in on professors' limits, each complainer thinks: I can't be the problem—I've been doing the exact same thing as I've been doing in high school. Why am I suffering now? Best case scenario, you have to suffer through GroupMe texts of students using their struggle bus to plow each other over. Worst case scenario: all-out racist and transphobic remarks (followed by the templated apology), targeted shaming of professors in lecture halls leading to public breakdowns and outrageous lies on course evaluations in hopes of ruining lives.

To be a teacher, in essence, is to grant access to a treasury of knowledge, in hopes of growth and wisdom. The latter, wisdom, is the responsibility of the student––the receiver and the interpreter––as only in the application of knowledge is there wisdom. Between students and teachers, there is a lot to demand from one another. What professors are responsible for is presenting an education that is accessible to every individual student, creating a space where students have the potential to flourish. What students are responsible for is to put in

the necessary effort to succeed, given that the individual has made the choice that there is value in doing so—success being defined here as some kind of metaphysical acquisition, not the letter A on a transcript. This is the foundation for the sacred relationship that lies between a student and a teacher. Just as your place here at UCLA was no fluke, to be a professor at UCLA means that they have something to offer you. This doesn't translate to "just work harder". It means that it is your responsibility to receive it in a way that will benefit you.

I understand this kind of behavior so intimately because it is the first and foremost thought in the process of anyone's panic, especially as college students trying to keep the fear of failure at bay. Who can I blame this on? Truthfully, sometimes the professor is just a dick, the material is rigorous and the fear of no future is real. Unfortunately, the world is not a dick-less place, and I have a feeling that our life after college is not either.

The complainers of UCLA seek to eradicate their part in the equation, erasing the influence of their conscious effort and thus, abating the emotional consequence of trying. Tormented by a fear of introspection and inadequacy, their acts of complaints and outsourcing blame is one of defeat and surrender of power. But what becomes of your life is irrevocably a reflection of you. So, what then? The act of complaining about anything and everything is mundane but it is deep-rooted in fear. When given a coloring book, there is a choice to be made among the myriad of ways to fill it. What becomes of your art will echo how you approached it, whether it be by markers, crayons or paint, but to sit there in anger of the page given to you is insulting to your ability and wasteful of your time.

In the face of suffering, we first have to ask whether the suffering is worth it. There is always a degree of autonomy in suffering—if not directly in circumstance, in how you suffer. If you want to be a doctor bad enough, then you will take on the prerequisites and the pain necessary to pursue your dreams. In willfully accepting the conditions of your desire, you then have to ask yourself, how can I seize the value in this suffering? Find meaning in it. Else, you can

JESSICA PHUNG

ATION: 1 AM THE VICTIM

say no, shut that door and turn elsewhere. A lot of us engage, even unwillingly, in the idea that steadfast meaning is found in the far and presently intangible destination—that the intrinsic turmoil will cease. So, almost soullessly, we seek to accomplish our dreams mechanical-ly, without the growing pains. It'll all be worth it when my dreams finally come true. And while it is absolutely achievable in this way, it guarantees that who you are when it does happen, will be a stark mirror of who you are today. Upon this, in the face of success, you may find that it is you who is not worth it.

We're all just kind of treading along, always hoping for tranquil sea but never knowing when we are to face turbulence. One can imagine what life would be like for the man whose feet are cemented, for someone that is bitter and resentful against all of the soreness. As students, it is our job to find the beauty that can arise from the tenacity and unyielding nature of man against the chapters that unfold. To learn how to better equip ourselves as we move forward through time and to actively seek the power in adversity moment to moment will allow us to transform incredibly. Complaining won't help you, even if you get your momentary wish, because the choice to do so only perpetuates

a reality that cradles manufactured barriers. Who you are and the nature of your reality is as fluid as your will to respond to unpre-dictable happenings. Given all this, the question to ask must be, what has become of you after the fog clears? We all believe in a future of excellence but it is the choices that we continuously make today that fosters the instincts of the person we become. As students gifted with the blessing of youth, dreams and a lifetime ahead of us, there is weight in every single choice we make. Don't complain. There's always another way.

In opposition to the feminist of the early 2010s – the hyper-positive millennial woman with a #girlboss sticker on her Macbook and a Spotify playlist titled "Who Run the World, Girls!" – comes a more nihilistic feminist, a woman whose exhaustion with the world's patriarchal values lulls her into a sleep-like trance. The age of social media activism, carried out through Instagram infographics and nationwide marches, proved itself to be unsuccessful in redeeming the presence of women in the face of a male-dominated society, namely in the spheres of equal pay, women's health laws, and even simple respect for women in social spaces.

The girlboss feminist tired us out, and she frankly proved herself to be, like most things, inclusive only of cisgender and heterosexual white women. Justifiably, the pendulum of feminism now swings towards a pessimistic, dissociative, and arguably chaotic expression of womanhood, representing Gen Z's exhaustion with mainstream feminism. "Dissociative Feminism", a term coined by Emmeline Clein in 2019, features a woman who is simply tired. She chain smokes, reads Ottessa Moshfegh's My Year of Rest and Relaxation like it's the Bible, and passively accepts worldwide male dominance, surrendering a fatalistic approach to feminism. While this dissociative expression of female concerns is significantly more authentic to the painful acceptance of feminine struggles and the horrors of womanhood, it does nothing to abate the problems of inclusivity present in girlboss feminism. Both feminist expressions are also performative by nature, with focus on outward aesthetic choices rather than the formulation of concrete opinions and plans to bring the movement forward. The dissociative feminist and the girlboss feminist are typically both

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ociative Feminist?
Areni Panosian

passionate about feminine issues, however, both practices focus primarily on how to express these passions outwardly, which places performance at the forefront of the movement. Though it's hard to blame modern women for feeling emotionally bankrupted by the previous expressions of feminism, nihilistic passivity is by no means a more productive option, as it places women back into a dangerous position of resignation and unassertiveness, which reflects the privilege modern Western women have.

White, straight, and cisgender dominance is ubiquitous in both aforementioned feminist expressions, reflecting an existence that often isn't true to the experiences of most women. The chronically online, "I'm in my Fleabag-era", dissociative feminist is often portrayed to be a thin white woman, as this is the only woman who can afford to sit back and stare into our patriarchal zeitgeist with mascara running down her face. The clear difference is positivity - one approach to feminism leans to more uplifting rhetoric, while the other is more dissociative and nihilistic. Neither case is correct or incorrect, as they both address similar issues and they both reflect the opinions of women at the time. If anything, I believe the nihilistic approach does speak more authentically to how women feel in the face of an often hopeless and disheveled existence in society. It is also reflective of the cynical existence of Gen Z as a whole, as we've grown up amidst recessions, pandemic, and a global climate crisis. It is unrealistic to expect young people to adhere solely to the encouraging words of previous feminist cheerleaders considering the context of the modern day.

Though dark, cynical, and nihilistic forms of feminism certainly speak more authentically to the frustrations of the feminine experience, they are also a simple exit from the rigid feminist expressions we burnt ourselves out of. At times it feels like we are sleepwalking into this abyss of disengaged yet incredibly self-aware feminist expression, and though this expression is simply a reaction to the hyperactive #girlboss feminism of the 2010s, it also pushes women back into dangerous passivity. Defiant passivity will by no means support the fight for abortion rights, trans rights, or the protection of women in general, and it is an undeniable privilege to put up a jaded and disillusioned front in the face of ethical and political issues. The stilts our society rests upon are undoubtedly patriarchal, and a solution is difficult to comprehend, however, the luxury of fatalism and cynicism is by no means productive, especially for people living outside of a white middle class urban bubble.

Admittedly, taking on the role of a tortured, misunderstood young woman is a fun time, and frankly a detachment from the exhausted, hyper-positive feminism we grew accustomed to is beneficial. Furthermore, the categorization of feminism only pushes women farther apart from one another, and frankly, feminine people shouldn't feel the need to label and categorize their frustrations - we have the right to asimply be. A concrete solution may be invisible, and it is important to acknowledge the bravery in any individual to find the happy medium between apathy and "f*ck the patriarchy!" enthusiasm. Whether you're active or complacent, it's okay to be tired, and these shifts in feminist rhetoric reflect that.

JULIA ROSE

POPCORN, NUANCE, AGE OF THE INTERNET

James Charles, Camilla Cabello, Matt Damon, Will Smith, Winona Rider, Hailey Bieber. If you or a loved one have been on the internet in the past year, you've definitely heard these names before. These are just a few examples of people on the internet we've judged with little to no context.

Remember Sarah in your 8am discussion, who said something that rubbed you the wrong way? Or Jonathan from your floor who made a joke you didn't like? Or Sofia who hoarded all the popcorn during movie night?

What do all these hypothetical people have in common with Matt Damon? They too have been judged with little to no context. The difference is that you had judge Mr. Damon with little to no context because you were provided no other option. But Sarah, Jonathan, and Sofia are real people who you have access to.

People that could provide plenty of context, hopes, fears, and motivations if you would just give them the chance. Instead we choose to persecute the people around us based on small interactions without asking for explanation or offering another shot at friendship. I believe this phenomenon can be explained in part by attribution theory.

Attribution theory is a concept in social psychology which states that humans tend to believe that when they perform an action, it is due to the situation, but when somebody else performs the same action, it says something innate about them. For example, Sofia ate all the popcorn and did not share because she is innately greedy and too selfish to care if I wanted popcorn. However, if I ate all the popcorn and did not share, it's not because of my inherent gluttony, but rather because I hadn't eaten that day and popcorn is my favorite snack, and the fact that Sofia might have wanted popcorn did not occur to me in the moment (I'm sorry, Sofia).

Obviously, the Great Popcorn Fiasco of 2022 is not a valid reason for Sofia to terminate her friendship with me, but my innate greed would be a valid reason. However, Sofia knows me, and she knows that in my heart of hearts I'm not greedy or selfish or a bad person. If I became a repeat popcorn-hoarding offender, the argument for my innateness could be presented, but without a pattern of movie-going boorishness, sometimes popcorn is just popcorn.

But often, popcorn isn't just popcorn, especially on the internet. In 2017, Matt Damon was at the heart of an internet controversy. When he was speaking out against sexual misconduct he used the phrase "because I have daughters." Upon first glance, this is relatively harmless. However, these four little words were the catalyst for a tirade of articles and speeches and well intentioned videos. Feminists were mad because they felt the phrase implied that Matt Damon only cares about sexual assault because he has daughters. This insinuates that prior to having daughters, he did not have a reason to care about that issue and is therefore a bad feminist and a bad guy. Matt Damon ate all of our metaphorical popcorn and we literally judged his character for it.

Sofia and I have been friends for ages, so when I ate all the literal popcorn, she was pissed, but she also knew that it wasn't because I was a bad person. The public doesn't have the same relationship with Matt Damon. There's no context, no benefit of the doubt, no girls nights in or birthdays or breakups that he helped us through because we do not KNOW him. Despite the parasocial relationships we may have formed, we do not really know anyone on the internet. Instead we are given a sliver of their personality and we take it as law, because what else are we meant to do?

But you have good days and bad days. Sometimes you're funny and sometimes the joke falls flat, sometimes you're under pressure and you don't say what you mean. And so do people on the internet. If I was told to solve a murder case with just one fact, I would most definitely fail, and when you're tasked with assessing someone's entire being based on one ten second vignette, you will fail similarly.

But I'm not here to be the savior of everyone who chooses to post themselves on the internet, and I don't have a problem with nameless, faceless people making snap judgements about others on their For You Page. It is human nature to judge. My problem lies in how widespread and unchecked snap judgements have become because of the internet. When you spend hours everyday online making these snap judgements, it becomes ingrained in your psyche. We have trained our brains to be so judgemental of others that our 10 second litmus tests are bleeding out into our everyday lives.

One mistake is enough to terminate a friendship and one bad joke is a valid reason to kick someone out of a club. Where's the nuance? Where's the benefit of the doubt? The room to grow? We're in college. We're not perfect, and that shouldn't be the expectation. People are flawed and messy, and for every slip up or bad day you see, there are several thoughtful birthday gifts given and friends they've been there for and goodness and popcorn shared not hoarded.

I do not know if nuance is possible on the internet, when you have so much access to so much information all at once, snap judgments become a vital skill. But I do know that nuance is possible in the real world, even if the internet has trained your subconscious otherwise. The internet makes it so easy to be apathetic. To expect Instagram-esque perfection not only in looks but also in personality. To make those snap judgements of your peers as you would with any rando who pops up on TikTok. But please remember that your classmates, floormates, and fellow party-goers are not nameless entertainment hubs, but real people with real feelings who sometimes slip up. In the wise words of Hannah Montana, everybody makes mistakes, everybody has those days.

Pobodies nerfect, so extend the same kindness you would to yourself to others.

JULIANNE LEMPERT

No one cares about your underground, indie Spotify Wrapped—you're not cool, you're not quirky, you're not better. Get over it.

Let me take a step back for a second. That's great you've found your indie groove. The issue is that people have too hastily cast aside the genre of pop as a bad and embarrassing music taste. I posted my Spotify Wrapped last year and a girl DM'd me, "how are you not embarrassed?? [insert skull face emoji]." My top 5 most-listened artists were all pop musicians and household names. I was puzzled by the girl's reaction and frankly a little insulted. I wanted to understand why everyone seemed to hate pop, the music that everyone loved.

We all know the people who love to boast about their dad's records from the 70s or their favorite artist with under 10k followers. These people often put others down for liking contemporary, well-known music. Deep down, our disdain for pop comes from a relentless need to be different and some deeply ingrained misogyny. The abbreviation of "pop" is literally "popular." Pop music is popular because people like it. Maybe your "cool" indie artist only has 1,000 followers for a reason. Have you considered that your favorite music might not be the end-all-be-all of art? Perhaps the offbeat duo 100 gecs's wacko experimentalism hasn't seen the same level of success as Katy Perry because it is less good, not because it is tragically misunderstood. Pop music is good. And that's okay. You might hate it because you need to feel better than everyone else. Perhaps if a given pop song was sung by one of your favorite artists, you might feel differently. If Olivia Rodrigo's "brutal" was sung by one of your underground 90s rock bands, you might characterize it as the epitome of a teenage angst song over some rockin' guitar. If your favorite emo, indie lyricist had thought up Taylor Swift's "my tears ricochet" or "right where you left me," you might have said it was a majestic lyrical creation. Yet recognizing these art pieces for what they are now means that you didn't find them first and that lots of other people agree with you. This inherently decenters yourself from the equation. You lose out on some pride and individuality.

The insufferable egoism is not just annoying; it stems from our worst American traits. We have an obsession with wanting things to be our own. In America, our self-worth is derived from our originality and ability to stick out in an ever-competitive world. This drives our urgent thirst for uniqueness in every aspect of our personality. Popularity colors the way we value something, whether it's a particular fashion trend, a popular band, or an emerging hobby. Our disdain for pop emphasizes our lack of community. We need to be able to enjoy something collectively. Communal joy and recognition of art should be a positive experience. Enjoying a little pop might be the first step in getting over the fact that there are others like you—and that might be a good thing.

Misogyny is the other toxic mentality that plays a major role in our treatment of pop. Misogyny appears because pop is associated with girls. Whether sung by men or women, pop music tends to focus on traditional themes of romance and falling in love, topics that often

NO ONE CARES ABOUT YOUR SPOTIFY WRAPPED

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draw in young girls. These more feminine-oriented themes pair with the female inclination to attach to male heartthrobs and female role models. Whether it's the image of young girls screaming over One Direction or college-age women dumping their life savings into Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour, pop is inextricably linked to femininity.

The equation gets pretty simple from here. In a society that hates and disrespects women, society tends to hate and disrespect women-oriented things while things associated with men are more respected. We can see this in the devaluation of female entertainment. It's okay to be a die-hard sports fan and know every player's stats, but does that woman really need to spend 5 hours on her outfit for the Harry Style concert? It's okay to sit at the throne of Star Wars, but does that girl really need to know every episode of Grey's Anatomy? In this same vein, much of our hatred towards pop music stems from our hatred of women and girls.

The issue even presentsitself among female musicians. Again, we arrive at a simple equation: the more girly, the more hated. It's no secret why an incredibly feminine and classically pretty artist like Taylor Swift gets some of the most misogynistic treatment in the music industry. Artists with deeper voices or more masculine traits like Miley Cyrus or Lady Gaga receive less of the baseless shade thrown at Swift. Someone like Olivia Rodrigo is unapologetically a teenage girl. Her album SOUR captures the pendulum of emotions that characterize female adolescence. She is not running from the stereotypes of being hyper-emotional and boy-crazy. That's precisely what makes "the boys" so mad and renders her so vulnerable to misogynistic bullying. What's more, boys are not punished for being "basic." They can say their favorite artists are Drake, Kanye, and Travis Scott, and they are cool dudes. Girls say they listen to Ariana Grande and Shawn Mendes, and suddenly they're a basic bitch. Boys can be one of the crowd. There's a reason we don't joke about the phrase "I'm not like other boys"—because it doesn't exist. Girls are bashed for being mainstream but also slammed for trying too hard to be "quirky and different." Girls cannot live in peace. In these toxic circumstances, girls turn against each

other. We compete on how to be most different from eac https://pin.it/4lcREd2 h other while making it seem effortless. This explains why so much of the obsession with indie, experimental, or "oldies" music comes from women. It does not surprise me that the DM I mentioned earlier came from another woman. In the same way misogyny fuels men's rhetoric about music, internalized misogyny blinds women, leading us to spread the same negativity.

Our aversion to pop music is much more profound than one might think. In hating pop, we reveal more significant social issues, like our obsession with individualism and hatred of women and girls. For all the people feeling superior with their retro music taste, in 50 years kids will be doing the same thing with our current artists. "No, you like, just don't get it, 'Blank Space' is literally my jam." "How do you not know Justin Bieber, 'Baby' is like literally so historically significant." So, relax. The little individualist pedestal you have built for yourself is only temporary. So why not hit up the Top Songs USA Spotify chart. Why not dig into a little 1D throwback, or get to know what your fellow Americans have been rockin' out to. You might be missing out on some fabulous tunes, and you might just be a little happier when you learn that enjoying things together feels good.

¡iPad
FeeL Li

Katya Leal

In my experience as a Gen Z-er, Boomers are constantly criticizing and catastrophizing our use of technology. In response, I would justify our close link with technology: this is the future, and they just don't understand. But now, I see the new generation of kids with greasy iPads in their Cheeto dust-encrusted hands, and I can't help but feel like something is different. But then again, I wonder if I am just falling into the cycle of the older generations' constant criticism of younger ones. Surely, their relationship with technology differs from ours, right?

The younger generations' use of screentime can't be healthy. The way the younger generation, Gen Alpha, uses technology is fundamentally different from any previous generation. This is true in both amount and content. Many young people have extremely high screen time. You would be hard-pressed to walk into a restaurant or mall without seeing a young kid with eyes glued to a screen. Interacting with the world around oneself is an essential part of human development, yet these kids are going through crucial stages of development with a constant stream of Cocomelon being burned into their brains. It's not only about the screen time, but the breadth of content that they can access is concerning. You can try parental controls, but any kid with even a modicum of technical knowledge can easily get around that. In the age of the Internet, monitoring what your child views goes beyond what parental controls or safe search can manage. The dangerous content isn't just mature or adult content; now, there are more ways in which online content can harm children's brains. For example, short-form content is doing measurable damage to developing brains. In an attention economy, social media algorithms are designed to maintain our attention for as long as possible, ruining everyone's attention spans in the process. The evolving Internet has created a hostile environment for young children, while lazy parenting means kids these days are basically raised in this artificial landscape.

There is some truth to Boomer anti-technology sentiment: Millennials and Gen Z have grown up with unprecedented access to technology, and it has negatively impacted us in many ways. The world is becoming increasingly isolated, and people are more lonely, anxious, and depressed than ever. In the modern world, there are so many factors other than technology that are affecting our daily lives and socialization. Of course, simply blaming this on technology would be an oversimplification. At the same time, it is a delusion to act like technology hasn't had a major impact. Technology addiction isn't unique to Gen Alpha; almost every Gen Z-er or Millennial has an addiction to technology in some way. However, Gen Alpha makes our addiction look mild when you consider

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ike a Boomer

they are going up completely enthralled with technology from the moment they are born. We can only expect the negative impacts of technology on these young minds to be even greater.

Considering how much technology use has negatively affected my generation's social skills, Gen Alpha is at serious risk of not being able to develop critical social skills. The current youngest generation is missing out on key socialization in their formative years because it is being replaced with screen time. Everyone knows an iPad baby in their family who won't even interact with other people and would rather just stare at their iPad. One can't help but wonder how these kids will be able to interact with their peers once they hit pre-school. Despite my criticisms for iPad babies, I can't help but wonder if they're just navigating through the changing times, that this is the future, and my generation is being left behind just like Boomers. Maybe socialization will be completely different in the future, where we will continue to use technology more than ever and upload our brains to computers. Already, many people circumvent traditional forms of socialization with technology. This is a new phenom-   enon, even in the short time technology has been

around compared to the span of human history. Technology is changing the world faster than we can even notice; maybe iPad babies are just being prepared for a world I wouldn't understand. But the way I see it now, iPad babies are losing out on their essential formative years to excessive amounts of screen time, and I don't care if saying that makes me sound like a Boomer.

YOU'RE NOT CRAZY, SAKSHA

By now, I have written and rewritten this article about 5 times, maybe more. Each time I did, I appeared a complete lunatic as I talked out loud to myself through my own thoughts to decide what adjustments to make. However, without these self-conversations, I wouldn't have even come up with the idea for this article. Talking aloud to yourself is an art lost by most of us. We're so quick to judge everyone who engages in this activity as potentially mentally unstable that we forget how talking to ourselves can help us efficiently decipher our own emotions and desires.

Media and film have created a stigma around talking to oneself. When one thinks of verbal self-talk, the first picture that comes to mind is that of the mad genius in their lab creating the next Frankenstein's monster. In the media, the only characters who talk to themselves are insane. Hence, when I talk to myself, I do so in isolated areas so as not to scare people off. There is definitely a point to this, however. Talking to yourself is much more effective in isolation because when you are alone, you can be more open with yourself. Also, speaking aloud in a public space isn't necessarily respectful of the focus of those around you. Yet, the stigma makes it seem like talking out loud to oneself even in an empty room is a sign of insanity. However, you have to realize that the mad scientists in movies are called geniuses for a reason. Not only do people who talk to themself have access to better memorization, according to a Bangor University study, but they also increase focus. This practice improves long-term memory and enables greater critical thinking by engaging more parts of your brain.

Furthermore, these conversations act as a tool for idea creation and processing. Regurgitating ideas has always been a common method of finding the one that sticks—talking to yourself offers a convenient method of doing so. The flaw with ideas, however, is that they are inherently messy, disorganized, and often contradictory as thoughts flow freely through your brain. Talking to yourself cuts through cognitive dissonance because saying a thought out loud makes it more definitive. Dr. Jessica Nicolosi explains that speaking aloud slows us down by making us access our brain's language structures. It exposes internal inconsistency and gives structure to our thoughts.

It is important to also recognize the emotional benefits of talking aloud. People are inherently secretive about their inner thoughts, emotions, and desires. We try to be as open as possible as we can be with our friends and loved ones but at the end of the day, there is always going to be a part of ourselves that we don't want other people to see and judge. Yet, we fail to recognize the one person to whom we can truly be vulnerable: our self. Talking to yourself aloud gives you that "outlet" for your deepest, darkest secrets. That's why conversations with yourself are a great way to process emotions and desires. The benefit of talking out loud is that you actually have to form your thoughts into definitive, coherent sentences and then evaluate them just like any other conversation. This gives you an objective standpoint on your own situation that you might not share with anyone else. Thus, you combine logic with emotions to ultimately formulate a better decision-making process.

To make these heart-to-hearts with yourself more effective, talk to yourself in the second or third person. Doing so creates

SAKSHAM MADAAN
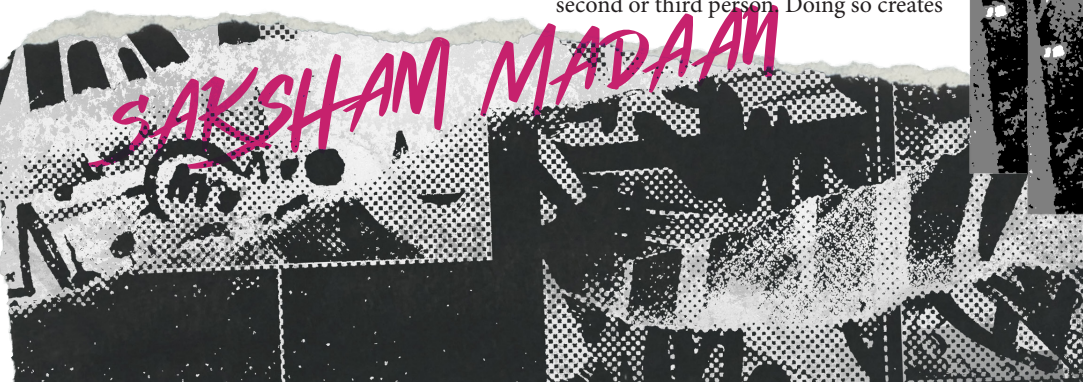
separation and builds an objective view of yourself. This self-distancing has been found by researchers such as Ethan Kross from the University of Michigan to be one of the more effective modes of self-conversation. Ask yourself questions in this format and then answer them. Fully engage yourself in a conversation despite how insane that may sound. It gives you an outside look into yourself that you may not have gotten before. However, the most important part of this rule is to not to forget to listen. I know it seems counter-intuitive to be giving this advice but it is very easy to get lost in the talk. In that sense, it is very easy to have a conversation with yourself and forget your pivotal points because you were just talking. At that point, talking out loud becomes no differ-ent than the in-ternal conver-sa-tions

in your head. You are organizing your thoughts into coherent sentences for a reason but if you don't listen to those sentences, you lose the self-awareness that comes with these conversations.

Thus, you will often find me walking down Bruinwalk talking to myself. And no, I am not crazy or a lunatic. I am simply a human being organizing my thoughts in a way that I can understand them best. Were it not for these dialogues I have with myself, this article might not exist.

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?
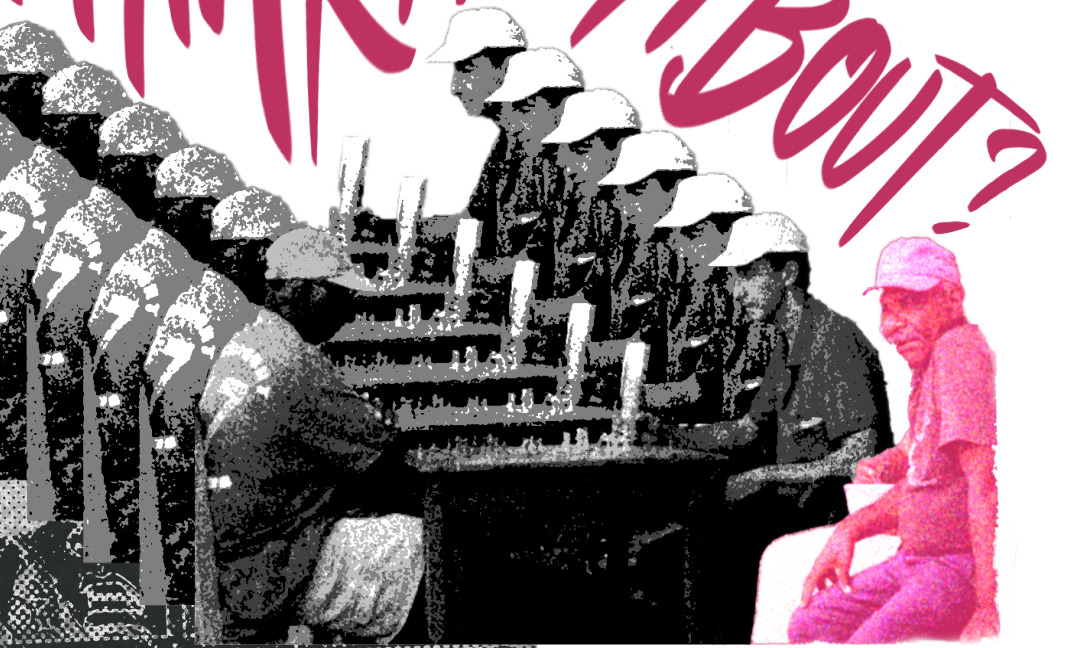
Don't get me wrong, I ate up every bit of the TV drama emerging from the last two seasons of Euphoria, scrolled through countless Twitter threads after each episode aired, and avidly swapped bizarre theories with my friends. Does Nate really have a secret brother? What happened to Rue's debt to the creepy drug lord? Why is Kat acting, like, totally insane? However, the season two finale made it clear that if you have any of the same questions, Euphoria writer and director Sam Levinson does not have answers. The show builds a messy story around aesthetic shots, tension-filled sequences, shocking graphics, and plot twists so out-of-pocket, they make the audience wonder whether anyone should be watching. There is no resolution to high-stakes conflicts set up in

Even worse, our obsession with the pretty lights, sparkly glitter, and unhinged nature of shows like Euphoria proves that this format is working. The push for relevance through shock value makes sense given the sheer amount of readily-available entertainment — it's hard for a show to stand out against all the constant surrounding noise and clutter. Even when I had nothing else to do during quarantine, I still found myself overwhelmed, trying to keep up with every new show that came out. (I'm sorry to say, I never made it onto the Tiger King train for that very reason.) It seemed that showrunners were ready to approve anything and everything that had a potential audience, letting whatever pulled in the most numbers to continue as a series. It's a "throw-everything-at-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks" method that results in many shows, including some I've grown attached to, being as quickly

the series; no consequences for any of the characters' morally gray decisions, no real reason for the overly dramatic twists and turns other than audience engagement; Euphoria is a second-rate soap opera without the heart to justify its existence. And yet, more than a year removed from its latest episode, the show's sustained popularity reflects a wider sentiment across many networks and filmmakers; media is no longer about conveying a message or creating a masterful work of art. Instead, it is about getting the most eyes, igniting the most conversation — no matter how negative or short-lived.

canceled as they were greenlit. Networks sent a clear message: if a series wasn't an instant hit, it would be killed. However, as we've seen from The Office, Breaking Bad, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, a weaker first season

isn't always indicative of the success a show will go on to have; good art takes time to develop.

This condensed "trial period" has a devastating impact on the quality of our entertainment, reducing characters with meaningful multi-season arcs to easily digestible tropes, sacrificing well-paced storylines for "trendy" content, and forcing every new piece of media to be a flashy shit-show we love to watch burn. Which brings me to another side effect of this media overload: the renewal of universally disliked shows. It's no secret that media like The Kissing Booth, Emily in Paris, and Ginny and Georgia are despised by audiences — and yet these are approved for season after season, sequel after sequel due to their countless hate-watchers. These are the shows that flood online conversation, pushing more and more people to watch just to understand the collective dislike. And yes, I understand the appeal of turning our brains off and consuming trashy entertainment as a guilty pleasure — especially considering the F.O.M.O. that arises when online discourse is centered around this very entertainment. But at the same time, we can't expect anything better if we keep indulging in mediocre media. As consumers, our views and engagement tell producers that we want cheap Gossip Girl and Pretty Little Liars reboots that bank on nostalgia views, that we want half-assed performances from Tiktokers with no acting talent (I'm looking at you, Addison Rae). When networks care more about profits than performances, why should they spend time creating well-written storylines and character arcs if negative attention is equally, if not more, rewarding? The shows we watch, the entertainment we consume influences us. I don't need another controversial attention-grabbing trainwreck that I'll forget about in a week. We can hold a higher standard for media and the conversations surrounding it. Television is a way for us to share our experiences with one another — and it is often through media that many of us are exposed to concepts that we might not run into in our daily lives. Good entertainment is the difference between Boys Don't Cry and Thor: Love and Thunder — one a beautifully directed queer story presented to the world, the other a pitiful cash grab targeting the wallets of a queer audience. When done right, it can help us become more compassionate, more understanding. It shares experiences, it provides representation, it pushes us to think. And yes, sometimes it's silly and goofy and comforting, but good entertainment has a purpose beyond getting the most views.

I've watched so many films and shows that have absolutely changed my life — true works of art in every sense. However, these pieces and their messages are often drowned out in today's ever-moving virality-focused culture. So before we all scramble this June to watch Levinson's new project The Idol, which has already managed to stir up controversy, I urge you to think — without the external pressure to "be in the know", would you still view this show? If your answer is no, remind yourself who you're watching for.
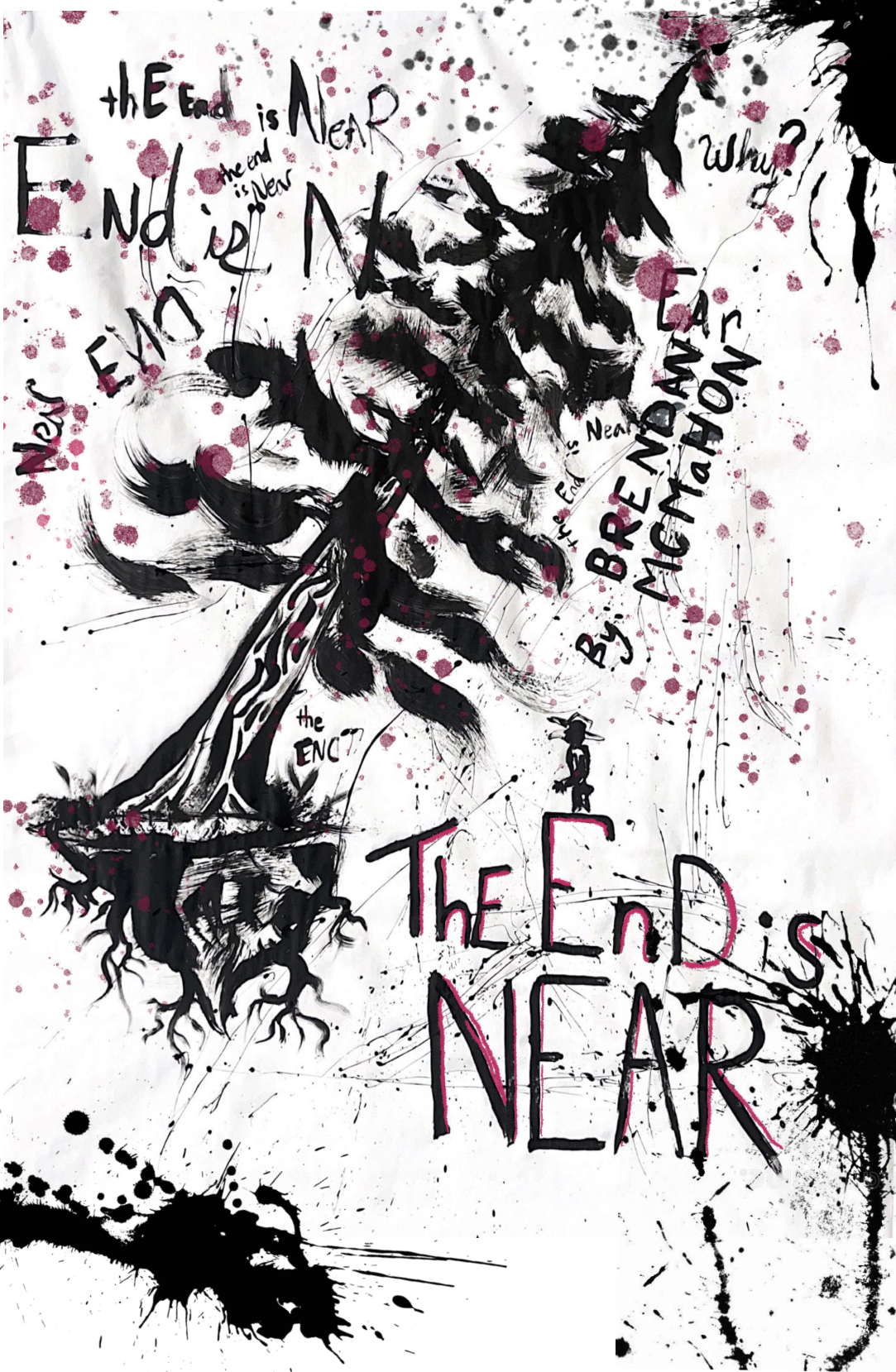
Ananya Devanath

Why I Can't Stand Sam Levinson

'Apocalypse' negates salvation, as if we never had a chance or a choice in the face of doomsday. The image is medieval: a cloaked figure in the square, ringing a tired bell, blathering "The end is near!" through labored breaths. Do we listen? The answer is a question of scale.

An existential threat's intensity is measured by the extent the modern social fabric will be upended in its wake. Nuclear war, for example, holds the possibility of death and destruction of unimaginable proportions and has therefore altered humanity's conception of violence. The international community was forced to rewrite the rules of warfare to include the imminent fear of planet wide catastrophe at the push of a button. Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic had massive societal implications, locking families inside their homes and transforming the basic ways humans interact. Although these crises differ, both brought a rapid shift in our behavior because of their proximity to the lives of every individual on the planet. We were able to adapt when the need was large enough.

Unfortunately, abstracted issues like climate change confuse our evaluative process. There is a remarkable gap between our perceived societal impact and the devastating realities of our situation. People hear "rising sea levels" and decide to not buy that beach house they always wanted, as if that will fix their problems. We miss the decimation of island nations and the influx of billions of refugees that the term 'humanitarian crisis' can't even begin to represent. We miss the global economic collapse when the resource-rich, developing nations become uninhabitable and world superpowers can no longer supply their consumption-reliant populations. We miss the breadth of what is really at stake—life itself. There is no immediacy to fix what is broken, just rationales for our neglect.

We lack urgency because of the strange time dilation applied to the climate crisis, which compounds with people's misunderstanding of the issue. Over and over, climate communications relay deadlines for action, and none are more classic than limiting our greenhouse gas emissions. Fifty percent reduction by 2030, net-zero by 2050, net-negative by 2100. As if the real consequences of the climate threat weren't hard enough to grasp, they make an assignment out of climate action like it's a school project to be procrastinated right up to the deadline, then submitted with the instructor none the wiser. But Mother Nature doesn't care about deadlines, or schedules, or any excuse we could possibly make because she will steamroll us into nonexistence without blinking an eye. Humans forget the Earth was here billions of years before us and will be here long after our story ends, unless we act. Climate change detractors are right that the Earth is a self-correcting system, but are horribly wrong to think it'll wait for us in the process. Where nuclear weapons and the global pandemic demanded immediacy, the climate crisis ends in

complacency. This is the pattern that must be disrupted to enact tangible change for the planet. We need to reshape the climate threat in a way that'll make individuals, corporations, and governments take the necessary action to prevent the depths of apocalypse. But this task seems impossible when people continuously choose themselves over the needs of others. The world is entrenched in a dizzying array of monied interests with a death grip over public policy and western liberalism has redefined society to make selfish actions standard and accepted. In the age of connection, we have never been further away from each other. Politically, socially, and ideologically, we have an uphill battle against an ingrained system that will require a revolution of human association to bring us back together and respond to this threat.

To confront and reconcile these modern societal chokepoints, we need to inject the climate crisis as a critical axiom for every human being by building a framework that includes journalistic values, our children's education, professional education, and conversations of all kinds: at the dinner table, in the workplace, on the street, in the morning, and at night. We need to present climate change in a way that will foster community within the people to show our governments that we all care about this issue and will not go quietly. In our actions, we must show climate change the same immediacy required by nuclear war and COVID-19. Humanity is capable of solving this problem, but we need to take an objective view of exactly why nobody seems to "care" about climate change. No substantial action to preserve the Earth can be taken until we understand our shortcomings and work to overcome them.

It's not an apocalypse if you're given a choice. Make the right one.

PRIORITIZE SOCIAL PRIVACY

What do you envision when you hear the term "digital privacy"? A man in a black ski mask sitting in front of a computer, reading the undignified text chain between you and your best friend sent with Invisible Ink? Perhaps even Gene Block logging into your myUCLA account, bypassing the Duo Mobile two-factor authentication, and slipping in an additional hefty tuition fee! Whatever mental image is spurred within you, knowing that there are multiple ways that your digital information could be stolen is undoubtedly frightening. Users are entirely defenseless to the vulnerabilities that stem from repeated interaction with technology – it is merely another aspect of the unspoken terms and conditions inherent to internet use.

This is noticeably a point of concern for Americans. According to Pew Research Center, about 79% of citizens are worried about how companies are using collected user information while 64% are hesitant about the government's access to their data. A Markets and Market reports that in 2021, companies in the United States spent nearly $162.6 billion buying and selling user data. They project that in 2026, this industry will be worth $273.4 billion – an exponential increase in value. One important distinction that I would like to underscore is that when I mention the active exchange of user data, I am not encouraging illegitimate parties to play a role in this. Namely, individuals who specialize in online identity theft, extortion, or scam users online for monetary gain. Rather, I am referring to government agencies and companies that focus on surface level information for the sake of collecting data, provide monetized advertisements, or sell their own products online.

Although this industry may seem elusive, I believe that giving up a degree of digital privacy is more beneficial, and often less risky, than consumers generally perceive it to be.

I find it hard to believe that as UCLA undergraduate students, we store information on our devices that would require us to vehemently protest digital companies infringing on our privacy.

Unless you have information regarding national security or any sort of implicating evidence of a crime you have committed, your phone most likely reflects a plethora of interests: your gym music playlist, online shopping habits, heartwarming 0.5 pictures of your pets, or the Theo Von Tik Toks that you send to your younger brother. I cannot imagine that data mining agencies would be invested in the intricacies of your personality as expressed by your digital footprint. Quite frankly, data collecting is not as intimate of a process as it's made out to be – after all, they are solely driven by financial motives, such as advertising purposes, and not individualized interest.

The NYU Dispatch mentions how major platforms such as Instagram, Spotify, and Google use recommendation engines to give users content that is relevant and related to their past digital patterns. This process occurs by collecting data, storing the data in the agency's database of choice, analyzing potential recommendations, and then finally filtering these recommendations to give users the most optimal suggestions possible.

When solely considering user experience, this process is widely considered to be positive. Algorithms that optimize your TikTok For You Page to show you videos tailored to your humor or an Instagram ad for a particular dress that you were trying to find on Google earlier that day make your screen time more enjoyable. It creates an endless cycle of captivated scrolling: a Data Reportal survey states that the average person spends 6 hours and 37 minutes on their phone per day.

If the most apparent benefit of allowing agencies to have access to our data is insufficient, it is vital to recall that nowadays, most aspects of life are posted willingly and our information is given to the public voluntarily. Realistically speaking, the same critics who vouch for more digital privacy are those who post their every move on social media. Every meal, trip, thought, and creative endeavor are logged in a series of snaps and captions. If organizations and agencies wanted to take your information without backend web analytics, it would be just as easy to do so.

If anything, the biggest liability to your privacy is not a CIA agent who has access to your Snapchat history. Instead, it is those that are embedded in the intricate social dynamics of your daily life: your friends. Your social circle poses a greater threat to your privacy than anything else. Not only do they have access to your private information through messages, images, and conversations, but they also are able to relay this to those who have a direct impact on your life. Those who are closest to you have the ability to ruin your reputation, humiliate you in front of your crush, or alienate you from social circles. Friendship's currency is sensitive information, and this inherently causes a tender, yet potentially perilous, sense of vulnerability. Ultimately, to data-buying actors, your information is a miniscule piece of data used to create a statistical picture. To your social circle, you are seen as an individual and your information can be used against you to create permanent repercussions.

Instead of fearing your phone, fear your friends.
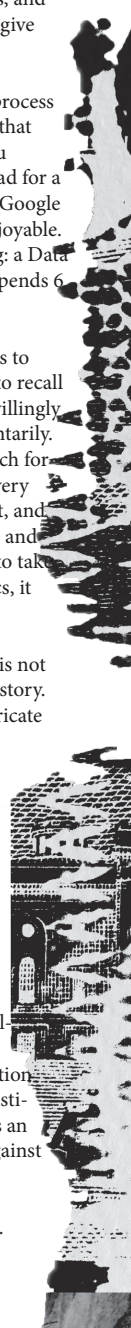
CY, NOT DiGiTAL PRiVACY
JULia TORRES

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In today's society, being alone is often seen as a bad thing. Doing something on your own is perceived as lonely and there's a societal ideal to always be around friends or family, with adults who remain single or unmarried being seen as outcasts. Additionally, everyone stays connected today through social media. Posts on social media constantly showcase the parties, outings, and other moments shared between friends. Human interaction and social circles are essential to a healthy lifestyle, but the idea of being social has become skewed. Instead of forming genuine connections, there's an increased emphasis on posting for attention with as many friends as you can. While I would never advocate for isolation, I think that this fear of being alone is harmful to achieving a happier and healthier mindset. There's no reason to evade being alone once one finds peace in it.

A common struggle that first year college students experience is feeling alone. This isolation motivates us to try to meet as many new people as we can and make friends quickly to fill this void. These relationships appear to be genuine at first, but over time, they begin to reveal themselves as nothing more than bonds built on a common fear of isolation instead of on true friendship and interest. Additionally, many of these friendships result in participating in activities just to avoid feeling lonely. "Friend Groups" are a great idea in theory, but not in practice. Built on weak links like brief meetings, most people in these social circles are not all friends with one another. While convenient, these relationships are not built to last. Going to sporting events or seeing movies in a big group is great, but hardly any deep connection comes from it. Getting swept up in a constant stream of business doesn't allow for one to see the issues. The remedy for this debacle comes in the form of taking a step back and spending some time alone.

When one spends some time alone, they can finally become more in touch with who they are. Starting college and entering adulthood often leads people to struggle with their identity. Coupled with the instinct to be around others, there is hardly any time for independence. Only through independence and alone-time can one focus on self

reflection. Taking some time to sit outside, listen to music, go for a walk, or even rest on your own gives you the opportunity to think critically about yourself and what you really want. As someone who fell into the trap of not wanting to be alone, I lost sight of myself. After doing things like eating meals and spending time on my own, I was able to reflect on the relationships in my life and realize that I enjoy having time for myself. I don't need to spend all of my time with others to achieve happiness. I reevaluated my boundaries and started to focus on enjoying time to myself.

Once you utilize your independence to figure out who you are and what you want, you're capable of going after what makes you happy. The fog, which arrives during week zero and encourages you to meet as many people as possible, begins to clear. Instead of entering into relationships that don't bring you joy, you can form better ones that are entered with intention.

Intentional relationships are more meaningful as both parties are choosing to spend time with each other because they want to, not because they feel obliged to. This allows for stronger relationships built on more than filling a void. Furthermore, spending time with one or two people ensures that everyone wants to see each other, and allows for deeper connections to form. Friendships of quality are more beneficial than having a large quantity of superficial ones.

These strong relationships with others and oneself are the most rewarding. Despite advocating for alone time, I don't believe that anyone should spend all their time on their own. Too much isolation is also dangerous to one's mental health. However, I think that one should feel empowered to do things on their own and prioritize figuring out who they are. Being alone is closer to being independent than we realize, yet being alone is stigmatized. We shouldn't be afraid of being on our own. In today's age, it's nearly impossible to avoid getting distracted or to find free time. This is precisely why we need to prioritize self reflection. Without self awareness, there is no opportunity for self love. Social media showcases what we should want, but we don't necessarily all want the same things, and striving to be like someone else often clouds our perception of ourselves. It's not easy to find yourself, but it's worth taking the time to try. These pivotal college years are not easy, but reflecting on who you are and learning what you want can make them easier to navigate. Take advantage of the opportunities around you once you know what it is you're really looking for. Try something new on your own, like joining a club or going out by yourself. Learn to treat yourself better and get to know yourself again, and you may find that you didn't know yourself nearly as well as you thought you did!

As an avid bookworm who inhaled books by the shelf in middle school, I reflect on how quickly my love for literature declined as I entered high school and find it quite jarring. The National Center for Education statistics finds that the percentage of children who read for fun decreases between the ages of nine and thirteen, which demonstrates how dramatic bookworm death really is (NCES, 2021). This clear downward trend occurs around the time more formal literary analysis is introduced into the curriculum. On average, teenagers have less time to read for fun because of extracurriculars, homework, jobs, sports, etc., but it is important to consider that with the abundance of smartphones and audiobooks, reading has become more accessible than ever. Instead, it is the individuality-crushing curriculum that poisons what was once a steady thirst for the fantastical.

Given the merit-based tools of assessment we use to determine student worth, teachers assess you for how "correct" you are instead of your ability to interact with a text and gain something meaningful out of it. When I think of literary analysis, I think of overarching themes, author's purpose, motifs, character development, etc. All of these elements are important in analyzing a text, and deciphering what the author wants to tell you is part of the experience of reading. However, we tend to skip over what this message means for the reader because it is more difficult to assign a letter grade to. Education prioritizes test scores and quantitative goals over the students' individual needs, which discourages the personal factor that is so important in reading. According to Merriam-Webster, reading is also "a particular interpretation of something." Writing can have the most nuanced and well-developed message, but unless the reader is able to interpret their own meaning, the "goal" of literature as an interaction between author and reader has not been accomplished. Academic institutions focus on surveying students' writing abilities without regard for how narrow-minded approaches damage a student's ability to interact with a text in a meaningful way.

Sometimes, teachers are unprepared to discuss uncomfortable topics that impact students, and other students may also push against such discussions, which pushes students out of literature that they may relate to. Every student should always feel comfortable in school, but this does not really apply to shunning concepts such as queerness, the impact of religion, and poverty to foster comfort. My liberal, Southern California high school was very tolerant, but not every topic was given the same amount of attention. Most self-aware queer students will notice the not-so-subtle homoerotic tension in The Great Gatsby, but no one ever mentioned it. I would not say that the environment at my school was anything but supportive of queer students for the most part, yet there was something preventing anyone from voicing a critical take on the literature we found relatable. There is an unspoken set of blurry lines that no one crosses because of how school pushes students out of the narrative when the topic becomes difficult or uncomfortable.
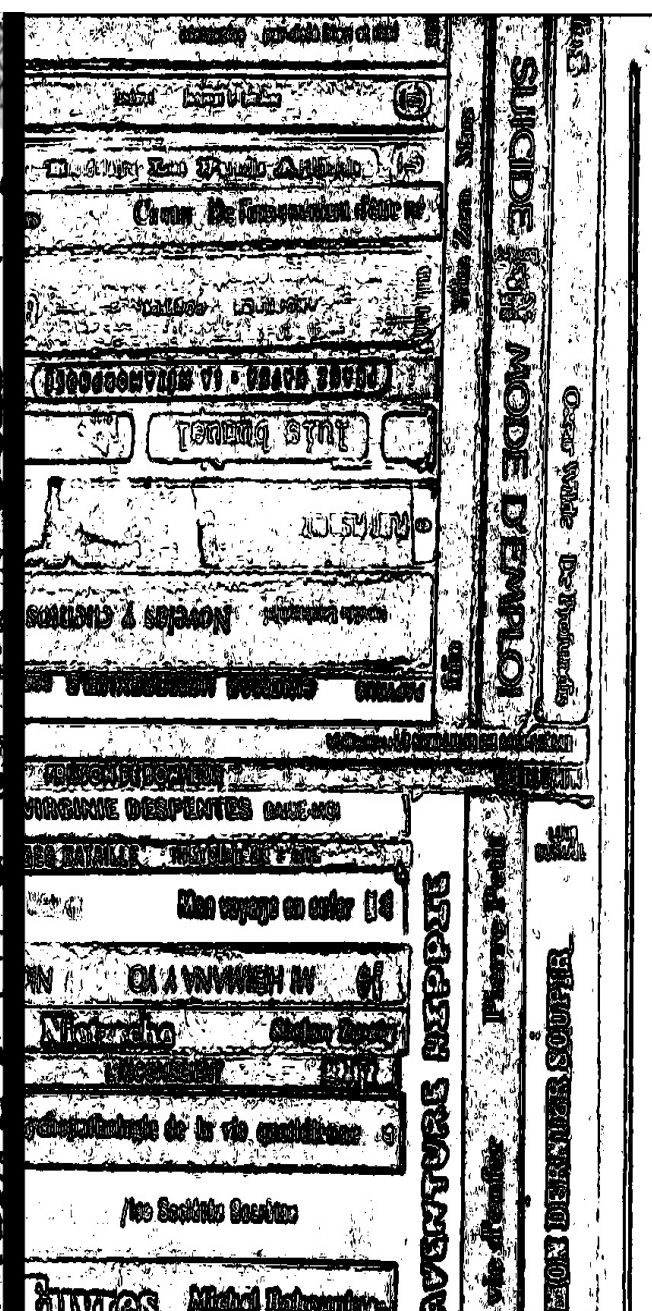
When it comes to maturity, high school students tend to be across the board, so limiting options leaves students out and holds others back. There are students who have been in long-term relationships and students who have never held hands with romantic intent. As a result of a rigid curriculum with set books that all students have to read, there is no reliable method for gauging which books will resonate with a group of students and which will not. For example, I could not appreciate Romeo and Juliet because the concept of killing yourself for a man you just met was ludicrous to me. While I cannot say that this sentiment is something I will ever relate to, I can understand it better four years later after experiencing life a little more. Of course, schools need a structured curriculum in order for teachers to be able to teach, but by giving students no choice in what they read, students who lack the maturity to appreciate certain themes become frustrated with literature. This incompatibility is one of the reasons that many adults think literature is boring.

With American media's emphasis on "useless degrees" and the pointlessness of a liberal arts education, reading becomes a box to check, a quota to fill, instead of the delightful experience that it should be. In a society obsessed with hustle culture and constant productivity, reading is dismissed as a waste of time. If students finish early, they should start on their homework. The kids that read by themselves during lunch are ridiculed. Rather than introducing these avid readers to new genres and opening perspectives, school crushes the appeal of reading as something worthwhile. The constant emphasis on Lexile levels pushes students away from books they may find interesting. Students learn that their interests may be inappropriate and that they need to read to improve the district's funding over pursuing their own interests.

I must admit, I still do not read nearly as frequently as I would like, but the time I spend with my nose buried in a good book has dramatically increased since I graduated high school. I attribute this change to the different approach to reading in college, where my thoughts, feelings, and opinions about a piece of literature are centered. Yes, there are major themes my professor wants me to dive into, but the lens of how I approach analyzing them is drastically different. Suddenly, I find that there is no wrong answer as long as I can argue my point. There is no taboo topic too unpleasant to bring up. I am able to interact with narratives as myself, not the student someone wants me to be. Of course, there is no standardized curriculum in college and professors have complete freedom with their syllabi, but I believe that high school students would greatly benefit from being welcomed into the narrative of literature. Students deserve to be able to see themselves in the literature they read.

SUICIDE MODE D'EMPLOI

SUICIDE MODE D'EMPLOI

VIRGINIE DESPENTES BAISE-MOI

Mon voyage en enfer

Nietzsche

...NIA
OKOLOWSKA

HOW EDUCATION CAUSES
BOOKWORM DEATH

and how do we measure this? The simple answer is: students aren't learning and the existing standards of testing students has become obsolete with the advent of technology in education. However, this is not new information for most of us. In Richard Arum and Josipa Roska's book, Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses, these sociologists found that college students aren't learning as much anymore—at least in the ways that matter. While grade averages haven't significantly declined over the years, sociologists and prospective employers have found that recent college graduates have shown a decreasing aptitude for critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing. There are many potential causes for this decline in intelligence and soft skills in our generation's cohorts of graduates. However, I will focus on one: technology. While technology has allowed for students to attain higher GPAs, the use of technology throughout one's academic career is a self-inflicted robbery of the opportunity to learn. Technology has replaced thinking in many ways. While search-engines and online math solvers have existed for over a decade, the new age of artificial intelligence has given students access to tools that complete entire assignments autonomously, or allow them to cheat through any assessment. With Google as a source of instantaneous information on any subject, it was easy for us to build an argument against memorizing facts in school. As technology becomes more accessible and convenient, it becomes easier for us to justify delegating the acts of thinking, reasoning, and writing to artificial intelligence.

The modern day education system is essentially obsolete given all these new emerging technologies. Students have found ways to pass through this broken system, sometimes even gaining extremely high grades doing so, while not actually learning anything. This is because today's education system is strictly defined by one thing: grades. When a student enters a class, they're not eager to learn any valuable knowledge or skill through this experience. On the contrary, they're simply just trying to survive another class with an 'A' marked on their transcript just to move onto the next class without gaining anything from those months of lectures, tests, and discussions. Moreover, the sole

I have a confession to make: I hate ChatGPT. Most college students would disagree with me on this, and I get where they're coming from: recent developments in AI have made these tools useful for common tasks, such as writing essays and giving students quick summaries of long readings. Part of this is motivated by pure laziness, but I still understand the appeal. As students, we exist beyond our academics—we have jobs, obligations, social lives—and even then, just our academics are often impossible to perfectly manage. Thus, I see the value, and yet still hate ChatGPT because the appeal of an easy out has distracted us from the real implications of this technology. While my fears about AI aren't based on fictitious portrayals of dystopian futures run by robots, I'm afraid that AI will completely unravel an already broken educational system.

As we increasingly rely on artificial intelligence and technology to complete the menial tasks of academics, even relying on these tools to complete our tests for us, an obvious question arises: How are students learning,

purpose of grades has become feeding the system's incessant need to prove its effectiveness through 'results' that don't actually mean anything. Regaining the value of our education system isn't so simple. Beyond the financial and logistical demands of changing the education system, there is a greater need for a change in how we value and perceive education. The primary function of the educational system is, and has always been, to guide children through their developmental stages by giving them knowledge, soft skills, and the opportunity to learn how to form their own arguments and opinions using these educational experiences. However, the actual function of the education system today is to force children to perform well on assessments to get the degree they need to get a job. It's a cyclical system, and its results really only matter on paper. There isn't a 'quick-fix' to shifting an entire society's perspective on an integral institution—despite the fact that education is of highest importance to creating a functioning democracy with well-educated citizens.

An ideal first step to this solution should involve a change in curriculums from memory-based learning to teaching application and communication skills. Educational institutions must restructure their teaching and testing methods to allow for the limited use of technology as a provider of information for students to leverage in their own real-world applications and interpretations. This restructuring would grant students opportunities to build thinking, reasoning, writing, and other soft skills through educational experiences, allowing them to gain basic knowledge and learn how to use this to solve problems and communicate new ideas. The integrated use of technology in this new curriculum is essential in addressing the insufficiency of current testing methods against AI tools and preparing students for the increasingly tech-centric working environments of most careers today.

Educators and students need to work together toward the common goal of bettering the system in order for change to occur. Students must be willing to adapt to this new learning environment where they must hold themselves accountable for how they use technology to benefit their education. Educators must also reevaluate how current grading systems can be adapted to prioritize the assessment of a student's ability to think, communicate, and reason

critically and unaided by technology. This new system calls for a larger change in society to abolish the norm of punishing students for underperforming in school. The devaluation of one's character based on their grades encourages students to cheat and undervalue the education system. Existing methods of learning force students to mold their intelligence to a strict standard and perceive grades as the sole determinant of their success. It is our collective responsibility to make learning environments a safe space for students to collaborate and form independent ideas without fear of academic failure. This change requires students to be academically motivated by their own desire for education, not by the pressures of a grading system. Artificial intelligence is a serious threat to our education system if students continue to misuse technology and educators fail to adapt their methods in the face of changes. So the next time you're tempted to let ChatGPT earn your next 'A,' you might want to consider what you're losing in the process.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS STEALING YOUR EDUCATION

NICOLE PACHECO

K-pop, the South Korean music and cultural movement, has taken the United States by storm. From Blackpink's headlining performance at Coachella, to BTS member Suga's appointment as an NBA ambassador, to Marvel cast members discussing their favorite groups in interviews, the influence of K-pop has become ubiquitous in the US. However, the rise in K-pop's popularity also brings to light a more complicated history of Asian public figures in the United States. K-pop stans will tell you they live for the catchy songs, precise choreography, and sexy stars. Yet, it is rare to meet a fan whose love of the genre is not rooted in a fantasy of the Far East. The growing infatuation with the aesthetic and narrative of Korean popular culture leaves Asian Americans in a complicated position. Ultimately, the hypersexualization and fetishization of K-pop stars and Korean culture in the United States result in harmful stereotypes that negatively impact the perception of Asian Americans, making K-pop a problematic cultural phenomenon for the community.

K-pop, or Korean pop music, is a relatively new genre originating in the early 1990s with the group Seo Taiji and Boys. Considered pioneers for the integration of rap and other genres into the Korean music scene, the group's popularity was a driving force behind the formation of many Korean entertainment companies such as SM, JYP, and YG. While the genre's national success flourished throughout the 90s, K-pop did not become accessible to an international audience until the 2000s with the rise of the internet. Artist Psy really put the genre on the map with his international hit, "Gangnam Style" in 2012. From there, groups such as BTS began to gain worldwide popularity in a way that does not seem to be slowing anytime soon.

While the presence of K-pop in American popular culture is relatively new, America has had a longstanding fascination with Asian cultures and aesthetics. European conquest in Asia began in the 19th century and has led to a history of portraying Asian countries as something to plunder and exploit. From this, comes a Western fascination and fetishization of Asian cultures and people. These ideas are especially prevalent in Hollywood where the exotic Asian woman is contrasted with the emasculated Asian man. Movies such as Disney's Aladdin and Warner Bros' Blade Runner also display an outright construct of the fantastical Far East in either a historical or technological aesthetic. However, neither film properly celebrates or acknowledges Asian culture. Rather, they are built upon stereotypes of Orientalism.

While it is easy to condemn these Americanized depictions of Asianness as racist and wrong, K-pop complicates this idea as it is generated from an Asian country rather than a Western one. Nevertheless, you cannot separate America's enjoyment of K-pop from the history of Orientalism and colonization. The power of the historical orientalized images lies in their ability to reinforce and implant racist stereotypes in the cultural consciousness of the United States. Therefore, even before the United States became aware of K-pop, their consumption of it was influenced by pre-existing Orientalist attitudes. On the other hand, K-pop companies do not attempt to complicate or combat the history of Orientalism. Rather, they use these stereotypes as marketing tools for their groups, reinforcing the colonial notion of Western entitlement to Asian culture. What may have been a more financially based market model becomes much more culturally complex when it reaches beyond the monoethnic country of Korea. For example, the K-pop recruitment and training system reinforces the idea of the Asian person as a commodity. Children and young teens are recruited by companies and trained nonstop for an average of 9-10 years to become the ideal K-pop idol. The trainees are educated in areas such as singing, rapping, dancing, and foreign language to a level of perfection. Even then, only about 10% of trainees will be allowed to debut as fully-fledged idols. The completely controlled lifestyle of a trainee is meant to mold them into an ideal consumer product and prepare them for a life of continued control as a celebrity. However, at times, this strict control can cross the line into abuse. One example is Momo, a member of the group Twice, who was reportedly limited to consuming just one ice cube per day by her company in order to lose 7 kg (15 lbs) before the group's debut. Although Momo appeared to be the perfect K-pop idol by the time of her debut, her mistreatment remained unacknowledged. This level of control over an idol's behavior allows K-pop companies to sell them as a token of exotica without concern for their individual wellbeing or personality. Ultimately, this system perpetuates the idea that the value of an Asian person lies solely in their consumption by a Western audience. Another key aspect of Orientalism's relation with K-pop in the United States is the reception of girl groups and how it relates to the historical stereotype of the hypersexual, submissive Asian woman. The group NewJeans recently debuted in 2022 with a trendy, schoolgirl, Y2K aesthetic. While the group is comparable to other K-pop groups in many ways, the idols are much younger, with ages spanning from 14 to 18. Already, NewJeans has been the subject of much sexualization from fans and the company they are under. One of their songs, entitled "Cookie" hinges on sexual innuendo and has sparked controversy over its alleged "Lolita" concept. While the song is inappropriate in any cultural context, it has specific implications in the United States. Historically, Asian women have been treated as a part of cultural exotica. In American media, Asian women have been hypersexualized and as existing for the white man's pleasure. Thus Asian women characters are often portrayed as prostitutes or the subjects of white saviorism. Examples include Papillon Soo as the 'Da Nang Hooker' in Full Metal Jacket (1987) or Sononya Mizuno as Kyoko in Ex Machina (2015). NewJeans' employment of the schoolgirl aesthetic paired with the sexual lyrics of their songs, is a part of a larger pattern of the objec-

K-Pop and the New Wave Of American Orientalism

Amanda Kang

tification and hypersexualization of Asian women. In the end, this perpetuates harmful attitudes and behaviors that can lead to violence and harassment of Asian and Asian American women.

While K-pop has gained immense global popularity, it has overall led to negative impacts for the Asian American community. It is at the expense of these communities that the K-pop industry doubles down on racial stereotypes to appeal to American audiences. However, American audiences also do nothing to disrupt the institutions or challenge the images they are being presented. As a result of this thoughtless consumption, Asian Americans continue to be marginalized and pigeonholed as exotic or foreign, rather than being recognized as fully formed and diverse human beings. In the most extreme examples, this leads to continued violence against Asian Americans as demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is crucial for both the K-pop industry and American audiences to recognize the negative impacts of this cycle of media consumption. Only then can we begin to dismantle harmful narratives and think more critically about the globalized portrayal of Asians in media.
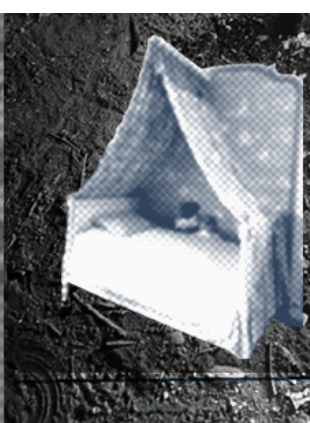
College; A Time Without A Home

Tali Lebowitsch

Every official record-keeping document asks you the same question: Place of residence. Yet, this seemingly straightforward question is cruelly deceptive. In fact, everytime I am confronted with this simple inquiry I am forced to take an extended, existential pause. My initial instinct is to scribble the familiar lines that have been ingrained in memory for as long as I can remember, lines associated with the poster-covered walls of my childhood bedroom, the smell of my mother's cooking, and a tree-lined street in Brooklyn. Yet, I am then painfully reminded that I actually have not been to this "home" for many months and, in reality, my everyday existence is executed in a small apartment in Westwood completely under the jurisdiction of three nineteen-year-old girls. It is within these mundane moments of my life that I am forced to face the alarming conclusion that "home," as I once conceptualized it, no longer exists.

College is a time of in-betweens. We occupy the liminal spaces between childhood and adulthood, dependence and independence, and freedom and responsibility. These were transitions I was aware of and tentatively ready to embrace. But in my experience, I was vastly unprepared for the purgatorial zone that the notion of "home" would be delegated to. No matter if you live a thirty-minute drive or 3,000-mile plane ride away, your grasp of the place in which you are most safe, most loved, most grounded, and most understood—the typical connotations of "home"—becomes increasingly convoluted when you depart for university. The extent of this dissonance obviously varies from person to person and is dependent on many factors, but it is true of almost everyone I know, and the sensation is universally unsettling.

What is home? For a long time it felt like it could never be anywhere other than the material environment of my adolescence. Nothing could replace the familiarity of the streets I had walked a thousand times before, the neighbors who watched me grow from a child to a woman, and the bed I'd slept in for ten years. However, the perfectly shaped hole of my existence that I left behind when I moved to California, one I always expected to seamlessly slip back into upon return, has gradually felt like it fits less and less. Once an integral member of the ensemble cast, you are now merely a guest star. On the one hand, "home" is no longer the same. New stores open, neighbors move away, and your family has celebrated birthdays, anniversaries, and milestones in your absence. But more fundamentally, you are not the same. The fabric of your character has evolved under the influence of thrilling experiences, new relationships, and the rebuilding of an entirely new sphere of experience. As much as you may try to convey these aspects to the people waiting for you back there, they can never truly grasp what it feels like to live through them.

Furthermore, there is another "home" in the picture now. This new home might lack the stability and security of the home you left, the home that is often occupied by people who are legally bound to care and support you, but it is "home" in the literal sense: the space of your daily existence. Your new home is filled with the people who you have made the decision to bring into it, your chosen "family." Although they may not provide for you financially or take care of you when you are sick, they are the ones who witness you as you confront the trials andtribulations of the confusing, riveting rollercoaster that is the college experience. As you move in a constant state of impermanence between the dorms and multiple apartments, your home becomes less anchored in the physical place which you return to, day after day, but to the people whom you return to. And no longer are the familial units of this home in adherence to the binary categories of caregiver and recipient, guardian and child. Instead, you are legally an equal participant in the maintenance of a household, with fluid, transient roles of giver and receiver of care as dependent on the varying states of you and those around you.

This constant discordance between your differing "home" states might lead you to the despairing deduction that you simply no longer have a home. While this might be true in one sense, this absence of a definitive "home" leaves room for a radical reconception of comfort and belonging that transcends geographical boundaries. What is left instead is a multi-locational broader landscape of human connection and safety that is more intimately tied to the people who compose it. Home becomes an abstract entity that transcends physicality. It becomes calling your parents on the phone and then smoking a cigarette on your balcony with your roommates. While it is a jarring and unnerving shift, it is one that is vital for the beautiful and confusing process of growing up and forging your own identity and place in the world. While your deeply comfortable and reliable conception of "home" might have been destroyed, what has taken its place is ultimately more beautiful and fulfilling.

THAT FIRS

SIP

BY:

FIONA   PERKOCHA

FEELING

Sitting on the plane, I stare at my plastic Starbucks cup with a sippy cup lid—an attempt to "prevent waste." I feel a sharp prick as I notice the slogan, "That first sip feeling." The string of words is irking me, nagging me, yet I cannot find the thorn. Searching through my mind, I finally find the tip of the thorn.

The slogan, "That first sip feeling," is not as innocent and carefree as it may seem. This advertisement draws on the imagery and experience of addiction, alluding to the initial rush of the high typically caused by stimulant drugs. It elicits a feeling like no other—an irreplicable state of euphoria. That first sip feeling is strategically placed on every cup to trick the consumer into believing that drinking Starbucks will result in an elated feeling, cultivating the addiction. The consumer becomes addicted to the experience rather than just the taste of coffee — we all know Starbucks is not the best coffee we've ever had. There are many consequences of becoming dependent on coffee, such as financial and health implications. However, we must also recognize how Starbucks's use of addictive marketing— the advertising strategies that aim to make the consumer dependent on a product— feeds into binge culture, compulsive buying, and overconsumption. This culture compels us to buy what we never wanted or needed.

The scariest part of addictive marketing is its rapid spread and proliferation beyond the initial pioneers like Coca-Cola. After realizing it dramatically increases profits, Coca-Cola spearheaded subliminal marketing: advertising strategies that present images or messages that affect someone's mind without their awareness. In 1957, the message "Eat Popcorn, Drink Coca-Cola" was slipped into a one-second frame during a movie. Reportedly after this movie, there was an 18.1% increase in Coke sales and a 57.8% increase in popcorn sales (Business Insider). Beyond simple messages like this, subliminal marketing has also been used to play on the appeal of drugs. Watch one Coca-Cola advertisement to see the "high" in action. In the Tyler, the Creator 2021 Coca-Cola campaign, the second someone pops the can of Coke, you hear the fizz of the drink and feel their anticipation. Once the actor takes the first sip, their eyes widen, their pupils dilate, and their eyes roll back— replicating the rush of a stimulant high. Their bodies start jerking, and they immediately break out into dance. Take away the upbeat music, and you will see addiction.

"That first sip feeling" emphasizes the taste of the first sip over the satiation of the whole drink. If the first sip is incomparable, then is the second sip worthless? The impossibility of recreating that first sip feeling creates a binge culture where people buy and buy to try to find that initial joy. When we enter the endless cycle of overconsumption, the products we buy end up owning us. In the end, there are just more plastic cups in landfill and dents in one's bank account— never satisfaction. The true danger lies in what the future holds. Now that addictive marketing has taken over Starbucks, who is the next victim?

We all like to think advertisements have no effect on us and that we make our own decisions, but the harsh truth is we are not in control. Surrounded by billboards, bus stops, coffee cups, and social media, we are drowning in addictive advertising. It is only expected that we buy into it. But how do we escape this cycle? We must educate ourselves and promote ethical advertising. A study in the Journal of Behavioral Addictions finds that people with higher levels of persuasion knowledge, a person's confidence in his/her ability to understand marketers' tactics, hold less positive attitudes towards advertising. Thus, they engage less in compulsive buying, the consumer's tendency to be preoccupied with buying, shown through repetitive buying and lack of impulse control. By educating ourselves about persuasive marketing techniques, we can arm ourselves with the tools to fight against the impulse to buy what we don't need. This is not to say, "Never buy Starbucks or Coca-Cola." Instead, it is a call to be more conscious about our buying. By examining the influence of advertising on our purchasing habits, we can avoid falling into marketing traps.

Furthermore, to counteract the profits companies gain from using addictive techniques, we should support companies with ethical marketing campaigns — that genuinely promote the product without hiding information or attempting to make the consumer dependent. For example, a yerba mate company, Erva, places the slogan "kindness is badass" on every cup. Following its values of positivity, health, and sustainability, its message is not harmful to the consumer and helps the well-being of society. While "that first sip feeling" aims to make the consumer dependent on the product, "kindness is badass" intends their consumers to associate kindness

with their brand— which is very different from linking euphoria to a product. By supporting brands that utilize authentic marketing, like Evra, we can help shift our societal values towards intentional consumption and away from overconsumption.

Addictive marketing is the cause and result of our consumption-based society, which exceedingly emphasizes buying. Starbucks recognized the success of this type of advertising through companies like Coca-Cola and implemented it. We must stop this cycle and tackle this issue from all angles. By consciously selecting what products we buy, we can mitigate the effects of and devalue addictive marketing.