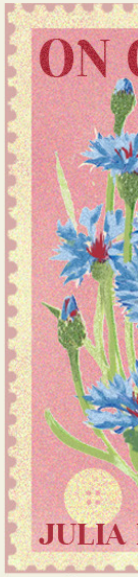
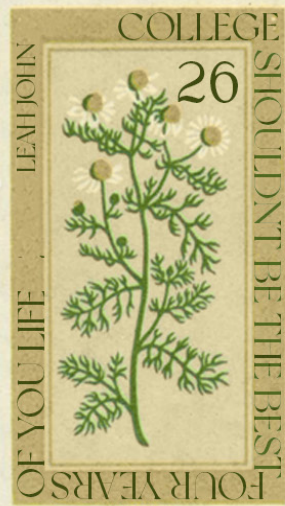


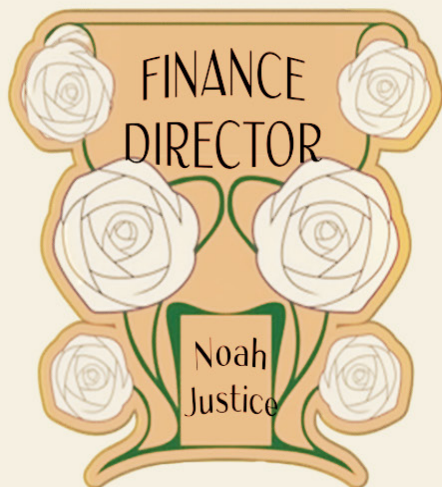
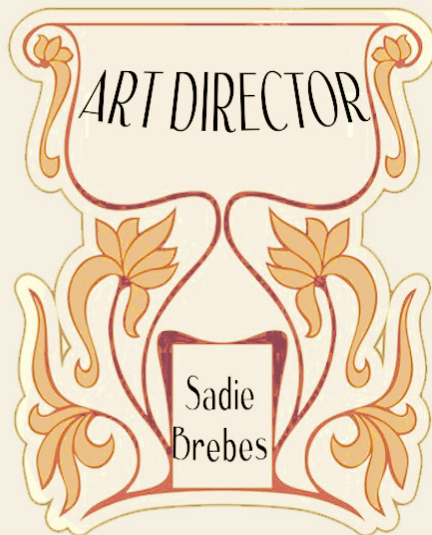
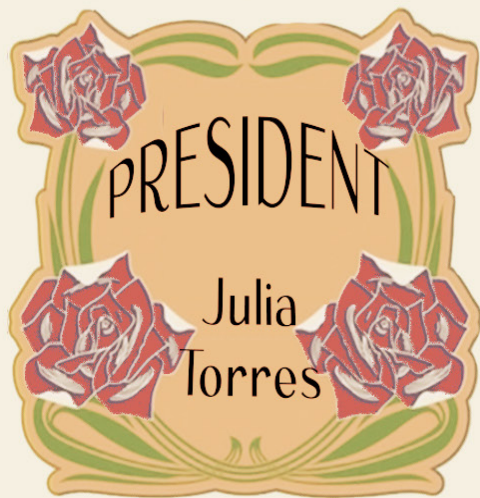


EDITION 12

THE BRUIN REVIEW











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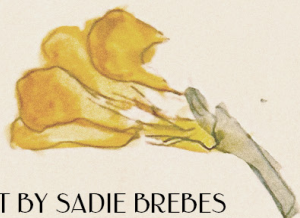
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# PUBLIC SCHOOL KIDS HAVE A SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

Public school kids have a superiority complex. Yes, you read that right. Whether it's self-righteousness under a facade of self-deprecation, or the typical hypocritical private school jabs, we have got to discuss the behavior of privileged public school students.

This claim has a specific audience, and I think you might know who you are (and might start to feel a little self-conscious as I go on). I'm talking about (typically white) public high school students from privileged backgrounds who make some of the following comments.

Now, don't you let your author go on without identifying herself. Hi—you got me—I'm a privileged white person who attended an elite private high school in the heart of Silicon Valley. Prior to high school, I attended public elementary and middle school. Now let me tell you why I'm

bitter.

In eighth grade, I chose to go to an independent private high school because the local high school did not have the best teachers, and my private school of interest had a fantastic course catalog and fascinating programs.

I saw my white friends of the same economic status go to public school and spend tens of thousands of dollars on things besides a better education. I saw them make fun of private school kids as they drove home in a white jeep to their SAT tutor's office. I saw them post photos from lavish vacations, then proceed to denounce the audacity of private school families for fiscally investing in their child's intellect. Perhaps affluent public school families should be contemplating where they put their money if they have the ability to not be at a school that

incessantly mock.

I saw my public school friends boast their high ranks; meanwhile, kids with poor marks are already screened out at private schools, making it more difficult for private school students to climb to the top and stand out on college applications amongst their peers. This phenomenon neglects the reality of wealthy public school children who are automatically at the top and the marginalized students at private schools who sacrificed everything to get where they are.

Privileged kids need to stop joking about attending public school when they continue to receive the same wealth benefits outside of school while claiming “the struggle.” They develop a superiority complex based on a false narrative that they took some sort of “rough route,” making fun of private school kids when they’re both participating in the same thing. By continuously making the jab that private school kids think they’re special, public school elitists have built a pedestal for themselves in the process.

Privileged public school students post videos on Snapchat and TikTok of school mishaps or chaos, saying “public school core,” “only in public school,” and “public school kids relate.” In reality, they are joking about things that often aren’t theirs to joke about. Bathroom overdoses, teen pregnancies, and low quality school lunches are not funny. These issues tend to affect marginalized communities the most, yet it’s privileged students who make the most jokes. They are rarely the victim, yet they make up the loudest laugh. Proximity to a struggle does not mean it is your struggle.

The actual drawbacks of private schools are overlooked in these jokes. Public schools tend to be more economically and racially diverse, and private school children often don’t have experience working and learning with people who have disabilities. Yet these ideas do not take center stage because this rhetoric is not as profitable for affluent students. It does not set up an opportunity for them to deflect from their own privilege.

While it might be annoying to have a busted pipe or gross food at school, at the end of the day, they go home to nutritious meals and a furnished house in the suburbs. These problems only exist in the TikTok they just posted. Those issues should be advocated for instead of joking about

how private school kids have nice facilities. That’s a good thing, okay?


Private schools aren’t bad, and you’ve got to get over it. Public school families often make fun of the idea of a bubble and some kind of “hand-holding” that goes on at private schools. But should we always force children to “go it alone” and continuously prepare them for the “real world”? We should not tease people who have more resources—resources are good. We should advocate for more resources at public schools, not boast that public school students got



there the hard way. We should be nurturing our children; we should be holding their hands.

Privileged public school students should take a look at themselves and realize that their jokes about public and private schools alike are not only not funny but harmful on a deeper level. We should be uplifting students and communities. We should strive towards a better future for education—sincerely, optimistically, and most of all, collaboratively.





our brains and clouds our judgment. But when the buzz fades, instant gratification is followed by a feeling of laziness, shame, and inadequacy. The only natural recourse, we tell ourselves, is to overcompensate, to engage in what we deem to be a self-punishing balancing act. That is, to grind. The grind is a way of showing the world that despite the fact that we wasted six hours on TikTok, we are worthy. After a grind ends, our productivity goals are met. We think everything preceding it is okay. Yes, we binged the entirety of our “For You” page twice over, but we made up for it with 80 pages of reading and practicing seven Quizlets. Importantly, we’ve learned that the grind will always be there to redeem ourselves if we decide to indulge. It’s a quick fix and does nothing to alter the overarching pattern of behavior. Masquerading as a temporary counter to a binge, the grindset does more harm than good, facilitating rather than stopping the cycle of binge culture.

To- night I have  
to grind. I have  
to get this piece to my editor,  
and I spent most of the day  
watching Youtube. I did take a break  
from Youtube, but only to binge Netflix. It’s  
okay now; I’ve blocked those websites, deleted  
social media, and plugged my noise-canceling  
headphones in. I’m ready.

But why am I doing this? At first glance, it’s to finish a task or pursue a goal. By the end of my grind, I’ll have finished this piece, and then I’ll probably watch some more Netflix before getting on the “grindset” again for midterm season. But at its core, the grind’s goal isn’t to get something done. It’s to make us feel better about ourselves after we indulge more than we feel comfortable with.

With the rise of technology, binge culture has grown at a rapid pace. It’s easier than ever before to happily waste our time partying the night away or staring at screens—whether it be social media or our favorite shows—as dopamine courses through

We often view a temporary embrace of the grindset as the initial step towards creating a lasting transformation in our productivity. But a permanent grind is illogical: the energy it requires is unrealistic and unsustainable, leading to burnout. Furthermore, the grindset is punishment, depriving us of what makes us happy. So unless you’re a masochist, there’s no reason to make the grindset permanent. Because it is temporary, it can never be a mindset. Mindsets are set; they are established behaviors and ideals which dictate our actions and thought processes. Bouts of grinding will not reshape our long-term perspective, something we desperately need to do when it comes to countering binge culture.

That leaves us with a short-term “solution,” one which plays into the problematic cycle it attempts to halt. Refraining from changing our long-term mindset by entering a temporary grind will lead to bingeing again. Yes, the output of a grind is positive. Still, the shame and self-punishment which causes it, and the shame and self-punishment it will fail to prevent in the future, outweighs whatever material results the grindset allows us to produce. Furthermore, temporary bursts of the grindset harm our

RITHWIK NARENDRA

## YOU DONT NEED TO GRIND

stability, and stability is perhaps the most essential factor in success. A recent paper published in *Frontiers in Psychology* suggests that maintaining a stable lifestyle, which includes leisure activities that the grindset deems unproductive, can actually lead to better sleep, increased productivity, and improved mental health. Repeatedly oscillating between “binge” and “grind” leaves our emotional and mental state in flux, endangering healthy stability while keeping us in the clutches of the binge cycle.

To beat that cycle, we need to change our mindset by making gradual adjustments. Moderation is key. The things that make us happy make us happy for a reason, and we shouldn't completely cut them out. Nor should we ignore the fulfillment of responsibilities and completion of tasks and goals that allow us to do the things that make us happy. Taking the middle road enables us to feel good throughout whatever we are engaged in, unlike the fluctuating highs and lows of the grindset. Our motivation for undertaking something should not be shame but rather the desire to celebrate our achievements. By switching from a punishment mindset to one consisting of rewards, we can forgo the grindset entirely.

I'm not advocating for laziness. Nor am I espousing indulging in an ever-lasting binge. Rather, we should move away from the extremes. It's crucial that we invest the appropriate amount of our energy and time in what we do, whether it be watching *The Last of Us* or working on that midterm paper. Moderation therefore allows us to achieve long-term success while avoiding the pitfalls

of the burnout caused by the “grindset” or the guilt caused by bingeing. Instead of leaving us in constant emotional instability, as the binge-grind cycle does, moderation facilitates stable happiness by allowing us to enjoy the things we love without neglecting our responsibilities.

We need to recognize the grind for what it is: a crutch, and one which does us more harm than good. We think the grind will save us from the binge, but it keeps us trapped in the cycle of binge culture. To escape, we must embrace moderation and stability. Let us not cut out what makes us smile.





ON GOD

JULIA ROSE



I was with one of my friends at a drive-thru, and when we got to the window, we were informed that our meal had already been paid for.

After we left, my friend turned to me and excitedly told me that she manifested this happening to her. She told me about lucky girl syndrome and all of the instances of how it had been working.

This scenario wouldn't seem strange if you've been on Tik Tok or (God forbid) Instagram Reels in the past two years. These platforms have been chief purveyors of Gen Z's version of spirituality. The two main culprits of this new-age spirituality are the Law of Attraction and, more recently, lucky girl syndrome. In layman's terms, the Law of Attraction states that by simply thinking about what you want and visualizing yourself receiving that thing, you can manifest it into your life. This applies to money, jobs, and even people. Similarly, lucky girl syndrome is the idea that by thinking that you are the luckiest person in the world, the universe will provide you with luck. Lucky girl syndrome paints "the universe" as its own benevolent entity, watching over those who believe. Gen Z's desire for spirituality is understandable for a generation faced with an uncertain future; but this generation's pseudo-religious movements lack the community focus of organized religion and reek of narcissism.

When I was a kid, I was terrified of the dark. One night, the power went out. I was so scared that I cried for hours while my mom comforted me. When she finally left to go to bed,

she told me I shouldn't be afraid because God was always with me, so I would never be truly alone in the dark.

As an adult, I look at this memory fondly, almost humorously. The idea that I was once comforted by the idea of a Christian God is almost laughable. To me, religion is an excuse. It is an excuse to act cruelly in the name of a higher power—an excuse to shame someone just because they don't fit your narrow mold. Religion is denial, it is hate, it is shame.

Religion is noticeably absent from Gen Z. In fact, Gen Z is the least religious generation, with 34% of teens identifying as religiously unaffiliated compared to 25% in Gen X according to the Survey Center on American Life. I don't believe in God, and I don't think I ever will; there's too much bad blood there, too many years of hatred and disbelief. But I wish I could. I wish I could know religion the way it was meant to be known, as a means of forgiveness, a purpose, a way to lessen the blight of the human condition. I look back at that memory and long for the comfort that "God" once brought me.

In an age of failed systems and uncaring corporations, it's easy to lose faith in humanity. Many people, including myself, feel very alone in the world, and rightfully so. We pay too much money to a university that doesn't care about its students and consistently fails to provide us basic necessities like accessible food and working Wi-Fi. Our government perpetuates systems of hate and violence against minorities.

The world





is increasingly dependent upon a couple of private businesses that prioritize profit over people. When I look around, I don't see anyone looking out for me.

The Gen Z notion of religion is a direct answer to this feeling. Believing that my good fortune comes from my belief in a high power and overpriced crystals provides a sense of control when the world is spinning out of it. It's nice to fall back into the comforts of the universe, the idea of something looking out for me. But, to be clear, a gift from the universe is a gift from another human. That ten dollars you found on the ground came from someone else's wallet; it did not just appear.

While Christianity (along with every other religion) comes with its own set of problems, it is necessarily generalizable to all its followers. Its rules are set in stone and applicable to the masses, including rules such as "Love thy neighbor" and "Forgive and you will be forgiven." The Bible focuses on fostering a community, working to create a set of morals and rules that moderate and improve upon society. Organized religion takes a holistic view of humanity that discourages the solipsism embodied by Gen Z religion.

Christianity provides the comfort in faith we crave as well as the emphasis on community that Gen Z spirituality is missing, but it comes at the cost of aligning oneself with an organization that has continuously committed heinous crimes.

New-age spirituality may provide the same comforts as Christianity, but it fails to consider other people. Because spirituality is so personal, it becomes narcissistic; focusing too heavily on what religion can do for you, such as manifesting luck or fortune, rather than focusing on what you can do for the community. By viewing kindness as reparations from the universe, it removes the human behind the act and takes away the idea of paying it forward or giving back to the community. My friend's drive-thru order was paid for by another person, it was not manifested and it was not a gift from some mystical entity, and attributing it to a higher power removes the kindness and generosity of that person's actions.

Both organized religion and Tiktok spirituality indicate a need for a belief in a higher power, something to make you feel less alone in the dark. But believing in an invisible, yet objective omnipotent being is a balancing act, and humanity hasn't quite figured it out yet. Maybe we never will. Believe in the universe or in God or whatever you want, but do not credit your belief system with the kindness that comes from other people. It is easy to lose yourself in the storyline of you and the universe against the world, but it's important to remember that you are not in this alone. Be grateful for everything that you receive but be grateful to the people that have gifted it to you.

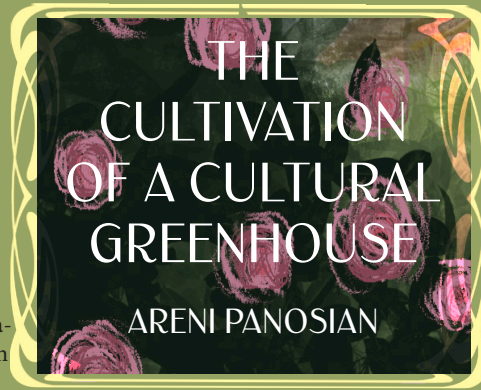
Be the "luck" someone else receives.



Bright glass walls surround the beautifully peculiar plants inside every greenhouse, generating a habitable environment for life that cannot thrive on unfamiliar soil. Greenhouses were brought to the United States in the 1700s to enable the somewhat artificial growth of foreign species on non-native land, most notably when George Washington used a greenhouse to grow pineapple, a fruit that isn't native to America. Greenhouse cultivation initially intended to preserve the exotic charms of these plants for the enjoyment of Westerners, allowing Western nations to grow unfamiliar vegetation from the comfort of their own worlds. Similar to greenhouses, identity-based communities provide an enclosed space for cultures to flourish on outlandish Western soil. Surrounded by protective barriers in artificial sunlight, these cultural greenhouses—communities—design significant yet incredibly exclusive social bubbles, and with that, the question of how they assist the wider Western society.

Ethnic communities preserve heritage in a world that strives to diminish it, forming within the harshly individualistic Western world a glass greenhouse of flourishing culture. In an unfamiliar and generally unwelcoming world, tight-knit communities facilitate survival, and are therefore formed out of necessity. These spaces are obligatory to uphold, as they establish kinship in a country that isolates anyone with a slightly unique identity, not only by race, but also sexuality, gender, religion, and expression. Identity-based communities may appear to merely be exclusionary bubbles, but these bubbles ensure that ethnic groups remain united in the face of oppression, ostracism, and the pressure to contribute to the greater benefit of Western society in some way. The formation of small, specifically ethnic, communities counters the rugged individuality and self-service that reign supreme in the American milieu. In a “melting

pot” like America, it's easy to melt into a pot of monoculture rooted in the conformist machinery of capitalism, a sphere that prioritizes self-service over communal connection. For minority and immigrant ethnic groups, it is crucial to form tightly-knit communities to preserve ethnic heritage in a world that constantly attempts to diminish it, even if these enclaves re-



semble an exclusionary bubble. The exclusive nature of tightly-knit ethnic communities exists not to shield members from the world, but to imbue a sense of purpose, devotion, and service to a specific group of people based on an unchangeable trait. The preservation of culture through community is compulsory, as communities build the support systems our country inherently lacks, while also instilling a higher purpose onto members. These ethnic communities—these cultural greenhouses—need to cultivate an aggressive level of ethnic pride in order to protect non-Western cultures and bestow a sense of belonging onto members of minority groups.

I did not have a non-Armenian friend until I was in high school. I grew up in the cultural greenhouse of San Francisco's Armenian immigrant community, and I attended an Armenian immersion school from preschool-8th grade. My school held approximately 120 students, reflecting the insular bubble of my community, and it was here that I learned about the preservation of Armenian culture and language alongside my peers, contributing to the formation of my robust ethnic identity. Without the communal bonding and vigorous immersion in cultural practices found in Armenian communities, the Armenian diaspora may not maintain itself amidst American conformist machinery, catalyzing the impetus for descendants of genocide survivors to forge communities, organizations, and schools such as the ones I grew up in. With the constant threat of tumultuous wars in the homeland and the constant threat of assimilation in the diaspora, this impetus becomes the

fertilizer and preservation for numerous exiled communities. A positive result of my upbringing is the development of a strong sense of self, fluency in my mother tongue, immersion in community, and a solid duty of service—I know who I am, I am indebted to a country I have only visited twice, and I am motivated by the love of my ethnic identity and my community. Isolation and loneliness are the ubiquitous products of

case of ethnic patriotism in a foreign world, it is an excusable method of validating one's identity as a minority, and is therefore a prerequisite to upholding ancient cultures. Ethnic patriotism exists to dismantle the conscious and unconscious assimilation that minority groups endure in a society that perpetuates Western homogeneity, using an almost radical form of cultural love to override prejudice, and this cultural love is primarily grounded in community and family.



American individualism, and the formation of identity through service, bonding, and love from a community counteracts these uniquely Western experiences, permeating a sense of direction towards something besides personal profit. The development of deeply patriotic views is generally viewed as problematic, but in the

Vibrant ethnic communities contribute to the wider benefit of society, but they are not by any means founded for that reason. Powerful ethnic enclaves in the U.S., such as the Jewish-American community of New York or the Latinx-American community of Southern California, seam into the fabric of American cities with rich culture, and this contribution reflects greatly that ethnic communities serve both their inner world and the country at large. That being said, ethnic people don't exist for the hyphen, and these greenhouse communities serve a far larger purpose than enriching a country that barely respects us. American culture cannot continue to decorate its vast and giving gardens with the beautiful cultural greenhouses that already struggle to remain watered and alive for decorative perusal—we are too busy replenishing and fertilizing the few sprouts that are left to germinate in our greenhouses, beautifying the fields of the fragmented American landscape you wish to call your own.

# YOU ARE ADDICTED TO STRESS

Jessica  
Phung

There has never been a time in which stress has not acted as a powerful force for survival. At baseline, it's hunger and sex. As students understand it today, it is the loud awareness of our individual academic and economic futures. Without a sense of control over this, there lies our ultimate driving force. Thus, it is no surprise that today, we are utterly addicted to stress—a condition that allows for just enough air and never enough mercy.

Both emotionally and physically, we live our lives in extremes. Being sleep-deprived with unhealthy eating habits and all the self disparagement along the path to achievement is always justified in one way or another (usually with a mark that reads "A").

The mere fact that we are here at UCLA constitutes that having endured a journey that calls for a heightened sense of academic fight-or-flight is ubiquitous. We have been made exceedingly aware of our future in a manner that has engulfed purpose and passion in fear and stress. The line between intrinsic motivation and stress has been blurred because these fleeting moments can grant a temporary release from the truth: everything but the past is absolutely uncertain. So, why not cling on to something seemingly palpable, like the idea of being pre-med or pre-law, having a perfect GPA or a score on the exam—achieving perfection—to be able to tell ourselves that we have control. It has become instinct.

Truthfully, I struggle to find any clemency in this fact of existence. I've turned to ask a different set of questions:

Is a life without stress... a life? Does such a thing exist?

Thus, is there really any other way to live? Should we desire to live another way?

As students, what does this mean for our pursuit of happiness? What does it mean for our academic endeavors and attendance at an institution like UCLA?

It's hard to deny the power of stress. Cortisol, the stress hormone, has been shown to increase alertness, improve cognition, and sharpen memory—to a certain extent. We all know that the pressure of an exam can induce a state of hyper-focus that often motivates highly effective studying and memory recall during a test. Others are able to act miraculously under moments of high pressure. However, some crack. Too much cortisol can lead to physiological deterioration, including but not limited to: a halt in digestion, increased blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, anxiety, depression, irrational behavior and brain fog that can, in the most extreme, lead to hallucination.

The reality is that most of us didn't get to UCLA because we were driven by purpose. We worked mindlessly through harsh academic conditions.

tions  
in  
high

school,  
taking  
on loads of  
extracurriculars—a  
product

of our external pressures coupled with the belief that the best college would finally give us control. Yet, we're here, and nothing has really changed except that we maintain a higher level of stress, looking for a bigger cookie.

Sometimes, the way I punish myself academically feels evil. I am chronically aware of my addiction to the tangible aspects of academic validation and accomplishment because I feel it getting more and more relentless. In many moments, I feel as though I'm on a seesaw of two extremes: the intoxication of success and the rupture of my spirit in its lack. What I realize is that both grounds seem to lean deeper and deeper with every lurch of the teeter; self-dissolution only gets worse and the bar for satisfaction only gets higher. To this end, I realize I desire to live another way. Without true direction, we are destined to become jaded with time, our spirits of natural curiosity and passion compressed into living for externalities. Much like substance addiction, the first step toward recovery is awareness. There must be moderation to be found in such an understanding of our current conditions. A moment of equilibrium to the seesaw. Surrendering to this truth will remind us of the intangible forces where our locus of control lies.

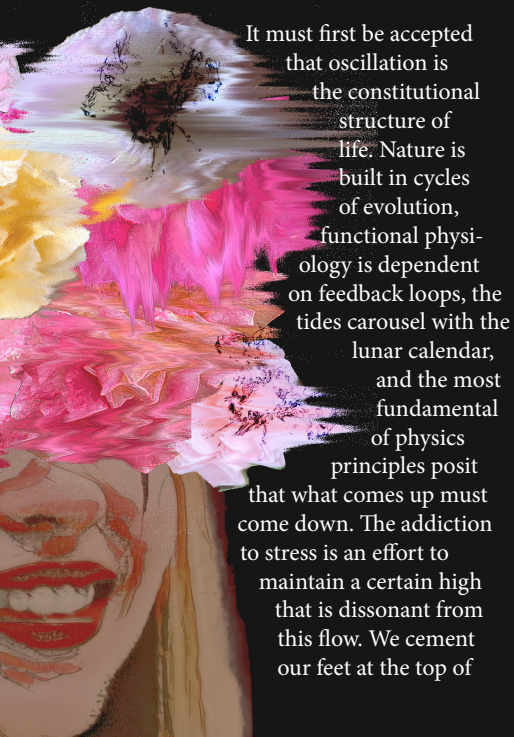
It must first be accepted that oscillation is the constitutional structure of life. Nature is built in cycles of evolution, functional physiology is dependent on feedback loops, the tides carousel with the lunar calendar, and the most fundamental of physics principles posit that what comes up must come down. The addiction to stress is an effort to maintain a certain high that is dissonant from this flow. We cement our feet at the top of

the hill, refusing to fall forward. The power of stress is not to be neglected. However, the way in which we desire to hold on to it, confuses it with the driving force of our motivations. Passion and purpose are inherent whereas stress is not.

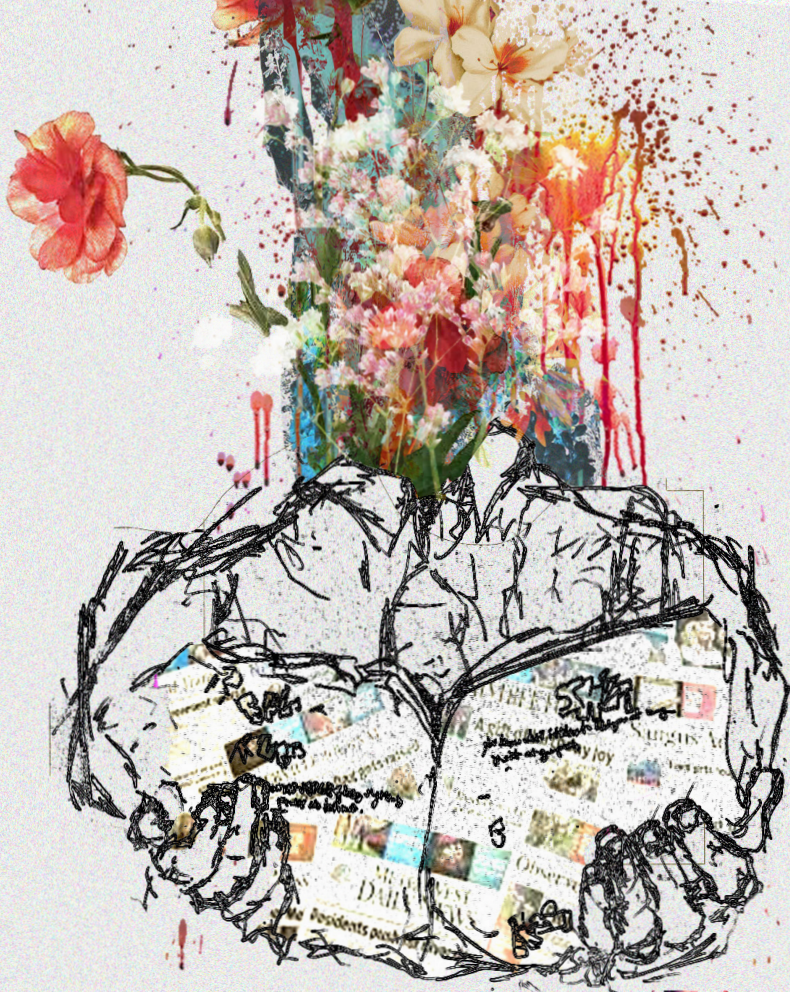
We can start at the core of our youth. In our inner child, there is a being that knows only curiosity and an eagerness to learn. Motivation for deep connection and

wisdom has yet to be tainted by tangible comforts. We delude ourselves into believing that material things can ease this itch for fulfillment, but worldly achievements could never take the place of intrinsic satisfaction and motivation. This is the root of our entrenchment in stress and failure. It's why we unknowingly seek more and more ways to aggravate ourselves. We take on more and more loads of work with the notion that what comes out of it will be worth it, without truly considering how much we lose in the process.

Stress can be a chronic motivator of sadness, depression, and health issues. Understood as a kind of physical or emotional tension, it is clear that stress is an inevitable human reaction to change. Thus, a life cannot be without stress or some kind of stressor. Such a thing can not exist because there always is, in one way or another, a motivation for life. Though for us as students, it has rapidly become the ultimate source of motivation and due to its transitory nature, we are addicted. What can be said then, is that stress does not grant vitality as does purpose. It is a source of energy in which case stress can only be momentary redirection. There is a power in inner purpose that is merciful and dynamic in a way that does not strip our spirit. Integrating this into the moments of our everyday life, as we prepare for exams that seemingly mean everything, as we make our way to graduate schools and as we move forward as members of society, will give way to functioning at the highest of our capacity.







# THE DEADLIEST WEAPON IDEOLOGICAL DIVISION

JULIA TORRES

At beautifully odd intervals, strangers morph into a peculiar version of family. Westwood is a breeding ground for these interactions—at any given moment, students are associating tender memories with those they hold near to their hearts.

Making good friends requires filtering those that you will sacrifice time and energy for from those that you will allow to slip through the fingers of Circumstance. To our dismay, I be-

lieve that our inherent mechanisms of filtering people has been wholly hijacked by the greatest corrupting force of our generation—the all-encompassing ideological identity.

The most tangible example of this is something I am all too familiar with: a Political Science discussion section.

Every quarter begins the same way: initially, discussion sections are littered with the hands of anxious students divulging the politically

correct, one-sentence answers that they replay in their minds multiple times beforehand. Evasion and precision reign, all so that peers are unable to place them on the political spectrum. Soon, seats begin to shift as students have an inkling of who may line up with them politically. Inside jokes are crafted through devious whispers, looks are shared as different points of view are vocalized. Camaraderie and animosity grow from the same seed, creating strong and permanent roots.

Unfortunately, this is not a phenomenon that is exclusively found within the behavior of Political Science students at UCLA. It is undeniably a symptom of political and interpersonal modernity.

A study published by the University of Chicago shares that on dating apps, users are often swayed more by ideological leaning than attractiveness. Even hookup culture, where interactions are reduced to merely the instant gratifications they provide, is saturated with ideological division.

However, my biggest concern with the continual polarization of society is not the chasm that grows between the worldviews of the Right and the Left. If you have read THE BRUIN REVIEW for some time, you are aware that we are not a political magazine by any means. I intend on holding to this precedent.

Therefore, what I believe is the essential issue with public division does not stem from the moral disagreement between citizens themselves, but the way in which policy is presented to the public.

The Narrative Policy Framework attempts to unravel the methods and impacts of how policies are brought to public attention. When looking at the empirical data from recent policy narratives from universities such as Oregon State, a pattern emerges: the same biased methods of storytelling used in daily life are applied to how government policies are relayed. If storytelling is the preferred medium through which policies are shared, inherent narrative biases are inescapable. Policies nowadays are often tied to some sort of moral takeaway that listeners, if subscribing to that party's identity, must agree to. Additionally, policies are shaped by the media through characters: a hero and a villain, a good guy and a bad

guy. Much like the novels you will read in your Writing II courses, there will always be a morally explicit example of who the reader should and should not be.

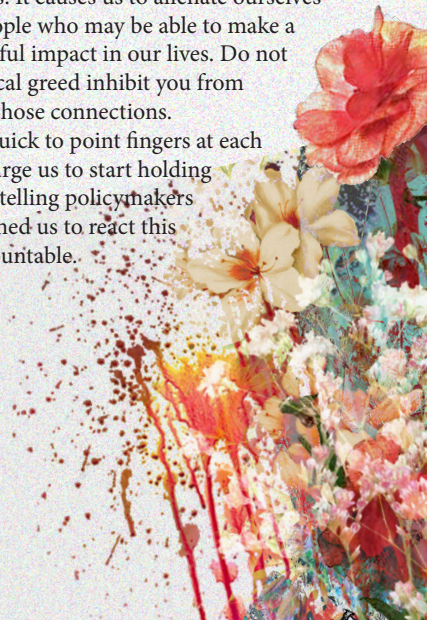
Think back to a time when a sensitive government issue was explained in layman's terms, either in the news or in the classroom. Chances are, you did not read about the technical class and systemic issues that plague that policy, or investigate a well-rounded historical background of the issue. Instead, it was presented through the following train of thought: this is what the other side does incorrectly, and we do not stand for this. No wonder we all hate each other!

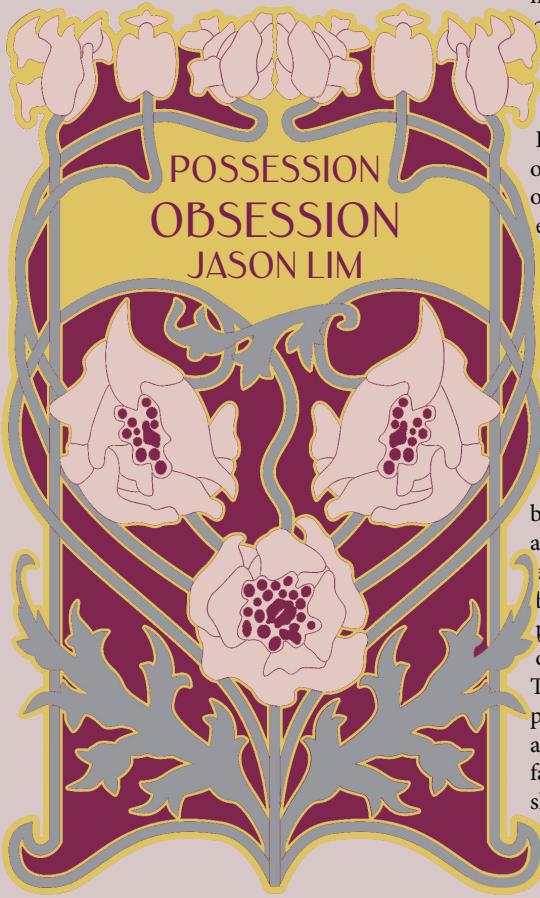
The issues that we are constantly bickering about are not as important as the intentional instigation of arguments by the authority figures in charge of this country. I wholeheartedly believe that the domestic and international issues that we tirelessly vouch for are often distractions from a deeper corruption that transcends party lines.

As Bruins, we are well aware that participating within the political sphere is an integral aspect of our civic duty. I would like to challenge us to, instead of funneling our anger at a particular view that does not align with our own, think about why we have allowed ourselves to get to this state.

Public policy is the most dangerous weapon used to turn us against our own community members. It causes us to alienate ourselves from people who may be able to make a meaningful impact in our lives. Do not let political greed inhibit you from making those connections.

We are quick to point fingers at each other. I urge us to start holding the storytelling policymakers who trained us to react this way accountable.





materialism is the result of an outdated mindset that conflates private property with independence and freedom.

Property ownership is so deeply ingrained in our culture that we sometimes believe it is one of our foundational rights, right next to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, the concept of owning land and property emerged in agrarian society as a means to protect other liberties. 17th century philosophers recognized that access to arable land was essential for the survival of farmers, and without it, they could lose their natural rights to life and liberty. John Locke believed that all citizens should have the right to own land as it supported their right to self-determine. Private ownership of land became essential to the concept of liberalism, and because American values are based in liberalism, Locke's conception of property rights became integral. Somewhere in the process, private property transformed from a tool for defending freedom into freedom itself.

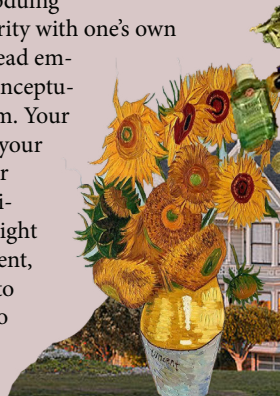
The Homestead Acts of the 19th century exemplified America's connection between freedom and property ownership. Locke reasoned that a farmer established land ownership by improving the land.

Similarly, the homestead principle asserts that one can establish ownership by living on a piece of land.

Through the Homestead Acts, Americans were able to incrementally steal immense tracts of land from Native Americans.

The idea of a homestead resonates deeply with American self-conception as an independent conqueror of nature, subduing the land to build prosperity with one's own hands. Life on a homestead embodies American self-conceptualization of individualism. Your house is your kingdom; your tools, your land and your family make up your universe. Without the oversight of a tyrannous government, you are completely free to do as you please, but also

Marie Kondo, Thoreau, Gandhi, Jesus: figures from antiquity to modernity have espoused the virtues of a simple lifestyle, uncluttered by an abundance of material possessions. The minimalism movement has succeeded to the extent that it is common knowledge that materialism distracts from the pursuit of real fulfillment, limits our life choices, and unsustainably taxes our planet's natural resources. Yet, especially among Americans, minimalism remains a fringe movement—something that everyone knows is right, but few are willing to adopt as a way of life. Thus, we are just as likely today as ever before to hear tales of Americans trapped in jobs they hate, chasing extra income to purchase things they don't need, neglecting their family and their dreams. The evolution of American ideas about private property explains how materialism became a fundamental American value. America's inability to widely accept mini-



completely on your own if misfortune befell you. The independence of a homestead places importance on property because land and property are the raw building blocks of a homesteader's life. America's deep bond with the idealized independence of a homestead led to our present-day confusion of property ownership and liberty.

Because a homestead is such a pure manifestation of American ideals, we continue to imagine ourselves in a homestead of sorts as we pursue those ideals. We still consider ourselves fundamentally independent from others and believe our property strictly defines the quality of our lives. The independence of our households and associated property is, itself, our freedom.

But American society today looks nothing like the homesteads of past centuries. Our society is completely interconnected, and we rely on others to do even the most basic tasks in life. Our ability to specialize and cooperate provide for one's needs a great

advancement over the insecurity and isolation of homestead life. We can recognize that our freedom as Americans is mostly reflected in civil liberties and ability to self-determine, not our right to property. Today, when we view material goods as the sole method to improve our lives, we get trapped in an all-consuming cycle of consumerism. And as contemporary minimalists point out, excessive physical property is more often a burden than a freedom. The Homestead Acts reflect an outdated view of the environment, namely, America's belief in an infinite frontier: abundant and bountiful land stretching forever West. However, we can now recognize that homestead thinking demands excessive resource use through its insistence on private ownership and self-sufficiency. We produce too much stuff, so that each person can own everything they need to build their imagined homestead.

Thus, our homestead



# ANANYA DEVANATH

# BUILD YOUR OWN RELIGION

It's no secret that Gen Z has been shifting away from organized religion for a while now, especially in the United States.

Growing distrust of religious institutions has pushed more members of our generation to identify as agnostic or atheist than any previous one, following the trend of rejecting many long-standing American institutions. Even Christianity's influence in America is estimated to be halved by 2070. But I argue that this shift away from organized religion doesn't necessarily mean the death of spirituality as a whole.

My source? Tiktok, of course.

See, as I was scrolling through my "For You Page," I stumbled upon a video. Specifically curated for me, with no hashtags, no audio... how could I have seen it other than by divine intervention? (Never mind the 3.4K likes already on the clip.) On my screen was a real-life tarot master, feeding into my delusions of incoming fortune and soon-to-be-revealed secret admirers. I was entranced, barely even noticing as I clicked through parts 2, 3, and 4 of my reading.

And so, after diving into the algorithm-induced rabbit hole of tarot Tiktoks, I came to the conclusion that, for many of us, our faith hasn't necessarily diminished—it has simply evolved. Personalized horoscopes and readings have become our sacred texts, our worshiped priests transformed into bubbly internet psychics,

and our prayers upgraded into manifestations. For a period of time, I was fully immersed in this culture; I downloaded an app called Co-Star, learned all about my sun, moon, and rising signs, and found out exactly what crystals I should invest in for success, wealth, love, and happiness. From all of this, I've understood one thing: spirituality will persist in some form or another. People desire some sort of framework, some guidance to make sense of the world, some faith to give them control over the most uncontrollable parts of life... even if this faith does come from colorful rocks.

That's not to say that this kind of spirituality doesn't have its drawbacks. I've heard my fair share of overly optimistic fantasies ("She's going to ask me out, I manifested it last night!") and outlandish justifications for questionable behavior ("Sorry I was an ass but Mercury is in retrograde so can you blame me?"). But who's to say this is worse than the blind trust we put in our religious leaders and their preachings?

Given the rising awareness of extreme religious groups, such as Confederate flag-waving Christians or the women-repressing Taliban, the thin shield of religion is often a poor justification for sexism, racism, and homophobia. Even setting these radical cases aside, many people still feel unseen by outdated religious texts and unchanging rules that don't always align with modern ideologies — and that can under-

standably sour any potential religious experiences. This aversion makes sense; I, like many others, have felt the push to distance myself from any controversial belief systems and those that represent them. However, we should not be so quick to dismiss these religions, as they still have important philosophies that we can and should learn from.

Which brings me back to the most useful takeaway from my Tarot-Tok deep dive: learning to, as many of my favorite wellness gurus reiterate, “take in only what resonates with you.” We can extend this idea to encompass older religions as well, adjusting them to create our own customized faiths, our own personalized belief systems. Even those like me, immersed in religion from a young age, might only heed its particularly appealing facets,

or even pull from different sects to find a belief that makes the most sense—and this should be encouraged.

Next time you encounter a new philosophy, don't disregard the whole theory just because it doesn't completely conform with your perception of the world. Instead, pause, take a second, and think: does any part of this make sense to me? We are uniquely privileged to access

so many different ideals at the touch of a finger, and we can decide what fusion of philosophies aligns with our own personal values and moral principles—even if this means not believing in any spirituality. This is not a novel concept; so many subsets of religion stem from a partial inclusion of older faiths, with Buddhism drawing from aspects of Hinduism or Protestant churches diverging from orthodox Catholicism. While individualized spirituality might not allow for a formal religious figure to instill

important moral principles in our lives, rejecting organized institutions has proven to make us a more tolerant and accepting generation. Our tailored belief systems can create safe spaces for anyone with identities that traditional religion might diminish, while pushing us to re-examine our own lives, what values and philosophies we wish to prioritize. This decentralized faith focuses less on making communities that blindly echo the same beliefs, but more on introspection and finding a way of navigating life in a way that works for each person.

I myself have an ongoing struggle with spirituality, in understanding what it means to me and what role it plays in my life, and how following an older tradition doesn't have to mean dimin-

ishing my own modern ideas. I believe in nirvana and karma, in loving thy neighbor and Heaven, in crystals and manifestations; we're allowed to create our own moral playbooks. Because at the end of the day, faith is simply the



lens through which we understand the universe, the perspective we look from when dealing with the unknown. It is not meant to provide a blanket justification for every action, it is not meant to create ideological echo chambers, and it is not what defines us. What matters is how we interact with the world and those around us, and the choices we make based on our beliefs.



YOUR LIFE  
IS  
MEANINGLESS

AVA CHADER

Climate change, coronavirus, corruption, and chaos—with the tumultuous last few years, Generation Z has turned to the “floating rock” mentality, finding comfort in the fact that nothing really matters because we’re all just orbiting a ball of fire in an endless space. Even if there’s no method to this madness, it’s absurd to live as if your actions are inconsequential because there is no predestined plan for your life.

Existentialist philosophers add another dimension to the meaning-of-life discourse: whether a life without inherent purpose is worth living. Nihilists, existentialists who believe life is meaningless, argue it’s not. Thus, they reject all social norms on the merits they’re artificial and do not influence natural law, therefore have no significance. Though that’s a load of crap, the nihilists do pose some solid points. The truth is, we live on a grain of sand in the neverending beach of the cosmos, and the time we live equates to a blink in the life of the universe. We, as humans, can’t even begin to comprehend these concepts, much less affect the natural order that defines

everything. We were never meant to. So

touché, turning in that

math assignment on time really is inconsequential in the grand scheme of things.

This might seem awfully brutal—the notion of a lack of providence that’d orchestrate your destiny in a movie-like fashion where it all works out in the end—but it’s honest. However, just because your happy ending isn’t spoon-fed to you doesn’t mean the possibility for a good life doesn’t exist. Consider Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a story of a man doomed to push a boulder up a mountain for eternity, yet accepts life is senseless to find his peace. No matter how difficult your life seems now, we could all stand to take a page out of Sisyphus’s book; when given the worst, all you can do is make the best out of what you can control.

Camus and Sisyphus lay the perfect groundwork for the transition into optimistic nihilism, the lens I encourage you to look at life through. The black-and-white mindset of nihilism that posits we live an idle life kind of sucks—let’s flush it with color. Optimistic nihilism suggests that

since we're not all given a predestined track, we get to decide that for ourselves. You'd probably never pick up a book again if you knew that every single book you would ever read had the same message because everything would be formulaic and predictable. The same would apply to meeting new people if we all came packaged with a pre-written intent. If everyone lived with a uniform aim, there would be no distinctive factor that makes each of us special. While there is a ton we don't have control over, a more intimate truth is this: our impact on the universe as a whole is negligible, but our influence on what we can grasp—the world and society around us—is considerably larger. There's no fate, because humans are unpredictable in our actions and motivations. You might find that this is what makes life seem nonsensical and out of control, but it only proves that we, individually, can determine our own path. Life itself might not have a set purpose, but it's up to you to give it value. I'm going to put "practice what you preach" on pause for a second here to be a little negative, so nihilism-exploiters, this bit's for you. When are we going to stop using the argument, "life is meaningless, therefore nothing matters," as a way to justify not accepting responsibility for our actions? The only reason your life is meaningless is because you're letting the world define you rather than defining your world. You might not be able to command nature and the actions of others, but you do have autonomy over how you experience your own life. Don't worry: I know we're all imperfect and are bound to make those "oops! I accidentally missed the trash can" mistakes and disregard them into a black hole of nothingness, but I am begging you to not make that a habit. Think about climate change—those mistakes accumulate into something awful when we don't hold ourselves accountable and correct our errors. Optimistic nihilism is not your excuse to ignore the problems that you might be inadvertently contributing to, but an encouragement to steer your life in a positive direction and do what you can to fix them. That's how we, as humans,

learn, grow, and become fulfilled.

The mantra is simple: take what you're given, and make what you're not. You're given considerable influence on the livelihood around you which increases with immediacy, so capitalize on that. The laws of nature are the only thing predetermined in life, which means all our destinies are susceptible to change. If you use nihilistic views of rejecting social customs, like constantly stealing from stores or committing petty misdemeanors "just because you can," I'm talking to you. Your actions have real consequences on real people, which is proof that you aren't insignificant. So stop gallivanting around the world like you're the only one here, because you're interrupting the rest of us trying to find comfort and fulfillment. The universe is chaotic, but if we all focus on finding our purpose and have our actions reflect that, society doesn't have to be.

Life isn't empty—only you, attuned to your sense of self and circumstance, can shape it with substance. Optimistic nihilism gives you the perfect toolkit to do so.



life, and consider that life has so much to offer even when we are not in the throes of our youth.

COLLEGE  
SHOULDN'T  
BE THE  
BEST FOUR YEARS OF  
YOUR LIFE  
—LEAH JOHNSON

High school may be hell but just you wait, college will be heaven! Or at least that's what every mysteriously cool college kid reluctantly visiting the dusty suburbs of home over the summer told me growing up. So with expectations set exceptionally high and a year and a half of

COVID-induced boredom under my belt, I went into my freshman year of college ready for the best four years of my life. I was met with unique new experiences and truly fascinating people. But I also faced crushing loneliness and profound sadness. I had good days and bad days, but even on the former, I felt a gnawing sense of anxiety that my days weren't good enough. If life really was all downhill from here then why did the views from this so-called "peak" look so mediocre?

My less-than-picture-perfect college experience is not a rarity. Behind meticulously curated Instagram photo dumps and packed social calendars, many college students find college to be a difficult and isolating time full of growing pains. Yet the collective narrative that this is supposed to be the most fulfilling four years of our lives makes us feel more alone in our college struggles and results in a worse experience overall. Instead of perpetuating the narrative that ages 18 to 22 are the indisputable golden years, we must acknowledge that a select four straight years are highly unlikely to be the best of your

Moving away from home to live independently for the first time is one of the starkest life changes a human can go through. Yes, independence can be liberating, but it can also be daunting. College students are going through this incredibly tumultuous time before having matured entirely. Although the world may expect us to start operating as adults, our brains are not finished developing until our mid-twenties and our maturing is far from done. The quick removal from a support system at a pivotal time contributes to high rates of depression and anxiety in college students. A 2020 survey conducted in 9 major public universities found that over 1/3 of the college students reported feeling symptoms of clinical depression and anxiety while 68% of the participants described feeling chronically lonely. Based on the numbers, the most universal college experience isn't getting drunk playing rage cage in a frat house, but rather sitting alone in bed shedding a few tears, watching episodes of *The Office* on repeat.

Comparing these numbers to the glorified tales of college make it seem as if the college experience is uniquely failing our generation. However, these seemingly bleak statistics are simply a symptom of the reality that college is supposed to be hard. Higher education is a privileged path that not everybody chooses or is able to take. It's supposed to be academically difficult and require copious amounts of time. This past year, the first-time undergraduate

COLLEGE  
 BE THE  
 YEARS OF  
 LIFE  
 JOHN

12-month college dropout rate was 24%. Even those who stay in school are highly likely to fail at least one class throughout their college journey. Analysis of California State Universities in 2021 indicates that in just 3 schools, 423 courses have an over 20% failure rate. While the “college experience” is certainly a valid one to desire, at the end of the day, tuition is going towards preparing students for a highly skilled career. In order to do this, classes not only have to prepare students for the rigor of the workforce but also have to teach young adults how to function without the constant hand-holding provided by the K-12 education system. Not being able to attend the party all your friends are raving about so that you can study your ass off for a midterm you’ll fail anyway is intrinsic to higher education.

Difficult academic calendars are not the only inevitable anxiety-inducing factor of university life. Socializing in a brand new environment without the support network naturally built over one’s childhood is a complete flip of the norm. Furthermore, university is advertised as the breeding ground for friendships that last the rest of your lifetime. This immense pressure makes finding companions feel extremely urgent. While the first few weeks of freshman year are filled with non-stop conversation, once school kicks into session finding a solid group of friends can be hard. Unlike high school, there is no guarantee you will see your acquaintances every day,

thus forming meaningful connections requires copious work. A 2014 UCLA study of college freshmen nationwide found that roughly 40% of students report spending less than 5 hours a week with friends. The lack of social time means students are increasingly leaving college with a couple of close companions as opposed to large friend groups. Lifelong relationships definitely can be forged in university, but the experience of finding “your people” is far from universal. Now, this Debbie Downer rant is in no way attempting to depict the college experience as something that is all bad. Although arduous, college is filled with so many incredibly fun and life-changing moments. However, if we don’t change our mindset these moments of joy will continue to be overshadowed by our expectations. With the average life expectancy increasing, we are likely going to live long past our mid-twenties. Hyping up these 4 years in the first quarter of our life as the best it gets, counter-to those able ex-mistic of in of these 4 years is not only productive making years enjoy- but is also an tremely pessi-outlook on the coming decades life. Whether your time in college was heav-en or hell, 22 is not the end of your story. So, to the lonely 18-year-old feeling inadequate because they don’t have a college best friend yet, or the burnt-out STEM major failing out of their math class, or even the senior looking back at their COVID-rid-dled four years wondering why their college check-list isn’t anywhere close to complete—know that you are not alone. These four years are just that—four years—and you



## THE REALITY OF OUR ROLE IN LOS ANGELES

JAKE SNYDER

Palms sway in the light against the ocean breeze beautiful backdrop of clear, blue, Los Angeles skies. Just like every other day, the weather is perfect, the city is full of life, and everyone is grateful to be waking up in the picture-perfect utopia known as Los Angeles. Since the rise of Hollywood in the early 1920s, the city has been portrayed to the rest of the world as the land where dreams come true. Its nickname, “The City of Angels,” evokes images of heaven on Earth. Films like *La La Land* depict the beauty of the city as dreamers navigate the ins and outs of the entertainment industry, shown through picturesque montages that highlight the beauty of Griffith Observatory. They make their way through the bustling lots of Warner Brothers studio before pausing for a serene moment on Hermosa Beach Pier. One can’t deny the allure of LA as it is presented through these films. We see influencers post glowingly about their happy lives in the city on social media, though real life in LA differs greatly from these rosy depictions. The illusion of perfection fades, revealing a city with deep issues that are anything but cinematic.

The city may look cohesive and manageable in a panoramic view

from the Hollywood Sign or Griffith Observatory, but one doesn’t realize that their “perfect LA montage” comes crashing to a halt as they try to drive through the city. Scenes of Hollywood sites like those in *La La Land* showcase how “ideal” LA is through highlights. All the city’s positives are on display while the struggles of Los Angeles, like the traffic, get hidden. LA traffic often doubles travel time and is especially brutal without other well-supported means of transportation. Unlike the movies, the lifestyle of LA is spending time stuck in traffic or struggling to get around without a car. Pair that with being a broke college student and you’ve created a constant headache when it comes to seeing the city.

While there is bound to be some delusion everywhere, LA is known as a mecca to those trying to succeed in careers as actors, celebrities, and influencers, and this reputation can lead to unrealistic expectations. Influencers often fabricate perfect lives online to adhere to our image of a glamorous LA lifestyle. Even students can get swept up in posting about having the time of their lives in LA, when in reality, they’re sitting in traffic and spending money on wildly



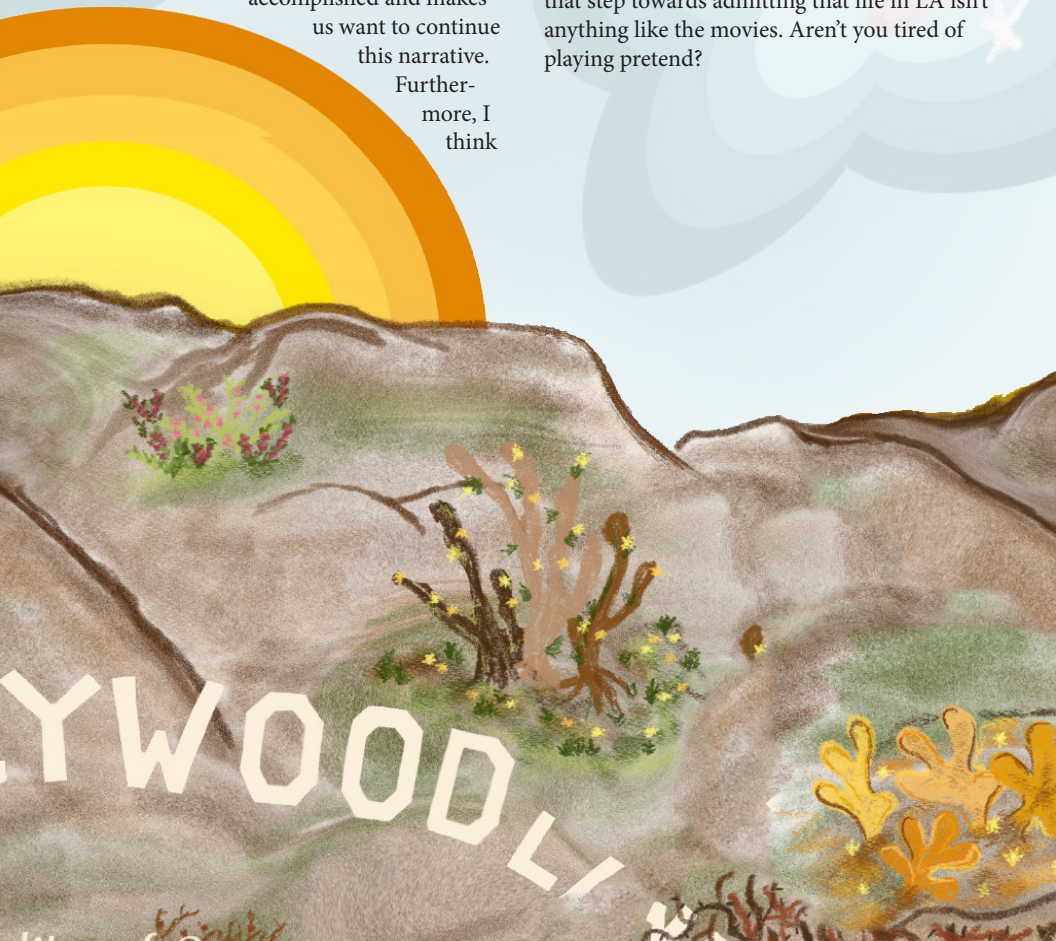
HOLL

expensive apartments like everyone else. These real issues are often swept under the carpet to protect the appeal of the city. The beauty shots at Santa Monica beach and “aesthetic pictures” taken on a night out at a club fill the feeds of anyone who knows someone from LA, but they don’t represent the reality. Ultimately, all they continue to do is support LA’s facade to the rest of the world while concealing reality.

Why do we still play into LA’s fabrication even after we’ve realized that many of our expectations when moving here were misinformed? The easy answer is that LA does such a fantastic job advertising itself that we can’t resist participating in the show. Instead of going against the grain, it’s easier to play our part in LA like the other citizens, especially after consuming the promotions that Hollywood feeds us. It is satisfying to showcase your love for the city and be a part of Los Angeles culture. Fitting in somewhere portrayed as a dream helps one feel accomplished and makes us want to continue this narrative.

Further-  
more, I  
think

there’s something desirable about the chase. Despite not knowing if we will ever make it in LA or be able to stay here, there’s something so captivating about coming to Los Angeles and making it as a celebrity. Why watch La La Land when you could be Emma Stone and live the life that Hollywood paints? We love believing that we’re the movie star living in our own movie. We love playing into the wildest fantasies our mind can conjure. It’s comforting to picture our lives as perfect and continue to strive towards that idea, even though deep down we know it’s unreachable. It’s too difficult to break away from this dream, so we find ourselves sweeping the problems of LA under the rug to continue following the same unrealistic and mostly unattainable life that we bought from Hollywood. Through this process, we’ve become complicit in the “lie” of Los Angeles. Despite this lie being a part of LA’s charm, our complacency in propping the city up on these pillars is wrong. It’s time to become the main character and take that step towards admitting that life in LA isn’t anything like the movies. Aren’t you tired of playing pretend?





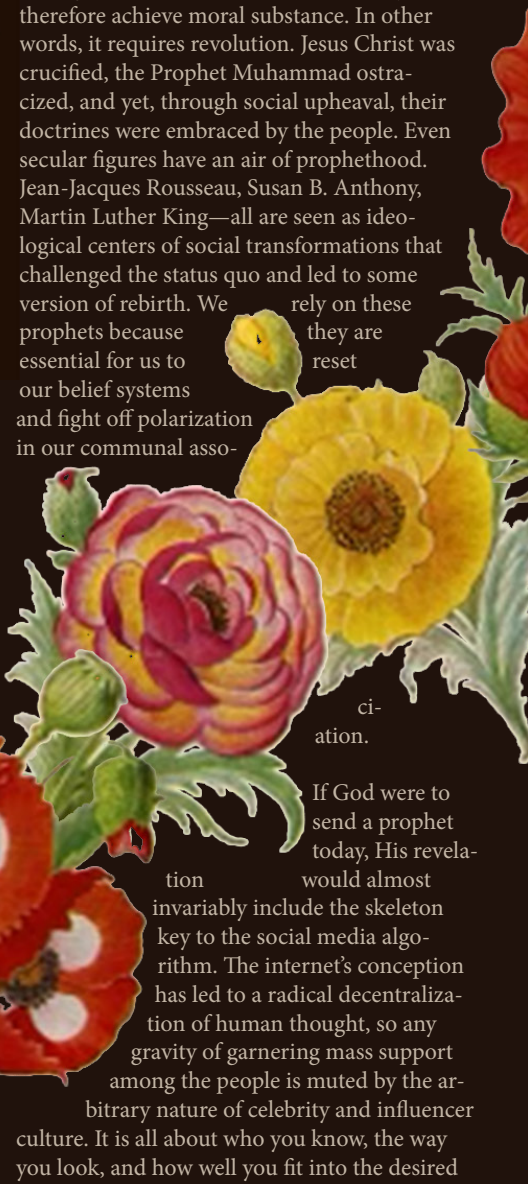
# Stop Following False Prophets

Brendan McMahon

Death, the destroyer of worlds, stands on the nuclear doorstep of our geopolitical situation, while the consequences of our environmental transgressions walk up the front steps. When reality is fractured, our social selves are thrown down into a void of uncertainty, so we reach out for a guide, or a prophet, to break the fall. History is testament: most modern religions involve a prophetic figure who rose through conflict to transform the dominant faith and thought structures, leading their people into a new epoch of association. This feature of human nature still

nection has decentralized the path to prophethood, devaluing its existence, and questioning its necessity. Celebrities, influencers, and cultural personalities are prophetic in style but not in construction. We need to remain mindful of modern false prophets, and how their sway can be destructive to public life.

The significance of a prophet is not necessarily the content of their prophecy, or its origin, but the adversity that their ideology has to go through in order to rise into universality and therefore achieve moral substance. In other words, it requires revolution. Jesus Christ was crucified, the Prophet Muhammad ostracized, and yet, through social upheaval, their doctrines were embraced by the people. Even secular figures have an air of prophethood. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King—all are seen as ideological centers of social transformations that challenged the status quo and led to some version of rebirth. We rely on these prophets because they are essential for us to reset our belief systems and fight off polarization in our communal asso-



presents itself today; however, the age of technology and con-

ciation. If God were to send a prophet today, His revelation would almost invariably include the skeleton key to the social media algorithm. The internet's conception has led to a radical decentralization of human thought, so any gravity of garnering mass support among the people is muted by the arbitrary nature of celebrity and influencer culture. It is all about who you know, the way you look, and how well you fit into the desired

mold that we all fantasize about because we want it for ourselves. It is destructive comparison and idolization, not social revolution. Today's prophets are purely aesthetic-based, searching to commodify our attention for their own enhanced image and monetary gain. This modern

Undying love and vehement hatred are equal destroyers of the public mind.

When an influencer makes a statement because they feel a responsibility to use their platform for good, do

When a we not

evaluate. Instead, we intuit a response based on their social position and how it relates to our own. This tendency reveals a fatal flaw in the way we chose prophets and leaders in our modern situation.

we prophets. trend has betrayed the original purpose and sanctity of prophethood. Celebrities' actions now influence an alarming portion of our decisions. From the food we eat to the people we vote for, we are hooked on our new prophets.

There should exist a separation between honoring the valuable opinion of a fellow human, and the engrossed infatuation evoked by many social figures today. Everyone deserves a voice, celebrities included. Lebron James shouldn't be told to "shut up and dribble" and Taylor Swift shouldn't be harassed by a United States President for her political statements. But that does not mean the public should place celebrity statements on the highest of pedestals and defend them like they are a god, or a prophet, or anything other than a person no different than everyone else. The dilemma occurs when entire groups attach themselves to the views of an individual, not for the content or rationality of their arguments, but because their name is Taylor Swift, Lebron James, Oprah Winfrey, Kanye West, Joe Rogan, or whoever else. And it goes both ways.

We have an obsession with social figures that is based not on logical evaluation, but emotional response. The origin of this feature is clear: our tendency to identify prophets in society. The irony reveals itself in the realization that the prophets we picked never trusted the bodies that gave them power in the first place. Alexander Hamilton, another individual heralded as an American prophet, wrote the following: "The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government. They will check the unsteadiness of the second." Our own prophets view us as volatile and untrustworthy of acting for ourselves, and we believe that too. "I need Jon Stewart to tell me how it is because he's a celebrity! He must know something I don't." No, he does not. There is no relation between the prophets of the past—secular or divine—and the TikTokers and red carpet walkers of the present. We need to steal our minds back from the hold influencers and celebrities have on us, realizing ourselves as individuals with equal access to human thought, to build more healthy and sustainable relationships with each other.



# THE HUMAN URGE TO SUFFER ANIA SOKOLOWSKA

Pain is a defining aspect of the human experience, but not all pain is created equal. Madelaine Hron's "The Trauma of Displacement" illustrates the idea that pain is a social construct, much like language, so it is "shaped by a specific culture, time and place." She examines interpretations of pain and variations based on sociocultural and political contexts, arguing that differences between groups cause the expression and interpretation of pain to be so varied that translation is no longer possible.

Experiences of pain come tied to disadvantaged communities, a phenomenon that fosters self-identification with one's community. Privileged communities will never understand this form of pain, and they co-opt it without being able to replicate the true depth of feeling, leaving interpretations hollow and meaningless.

The liminal space a second-generation immigrant occupies is inherently isolating. The supposed opportunities of a developed country like the United States pressure the second generation to succeed, particularly in light of the first generation's sacrifice to get there. Children have a desire to empathize with their parents, to be equally marked by their pain. Oftentimes, there is a heritage of suffering that serves as a collective familial or cultural history, but the secondhand perception of it will never align with lived experience, especially with the guilt

that results from being born into greater privilege. The child feels the need to feel this pain to be worthy of their inheritance, to be secure in their identity as their parents' child. This need becomes actualized through the child's effort to be perfect, to prove that the parents' sacrifice was worthwhile. Many children learn that their efforts will never receive praise as perfection is impossible to attain, yet the struggle continues, even at the cost of one's self-identity and mental health. The child justifies their self-abuse because they feel their suffering is owed, that it is the price of inclusion in their family and culture. There is a sense of community and pride in the face of such pain, one that associates it with comfort, and ingrains the idea of suffering as necessary.

The idea that one must experience pain for their identity to hold validity is also prevalent in the queer community. Gender dysphoria is the idea that one experiences significant distress because their current gender expression does not match their true gender identity. Some people argue that gender dysphoria is a key aspect of being transgender, and that someone cannot be trans without experiencing such pain. The idea that pain is a requirement for queer identity is ingrained within the community and often used as a tool for exclusion. Queerness has such a long-held history of persecution that to some, pain has become part of the identity itself. It holds a sense of community and belonging in the sense that everyone shares in a collective suffering, and there is a profound comfort in that.

There is a clear demarcation between a desire for one's cultural heritage of pain or one's pain and the appropriation of such pain. A striking example of such forced victimhood is the group of conservative activists who wore yellow Stars of David to liken their said persecution for not getting vaccinated to the Holocaust. Unlike victims of the Holocaust, their "pain" is self-inflicted and a fallacy in itself. This group rarely faces persecution on the scope of race, sexuality, religion, or ethnicity, so to relate and claim validity within the realm of suffering, they have to construct it on their own. Such attempts



fail because the pain is not genuine and falls flat. The victimhood present here is a clear portrayal of the aforementioned appropriation of pain, because they are taking the lived experiences of another group. They unjustly apply it to a situation where every main factor that constitutes that experience is absent. For these privileged groups, the goal is not to share the feelings surrounding pain but the existence of the pain itself, because they falsely believe that it grants them the “privilege” of being underprivileged—that they belong to a communal suffering. It is as if oppression has become a social currency, where the strive for equity is perceived as an unearned advantage.

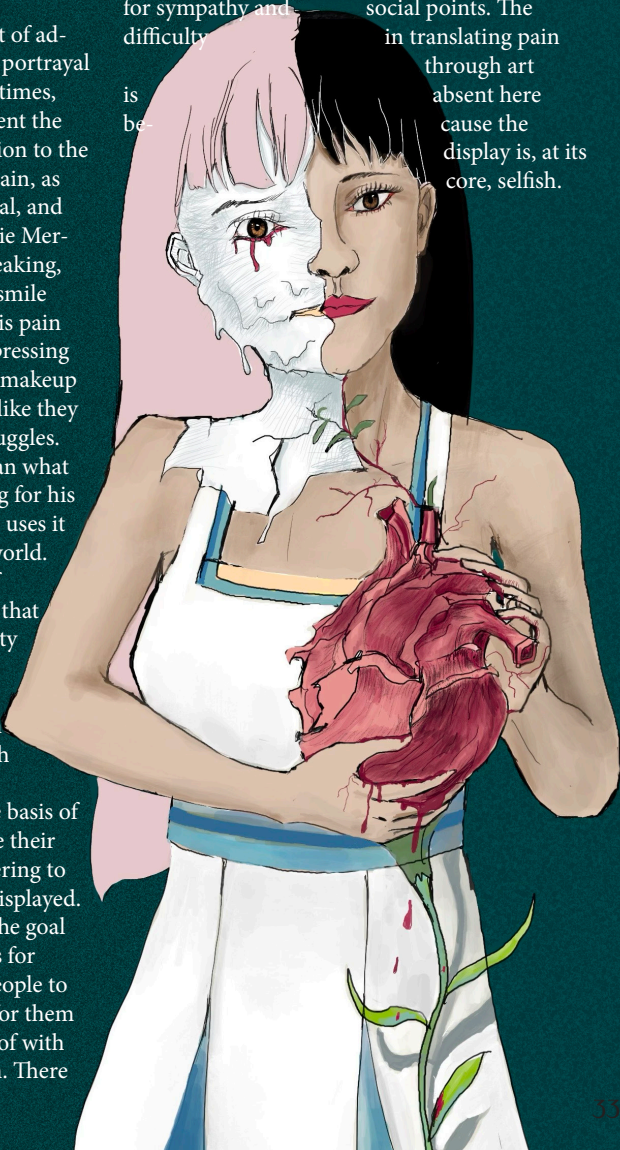
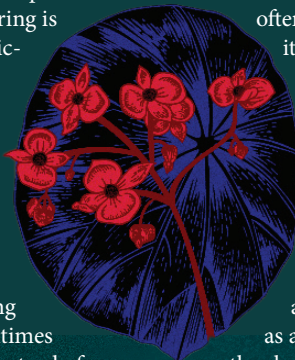
The contrast between pain as a result of adversity, and appropriated pain, is in the portrayal and communication of suffering. Oftentimes, cultural norms act as barriers that prevent the explicit sharing of pain. This is in addition to the already present incommunicability of pain, as experiences are often intimately personal, and words alone cannot define them. Freddie Mercury sings how “inside [his] heart is breaking, [his] makeup may be flaking, but [his] smile still stays on,” simultaneously sharing his pain battling the symptoms of AIDS and expressing this in a relatable way. The visual of his makeup flaking is relatable to anyone who feels like they have to keep going despite personal struggles. By talking about how he feels rather than what exactly it is he is feeling, he is not asking for his exact pain to be recognized. Instead, he uses it to inspire his art and share it with the world. Art and media are both used as tools of self-expression, and pain often inspires that art, so one finds comfort and community in it. When the familiarity of pain is denied, the original inspiration for art is lost. It can be comfortable to draw on suffering for that depth of feeling, which fosters longing for collective pain.

Those that appropriate pain on the basis of oppression desire their perceived suffering to be displayed. The goal is for people to feel for them instead of with them. There

is no intimacy to their demonstrations because it is not personal.

Suffering is implicitly the of it nity, fos-in-feeling oftentimes art, instead of for sympathy and difficulty

In contrast, genuine often portrayed itly due to difficulty sharing outside of one’s commu- which ters di- vidual and emotion, as a basis for the shallow desire social points. The in translating pain through art absent here cause the display is, at its core, selfish.





Cue the high-pitched screams in the background because a murder has just occurred. The victim: our hobbies. A once-beautiful and creative outlet of human passion and emotion has been reduced to nothing more than the consumption of media. The line between hobbies and pastimes is slowly vanishing as the two begin to blur together. The very essence of the hobby is being forgotten. The most sinister aspect of it all is that there is not just one suspect—but two.

Suspect number one is our fear of commitment. As the burdens of today's world increase, the maintenance of a hobby has become more expensive and time-consuming—a commitment not many people are willing to take. With real wages having shrunk by 2.2 percent in the first half of 2022, having a hobby is just not as practical as it used to be. For example, getting into photography requires the purchase of a quality camera, different lenses, filters, and other accessories, which can quickly add up to thousands of dollars. Purchasing the camera is not even half the battle—one now must spend hours learning how to use the camera properly, the functions of various settings on it, and the role of each accessory. It is

much easier and cheaper to just go back to your room, open a laptop, and put on the first show that pops up on Netflix.

Hence, Suspect One's weapon of choice: the media. The media is our way of replacing the hobby with a low-cost, low-maintenance pastime. Rather than dedicate our time to the creation of something new, we maintain a sedentary lifestyle of consuming whatever the media hands to us on a silver platter. By doing so, we have mutilated the hobby into a shell of its past self. No longer in our free time do we create something new or further our own skills. Instead, we look for that little dopamine rush that social media provides us. It's created an addiction where every new comment or like we get gives us a little bit of a dopamine boost that we can't live without anymore. Our addiction to social media has also lowered our attention spans to the point where short, quick bursts of information or entertainment are the only things that can satisfy us. We don't give heed to anything that takes longer than 3 minutes. Consequently, the hobby has no chance of surviving in the environment we created.

The second suspect is

“hustle culture,” which has exploited the hobby for its own gain. As soon as someone discovers a

creative outlet for themselves, they are immediately encouraged to commodify it. This ranges from trying to go viral on social media to becoming an Etsy vendor. However, turning a hobby into a side hustle completely demolishes what it was meant to be: a form of relaxation. Once the hobby becomes a job, there is added pressure to do well in order to sustain oneself. Not to mention the restricted creativity that comes along with having to tailor a hobby to others’ demands. This has become so common in our society that, according to Fortune magazine, by 2019, 49% of Americans under the age of 35 reported having a side hustle. While there is nothing wrong with having an alternate form of income, selling a surplus of what you create to replenish supplies, or sharing your creative side with others, the issue arises when the sole purpose of what used to be a hobby becomes making money.

Yet, there doesn’t seem to be a reason to care. Doing what’s easier is naturally going to be more appealing, and so you might be tempted to just put this article away and go back to scrolling away the rest of your free time. However, what we don’t realize is that along with the hobby went all of the benefits we reaped. By killing the hobby, we took away key outlets of our creativity, and stress relievers. Research done by Sarah D. Pressman and her colleagues at UC Irvine found that having a leisure activity was not only associated with lower cortisol levels, but also lower blood pressure, waist circumference, and body mass index, thus emphasizing the effectiveness of a hobby in reducing stress. It offers an escape from everyday struggles while continuously engaging our mind and body in an activity. Furthermore, because of the crucial role that shared interests play in developing strong social connections, hobbies are a key part of forming relationships. As opposed to popular culture, which offers at most a surface-level connection, hobbies allow for deeper bonds over core aspects of our individual personality. A conversation based on a popular show not only is limited in material but also keeps us focused on media as a crucial part of life. It gets rid of any individuality that friend groups exhibit because each group is centered around what form of media is most popular at the time. Additionally, hobbies provide opportunities to meet new people through classes, events,



# THE DEATH OF THE HOBBY

SAKSHAM MADAN

or sports games. The media does the opposite by gluing our faces to our screens,

even in the most social of settings.

That raises the question of how we revive the hobby. The first step is simple: find something you want to do. Whether that is photography, crocheting, or playing basketball, it is important to find an activity you are genuinely interested in. Moving forward involves delving into that activity to the best of your abilities. It may seem daunting to pour money into a completely new hobby, but that just means that we need to invest a little more ingenuity in moving forward with the hobby. There are multiple ways to get started with hobbies for cheap in the world if we are creative enough. For example, low-quality low-cost art supplies are often available at dollar stores, musical instruments can be rented, and many classes offer trial runs. Obviously, delving deeper into a hobby will require a deeper financial commitment but at some point we have to learn to invest in ourselves. If the hobby turns out to be your cup of tea, the investment made with your time and money will definitely pay out in non-financial rewards. It’s okay to grow a hobby slowly if you are financially strained but to lose one altogether is a dangerous thing. Most importantly, be wary of those trying to turn your hobby into a side hustle. Your hobby is something meant for you, not the world. It is perfectly fine to sell off the surplus you make in order to fund your hobby or to start a side hustle if you are struggling financially. Life definitely does become easier to deal with if you have an extra source of income. However, there is also nothing wrong with having an activity just as an outlet and nothing else. There is no obligation to dedicate every aspect of your life to making money; some parts of your life can be just for your own personal enjoyment like a hobby. Your hobby belongs to you and no one else.

Ultimately, the fact of the matter is that we have killed the hobby. Despite the multitude of suspects, the murderer will always be us. By letting hustle culture and the media transfigure the hobby into something completely different, we have lost a critical aspect of our daily lives. With the hobby went our individuality, creativity, and a great social opportunity. However, mourning it will do nothing. The hobby is dead, and now we must bring it back to life.

As college students, we have grown accustomed to impermanence. The never-ending back and forth between our lives at school and at home,

summer internships, semesters abroad, and travels, create pockets of time that seemingly exist outside of our normal spheres of reality. In these settings, being the young and free spirits we are, it is more than likely that we encounter an opportunity for romance. Being released from the confines of our everyday, mundane existences burdened by trivial obligations, and immersed in a new environment vibrating with the potential for exploration and experiences, these romances often flourish. Yet, a distant date looms on the horizons, one riddled with dread. This date marks the

## *Why Everyone Should Experience the Magic of an Expiration Date Romance*



*Tali Lebowitsch*

foreboding, forced end of the blossoming relationship, and often our return to our normal, lackluster lives.

For many, the knowledge that this date lies ahead makes the point of pursuing such a relationship appear futile. Why suffer the grueling pain of a love thwarted too quickly when such an emotional blow can be entirely avoided? Such a sentiment is understandable. However, I urge you to cast such trepidations aside and embrace the all-consuming magic of what I like to call the expiration-date romance.

Expiration-date romances can range from a singular night, to a week, to an entire semester. The common denominator is that when going into one, both parties know that there is a definitive end that has been established by pre-existing circumstances. While such a premise might seem confining and claustrophobic, anyone who has been in one of these relationships knows that it actually is a much more liberating experience than real-world dating. Growing up, we were conditioned to let relationships blossom with meticulous precision, abiding by a host of unspoken rules, and encouraged to approach these with a strategic mentality. Questions of timeline, if things are going according to plan, can leave us feeling anxious and insecure, removing us from the glory of the start of a beautiful partnership—burdening us with all the weight of relationships past and the direction of the one we are embarking on.

For this reason, expiration-date romances are a unique chance to escape the exhaustion of the “game” of real-world dating. As young people, we know that our romantic partners are most likely temporary: leaving us with the questions of how, or why, things might end. Expiration-date romances eliminate such anxiety-inducing wonderings and allow us to embrace the magic of the present. Unburdened by these questions, we feel free to explore a relationship driven solely by passion and emotion in which rationality must not play such a dominating role. The security of the low stakes involved often make us increasingly open to spontaneity. Incentivized by a condensed timeline, we are pushed to open our minds and hearts more freely, and to seek vulnerability and raw expression of emotions before it is too late.

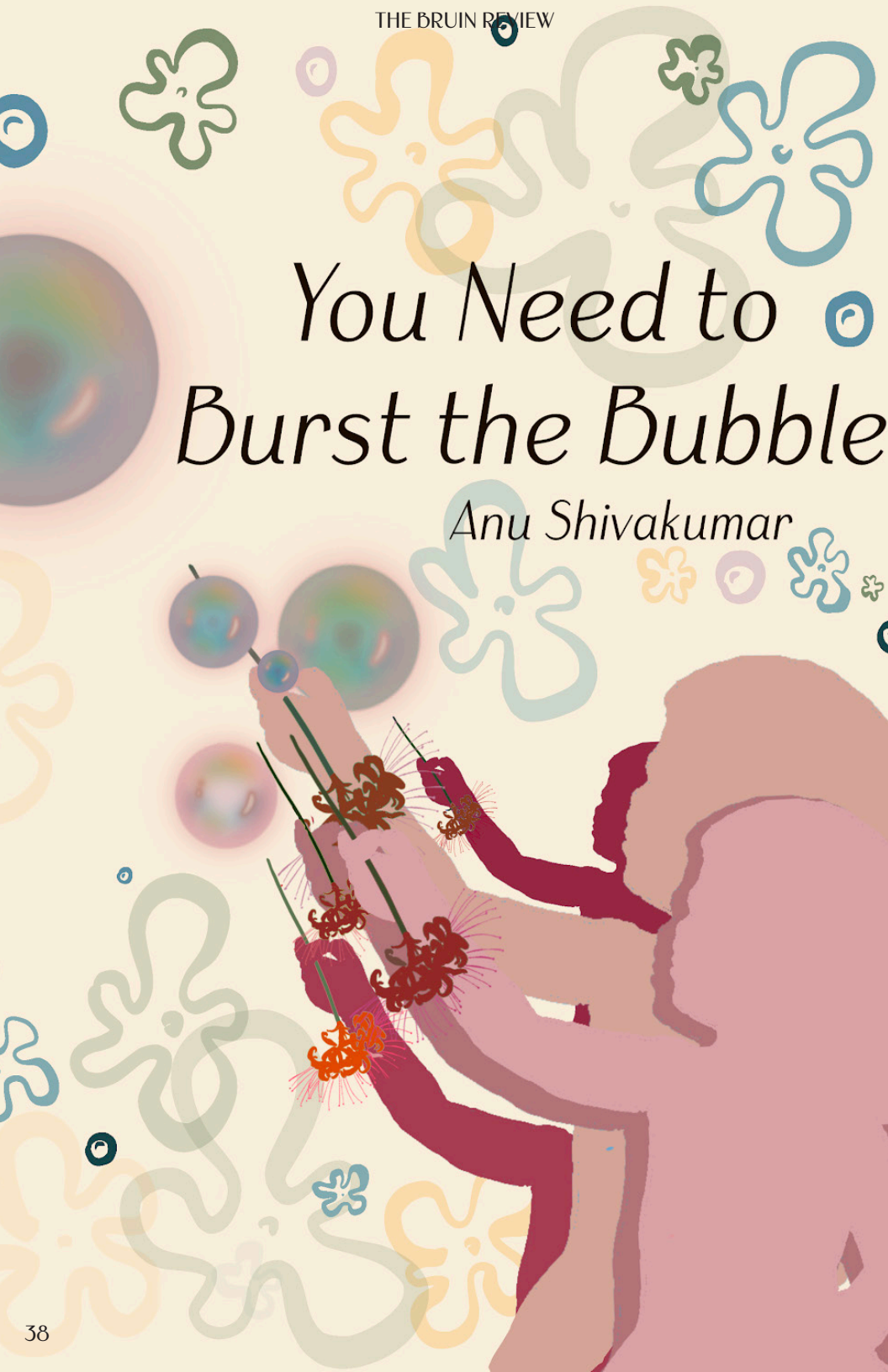
Through these

circumstances, we gain the opportunity to explore ourselves as instinctual and romantic creatures, removed from the societal conditioning ingrained in us that promotes a confined vision of dating and love. In other words: we are free to be ourselves in a way that is rare in real-world dating.

But yes, the relationship will eventually have to end, and it most likely will be painful. I challenge you to process this pain through a lens of gratitude, for it is a privilege to connect with someone in such a raw and fleeting way, and even more so a privilege to connect with yourself in such an environment. While involving two people, expiration-date romances usually result in being rare experiences that exist solely for ourselves. In a fast-paced world that rewards steadfast focus on the future and a consistent attentiveness to the sensitivities of those around us, these relationships are an escape. The other person involved might be gone, but you are left with the memory of something powerful, passionate, visceral, and raw—only for you to enjoy. It is a perfect pocket of memory, one that is untainted by a messy ending.

# *You Need to Burst the Bubble*

Anu Shivakumar



“From sea to shining sea,” the “land of the free” is marketed to young American minds as all that matters. Elementary schools champion the memorization of every last state capital and president, while students remain unaware of an entire world that exists beyond the confines of U.S. coasts. Patriotism can no longer remain a defense for this ignorance; the future success of American political and economic systems is heavily dependent on students’ level of cultural awareness. The disillusionment with which public schools maintain a curriculum void of holistic world history is not only harmful in terms of the professional success of individuals, but encourages a societal arrogance that is not positive or enriching for its students. At its best, this education (or lack thereof) deprives students of cultural awareness—at its worst, it leaves them unable to participate in the international dialogue and succeed to the best of their potential.

This phenomenon, sometimes dubbed “Americanism,” runs so deeply in the education system that American students are popularly known, in the global context, to lack basic knowledge about other countries. The impact that has on the national reputation is harmful, and both structural flaws and societal attitudes should be addressed to resolve it. Public high schools maintain social studies programs that are not often comprehensive—focusing only on major historical events primarily in the European sphere. Students are certainly taught about the French Revolution and the American Revolutionary War but are not offered information on other major and impactful historical events, such as the Nanking Massacre or Kalinga War. My own high school only offered two advanced history classes: European and United States History. While Europe is part of the broader global discussion, an American-focused education with European influences remains homogeneous and restrictive. Millions of people were affected, and continue to be affected, by events that took place outside these two places. Leaving these lessons out of the education system denies American students necessary context about their international peers, and the world we live in.

A rarity in most countries outside the U.S., there is no national American mandate for foreign language classes in high schools. Districts are free to come up with additional requirements: though from a national level, this is representative of the manner in which a globally holistic curriculum

is not a priority for American lawmakers. By contrast, many other education systems across the world maintain language and history requirements that allow curricula to encompass a wider range of global topics. Such systems—ones that introduce students to the massive breadth of the world, with its different landscapes and groups of people, guide students to embrace opportunities beyond the borders of their nation. The experience of travel, for example, has great potential for individual learning and growth. Not only will students with greater understanding of the world be able to better recognize this value and aspire to achieve it, but cultural knowledge also ties heavily into an individual’s ability to succeed in another country—even if just on a trip.

Cultural awareness is of key value in an increasingly connected world. Technological advancements have propelled the world to a place where people with very different backgrounds are often collaborators, classmates, clients—friends. Being able to approach conversations with those of different backgrounds with a degree of cultural understanding and sensitivity is not only a marker of respect, but a lack of these qualities can imply ignorance. From a professional standpoint, the lack of a globally-aware education is detrimental to future success, in the workforce many students hope to join after graduating college. When there is little or no conversation in classrooms regarding certain entire countries or groups of people, it becomes difficult for American graduates to come across as aware and competent in these environments.

While it is often argued that America is a strong global power, so there is little need to be informed of much more than internal processes to excel within the abundant country, there can hardly be an argument that any country is above the need to be inclusive. Economic boom-and-bust cycles have run through nearly every country in history: the idea that America is invincible is incredibly unlikely. Additionally, technological and social interconnectedness have permeated global business and trade to a point past return. The national economy and political environment are interdependent with those of other countries. It is imperative that change in history classes begins now: the “American bubble” must be burst for our future generations.

# TRUTH THROUGH DISCOURSE



WINTER 2023