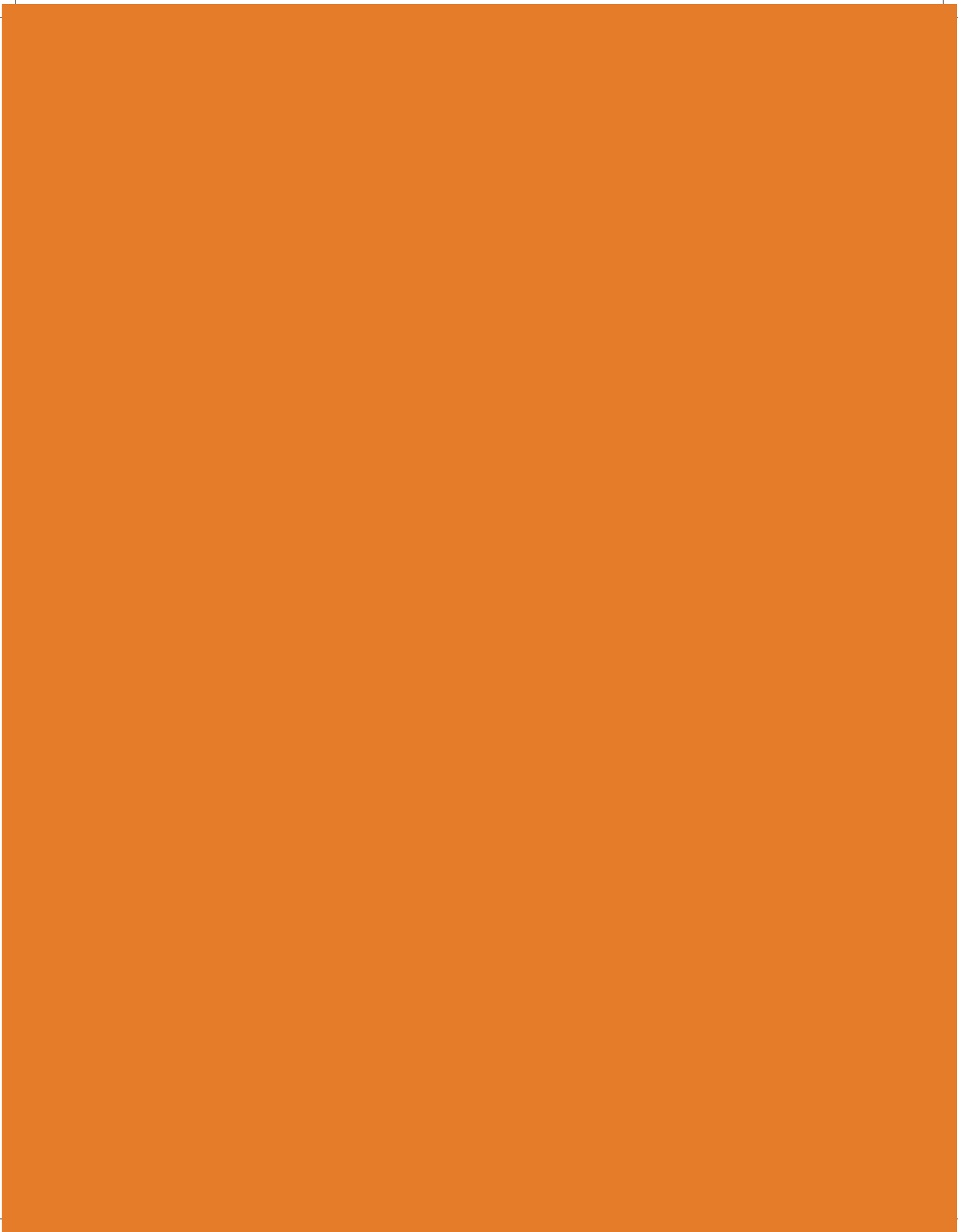


grain of salt

THE
BEST
of
2020







this project would not have been possible without the dedication of so many incredible people:

thank you to ella sylvie, our layout editor, who overcame the time zone difference to lend her artistic eye and manage an incredible team.

thank you to olivia stern, jessica underwood and skylar perera, our layout team members, for putting their heart and soul into every page.

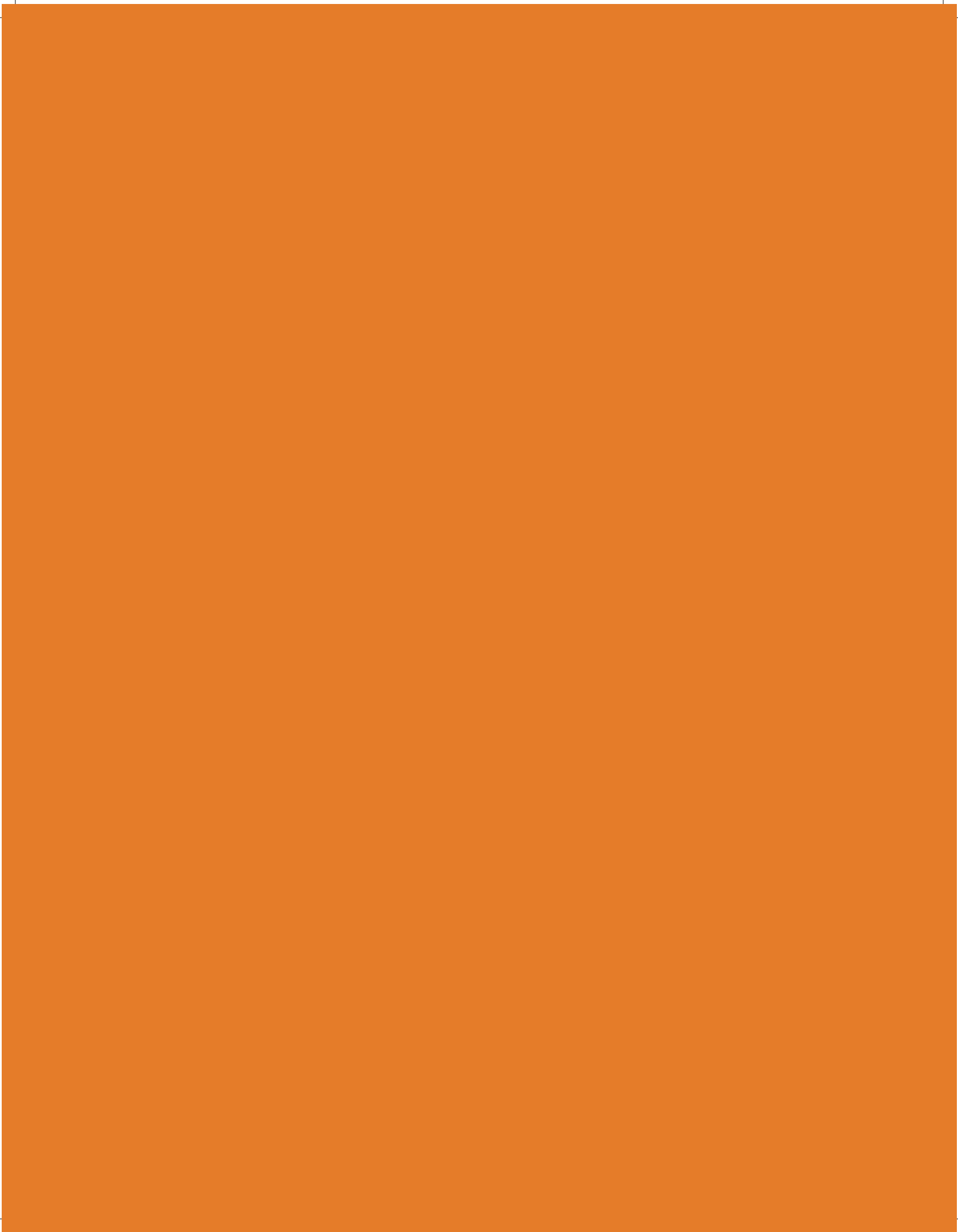
thank you to gillian kwok for constantly amazing us with her incredible artwork – especially the wonderful design that graces our cover.

thank you to our grain gang team members, maria trizzino, nicole vitiello, ali bernstein, sadie lookabaugh and madison leto, for ensuring that everything behind the scenes happened smoothly during this process.

and lastly, thank you to bobby campisi and everyone at graphic lab printing inc. for putting our contributors' hard work onto the pages that sit before us.

you have all made this dream a reality and we are eternally grateful <3.







so, how did we get here?

creative spaces are dominated by the male gaze. the sheer anger we have toward that was always rumbling within us, but it was being forced into quarantine that exposed how truly isolating and daunting creativity feels when artistic spaces aren't made for you. when you have all the time in the world, it becomes clear that you made up all those excuses to avoid creating in order to cover up the fact that you're just scared.

removing the male gaze from our creative spaces strips away the internalized gendered expectations we face when we embark on our creative journeys. by centering the voices of underrepresented identities, grain of salt mag seeks to ensure a safe, open community that encourages growth, collaboration and mistakes. so many of us are terrified of doing anything creative in fear of not being "good" enough on the first try, or because we don't have any experience, but if we don't have a space to fuck up, we'll never get better.

everyone deserves a space to be messy. a space where you can quite literally throw your *metaphorical* shit at the wall and see what sticks. a space to freely create without the suffocating restraints of limitation and judgement. and that my friends, is the reason why we're here.

even if this is the only print issue we ever put out and an asteroid crashed into the earth tomorrow, we'd get hit by the massive, flaming space rock feeling content knowing that people found the same solace in our mission that we did. being able to host a community for some of the boldest, bravest and brightest artists has been such an honor.

putting it simply, we wouldn't be anywhere without you. six months ago, the concept of a print issue seemed completely far-fetched. but thanks to your love, kindness and vulnerability, we were fortunate enough to produce this time capsule of our community's incredible artistry. so to our supporters, contributors, friends and family – we dedicate this issue to you. whether you've been here since day one or just recently stumbled across our publication, thank you for sticking around. and as much as you've given to us, we're even more excited to give back. part of the proceeds from this issue will be going to the people's bodega of nyc, a mutual aid fund that provides free water, food, safety supplies and PPE to new yorkers involved in the fight for abolition. the rest will be put toward our community and providing them with invaluable resources to continue their artistic and creative endeavors.

as always, be loud, be bold, be unashamed – because it is all taken with a grain of salt anyway.

with all the love in the world,
kayla, rita, mel, faith and isa





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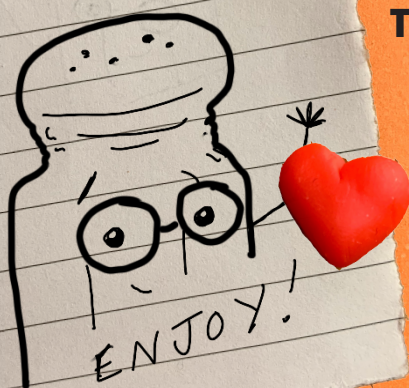
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I

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BB *I am Black. I am a Woman. I am bound to catch my tongue on certain words and ruminate on them for weeks.* DD

I am Black. I am a Woman. I am bound to catch my tongue on certain words and ruminate on them for weeks. I am Jamaican. I am trying to forgive broken promises. I am belligerent. I am a student, in more ways than one. And I am an optimist ... maybe.

I certainly find myself assuming that I will one day sit before my grandchildren and tell of evils we face today, but to them, it'll be little more than the boogeyman. I want to wish that we can make some meaningful progress in even the worst areas of our world. To be Black in America is to have every reason to abandon hope and yet being unable to let it go. As James Baldwin put it: "I cannot be a pessimist, because I am alive." Today, standing in his legacy, I wonder if our Black skin produces realism. Not pessimism, because our existence means so many have survived already. Not optimism, because we know that as beautiful as this skin is, it will be scarred. But realism, because we wake up, and we go to sleep, and we know we must do it again.

When it was time for me to think about what colleges I would consider calling my home for four years, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) never crossed my mind. Since kindergarten, I grew up in a majority-white town with majority-white schools. My life was marked by the feeling of being othered. So for me to go to an HBCU was to enter Oz.

To see in color for the first time, perhaps, but at a cost. I wasn't resistant to the idea of attending an HBCU because of what I thought I would experience there. I was disinterested because Dorothy ends up in Kansas again at the end. Because I would graduate, and enter a field, and maybe a workplace, and maybe even a town, that was once again mostly white. The bubble would burst.

I know now that my understanding of HBCUs was simplistic. I also know now how badly I do want to go to one after making it halfway through my education at my primarily white institution (PWI). Perhaps I never have to worry about that particular bubble bursting, but I do wish for a moment of levity. I wish that I wouldn't have to be 20 years old when I have a Black teacher for the first time. I wish no classmates ever suggested that we bring back Blackface. I wish I was never told that my writing sounded "urban." I wish I never felt the onus on me to be the Black voice in my classroom. I wish that in the wake of George Floyd's murder, when even the most complacent Americans were finally sparked into action, I didn't have to watch my university pay platitudes to my pain. But I did.

BB *I wish that I wouldn't have to be 20 years old when I have a Black teacher for the first time.* DD

I did. And it hurt, but it was a familiar burn. It was one set in my bones since I was a child and I heard the story of Trayvon Martin, a boy only a little older than my brother, whose eyes reminded me of my own, and I knew justice was only a kind story America tells its children so we stop asking about the monsters in the closet. I want to say I can enter my university with even a modicum of security, but I can't.

ALIVE

An honest answer to PWI ice breakers on the first day of class



In the wake of the death of George Floyd and the wave of activism it inspired, an anonymous group of students at my university started social media pages for other students to anonymously submit their stories and experiences with racism in the university community. I realized then that racism deserves a trigger warning. I had to unearth the years of experience from all levels of my education before I could go into another year. That meant confronting things like the desperation to individualize myself instead of being mistaken for the only other Black girl in elementary school. Or in middle school, when I heard students say that real Blackness and being “ghetto” were synonymous. Or in high school, when I was told my financial struggles must certainly be dwarfed by affirmative action. How silly of me to be a Black girl who found self-worth in education. How silly of me to look for self in the very place I was invisible.

A lot has changed since the last time any of us set foot on campus. But for me, the biggest change is that the bubble did burst. Not like the one I expected with HBCUs. No, the bubble I couldn't see with PWIs. The one that said, “Of course all these years of learning while Black haven't emotionally impacted you and no, it'll be fine. What'll one more microaggression do?” and “Of course you are just as much an optimist as you once were.” The bubble had to burst. I just wish I wasn't the only one hurt by it. I wish the university would be caught in the blast with me and feel all the blows and maybe stand up with empathy when it's all said and done.

I find a strange comfort, walking on to campus with a mask on. I get to frown. I get to scowl. I get to look around and see the whole truth and bear the weight on my face. This place wasn't made for me. It won't fight alongside me. It doesn't truly see me. Its arms are open, just not for me. And yet, I cannot be a pessimist because I am alive, and I am getting an education, and I'm winning a game with a deck stacked against me. But I will succeed despite this place, not because of it. I am Black. I am a Woman. I am in awe of the mountains. I am alive. I am alive. I am alive. I am the hope and dream of a slave. I am alive. And I am using my PWI, lest it uses me.

If that sounds naive, then I am an optimist ... maybe. But I will go to sleep, I will wake up and I will do it all over again. I dare you to try and stop me. I know that you will. You will try. But someday, you'll be nothing more than my grandchild's boogeyman.

By Daejah Woolery

why

??

By Emma Elizabeth Mathes

do i have to be 'hot'?

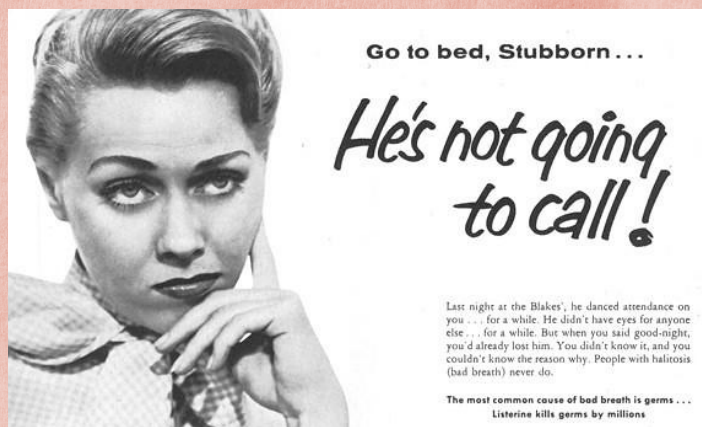
Some people hate the word "moist." I'm not one of those people. The word that triggers ugly feelings in me is "hot." I resent "hot" and all of its baggage; it haunts me. I'm not alluding to the climate. I am instead referring to the word as a concept of attractiveness. My observation has been that "gorgeous" and "beautiful" typically describe one's outward beauty, while "hot" specifically points to one's sexual appeal. I dislike the word "hot" because, if I'm being honest — no matter how much I know better — in my quiet and lonelier moments, I dream about being universally acknowledged as the capital "H" "Hot."

The capital "H" "Hot" is both specific and vague; it is qualified by society and determined by sometimes unobvious factors. Nevertheless, the pursuit of this "Hot" has become the modern American rat race. In our increasingly visual world, "Hot" has become an indicator of marketability (i.e. worth). Capitalism mines these insecurities because achieving society's "Hot" is never free. Over the past 20 years, the plastic surgery industry has grown exponentially, and every day, there are millions of people asking themselves, "Is this photo 'Hot' enough for Instagram, or do I have to Facetune away reality for likes?"

Women, in particular, spend large portions of their (already wage-gapped) income chasing desirability. They are taught that they are Not Enough but certain products can help them to Become Enough. This is not new. The economy has prospered off the belittlement of women for at least a century. Take Listerine, for example! The company quite literally coined the term "halitosis"; they put two Latin words together — "halitus" (breath) and "osis" (disease) — and used it to convince consumers (women, mostly) that their breath was a problem. Specifically, advertisements suggested that bad breath was the reason for a woman's sexual and romantic misfortune, giving women two unnecessary insecurities in one, fell swoop.

"Let
the tide
take her out..."

I WON'T!



And it worked! Sales increased 4,000-fold (that's not an exaggeration) and 100 years later, many industries are still effectively functioning on the denigration of women. My bank account alone has been victim to many ads convincing me I wasn't complete.

There rightly has been pushback against these notions. While the "Body Positive" movement wants to change beauty standards, there are inherent issues in its discourse. "All bodies are beautiful," while inclusive, still places an emphasis on looks; it preserves society's obsession with outward appearance. The patriarchy teaches women and nonbinary folks that their ONLY natural, quantifiable source of power is their body. Rape culture instills many with the notion that they begin and end at their body. Even the "Body Positive" movement suggests that our worth is centered around a perception of our bodies. It's a narrative that's hard to escape.

Oscar Wilde famously said, "Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power," which fellow Janelle Monáe stans will also recognize from her 2018 hit "Screwed." I think Wilde and Monáe are onto something. In a patriarchal society, the modern woman or nonbinary person may want to be capital "H" "Hot" because they want to be capital "P" "Powerful." This line of reasoning plays out in the critically acclaimed play (and TV show) "Fleabag." The character of Fleabag is a sexually voracious trainwreck; she fucks for the feeling she gets when someone desires her rather than for sex itself.



At the end of the play, she cops to this complicated relationship with sex: "I don't feel alive unless I'm being fucked and I don't feel in control unless I'm fucking because fucking makes the world tighten around me ... I know that my body as it is now is really the only thing I have and when that gets old and unfuckable I might as well just kill it ... sometimes I wish I never knew fucking existed because somehow there isn't anything worse than someone who doesn't want to fuck me."

Fleabag reduces herself to her body. She obtains self-confidence from her ability to be sexual. She has no conviction in any other part of herself; she cannot see herself beyond the physical. Fleabag, like many modern women, roots her self-worth in how "Hot" she is.

Rather than being pro-"Body Positive," I am pro-"Radical Self-Acceptance." One's worth should not be tied to beauty.

We must love and care for ourselves independent of our aesthetics! Real self-love comes when we unconditionally accept every version of ourselves — even the version that hasn't showered in several days.

But I am no paragon. I occasionally have to suppress the Fleabag in me (maybe more often than "occasionally" since the start of quarantine). I've spent more time looking at "Hot" people — on social media, in TV shows, in movies — in the past four months than ever before. And in my darkest moments, I think of all the things I would do if I had a billion dollars to spend on the pursuit of "Hot." I'm still unlearning the lessons our society taught me. But, more so with each new day, I'm recognizing that it does not matter. I'll be OK. I am OK. We don't have to be "Hot" to be OK.

A version of this article was in Emma Elizabeth Mathes's *TinyLetter* in September 2019.



new edition

Pritha Singh created this digital piece during the most tumultuous months of quarantine. She personally felt a very large internal change taking place, as if she was being reborn. With the influx of information from the internet rendering many things obsolete, as well as seeing personal values she used to uphold crumble away, it truly felt like she was changing, both body and mind.

WE CAN ALL LEARN SOMETHING FROM OUR MIDDLE SCHOOL SELVES

BY ISA RENÉE DE LEON

Life was much simpler in middle school. I'd wake up, go to school, come home and immediately go on Tumblr for the rest of the day. I filled my dashboard with Superwholock gifsets, funny textposts and endless pictures of One Direction. The Wonderful World of Tumblr in 2012™ introduced me to many things and even provided me with the foundation of much of my personality today. But, most importantly, it introduced me to something that changed my life forever: Adobe Photoshop.

Yes. Photoshop. I can't remember exactly what drew me to illegally download a version of Photoshop onto my family computer, but I do know that the Superwholock and 1D content that flooded my dashboard inspired me to create something of my own.

Before I knew it, I had learned the basics of Photoshop all via Tumblr tutorials (shoutout to yeahps and fuckyeahps who taught me everything I know). I would follow every tutorial I could find and post the results for all of the internet to see. I dedicated so much of my time to this hobby that gave me so much joy. At one point, some of my friends literally Paid Me Money to make them photo manips of them with Harry Styles or Calum Hood.

As I got older, my love for making things on Photoshop remained, but the confidence and time to actually make them dwindled quite rapidly. From time to time, I would make a basic photoset and share it with my friends, but never again did my work see the light of social media until college.

After being kicked off campus in March, I find myself now in my childhood bedroom — the same place where I edited a single picture of Amy Pond for hours in the seventh grade. Now, I look back on my old work and I cringe. What was I thinking? I obviously had a lot of room to grow in terms of my ability, but back then, that didn't bother me at all. Not a single thought of whether my art was "good enough" crossed my mind as I posted every completed graphic and gifset to Tumblr dot com.

I unapologetically and unabashedly did what I enjoyed doing. This was simply because making things made me happy. It kept me sane and gave me an outlet of expression through all the hormones and drama of adolescence. I am definitely glad to have grown as a person since then, but there are some things I can learn from my younger self.

As I've gotten older, I've learned that being creative is the one thing that will keep me sane. It's something I hold near and dear to my heart, but I often find myself afraid of starting a project or smothering any idea that begins to take shape — all because I'm afraid of not being good enough. That's because I'm self-taught, I'm missing a lot of fundamental things about design that inhibit me from truly putting out "good" work.

But this isn't true at all, because the only opinion that should matter is mine. If I'm proud of something I created and think it looks good, I should share it with the world. Not to be like, "we live in a society," but seriously, sometimes society places expectations for perfection that literally no one will reach. It's truly so refreshing to see someone share their passions with the world without fear!

Despite having written all that, I am nowhere near combatting my fear of creative judgment. I'll have my good days and bad days, but each day is progress regardless. I'm continually learning (or re-learning) how to be creative without fear of judgment. It's OK if what I have is kind of shitty, because who isn't shitty when they first try something? Who doesn't make mistakes when they do things? What matters is that what I'm doing makes me happy.

Obviously, each person's middle school experience was different, but one thing remains constant: When we loved something, we displayed it with the world. Whether it be live-blogging 1D's every move, writing fanfiction, making 8tracks playlists, etc., if we liked something, we shared it. Those outlets allowed us to be ourselves and helped us find who we are.

Growing up does strip us of our confidence in many ways. But, our middle school selves, while they were collectively ... Weird ... do have valuable lessons to teach our current selves about loving something and sharing it with others. I have my middle school self to thank for deciding one day to commit to learning how to use Adobe Photoshop. It's because of her that I am who I am today. Even though being home has led to my own mental regression into my past phases, I wouldn't mind also regressing back into my Photoshop-crazed self. I've missed her.





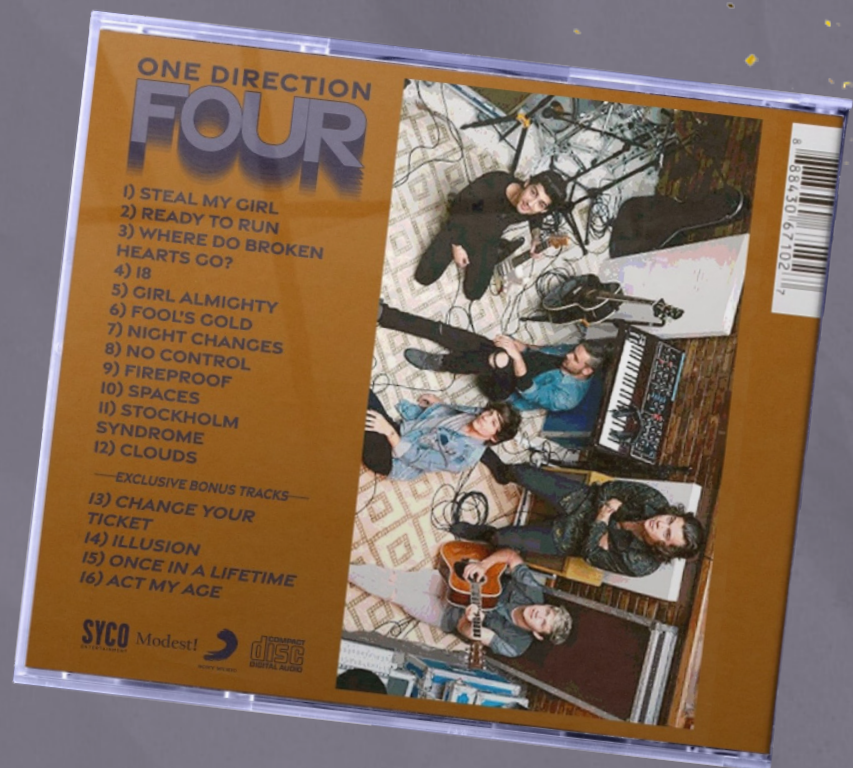
ALBUM REDESIGN

In my article, "We All Can Learn Something From Our Middle School Selves," I discuss a lot about trying to relearn the confidence and passion I had for creating graphics on Photoshop, and decided to put my words to practice by redesigning the "Four" album art.

If you've had just a single conversation with me, you'd know that "Four" has always been my favorite One Direction album. Its mature yet fun and retro-inspired sound has continually kept it in my Spotify rotation in the six years since its release. But there was one bone I had to pick with the album (aside from "Act My Age") ... it's the FUCKING album art.

I could rant about this for days. But I get it, it's supposed to be simple and minimalistic because it's waaaay more mature than their earlier albums. But I disagree. In many ways, yes, it is more mature, but there are so many songs that are the usual fun and pop-y songs we've been used to hearing (like "Steal My Girl," "Girl Almighty," "No Control," "Clouds" and many more). What makes them different is the heavy '70s/'80s rock influences in these very songs, bouncing off the more rugged rock sounds of their previous album, "Midnight Memories." There are obvious influences from '70s and '80s rock super apparent in songs like "Stockholm Syndrome," "Fireproof" and "Change Your Ticket."

Going into this redesign, I wanted to take this '70s/'80s influence and run with it. Taking inspiration from design trends and branding from those eras, I came up with this design!



by Isa Renée de Leon

NO, I AM NOT WIFEY MATERIAL

By Ritamarie Pepe

With my charming personality, winning smile and huge rack, one may be surprised to hear that I have never been in a serious relationship. Why wouldn't anyone want to hit this after endless conversations varying from the pros and cons of localized humanitarian action to why Louis Tomlinson is the most underrated member of One Direction? That's called range, baby. It's a mystery to me how anyone could pass up on all of this.

Although I'll never fully understand the lack of interest I have received as a potential romantic partner (and quite frankly, I Don't Really Care To Know), some whispers have escaped tight-lipped conversations and fallen upon my ears. In fact, one reason has been brought to my attention on multiple occasions.

"I wouldn't date her now, but she's someone I would marry. She's wifey material."

If I was able to roll my eyes as far back into my head as I wish I could, they'd get stuck. Give me a break.

There is (usually) nothing wrong with having preferences for romantic partners. For example, I find myself drawn to intellectual minds, a sharp jawline is enough to cause me to black out and I prefer people who choose to fill up the empty Brita filter before they place it back into the fridge. But there are some instances when looking for specific attributes becomes a little questionable, such as seeking "wifey material."

"Wifey material" is a phrase popularly used to describe women that are believed to be suitable for marriage. It assigns specific characteristics women exhibit or certain behaviors women perform as indicators of whether or not a woman would be a "good wife."

"Regardless, women should be able to do whatever they want whenever they want, especially without being shamed or forced to operate within boundaries established by men who face no repercussions for exhibiting the same exact behaviors."

A woman is wifey material if she cooks like your mother.

A woman is wifey material if she prefers a quiet night in to partying with her girlfriends on the weekend.

A woman is wifey material if she can bear multiple children while maintaining an hourglass figure.

A woman is wifey material if she understands that you have to cancel date night to watch a football game with the boys.

A woman is wifey material if she doesn't whine or complain.

And that is just the tip of the iceberg.

Quite frankly, “wifey material” sucks. Many of the token “wifey material” indicators conform to harmful gender roles and gendered expectations. They perpetuate the stereotype that a woman’s primary responsibility is to be a caretaker, and that as a wife, they are expected to cook, clean and raise children, therefore ignoring the complexity of women. This term strips them of their individuality and personality, reduces their passions and achievements, and refuses to acknowledge the space women take up outside of the home. Through “wifey material,” women simply become something that is most convenient for men.

These expectations also police women’s actions. For example, a woman who chooses to spend Saturday nights drinking with her friends at a bar would not necessarily be considered “wifey material.” Instead, she would be deemed irresponsible, reckless, immature, unintelligent and, if she hooks up with someone, a whore – all of which are incompatible with the caretaker stereotype. But this is a logical fallacy. Choosing to have fun on the weekends has little bearing on a woman’s ability to be a good wife, both in the perspective of harmful gender roles perpetuated by the “wifey material” complex and actual indicators of a mature romantic partner. Women can get absolutely demolished on the weekend and still be motivated professionals, intelligent academics and wonderful caretakers. Regardless, women should be able to do whatever they want whenever they want, especially without being shamed or forced to operate within boundaries established by men who face no repercussions for exhibiting the same exact behaviors. As the wise Cyndi Lauper once said, “girls just wanna have fun.”

“Wifey material” also creates a dichotomy among women that inherently pits them against each other. This creates a division between women who are “wifey material” and women who are not, always leaving one group feeling ostracized. I have often been left to wonder many things: How long am I expected to wait until a man is “ready” for me? Why aren’t I good enough now? Am I not funny enough? Interesting enough? Desirable enough? What do other women have that I do not? I could only imagine the questions my counterparts might have, but I have a feeling, some of them may be very similar to my own.

This dichotomy has the potential to create resentment between women when the real enemy is men who continue to use these stereotypes in order to manipulate them. I admit that I even fell victim to this scheme at first, spending some of my early high school years silently bitter about being passed over for other girls even when I was recognized as a suitable partner. What did they have that I didn’t? I struggled with my self-confidence in ways that affect me to this day. But since then, I’ve learned to redirect my anger away from the girls who do not deserve

serve my malice, and toward the men who have treated me as something they can save for a rainy day.

I am sick and tired – of being set aside for later, of being expected to wait and, most regretfully, of playing into this shitshow by passively accepting this problematic label by placing myself on the hypothetical relationship waitlist.

I am enough. And there is so much about me to love beyond the misogynistic criteria men have been checking off for me my entire life. I am fiercely loyal to my friends. I set high academic and professional goals for myself and then absolutely crush them. I know every One Direction lyric by heart. For god’s sake, I co-founded an online publication with my best friend and have built that up from the ground with pure hard work, determination, teamwork and dedication.

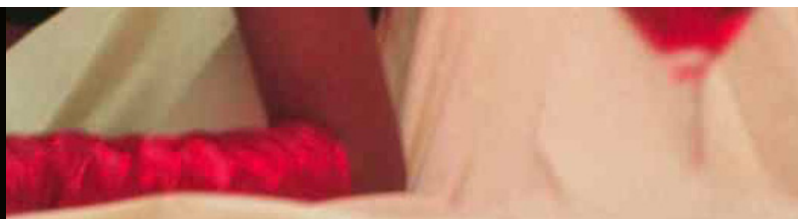
So if all you’re interested in is what I plan to cook for dinner when you decide to settle down in 10 years, then you’ve got the wrong damn girl.



A CREATIVE IN QUARANTINE: A SELF-PORTRAIT SERIES

Maya Gorman's self-portrait series explores what it means to be a creative during quarantine. After a combination of creative blocks and self-reflection, it forced her to find a muse within herself.





11

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KODAK PORTRA 800-2



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KODAK PORTRA 800-2



14



43

KODAK PORTRA 800-2



X



Your Hetero Made Me H



Trigger warning: references to homophobia.

I actively avoided the possibility that I was not straight. In many ways, I always knew this to be more than a possibility; I liked girls before I learned that I wasn't supposed to and thereafter locked those feelings in a box and threw away the key.

What I've dealt with in coming to terms with my sexuality is referred to as "internalized homophobia": the negative perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community that are believed true by someone who identifies as LGBTQ+. This term is disputed by many in the community, though, because it feels oxymoronic and counterintuitive. How can someone in the community hate the community? I didn't and don't hate people who identify as LGBTQ+, and since coming into contact with the community, I have always tried to align myself as an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. When I say "internalized homophobia," all that hate is really internal; me and my sexual orientation. I hated the thought of being gay, and the heteronormativity that existed around me is to blame.

I grew up outside of the States and was not exposed to many LGBTQ+ figures. I was raised in a Catholic community that believed it wasn't right to be "gay." The first time I ever heard "gay," it was used derogatorily, and I was expected to laugh at jokes where the punchlines were sexualities or gender identities. There were boys I knew who would get teased for being "effeminate" and girls who would be called "lesbians" for not performing feminine enough.

It has taken me a long time to confront my internalized homophobia, and I am still not completely over it. I think that my inability to feel anything but shame when I find a girl attractive, but don't shut up when I like a boy, is as telling as anything else. I remember acting in a scene for theater class in the ninth grade and being asked if my female scene partner and I were portraying lesbians, and being so offended. I was afraid that this person could tell what I was hiding. I was afraid that it didn't matter how many boys I had crushes on, I'd never convincingly be straight.

When I told my brother about a crush that I had on a boy, he said, "Oh, I was worried that you were gay." My reaction now would be, "What if I am? Fuck off," but back then, as a preteen who had only ever heard that being gay was bad, who had been told anything but straightness would make people uncomfortable, who had assumed that I'd be rejected by my loved ones and the Catholic Church that I'd belonged to since birth, I decided instead to deny any prospect that I could fall in love with anyone but a man. It's not like anything but a boyfriend was an option, anyway. At family gatherings, even when I was as young as eight, the question was always, "Which boy do you have a crush on?" or "So, who's your boyfriend?" On TV, all the girls kiss boys. On the playground, all of the boys liked girls, and I didn't know what a lesbian was but from how some kids would sneer, I could only assume it was a bad thing.



Nonnormativity Hate Myself

By Bea Mendoza

Sometimes, I'd cry, and because I was taught to turn to God in times of trouble, I'd try to talk to Him, but when the part of me most in need of healing seemed to be a sin, it felt so futile to pray. I have Googled, "Is it OK to be gay Catholic Church" and its variants so many times, only to be hurt and disappointed.

But I know more than anything else that God is loving. I have cried to God enough times, until one day reckoning that if it was wrong for me to fall in love with a girl, God would not have made it possible. I am not inherently evil for who I may or may not love. In a world that is so horrible, there is supposed to be a God whose love is rooted in kindness and acceptance. My homophobia and dissonance with the Church was not something from God, it was something from man.

If there is any sin related to sexuality, it is people's inability to live in the Godliness that they preach and simply accept people, and not just in spite of what they disagree with, and maybe not even because of that. We love and we love and we love and we love ...

It has long been insisted by mainstream society that we should be binary. That we are, or are not. That we are good, or bad. That we are straight, or not. Nothing is perfectly this or that, and the way that I have come to love how I love is to know that I am who I am, because I am. I know how fucking stupid that sounds, but acceptance comes in all forms and this is how it came to me. Still, it is hard.

I know that sexuality is a spectrum, and that, ultimately, it does not matter where I reside on that spectrum to anyone but me (and perhaps the people I want to smush faces with). But whenever I muster a mumble that I'm queer, or I look at a girl in a certain way, I can feel the panicked parts of myself reaching from the past. They tell me to stop whatever I'm doing and are backed by all of the people who didn't want to embrace anything but their versions of normalcy and acceptability.

But there is also a smaller version of myself from years before anyone told her who she has to be. She plays with Barbie dolls and sometimes they kiss. She does not yet know what it means to be a girl in love with a girl. She does not know straight or gay or anything beyond or in between. She does not have the vocabulary nor space to hate.

We are born wet clay, so malleable. We become that which holds us, mold into the shapes deemed correct. To repair baked clay, the only options are to use what is already available, and add on to what has broken. There are parts of me still afraid to love openly and freely, and I am more likely to tell you about the boy that I like than any other type of crush, but I am trying to overcome the hate that's inside me. I am trying.

I wish I didn't have to try so hard, and I wish I wasn't so sorry. All of the people who told me straight was the only way, who insisted the gays were evil and who made me feel so ashamed, they should be sorry. They should change. They need to change. I hope they've changed. I hope we can love.



DIARIES OF A CORPORATE SELLOUT



My summer working retail during the actual apocalypse

By Grace Getman

Trigger warnings: racism, police brutality, profanity, sexual harassment

Having worked as a cashier for four summers now, I can tell you that customer service is a retail as old as time. This does not change during the apocalypse. People always wonder what they would do during a zombie invasion, but I know the answer: be in line at Corporation Corp. The world may be ending, but your need for toilet paper sure hasn't.

Early June, early in the morning, but in a beautiful way: It is my first day. Manager Man tells me that Corporation Corp. does not enforce our state's mask policy as it is Bad for Business and Not Worth the Trouble. Partly out of caution and partly out of guilt, I begin to use hand sanitizer between every customer. Most people wear masks, though "wear" may be an overstatement. Having only recently emerged out of the Cave of Quarantine into the World of the Living, I become amazed at human creativity in avoiding caring about other people.

Early June, evening: A woman comes up to the counter and complains about another customer who asked why Complaining Woman wasn't wearing a mask. This becomes a problem as Complained-About Woman is directly behind her. They begin to fight. On her way out, Complaining Woman calls Complained-About Woman a "stupid ugly bitch." Stupid Ugly Bitch is perfectly nice when I ring her up. I try to express through my eyes how much I agree with her, which may have only come out as a squint.

Early June, mid-afternoon: As a woman who exists in Society, I am used to the diminutives that are given to young women and have probably lost feminist points by giving up my outrage on the subject. Honeys, sweethearts and darlings drop from customers effortlessly. I try not to take it personally. In fact, the regular customer who's nicest, a Southern Gentleman, refers to me as "doll." That same day, another man walks up to the counter. He is no Southern Gentleman. He refers to me in every single sentence as "girl," and I begin to regain my feminist points. He leaves before my customer service smile can fully leave my face.

Mid-June, mid-afternoon: A white man with Chia Pet hair throws his sodas onto the conveyor belt and begins, unprompted, to tell me his thoughts on the Black Lives Matter movement, which is exactly the action me existing as a cashier both asked and encouraged him to take. He tells me that Eric Garner and Ahmaud Arbery did not deserve to die, but George Floyd had it coming with his criminal background and degenerate ways. He says that I would get it as a person with no criminal background making an honest living cashiering. I decline to tell him that Corporation Corp. does not drug test and their background checks are sketchy at best, and that my only credibility to him as Someone Who Does Not Deserve to Die is my white skin. I stare blankly at him, refusing to give him the satisfaction that I "get it."

Mid-June, early afternoon: A woman comes up to the counter and purchases \$500 in Google Play gift cards. She tells me, smiling, that the gift cards are for her boyfriend in Canada, who somehow gets money from them. I do not think that Canadian boyfriend is real and ask my coworker about it. She replies that as long as money is good, Canadian Boyfriend Woman can get as many Google Play gift cards as she'd like.

Mid-June, early evening: Corporation Corp., stocked to the brim with processed foods has given me a newfound expertise in the art of the Hot Pocket, but also has left me subject to random rapid-onset insatiable cravings for vegetables. Today, I sit outside after my shift at a grocery store which bears a ragged banner naming it "The Best Little Grocery Store in America" – animalistically devouring an entire package of miniature cucumbers. A Black Lives Matter protest appears in front of me as if a mirage in the summer heat. They stand outside of The Best Little Grocery Store in America, demanding an end to racial profiling and to being followed by white employees in the store. I sit, unsure if girls bearing unreasonable numbers of cucumbers will be accepted in the revolution. I join in the chants and cheer anyway, leaving my cucumber concerns to the winds. The protest moves on just as fast as it came. I finish the cucumbers.

Late June, too early in the goddamn morning: Bland white woman that I do not recognize: "I swear every time I come in here, you're at the counter. Are you stalking me?" I laugh politely, too tired to work through the implications of her statement. She stares balefully at me, unyielding, and then adds tersely: "I'm not joking."

Early July, at a perfectly civil hour that did not merit this: A white man and a Black woman walk into a store, and it isn't a setup for a joke. They confront each other over a driving dispute. White man, who is complaining about the Black woman's driving, is identified by her as being a "punk ass motherfucker." I don't disagree. Punk Ass Motherfucker stalks away from her, unable to convince Alleged Bad Driver of her sins. He walks up to the register, throws his money on the conveyor belt and yells at

me for daring to get him his coins. I hand him only the dollar bills and slip my resentment into a practiced customer service smile. On his way out the door, Punk Ass Motherfucker cries out, "God, I just want to get out of this store. Do you see what's happening here? I'm getting fucking lit up by Black people!"

I let the next customer, a Black man who began to speak in defense of Alleged Bad Driver, use the change that Punk Ass Motherfucker left on the counter.

Early July, still too early in the goddamn morning: It is a rare moment. I am thinking of all the nice things that I have seen at Corporation Corp. and how our humanity is revealed in our mundanity. I remember the woman who settled down another customer's unruly child with a bag of fruit snacks that she paid for using food stamps. I think of how Manager Man gives small children in the store free stuff (which is shoplifting, but hey, it's not stealing when non-cashiers do it). I think of the woman who told me that I had a beautiful name, and to go home and tell my parents that she said so. I think about how, even in the middle of what seems to be the end times, we can pull it together occasionally. Just for a second, I'm slightly proud of myself, my store and my community, as tired and as completely stupid and as relentlessly consumerist we all are.

These thoughts are interrupted by an old man asking a woman to wear a mask. She does not respond well, declaring that she will be fine because he is wearing a mask, I am wearing a mask and that they are 6 feet apart from each other. She says it is 8 a.m. and too early in the morning for this bullshit. He replies that it is in fact 9 a.m. This is not the sick burn he thinks it to be, but I side with him nonetheless.

I decline to explain to the woman that the mask is more to protect others from her than to protect her from others, feeling that would earn me a stern talking-to from Corporation Corp. I ring her items, allowing her bag to rip and not re-bagging her items as an act of revenge.

As the old man exits, she yells out: "Fuck you bitch, I hope you catch it and die!"

The next customer comes, and my rehearsed smile comes out.

"Hi! How did you find everything at Corporation Corp. today? The weather is certainly a scorcher, isn't it?"

And the beat continues on.



Modern Dating Is a Trend

By Juana Moya

XOXOXOX

Dating is a trend — let me explain. I don't mean this to sound like I resent couples for being happy or that I think romance is dead. I ESPECIALLY don't mean this to sound like I'm unhappy being single, so what's the big deal? Growing up, I had a very glorified view of what I would be like as a teen/adult, not unlike every other kid at the time. It was filled with the run-of-the-mill attributes that kids admired in adulthood. I wanted a bright red convertible to drive my friends around in, the latest cell phone, the cutest clothes and the most surface-level popularity. Most importantly, I wanted the hottest boyfriend who would do the most gushy-wushy acts of romance that were so sweet, he would give me and everyone around him cavities.

Despite the cliches and heteronormativity, most young girls had the same fantasy. Being swept

off their feet by some guy in high school, leading to marriage, three kids and a house with a white picket fence. We all wanted that happily ever after that has been shoved down our throats with every piece of media that we consumed. Shows I watched growing up, "Wizards of Waverly Place," "Zoey 101," "iCarly" and "Good Luck Charlie" (to name a few) always had an element of romance present within their plotlines. It seems to me that any show with a female lead at the time eventually had a potential romantic interest introduced.

In hindsight, this obviously has a wide margin of error, however, teen romance has been a prevalent expectation within high school culture for decades. What does this have to do with modern relationships? Well, for me it meant that a relationship was almost guaranteed the

moment I started high school. This led to a rude awakening for MANY reasons, however, as the years went on, the lack of any romantic endeavors in my life was beginning to settle as self-doubt in my mind. I was constantly wondering, "Am I being too loud? Am I pretty enough? Am I talking too much? Being too much?" These intrusive thoughts began to subdue my personality to become "more agreeable." I learned how to flirt with men and women, eventually landing me my first "relationship." Finally! The Teen Romance™ I had been waiting my entire high school career for! As happy as I was, my self-consciousness had risen through the roof. Any slight change in the tone of voice in my partner or if he was acting slightly different from the norm sent my mind into MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE. The expectations that had been set for me by the media I consumed had not been met. When the relationship ended, my sense of self had plummeted dramatically. But after the right amount of time and healing, I asked myself, "Why did I even want a relationship so badly?" It helped that my crush was attractive and caring, but more realistically, it was because I felt left behind.

I was 17 when I got into that relationship, so many friends of mine





already had been in and out of relationships, or had been committed, whereas all I did was pine silently over the latest crush of mine. To put it simply, I wanted one because everyone else had one. Seeing people in happy/supportive relationships made an easy target for jealousy. I didn't want to be left out of the seemingly ESSENTIAL world of dating. This feeling of exclusion is something that I've secretly struggled with in romantic settings. I didn't want to complain about my lack of experience in fear of seeming shallow or desperate. Dating in high school has such a culture around it that I felt like I HAD to participate or else I was going to seem estranged and unlikeable. It was like playing catch-up in a game where other players had a head start and I had barely warmed up. Nowadays, it's so easy to become swallowed up in longing for a relationship, especially since its influence seems to be everywhere, from #CoupleGoals Insta posts to TikTok

couples going on cute picnics, to regular old TV and film. No matter where you look, it seems like everyone on earth is in a relationship. The severe exposure to romance paired with the idolization that comes from relationships is what makes dating a trend. It's what makes us see cute couples and say to ourselves, "Man, I want what they have."

This pressure to just find a relationship and be happy, especially within younger women, seems to stem from the long-held belief that women can't be happy unless they're in a relationship. Luckily, nowadays we realize that we are complete and developed people on our own, regardless of our relationship status. Wanting a partner and romance is something human, and even if a romantic/sexual partner is not something you look for in life, it's all a part of the human experience. However, this pressure to jump into a relationship before you're ready is harmful to not only yourself, but

also to any potential partners. This imaginary race to see who's the "most experienced" is just that: imaginary. Whenever you begin dating it should be only because you feel ready for it. And if you're not ready yet, remember that taking time to figure yourself out is nothing to be ashamed of.

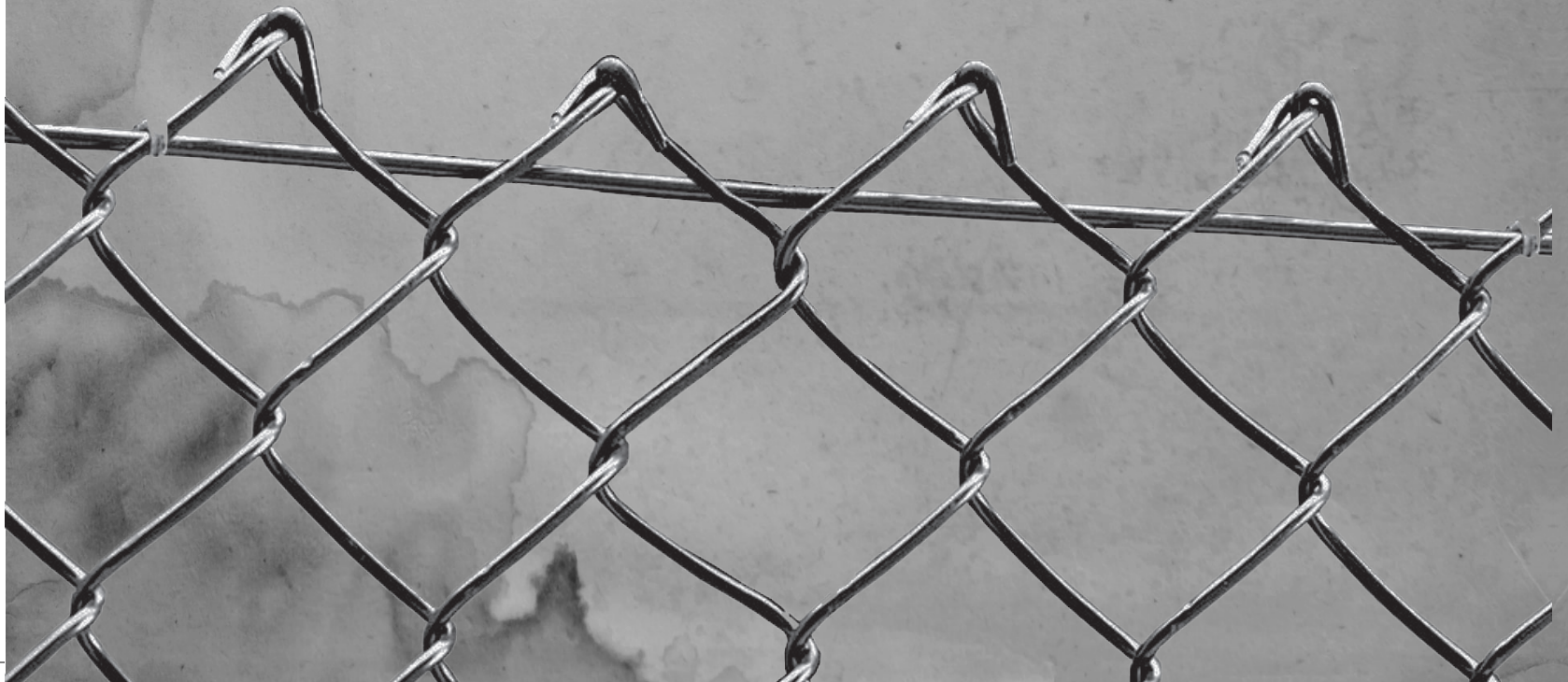
Ultimately, relationships are something that will come with time. We've got our whole lives ahead of us to find "the one." We are all capable, worthy and deserving of love no matter what. What motivates you to get into a relationship should be the chance to get to know your partner, not the pressure or fear of being left out. If you're emotionally ready and available for a relationship, by all means, go for it. Your whole life is waiting for you and there will always be time for love. Take your time, there's no rush.

X O X O X O X O

THE AMERICAN DREAM BECOMES A NIGHTMARE

By Ava Karas

There is one dream that floats above our nation, inextricably linked to our country's history and character, which holds together the very fabric of our economic and social systems: the American Dream. For most of us growing up, this term was tossed vaguely into the air in social studies classes, political debates on TV and most definitely at patriotic celebrations of any kind. The American Dream ... the elusive American Dream. *The United States is a country of opportunity, we're rolling in it. People here can have it all — cars, big houses, vacations, money, whitened teeth, security, comfortable cushions to stick your ass in after a long, hard day at work — you name it, you can have it. You just have to work for it. Pull yourselves up by your bootstraps and you can have some of that, too. You can be just like them.*



So believed the countless waves of immigrants as they neared the United States, clutching their luggage and their children, stuffing their native language into themselves and replacing it with foreign, harsh vowels, words and sounds that seemed to skim over the meaning of the word rather than unravel it in a beautiful, seamless arch. So the descendants of slaves laughed as they were fed these words of blind-sided hope, as they grew to realize that this dream, this thing that people speak of with wide eyes and beaming hearts, never applied to them, as their ancestors were piled onto very different ships than those of their white peers, denied all luxuries of such an abundantly rich country, with no claim to the adoration and invigoration that this so called dream, masked as an insatiable nightmare, evoked in the rest of the world.

**work
hard**

**& you could
have some
of that, too.**

They said to the college student, who worked two jobs outside of their daily load of classes, stretching out money to fit into the massive tuition bill, not one bit decreased by their parents' menial income, struggling to stay awake at night to finish that one essay that seemed to drag on and on, their mind fighting to make sense of the prompt despite the cups and cups of caffeine, draining their wallets, their focus and their spirits. *Work hard, and you can have some of that, too.* They said to the single mother, who worked a fulfilling yet stingy job that provided her no paid time of leave, no childcare, who tried to ignore the exhaustion she felt when she loped down the hall to check on her newborn, who tried to ignore the tightening in her chest when she looked at her bank account after some months of leave, who tried to ignore the stinging of tears in her eyes when she felt her responsibilities begin to clamp down on her and crush her, because she wanted that child and she could handle it, damn it. *Work hard, and you can have some of that, too.* They said to the housekeeper, whose soaring intellect and academic talent was diminished to cleaning the floors of a towering, soulless mansion at some worthless rate per hour, trying to save it all to work toward a formal education, but watching it slip away month by month as rent, food, heating whipped out its greedy talons and took, took, took.

You can be just like them. They said, pointing to the debt-free college sophomore with parents who lived in a sprawling California cul de sac, her, sporting a bright "FEMINIST" t-shirt and a wholesome, bought smile, claiming to be part of a movement when the very shirt she was wearing had been sewn by the hands of underage, underpaid, abused female workers in a land far away. *You can be just like them.* They said, pointing to a successful lawyer, who worked so intensely and bought cars and a luxury apartment in Miami and a handmade Italian motorbike but always felt empty, like an orange devoid of its juices, waiting to dry out completely and shrivel away into nothing. *You can be just like them.* They said, pointing to the tall, spray-tanned man on the television, bequeathed a life of wealth and pleasure, and playing with the people, the country, the world and its dreams at his whims.



DON'T RAIN ON MY PARADE

... or actually maybe do



By Nicole Vitiello

Like most New Yorkers, the sight of Bill de Blasio fills me with rage. But when he got on television on April 20 and announced that the NYC Pride Parade was canceled for the first time in 50 years, the only thing I felt was relief.

My reaction was due in part to my concerns for public safety. We may not know everything about how the coronavirus spreads, but one thing we're sure of is that large crowds pose a massive health risk. And while de Blasio's horrific handling of this crisis has mostly just exacerbated my antagonism toward him, his decision to cancel all nonessential city events for the month of June is one that I can stand behind.

Pandemic-related reasoning aside, though, I am actually genuinely glad that the parade is not taking place this year, and here's why.

Pride Month™ has largely been reduced to an opportunity for corporations to capitalize on queer identities, positioning themselves as LGBTQ+ allies without actually supporting the community in any meaningful way. Each June, more and more for-profit institutions across all industries — from fashion brands, to banking companies, to streaming services and more — jump at the chance to roll out rainbow merchandise, slap their logo on a parade float and launch Pride-themed ad campaigns that champion "equality" in only the vaguest of terms. Yet for the other 11 months of the year, most of these companies don't even pretend to give a fuck about queer and nonbinary people or their rights. And in some cases, Pride's corporate sponsors actually harm queer communities.

Take the pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, for example. Gilead was one

of the major sponsors of WorldPride NYC 2019. They produce a medication that can reduce the risk of HIV transmitted through sex by up to 90%, but it can cost more than \$2,000 per month without health insurance. That four-figure price range is horrifying enough as it is, but it's even more sinister given the fact that a month's supply costs just \$6 to manufacture. Even worse, Gilead refuses to release the patent for the drug, preventing the production of an affordable generic version. As the HIV epidemic disproportionately affects poverty-stricken urban areas in the United States, the exorbitant price tag on this medication means that those who need the drug the most cannot afford it. Moreover, gay and bisexual Black men have the highest rates of HIV in the country, but 75% of people who use Gilead's preventive medication are white. The fact that the populations most impacted by HIV do not have access to this drug makes it clear that Gilead doesn't actually care whether queer people live or die — they only care about making money. So, what the fuck were they doing sponsoring the biggest LGBTQ+ event in history???

Case in point, capitalist exploitation of queerness is utterly reprehensible, and even if things were happening as normal, I think I'd be struggling with the moral ramifications of participating in such a disturbing show of tokenism. And while I'm airing my grievances, I'd also like to point out that corporations aren't the only ones co-opting Pride Month. Just as companies see Pride as one big marketing opportunity, a lot of young straight people see it as an excuse to drink and party in the streets. Now, don't get me wrong — I'm not trying to argue that there isn't a place for straight allies at Pride, or that the event itself shouldn't be a cause for celebration. All I'm saying is that intentions matter, as does being aware of the

history of the event. And after a nauseating conversation I had in which a friend of mine likened Pride to the New York Village Halloween Parade, I'm increasingly concerned about the disconnect between the modern-day manifestation of the movement and the political necessity out of which it was born.

Even in 2020, we cannot forget that the queer liberation movement began with a riot. We cannot forget that it was a reaction to targeted, violent policing of queer patrons at the Stonewall Inn bar in Manhattan on June 28, 1969. We cannot forget that the initial uprising was led by trans women of color, namely Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. We cannot forget that the first Pride march, held one year later to commemorate the Stonewall Riots, was not a parade, but a protest. Especially in 2020, in light of recent events, we cannot forget that all of the progress that's been made so far has been hard-earned, that actual people fought back and were arrested and brutalized and killed for years in order to enact change.

Although the circumstances surrounding the cancellation of NYC's 2020 Pride Parade are unfortunate, maybe this is a chance to recenter. The disruption will provide a fresh start for next year's festivities, an opportunity to refocus the events around intersectionality and non-performative activism. As a young queer-identifying person myself, I understand firsthand just how important it is to uplift LGBTQ+ identities. Hell, my first Pride left me feeling so empowered that I came out to my parents the very next weekend. So no, I'm not calling for Pride to be scrapped completely and canceled forever — I just hope that we can shift the focus back to celebrating the work that's been done and educating ourselves about the steps we need to take going forward.

H O M A G E

T O H O M E



Ester Rekhelman created this piece two months into quarantine — morale was low, but seeing the place that she called home go through the horrors of a COVID-19 spike in April and come out stronger on the other side made her feel proud and empowered. She looked forward to the 7 p.m. clanging each night, cheering on the local health care workers and running past the desolate streets with children’s drawings of rainbows saying thank you to the local heroes. Amid all the current uncertainty, looking back at this collage reminds her that she really does live in the best and toughest place on Earth, and she can’t wait to see it bounce back once again.

The Problems Growing Up Mixed Race

By Avalyn Kwai Pun

"Quatre-vingt-sept pour cent," she spoke to me in a soft voice – but still loud enough so my family could hear. "Pardon?" My Canadian French was a little rusty, but it was good enough to understand that she had called me "87%." "She means that you look 87% Chinese," my dad explained with a cheeky smile. I was confused. This relative was my grandmother's sister who lived in Montreal with the majority of my dad's side of the family. Even though they were all Chinese, we all spoke more French than Mandarin. "How could I look more Chinese than white? I'm literally 50/50," I said back to my father. That one

comment inspired a question that has haunted me since: "Am I too Chinese?"

Camp Couchiching, October 2016. I was on a field trip with my seventh grade class. The counselors had just instructed us to group off into teams of five. My friend (who happened to be Japanese) grabbed my arm and pulled me into a group of other kids. We made up the perfect team, exactly five of us ... and we all happened to be Asian. "OK kids! Is everyone in teams? Perfect! Now, nickname your team!" The whole squad giggled at what felt like an inside joke that I didn't understand. "What?" I asked them. "We should call ourselves," my friend whispered to all of us, "the Asian Invasion!" We all laughed in agreement. We raised our fists in the air and chanted our nickname. The other teams laughed along with us. Later that day, as we sat in the grass and waited for our turn on the ropes course, one of my teammates commented, "I wish that Avalyn was fully Chinese though, now we're just 4.5 Asians, that's

hardly an invasion." She didn't mean anything rude by it, but imagine an already insecure preteen, mixed-race woman being told that she "just doesn't fit in." Growing up, I always felt that I was too white for my Asian friends or too Asian for my white friends. From elementary school all the way through high school, I dropped the friends that made a big deal of my race and kept the ones that didn't comment on it, or if they did, at least respected my boundaries.

The lack of Asian representation in the media is profound. Representation is one of the most important things for a child to grow up with because role models of shared identities boost self-confidence. Media that claims it is diverse is oftentimes lacking Asian representation. While having Black characters is great for representation, and there are still problems regarding Black representation in media, I rarely see my ethnicity on screen. A popular show that most people love,



"Grey's Anatomy," is a perfect example of a "diverse" show. Right now, the cast consists of 14 main characters. Three of those characters are African American, one is mixed (half African American, half white) and the rest are white — none are Asian. This is just the surface of the lack of representation of Asians in the media. And even when there is Asian representation, it is not always done "right." One of my favourite Asian characters is Diane Nyugen in the animated series "Bojack Horseman" — but she's voiced by a white woman! I had a conversation with my Canadian Scottish mother about Asian representation in the media and she just couldn't understand what I was trying to convey. This might have to do with our different perspectives — she was able to relate to the blonde-haired, fair-skinned, blue-eyed girls on her TV screen that mirrored her own. Those white characters were also three

dimensional and had other great redeeming qualities. Just look at one of my favourite shows, "Gossip Girl." Our main stars are all white, boys and girls. While they are all talented actors and actresses, the only Asian representation in the first couple seasons is a super smart and dorky side character. The strong, passionate and dramatic focuses of the story all represent white people. I never had that. At most, I had "Mulan," and she is a total badass and I love her — but that's besides the point. The lack of Asian representation in the film industry and in TV shows is frankly dis-

"I'd always felt that growing up, I was too white for my Asian friends, or too Asian for my white friends."

gusting, and even though it is 2020, we are still not being portrayed on TV accurately or properly. This is exemplified by whitewashing, casting Asian actors for diversity points, or creating stereotypical or dramatized characters.

Growing up mixed race and having to deal with these struggles from a young age is never easy, from not looking like my mother to rarely seeing myself represented on TV. But, as I grew up, I realized that my race really doesn't define me. You do not have to be the token Asian friend. It took me a while to understand that, but once I did, I felt a thousand times more comfortable with who I was and my heritage. I wish that I could say that you should, "follow these steps to not feel out of place," but I can't. Accepting your race and heritage is something that takes time and hard work, but it's all worth it in the end — you can learn more about yourself, and become more comfortable with who you are.





Spice Aisle, Tuesday.

By: Rachel McGrath



I'm stocking produce today, rotating and culling through the same items I stocked yesterday. The produce from the day before that is long gone. It's the same routine every day, undoing and correcting and repeating the work of a previous me. I like the consistency and the time I have for my mind to wander. I like to think about the very full, very real lives of the people around me. I think about where our store is on the to-do list of each customer, if they made a list first, if this is their typical shopping time or a break from routine.

The tower of waxed cardboard boxes starts to lean toward a middle-aged customer in dark scrubs and I hurry to adjust it without him noticing or falling victim to it. He doesn't notice because his eyes are down, staring at his own feet in rubber shoes. He peeks up at me only briefly to ask if the store carries black sesame seeds and a spice I've never heard of before.

I tell him I'm not sure, but we can look together. He smiles weakly in thanks. We walk to the spice aisle together, and I slow my pace so he doesn't notice a disparity between us. I'm struggling to find either item at first glance, so I ask him what he's making.

"Well, it's supposed to be a Hindu healing practice," he says, eyes to his shoes again. "I don't really know, but I read about it online and it's

supposed to help." His pale cheeks turn to blush. Help what? I wonder. Or who?

I quietly ask a coworker who's more familiar with this department where the items may be found. She tilts her head and repeats my question, asking the man what he's making. He mumbles something adjacent to what he told me moments before. She heads to a different aisle, but not confidently, so we continue to skim through the spices.

He's wearing a flimsy paper name tag, curling up at a corner. At a closer glance, it doesn't have his name, but the word "Visitor" next to the name of a local hospital.

They're not scrubs that he's wearing. Well, they might be in a general sense, but he's not a doctor or nurse. He knows someone in the hospital, a patient. I wonder if he came here immediately after leaving the hospital. It wouldn't be far.

He's stopped looking for the items on the shelves, or pretending to look for them. He's quiet again, but I can understand what he's saying. "I appreciate you trying. I'm new to this, but I figured it was worth a try."

I see the dark half-circles under his eyes, and the wrinkles by the corners of his mouth and at the bottom of his neck. I see the nights without sleep and the afternoons with attempts at

sleep in a brightly lit hospital room. I see the friend, sibling, child, parent, losing weight and hope in a tiny bed, falling victim to a vast illness with no cure in sight. I see the required temperature checks, gloves, masks, questionnaires that are probably routine to him now. He's still wearing his mask, and there's hand sanitizer in his shopping basket. I see a man, once a boy who went to church every Sunday with his parents, who fell away from it in adolescence, and is now trying again, going through practices of spirituality like shoes that don't quite fit but might do the trick for an evening. I see a man who didn't want to ask for help, who didn't want to share his rationale, who wanted to leave the store without talking to anyone or admitting his fear. A man who will try anything that works.

My coworker returns without good news. However, she recommends a few local markets that might do the trick. He briefly smiles, and he stands up a little straighter before thanking us again. We wish him luck, and then he is gone.



In my Mind

By: Blue
Prins-Erickson



This piece was inspired by "Entangle" by Tony Hoagland

I woke up late today, I've been having trouble sleeping. I look around at surfaces cluttered with anything and everything, clothes strewn haphazardly on the floor and over the back of my chair. But, "Sometimes I prefer not to untangle it. I prefer it to remain disorganized." My mother doesn't understand it. She can't work in a mess. She hates being in my room because it makes her anxious. Maybe I'll grow out of it but I don't know. I sort of thrive off of the mess. But only to a certain extent.

I know that the poem is more metaphorical than this, but my first instinct is to write about the mess that I sit in at my desk in the midst of all the clutter.

I work while listening to music. And not a "study time" playlist on spotify. Right now, "Doo Wop (That Thing)" by Ms. Lauryn Hill is playing. Having more than one stimulant helps my brain focus. Because when there isn't

enough going on, I get distracted in my own head.

"yet I prefer to walk down Reba Street instead in the sunlight and the wind, with no mastery of my feelings or my thoughts." I wish I could let go enough to be OK with having "no mastery of my feelings." I "need to control" everything that is going on in my brain. Which is hard, really hard. I think, maybe, that is why I'm so OK with everything being in such chaos around me. Because I try so hard to keep everything controlled inside of myself.

Now playing is "Oops!...I Did It Again" by Britney Spears.

Or maybe it is too hard to control everything around me at the same time as I attempt to keep everything in my head in line.

"in an unimpressive yard, in front of a house that seems unoccupied: a chest

high, spreading shrub with large white waxy blossoms." In analyzing this section of the poem, I write "the juxtaposition of the 'unimpressive' yard and empty house versus the shrub woven with intrigue gives the reader the ability to understand the importance that 'tangle' plays in the poet's life." But if I try to apply this interpretation to my original focus, it doesn't work, or rather, it's kind of sad. Because it would mean that my brain is the "unimpressive yard" and "house that seems unoccupied" and that my outward appearance is what is "woven with intrigue."

So, maybe, I should be less hard on myself for the way that my brain works. Maybe, I should be more OK with listening to a playlist titled "2000s Bangers" instead of ones called "Study Time" while I write. Because that's what makes the processes of my brain unique.



The Interesting Co

KILLING EVE

and

Warning: slight "Breaking Bad" and "Killing Eve" spoilers ahead

BY MADDIE HILF

"Killing Eve" had been on my watchlist for over a year. I remember seeing the Golden Globes in 2019 and watching Sandra Oh historically win for Best Performance By An Actress In A Television Series - Drama. I was a huge fan of hers from "Grey's Anatomy," loved the fact that the show was created and is run by women, with women in front of and behind the camera and a woman of color in the title role, and knew that the BBC was reliable with good TV after seeing "Sherlock" and "Orphan Black." Finally, during quarantine, I had the time to consume a lot of content, and I started "Killing Eve."

I was hooked immediately. It was the fastest I have ever binged a TV show, and I miss it now. The writing is perfect, the story creative and unique. Every episode was wild, but the Season 2 finale in particular (iykyk) had me screaming. Both Oh and Jodie Comer's performances, as Eve Polastri and Villanelle

respectively, are some of the best I have seen on TV. Their characters are rich and complex. Essentially, the series is fresh – to see two incredibly powerful women with agency and expertise in their jobs is something I am not used to seeing on television and in movies. It is satisfying, because though it is rarely so explicitly represented onscreen, it is real life. The exploration of their love/hate relationship, the humanity found within complicated characters – all of it was refreshing to see. It is one of my favorite shows. Another favorite show of mine, "Breaking Bad," may seem like an unlikely comparison but some similarities and major differences came to mind especially regarding the public's response to each show and their secondary characters. I will analyze them to illustrate the curious correlation between which characters audiences embrace and which they despise (can you guess?).

"Breaking Bad" follows the shocking experiences of high school chemistry teacher Walter White (Bryan Cranston)

when he is diagnosed with cancer and, in an act of desperation, decides to cook and sell crystal meth with his former student. The writing is astonishingly good, you root for the characters despite what they are involved in, and the teacher/student to partners-in-crime relationship arc is interesting as it unfolds. But it is extremely violent and extremely masculine. One woman in it, Walter's wife Skyler, played by Anna Gunn, does not know about his new business until later, and when she finds out, is completely disgusted (as she should be). Though, a part of her still supports her husband, and she even helps him launder money at one point. Walter is a sympathetic character at first, but he just gets away with everything, and the more evil he becomes, the more I wished for him to get what was coming to him.

"Killing Eve" is the story of a hard-working and passionate MI6 agent, Eve Polastri, who while investigating a highly skilled Russian assassin, becomes obsessed – with finding her or admiring her talent? – it's hard to say. Villanelle likewise becomes obsessed with Eve and the two women perpetually chase each other, unable to quit.



Contrast Between

and

³⁵ Breaking

⁵⁶ Bad

30

Their mutual infatuation as it manifests itself is exciting to watch. Their chemistry is strong, they are both brilliant and the way they respect each other deeply and test each other is thrilling to follow. "Killing Eve" is violent as well, but in another way – Villanelle is trapped in this career with no way out. Though she is a psychopath, she is a sympathetic character.

I want to talk about the spouses of each main character in these two shows. Since Skyler speaks out against Walter's harmful, poor choices, she is hated. The internet started a movement dedicated to fiercely hating her because she dared to be worried about the fact that her husband is in the dangerous business of illegal drugs, kills people without remorse, exhibits such extreme behavior and causes damage to their family. I mean that sounds pretty reasonable to me, and I always agreed with Skyler. But people were MAD, taking Walter's side always. They said horrific things about her. It even reached the point that Gunn was threatened just for playing the character.

She penned an article to speak up about the years of relentless hate poured onto her during the show. In it she said, "Male characters don't seem to inspire this kind of public venting and vitriol," and she is absolutely right.

In "Killing Eve," as Eve's fascination with Villanelle becomes more intense, her husband Niko expresses his reservations regarding their safety and her never being dependable. Eve has all of the power in the relationship and dismisses his concerns, distancing herself from him and doing whatever she wants anyway. I always took Eve's side, but some people have the opinion that she should be less hard on him. No one criticizes him even though he is doing just what Skyler was, in essence. Niko is pitied, while Skyler was hated with such fury. Walter is quick to be forgiven for his deliberate bad choices and horrendous actions, yet Eve is criticized for being committed to her job. The inherent sexism is evident in the way

these characters have been publicly interpreted.

"Killing Eve" and "Breaking Bad" have distinct stories, but some formulaic similarities exist in the fact that they both contain characters who are not easy to like yet can still be empathized with. The way in which the typical gender roles are changed between the shows and therefore reacted to vastly differently by audiences is telling evidence of misogyny, restrictions placed on women and their potential, limiting expectations that they must stick to or there will be an outcry. I found it quite fascinating noticing some of the elements of these two great shows that just expose one instance regarding how strong women characters, as opposed to men, are publicly viewed and judged. It's a disconcerting and harmful trend and attitudes need to change.



WHY I GO TO CLUBS

GIRLS
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BY FRANCES MCCANN

Trigger warnings: body image, sexual content

By the time I started my freshman year of college, I had been to clubs and bars many times, even though I had only just recently turned 18. To celebrate our newfound adulthood, my roommates, their friend and I went to a popular bar near campus, escorted by an upperclassman we knew. We didn't really like him, but he was over 21 and kept our cups full. By the end of the night, all of us were the drunkest we had ever been in our lives, and I don't remember how, but I had begun to make-out with my roommates' friend. We went back to my room and had drunken, awkward sex.

It was my first time with a girl, my first time with anyone.

The next day, I called my best friend of five years. She had just recently started having sex and we recognized

that she was a real woman now. I was so excited to tell her that I was finally grown up too, but she snidely commented that, unlike her experiences with men, sex with women didn't count. I was still a child in her eyes. I asked some of my other friends if the sex I had counted. The answer was unanimously no. If it wasn't PIV sex, it was invalid. I was determined to have a sexual experience that counted. I continued to go to bars, but only to pick up men.

Now, I set down my bag of clothes and makeup on my friend's bed. The other girls already have on a full face of makeup and are choosing their outfits. I start to get ready too, untwisting my hair and taking a drink from our bedazzled communal flask. One of my friends squeals seeing the contents of my bag: two different crop tops, jean shorts and a mini skirt. She hands me the shorts and lower-cut top. She says these

will be better to dance in, and will better show off my body. Another friend gets a call. It's the group of boys we'll be meeting at the club downtown. We are late and the boys are getting impatient.

Twenty minutes later, our Uber arrives and we all pile into the backseat, giddy and a little drunk. We talk only about boys; kissing them, touching them, dancing with them and pause only to tell the driver to turn up the radio because our song is on. No one is concerned about their early morning shift tomorrow or the paper due Monday morning. Within the four walls of this Honda CR-V, there is only room for heteronormativity. The boys are why we go to clubs after all.

My friends and I finally arrive downtown. We show our IDs and are let in even though none of us are older than 19. I immediately order drinks at the bar, drowning my fears and anxieties in a pink liquid

CLUBS

that burns. Maybe this is why I only pursue men at clubs, being with them anywhere else feels unnatural. These dirty, sweaty, hot clubs that don't mind selling cranberry vodkas to teenagers with big tits feel like the perfect place to blend in with the other hormonal teens and 20-some-things.

Here, I can interact in that way with men. I can do something that counts.

I have a few more drinks and start to get loose, pulling my shirt down and rolling my shorts up another inch. I dance and writhe to the rhythm of some bass-boosted song and wait for the callused hands of a stranger to grab my hips. In the back, I spot a group of Black and Hispanic boys. I gravitate toward them, knowing that as a Black girl in the Deep South, they are

the only ones willing to be my dance partners. I glide past the groups of white dancers, pretending to ignore them as they look right through me. Only one song goes by before I feel someone fit their groin to my ass. I look at my friends with eyes that ask, "Is he cute?" I don't really care what they say because I have been chosen.

My friends buy me more alcohol, literally inserting a straw into my mouth so I can simultaneously dance and drink. I am bored by this man, this dance and this club. I begin to zone out and almost fall out of rhythm with the song. The only thing that keeps me going is the cheers from my onlooking friends and my ability to tell this story for many nights to come. I am having a true college experience. Doing something dirty with a man, drinking

illegally as a teenager, finally becoming a woman.

The man pulls me closer to his groin and I do as I am told and grind against his crotch. His hands crawl up from my hips and onto my stomach. I tear them away and place them on my tits, my good fat. I never face him. The thought of his recoil upon seeing my face, glasses and gummy smile keep me enslaved to my dance. The music will stop and everyone will either sober up or break off into horny pairs. I only turn around to kiss him, our eyes closed and prejudices unnamed.

I go to clubs because it is how I blend in. If I am grabbed and passed around from man to man and submerged in dollar shots, it means someone wants me in some way. It is me doing something that counts.

"I AM HAVING A TRUE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE. DOING SOMETHING DIRTY WITH A MAN, DRINKING ILLEGALLY AS A TEENAGER, FINALLY BECOMING A WOMAN."



BY REBECCA SLAMAN

There's this trend on TikTok of commenting "Does she listen to girl in red?" on a hot girl's post in order to ascertain if she is gay. This pisses me off. Because I don't listen to girl in red. Am I gay? YES. Women who love women are almost universally associated with sad indie pop. I never agreed to this, and I want to try to work through why this perception exists.



Don't get me wrong: We definitely do listen to this kind of music. Go to a Brandi Carlile show and see how many women with colored hair you can count. Many people have written about the crushing loneliness of being lesbian. Generally being excluded from the patriarchal version of personhood can do that. The overall queer experience often comes with the personal struggle of doubting one's own identity and feeling erased. Think of the sad, indie-pop sounds of Dodie, Mitski or

Sufjan Stevens, who express a sonic loneliness. There's something about ethereal synths and soft, whispered lyrics that make you wonder if you are the only person in the world. It's easy to wallow in this feeling and romanticize it to cope. But just as this isn't the only emotion we feel, it isn't the only music we should be associated with. The girls like to throw it back sometimes!

Going to a gay club (RIP) means constant bangers and dance pop, while lesbian bars don't have that kind of consistency in musical style. As a lady gay, I love Gaga, Carly Rae and, of course, my bisexual queen Demi Lovato. They are staples in pop culture; their excellent, danceable music connects everyone, but they're specifically claimed by gay men as icons. Rather than claim that no lesbian mainstream pop fans exist, I think we are simply being overlooked. It is normative for women to be interested in celebrity; teenage girl fans are often scoffed at for their "shallow" tastes. This goes doubly for male artists. Gay men are stereotyped for loving female pop queens, but women uplifting male artists is the norm. In the patriarchy, men respecting women is abnormal, while women respecting men is expected.

Historically, lesbians have been associated with bra burning and

angry guitars. The '90s, it seems, were a time for loud gay girls to thrive. Second-wave feminism was kicking ass and taking names, and with it came the riot grrrl scene. Women were coming together to yell about politics and The Man while finding community in music. Think about that description of Kat from "10 Things I Hate About You" that's in so many Bumble bios: "Likes Thai food, feminist prose and angry girl music of the indie rock persuasion." Why did this scene die out? While "lesbian music" might have been descriptive, it was also used derogatorily. Fear that all feminists were secretly lesbians was damaging in a homophobic and misogynistic society. The riot grrrl scene was seen as too abrasive and radical. This could be another reason why a toned-down image is more acceptable now.





Sad malaise is more palatable than intense expression.

With mainstream celebrity culture now, it's assumed that female fans want to have sex with their male idols. This idea needs unpacking. When thinking gender-neutrally, fans attach themselves to lyrics and emotions. Why is female attraction to male musicians seen as solely sexual? This perception may erase lesbian fans altogether. Hozier is one of the few current straight male artists (possibly the only?) with a vocal lesbian fanbase. Why is he an exception? His lyrics treat women with respect and awe without shying away from physical desire. The perspective from which he sings is relatable to women who love women, as it lacks objectification while still being incredibly romantic. Hozier is definitely not the only male musician who lesbians like, he's just one of the few men who understands and embraces us.

One time at a Queer Prom in college, "Girls like Girls" came on the playlist. Hayley Kiyoko isn't my favorite, but her music comes with a certain pride in my people. Despite her harmless, bubblegum vibe, a gay man turned off the song midway through and gave me a sorry-not-sorry look. Lesbian artists may be popular within the community but don't achieve mainstream success. Pop culture isn't considered respectable until men say it is. This is why while many lesbian artists like Hayley Kiyoko and King Princess might be considered "cool," they fail to pick up radio play. Lesbian artists are not taken seriously and are written off as too niche to appeal to broader audiences. While queer

people are used to reading themselves into media, most nonlesbians won't make this effort. Men will elevate female pop queens who sing about self-confidence and sexuality as long as they also sing about loving men. Even this is not a given: Look at Janelle Monae. Her queer excellence remains unrecognized by mainstream culture despite her incredible artistry. She gave us the bisexual anthem of the CENTURY, "Make Me Feel." It never achieved higher than 99 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart.

Gay girls are whole people with myriad tastes and proclivities. I think it's time to examine why everyone tries to reduce us to a small subset of tastes that are made only for us. We should totally uplift our fellow gals and nonbinary artists, but also feel empowered to own all music we like. See y'all at the first HAIM concert post-quar.





THE CICADAS SANG

how I knew the world was

Like clockwork, one cicada after another began tuning his wings for the big show ahead. It was an annual event. One final hurrah before the beginning of school. But of course, such a beginning requires an ending. One door must shut for another to open.

Much to my dismay, I knew summer was coming to a close once more.

As the swells of music washed over me, I felt a familiar pang of sadness, for it meant saying goodbye to another summer. Goodbye to late mornings and even later nights. Farewell to sweet melons on the porch. Always a contest to see who could spit the seeds the furthest. I'm surprised we don't have a watermelon patch in our garden yet. Oh well, there's always next year.

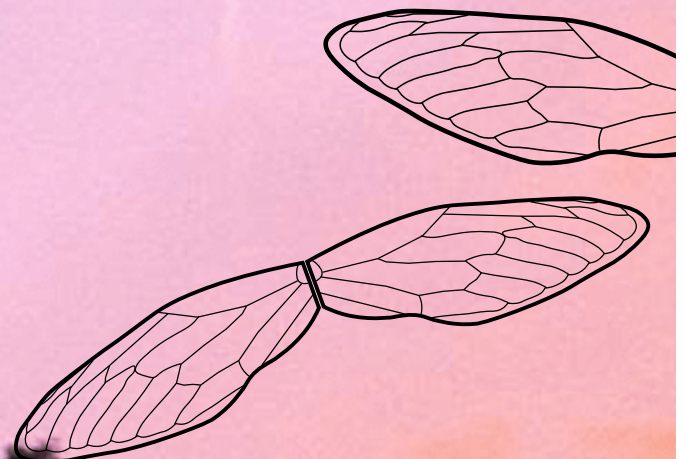
There's always next year to breathe in the flowers' sweet scent. The ones Mom planted with care. I should know, after all, I was there. I watered our friends each day in the hope that they would grow. Lush dreams of lavender, hydrangeas and creeping thyme were more than enough to nourish my mind. Creeping thyme. Oh, time creeping by, minute by minute until the minutes dried up in that hot, arid summer.

Goodbye to lazy afternoons where I lounged in the yard. Though this summer, it was more than just a yard. I called it my cabana, my place by the sea. On an island of my own, I blocked out the chaos of the world. Marooned by choice, I reveled in the heat and the quiet of the land until August.

In August, they came. One by one they took their place. Wings at the ready, they waited for the signal. And it came, like it always does. The rhythm of nature accompanied their tune, serving as their conductor to see them through. The thing about nature is she's always constant, weathering the ups and downs of the world while maintaining her tempo. And this summer was no different. Oblivious to the unrest and madness in the world, the cicadas played on.

They played with abandon, recklessness too. On and on throughout the night. It's all that they know after all. For them, to play is not a want but a need.

WORDS AND
PHOTO BY MADDIE
KATZ



NG THIS SUMMER

would keep on spinning.



I wonder what that feels like.

Not an if but a when.

I wonder what that looks like.

But I sure as hell don't have to wonder what that sounds like.

To think that my old enemies have become my favorite orchestra seems utterly mad. Yet somehow, what used to be a loud and overbearing cacophony of noise has transformed into an anthem of hope and resilience.

For this summer is different, as I'm sure you all know. I look forward to school.

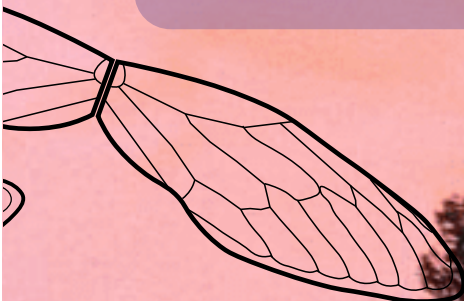
Words I might take back later.

School this year means much more than it ever has before. It signals a return to routine, some sense of normalcy. Something tangible to grasp onto in this ocean of uncertainty. Perhaps a life vest, maybe a rogue door if you're lucky. Well, that really depends on whether you're feeling more like a Rose or a Jack today. However, in this shipwreck one calls life, we sink or swim together.

As our ship appears to be sinking after hitting the iceberg of 2020, the sound of the cicadas gives me hope. A sweet, sad song not just for me, but for the whole world. They mourn the ones we lost, the ones we could have saved but they keep on playing because that's what they do. That's what we do. The world keeps on spinning and we keep on playing and trying to do better. That's all there is.

The seasons come and go, that I know for sure. Fall signals the start of school and a new season of learning. To cultivate knowledge is to embrace change. A change within ourselves so deep that it starts within our roots and grows outward. What starts as a small seed of thought has the potential to completely shift our view of the world but we'll have to wait 'til next semester to watch it blossom.

The cicadas sing and, for the first time, I hum along.



·ISSUE 1·

