

OUR INAUGURAL ISSUE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH | THE PINK STAIRS | THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

CHERRY VENUS



ISSUE 1

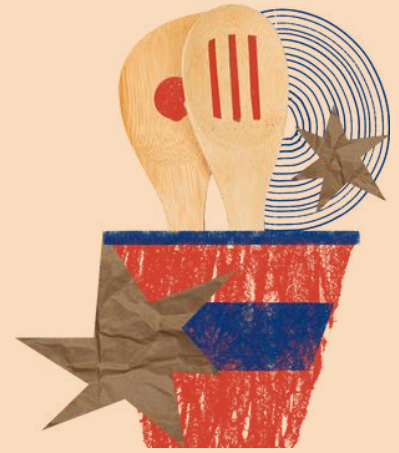


MARCH 2023

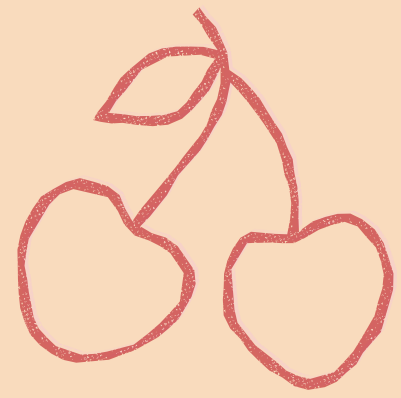
LET A FEMINIST FUTURE FLOURISH <3

how gen z's art is redefining self-identity and representation

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dearest Gentle Reader (yes, that is a Bridgerton reference),

I always tell curious people that Cherry Venus Magazine came from a mix of three places. In one of these places, I am a little girl in a big-box store. I am entranced by the shiny pages of girly, glossy magazines - and yet, I can never find a witty article by or featuring a girl that looked or sounded like me. In another of these places, I am a teenage girl working at a library. I come across an article that says something so culturally insensitive about haircare that I think about the offhanded comment for several days afterwards. In the last of these places, a guy friend of mine performs a poem about poetry for toxic masculinity in the back of an Indigenous-owned restaurant.

Cherry Venus was born as an act of rebellion. It is a platform for speaking your truth and knowing others will hear it.

I was fortunate enough to meet Sunny, founder and chair of The Pink Stairs, a youth-led nonprofit organization that gave Cherry Venus a loving home. I was fortunate enough to host the internship that allowed for the creation of this issue. I have met remarkable young women/people from all over the world, seeking everything that feminism is capable of when we are all working together. This issue is for everyone that believes we can have a better future if we stay hopeful, loving, and kind. We can't wait to hear your story.



Kayshini N.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF





BLINK & IT'S PINK

FOCUSING ON FEMINISM FROM A GEN Z VIEWPOINT

content warning: suicide ideation & attempts, sexual assault & violence, eating disorders, blood, non-body nudity



pallas; athena
Acintya Shenoy

A white banner lies untouched, for we don't dare
to entertain shame.

Hoarse throats clash and clack amid
a growing flame, grenades spilling from
mouths to mask the pain.

A mother's tongue sharp and bloody,
the blade of a guilty knife as mine
Two sides of this war that wage in the darkest nights.
And though the light escapes my eyes, all I see
is red — the color of love, the color of life, the color
of death.

The color of the baby's cries when it first
sees light, of the mother's eyes
when the daughter begins her life.

It's the blood that now seeps from the hands
that once cradled, that now slam
on the table for lack of anything else to beat because
deep down, we both know the truth —
It wasn't meant to be this way, lips that should have laughed and loved
now cracked and wrung of the sweet words
first whispered in soft, small ears.

The taste of metal in my mouth as knives sing a blaring cry, as the
blood
of the battlefield runs like the water from our eyes
it's shared, mixed into one.

There are no sides.
We cannot choose,
for this is war,
and we always lose.

blood and birth

Caprice Strgar

This acrylic painting, in a somewhat surrealist style, visually depicts some of the overwhelming emotional and physical experiences of childbirth as well as complications that can arise for the baby and/or mother. This piece directly draws attention to these experiences, clearly emphasizing certain components of the composition to represent it in contrast to the societal shielding of these events.



breakin' dishes

by Acintya Shenoy

i've started washing my vessels
after dinner
these last few days.
it's soothing, in a way,
hands cracked and dry
from endless streams of water
gently molding the bits and pieces
off the plastic, steel, clay.

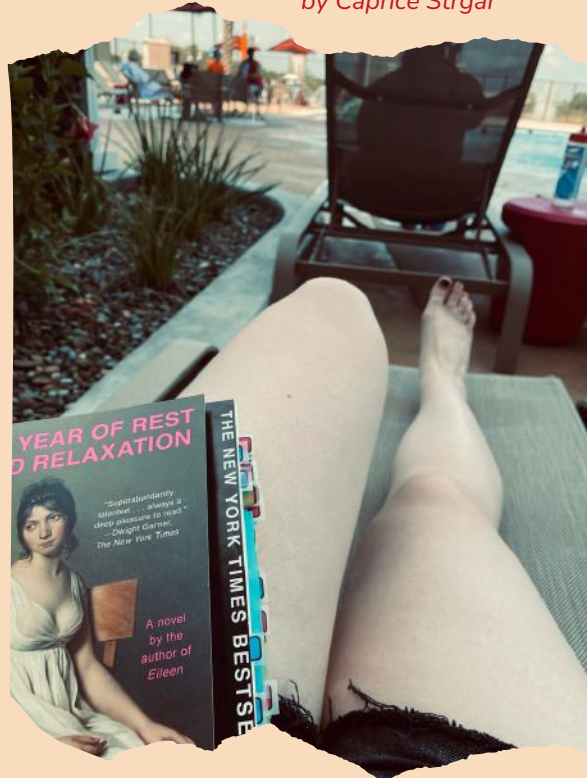
i've been taught these things
by my mother,
who guides my hands
with her worn, aching ones
shows me which sponge to use,
which vessels go in the dishwasher
or the drying mat.

until then, my mother will show me the way
through laughs and claps and yells, she will encourage me
for fulfilling a duty i've long neglected.



Well read and Unrested

by Caprice Strgar



This photograph explores the often intertwined experience of leisure and a working mind. This is particularly relatable to women who are constantly working or occupying their minds with a task at hand but seeking time to rest and take time away from their work. This piece also subtly depicts the feeling of exhaustion amidst a tranquil setting which contrasts the heavily annotated novel regarding "rest and relaxation" creating a sense of irony. Additionally, the woman on the cover---in her state of leisure---anchored by the title of the novel can be interpreted as an ideal, or a wish, in the minds of many women.

See the dish?

See how by your dirtied hands
it becomes clean again?

it's control, and it's not---
i know what and where to clean.

perhaps one day it'll be
my own hands that crack and dry
and ache and wear,
with vessels I eat from in a sink
I buy in a kitchen I cook in
in a house I own.



GATHER 'ROUND PRIDE ROCK

BY: KHUSHI SIDHU

The monsters. They lurk. Close.
We tell our young not to venture out
of the cave,
well knowing the danger of dangers
lie inside.
No creature learned or fierce enough can know
the danger only
the young
live.

Tell your daughters to be familiar with the spiders:
they see alllllll and

ladylike

lace their little spiralling doilies around you tell you you must act

to be liked in this world pointing out all very natural imperfections that
make us very whole
only

to tell us that a real woman doesn't have hair everywhere
(jokes on them, they do)

Then call over the boys and those in between
have them know the ants are merciless: worse if they're the fire ones. Each one's voice small
yet mighty pricks away at the foundation laid and my darling if you fall weak and slow just
know
their damage is twice as fast they'll cheat you and steal from you to make sure their world
doesn't stop turning because
winter stops for no one

Finally, there's everyone's favourite,
the bats: they drive you

out

from what you know

urging you to question
your roots and baby know
that your worth is not defined by the
fear they give it's by how you fight
back and never forget where you
came from

demons as they are

(they hide well in the dark)

startling

at the worst moments

so install a mental lightbulb.

Keep it running. They hate that.
Do what the animal kingdom hates.

That's how you stay alive.



CLAY BREASTS

BY: CAPRICE STRGAR

This piece, a photo of painted breasts shaped of clay, displays the differences in sizes and shapes that breasts can be. Depicting them on a platter, this piece serves to display how the female body---especially sexually associated features---are consistently observed and evaluated by others.



THE GREAT INDIAN MEAT SHOP

BY: KHUSHI SIDHU

oh they put in a door bell / silence it's a woman / I stare down the chicken / pudina, malai, tandoori, peri peri, Kashmiri, BBQ / fluorescents quivering / you look up to give your order and you realize where his eyes were / this visit was uninvited unplanned / the dusty ceiling fan slowing / we were both feasting / who, more immoral? / the pleasure isn't mine / much less the poor chicken's / was their breathe as shallow as my own? / did the men wear white, bloodstained aprons to defile you too? / who was more vicious? / the chicken that fought back? / or these eyes? / intendedly soulless / was I the shipment they were waiting for? / oh the meat just walked

in



YOUR POWER- BILLIE EILISH

BY: BRIANNA TSANG

The song, "Your Power" by American songwriter Billie Eilish, is about her personal abusive relationship and how it affected her. Abuse comes in many forms in a relationship, commonly we see emotional, physical, or sexual. In the song, she addresses the abuse of power and trust, rather than any specific situations about abuse. Billie Eilish writes vaguely about her experiences, but keeps it about common threads in abusive relationships in general to allow other listeners to find their own stories. Lines in the song including, "she was sleepin' in your clothes, but now she's got to get to class" highlight the dynamic difference in relationships revolving around power imbalances. The antithesis of sleeping or being intimate with a partner next to the idea of rushing to school depicts the sexual nature of predatory behaviour. While being intimate with a partner is seen as an adult, or mature thing to do, going to school is the complete opposite. Many people create this power imbalance when thinking about other levels of school, and even grades itself. In elementary school, many children look up to middle/highschool students and onwards. Even more so in highschool, students look up/down on other students with as little as a one year age gap. Lines in the song such as, "and you swear you didn't know, you said you thought she was your age" allude to relationships with uncomfortable, or even illegal age gaps. In different interviews and documentaries, Billie described her relationship with her former boyfriend, who was 22 while she was 16. She explained that she had tried to help him through his self-destructive tendencies, eventually stating "I can't fix him. I've tried." Many people experience these kinds of relationships, age gaps or just power imbalances, and believe it is their responsibility to care for/fix them. Many are taken advantage of and their perpetrators end up "abusing their power."

SHE WAS SLEEPIN' IN
YOUR CLOTHES, BUT NOW
SHE'S GOT TO GET TO
CLASS.

GENTLE FLOWER

BY: RAY DALAI

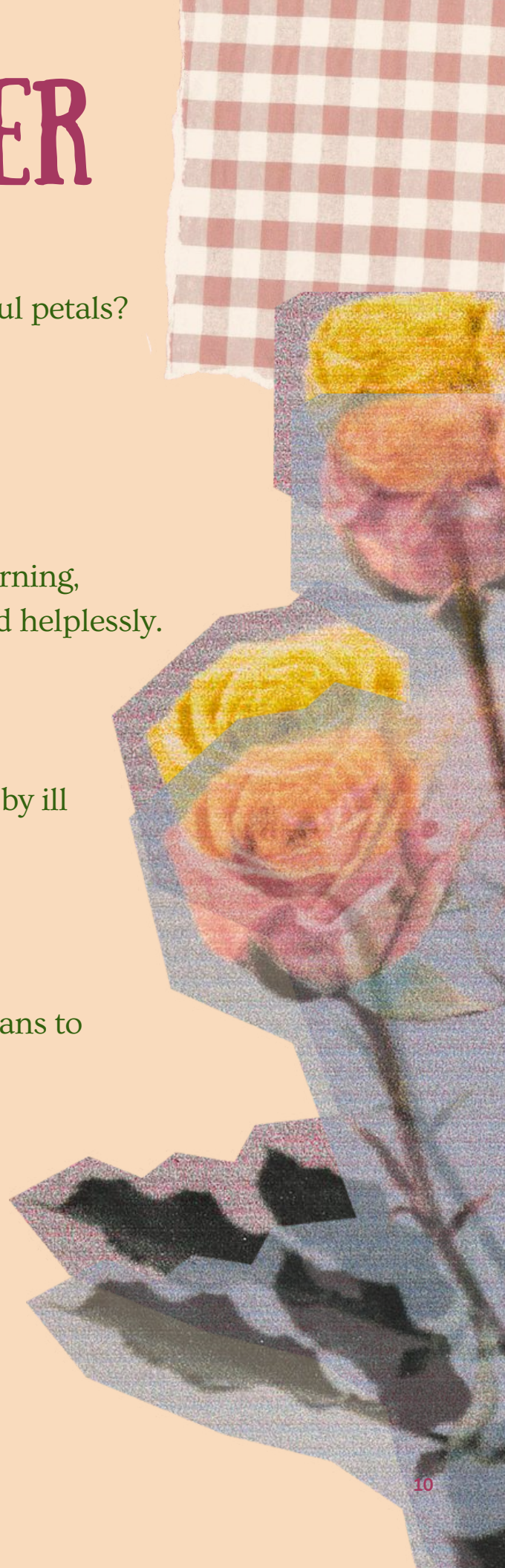
My gentle flower, what happened to your beautiful petals?
Why do they seem so wilted...torn apart?
What happened to your gentle soul...
so pure...so innocent.

Innocent, like freshly fallen snow on a winter morning,
ruined...trampled upon, plucked from the ground helplessly.
An innocent young child...tainted.

Tainted by the hands of malicious intent, tainted by ill
desires,
tainted by an unfortunate event...left helpless...

Helpless like helpless prey running away as a means to
escape...
the tainted hands of the predator...
the hands that tainted your beautiful petals...
left alone...helpless

My beautiful, gentle flower...
left alone and helpless, wilted, torn apart...
a tainted gentle soul.





A CUP OF TEA

By: Chainka



oh, please. stop playing dumb.
you're so tiny i could press you into dust with my thumb
yes, i know, they've been raising you like a sacrificial lamb
but now, if the lion eats you up
you'll be the one to blame
oh, please,

don't you already follow the game?
because, if to be completely and brutally fair
you were only born for us to distract and stare
i mean – you don't even have a name.
you're just like the rest,
all parts of you're ugly except for your chest.

oh, please. don't. don't look at me with those bambi eyes
while i'm pulling the arm in between your tights
"it's only for as long as you don't really mind"
(not that i'll stop if you do,
because, if being brutally honest, nobody cares about you)

yes, you will be looked down on.
yes. you will be less of a someone's daughter to a someone's son,
this is how it works
but you have to believe, it's a blessing, not a curse
i mean, learn how to be grateful, b***, because for some of you that's much worse
don't be angry. blink one more time
and put on your smile
(for some that's much worse)
put on a smile!!
– this is, actually, your only way to fight any kind of force

look at yourself,
to me
you're nothing but a cup of tea
tempting only while i know that it's warm inside of you
look at yourself as i'm looking through
i don't care about the cup,
can break that shit up



in the very first try to get the taste of your stale water
whispering that i'm more of someone's son than you're someone's daughter
like a blood-sniffing shark
i'll hear your porcelain crack in the dark
and it will happen a lot.
in the coffee shop,
parking lot,
bus stop,
maybe even your favorite park
i'll hear your porcelain crack in the dark
i'll feel your body shiver
and you'll never know
from where i'll go
because i'm the water too, i change like the river
i'll feel your body shiver,
burning down as if you got a fever
every time you'll see me in the other form
at your only boy friend's home
in your room in the dorm
in the dimly lighted hall of the mall
you'll see me more as you grow

look at me.
don't you see?
you're only a cup of tea,
and i'll pour you out when you turn cold
nobody wants a tea that gets old!
nobody wants a tea that gets old!

c'mon.
yes, obviously you'll betray your friend for a guy
or she will.
the characters change, but not the storyline
and then, yes, you'll hate girls, and the ribbons, and the pink,
just so they would treat you as person,
as someone who thinks
that's how it always happens,
that's just the thing



they'll call you a pearl, but they'll try their best to put you in the necklace
as long as you have a shiny surface
and you're— nothing but what they tell
glued in the desire to cover / to cut / to cover / to cut your shell
you'll lean into that feeling quite well

and yes, you'll bleed like the warriors did, not just once, — every month
but they won't celebrate it. the girls will whisper,
"cover up, fast"
and then you'll start to believe that an innocent child was full of lust,

not me
not me!

nowhere to run.
it's the same over the sea.

step by step, you'll agree
you'll really agree with me,
and then you won't even question
you'll too treat any kind of skirt as an invitation
and any kind of dress as the one that would make you a slut
you'll be the best at that.

one day you'll become a mom
and your daughter will be much, much less than someone's son
you'll watch how they'll take from her 'till she's gone
you'll watch how they'll undress her just to get fun
and you'll unlearn and learn again: how to punch back
or, rather, how to attack
and how to swear
how to take up all place and the space and pretend you don't care
when they say, "how did she dare?!"
how to finally stop starving your body and hating the food
because, apparently, your body never will be that good

yes, you'll learn.
your mind will be sewed up and torn
from the very first moment you're born
but you'll learn and unlearn
learn and unlearn
learn and unlearn

not only for yourself but
for all the girls that were there, in the dark,
at the house, party and park
you'll learn, unlearn and survive
for all the girls that couldn't save their lives
for all the girls that were buried alive

you'll learn and suffer and suffer and suffer 'till you finally make it on top of the world

didn't your momma tell you?
that's how it is when you're a girl



Wesley H. Cresser
Arundel, 1845.

BRIANNA TSANG

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES



This is a photo I took in Japan late at night. The cultural norms are so different that it is completely safe for me, a young girl, to walk around alone late at night. Going out at night in Japan often feels safer due to low crime rates, efficient transit, and the different nightlife. Areas such as Shibuya tend to stay active much later at night than places like Toronto. This sparks lots of debate on how social norms and law enforcement influence a woman's freedom.



PURPLE LACE BRA- TATE MCRAE

By: Brianna Tsang

Media Review

The song, “Purple Lace Bra” by Tate McRae is about trying to be heard, even if it means sexualizing herself to convey the message. She talks about her relationship with the media and how everything she seems to do seems to be misinterpreted by the public. The first verse explains how she’s been working really hard, singing and screaming until her throat bleeds, but no one sees how much effort she puts in. She’s dreamed of her career taking off, but the reality of this industry has led to many tear-filled nights. She knows people watch, but they don’t see the work behind the success. In the pre-choruses, Tate questions if the public only sees her if she sexualizes herself, and wears purple lace bras and gives lap dances. Gen Z is not shy of calling out the public for sexualizing women. In fact, we’ve seen people publicly call out important people (such as government officials) for the way they look at women and even young girls. In the chorus, Tate asks if she would be heard if she “whispered in your ear” and, “touch[ed] you right here?” In interviews, she talked about how she felt like she wasn’t being heard, and that this song was about her relationship with the media. She claims that the public doesn’t really listen to what she’s saying, or what she’s doing and many women can relate in many different ways. Many times a woman is overshadowed by a man even in the simplest tasks like cooking dinners. The misogynistic views are left behind politically, but those views are still present socially. Many men like to take credit for a woman’s work, whether in the workplace, at home, or for ideas that they didn’t come up with. In the chorus, Tate calls out the public for only paying attention to women when they sexualize themselves. The second verse repeats these similar motifs, stating that in order for a woman to open up about her issues, she must take off someone else’s clothes or position her body a certain way in order for someone to listen to her. The bridge very strongly conveys the frustration of being unheard and devalued beyond the physical appeal. The lines “I’m losin’ my mind, I’m losin’ my head” suggests the dynamic between the public and the artist takes a toll on her mental and emotional well-being. “Giving you head’s the only time you think I got depth” is a direct comment on how her worth and complexity are reduced down to moments of physical intimacy, rather than her intelligence, creativity, or emotional depth. This lyric further highlights the dehumanizing effect that society prioritizes male pleasure over a woman’s voice. The song as a whole paints the raw struggle for recognition in an industry that often values women for their bodies rather than their qualities.



THE MEN OF SANCTUARY

BY: KHUSHI SIDHU

most men belong to war
very few surrender themselves
to the act of love
putting your needs above their own
the men who understand
that yelling never grew a safe home
that your daughter should never feel the need
to seek refuge in another man
that broken glass only meant broken bonds
that listening can save a lineage
that you can win her over by
saying *I trust you*

the moment I laid eyes on him
I believed he was a forest-dweller
he sought wisdom from the fish
and love from the mountains
why else did his face seem
embossed
with the ridges
of time?

the natural world was him.
he embodied the calm of the creek
the tranquility of a deer
the warmth of the fire

*sanctuaire, c'est ici
parmi son sourire croché
sa langue douce
ses mots m'embrassent
comme une fleur en amour avec
un abeille*

the bees never never leave the same after
courting the flower
they forever roam the world
carrying its sweetness
ready
to harness
its love
into power

no wonder we run to the mountains when
an escape is warranted
refuge
can only be sought
where we can breathe
oh so

freely

fill your lungs with his sanctity
for these are the men
of sanctuary.



FERTILE FLOURISHING

by Caprice Strgar

Through its metaphorical visual imagery of leaves, vines, and assorted flora, this piece expresses the significance placed on female fertility.

Emphasized by the body's incompleteness, the piece depicts fertility's somewhat paramount value, depending on one's perspective. It communicates how the female body is often suspended within fertility expectations, whatever they may be.





SCENES OF WINTER

BY: JOVINA ZION PRADEEP

Sleek fur in caves their warmth lend
Ice frozen into destructible sculptures
Icicles drip down as compact dew
Watering the bare earth

Hot chocolate simmers on the stove
While you lie curled on the sofa
A blanket pulled over your head
Inexplicable laziness taking hold

Of you. The wind pounds at your
Window like a naughty child
While you cuddle your pillow
And nod to sleep.

You are awakened by the roar
Of snowblowers outside as you
Look out the window and see bare
Branches adorning your driveway.

Wearing a warm hat, fur anointing
Your head as you slip on silky gloves
Grabbing your coat off the wall
Stepping outside into blurry whiteness

You become a snowwoman, engulfing
Yourself in falling snow making footprints
That will wash away in a world you see
Till the sun melts it all again.





DYING ON THE INSIDE-NESSA BARRETT

BRIANNA TSANG

The song, “Dying on the Inside” by American singer Nessa Barrett focuses on the struggles of battling an eating disorder and the pains of keeping it a secret. The song explains the praise and compliments, that are actually backhanded, that one will receive for starving themselves and how it affects a person’s mind. “You should take it as a compliment. If I were you, I would be more confident.” People feel that she shouldn’t lack confidence or insecurities because of the positivity she receives on her body and that she should be grateful for how she looks. Expressing that because she is seen as a part of the beauty standard, she should not have issues with her appearance. The pre-chorus of the song, “It’s the dinner conversation no one talks about. Don’t know how much longer I can keep this down” have in depth double meaning.

CAPRICE STRGAR

GUILT



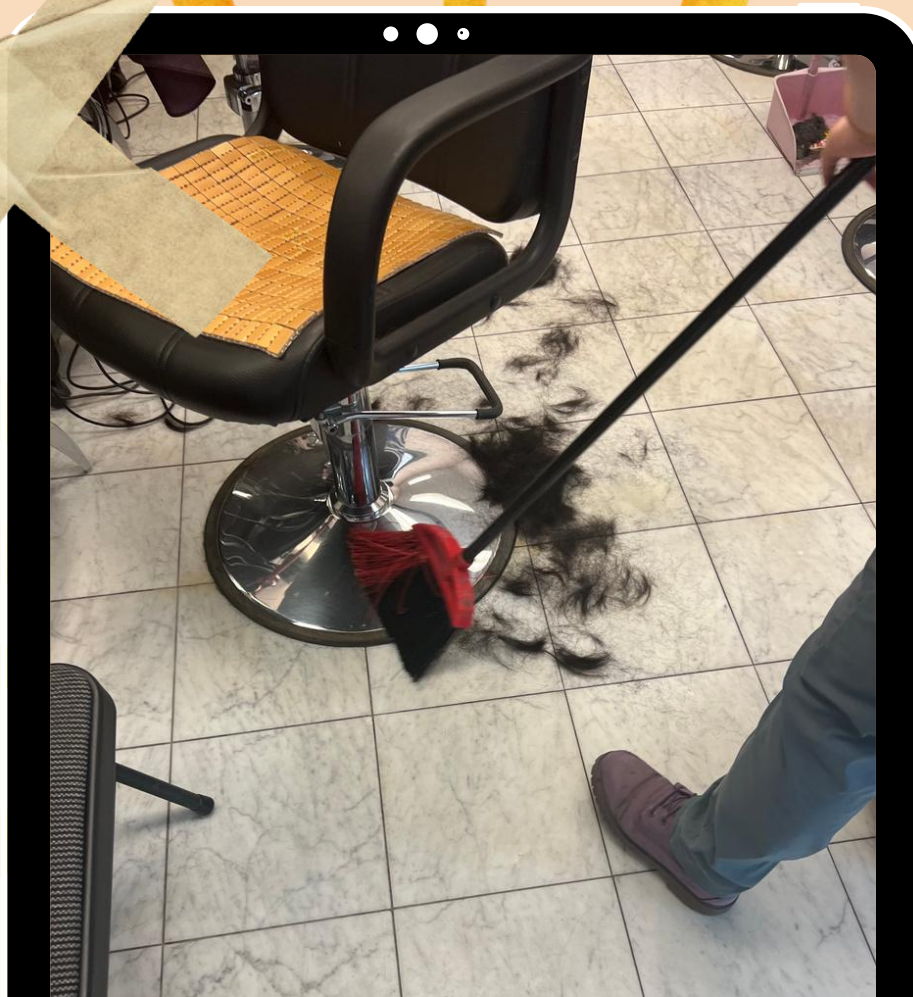
This photo presents an overhead view of a plate of dessert, encompassing the entire photograph's composition. It is a visual depiction of the overwhelming sense of guilt that many women have associated with eating and body image. This photo employs the viewer to interpret it subjectively by immersing them within the image.

A dinner conversation no one talks about topics that are left typically undiscussed, such as eating disorders and toxic beauty standards. Everyone understands that these things exist and are unhealthy, but they are left unspoken about to maintain the peace of the world. "Dinner conversation" can also directly relate to food and how people with eating disorders and their struggles with food. To keep something down typically refers to repressing something or keeping a secret. In this lyric there is a double meaning about repressing her emotions, and wondering if she can truly keep the dinner down (ie. not throwing up). She is worried about vomiting because "purging" or forcing oneself to throw up is a common symptom in people with eating disorders. On top of that she could possibly feel overly full from a small meal or even disgusted by any food, both of which are feelings associated with eating disorders and contribute to ultimately throwing up. The chorus uses metaphors to symbolize how beauty standards, which essentially caused her to develop an eating disorder, are slowly killing her. "Swallowing my pride so I won't eat anything. It's all a lie, honestly, it's eating me alive." Again, she writes with the double meaning of keeping her disorder a secret from others. Her eating disorder is quite literally eating her alive, as she's starving herself to live up to the beauty standards she set for herself. At the end of the chorus Nessa says, "I hate that I always look my best, When I'm dying on the inside." She understands that eating disorders inevitably harm her body, but further in the chorus we feel her inner conflict when people praise her. We learn that she feels like she's "dying on the inside" when she looks her best. In the second verse, her perspective of her eating disorder changes. She explains how she's tried to escape seeing and being in her own body to escape this disorder that haunts her. She mentions destroying the mirrors that reflect her "non-perfect image" to avoid seeing herself in the mirror as well as an attempted suicide through drowning in a bathtub. In the verse, she talks about how seeing herself make her want to "f-ing disappear" and that the emotional pain from her eating disorder has caused her to shed enough tears to fill up an entire tub. The end of the second verse explains how she feels that she's afraid to stop this harmful cycle in fear of how others will perceive her. Nessa is afraid that if she quits this cycle, she will lose people in her life. Gen Z expresses their concerns with eating disorders and mental health disorders in general more than any generation. As a whole we have prioritized mental health over everything, and this song is a prime example of such.



CHANGING HAIR AS A COPING MECHANISM

Brianna Tsang



Changing one's hair is often a symbolic act that shows self-expression, control, and transformation. In a world where mental health struggles are common, changing hair becomes a coping mechanism or a way to reclaim their body. Many see this as a form of self-care or reinvention, and this usually signals a fresh start after trauma, burnout, etc. Social media normalizes this and many influencers talk about their experiences while dying their hair. While this isn't a direct solution, it reflects deeper struggles with self-worth and the desire for control in a world of uncertainty.



AMBITION

by Caprice Strgar

Once upon a time

there was a girl who was bitten by ambition,
inspired by her intuition,
she fell into a carousel
propelled of her own volition.
As if in a premonition,
she became infatuated with a vision
forming together like nuclear fission.
Pressing her hands against walls,
closing her in like a prison,
when no one will listen.
Just a little too driven;
she was a figment of omission.
And now she's just a villain.



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESSICA KNOLL'S NARRATIVE ON BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN FOR GEN-Z READERS

By: Caprice Strgar

In her 2023 novel, *Bright Young Women*, Jessica Knoll explores the narrative depicted and perpetuated by the American justice system regarding serial killer cases—particularly that of Ted Bundy and a sorority he targeted: Chi Omega at Florida State University. The novel, noted as a “shining example of ethical crime fiction provides a prevalent and necessary re-examination of this trial in particular but the scope of the novel’s impact extends far beyond to many cases of the sort. Knoll examined the reports from the justice system and the narratives that they perpetuated of Bundy’s compelling nature, the unfortunate situation that he was so promising, and the flattening of the targeted women’s perspectives. She contrasts these established perspectives with narratives derived from the women’s perspective, emphasizing their significance, the validity of their perspectives, and the layered narratives of discrimination against them. Despite the novel being written primarily about events occurring during the 1970s, it is particularly relevant for Gen Z readers who are living at a point in time where narratives are being re-examined and re-evaluated for bias potentially affecting their validity and truth. The novel primarily, in parallel, follows Pamela Schumacher—president of her sorority—and a young woman who tragically disappeared years prior named Ruth Wachowsky. Pamela and Ruth’s stories become intertwined when Ruth’s romantic partner, Tina Cannon, connects with Pamela following the attack in the sorority house. Tina becomes integral to Pamela’s pursuit of the truth and justice for herself and the murdered and harmed women—some of whom had been her friends. Through her novel, Knoll breathes life and voices women whose narratives have been flattened, reduced, and manipulated by systems perpetuating this silence.

Knoll has explained that her novel is titled as an alteration of a statement, made by the judge of the case, that Bundy was such a “bright young man”. Knoll’s title exemplifies the nature of this text presenting the narrative(s) of the women affected by these crimes rather than the actions of the accused on themselves; emphasizing the women’s intelligence and promise rather than inspiring pity and regret for the accused. Gen Z is at a point in time—which they actively participate in—in which people are much more frequently held accountable for their actions. Thus, this novel is particularly relevant both for how narratives are currently examined, perpetuated, and explored as well as in reflection of past cases and experiences. Moreover, an additional significance of this text in the 2020s can be derived from the societal²² fascination with the true crime genre, ridden with podcasts, documentaries, novels, and more.

Exposure to a multitude of narratives—highly affected by subjectivity given their existence in the entertainment industry—quite frequently and comfortably, has diluted crimes, particularly violent crimes, because of the recurring narratives or imbued them with such character that they are becoming more of an interest than taken as legitimate fact. This novel provides a prevalent balance between an entertaining plot and considerable development of the narratives. However, in contrast to many true crime works, this text does not delve into the psyche and mental state of the serial killer, but rather intends to de-emphasize it in order to criticize the public and systemic fascination with the murderers for this reason. The text somewhat adjusts the narrative of the murderer, but still includes relevant and necessary information on his part. Referring to him solely as ‘the Defendant’ and revealing much of his perspective through her female characters’ awareness of his actions and statements Knoll cleverly and creatively adjusts the lens of the infamously perpetuated narratives.

Layering the themes in her novel—and how they interconnect with each other—within Knoll’s depiction of Pamela’s independent and determined seeking of truth and justice for her friends, Pamela’s strong and meaningful friendship with Tina provides a compassionate and important display of women supporting each other amidst issues they have both been affected by. Tina, desperate to discover what happened to Ruth, is displayed eager to help Pamela in her struggle. Subsequently, Knoll displays both the women’s individual strength and independence in persisting through horrifying and terrible situations as well as their notable camaraderie in helping the other persevere through their respective turmoils. However, their situations are interconnected in the intentional failure, and deliberate refusal, of the justice system to support or take them both seriously, acknowledging their opinions as worthy and valid. Through this depiction of friendship and support, Knoll exemplifies and demonstrates the significance of women’s support for each other through similar situations of facing adversity. It can be expanded to encompass the importance of people supporting each other despite being directly affected by the situation or not. This is particularly relevant for Gen Z in a world where there are multitudes of ways to argue and tear people down. It is essential that there is a greater emphasis on how people can support each other in the face of adversity than to combat each other and be solely focused on oneself. Within her novel, Knoll expresses how through supporting someone else, one can achieve success for themselves as well. Amidst a myriad of issues—social, political, ethical, moral, environmental for example—the support that Gen Z can provide each other, and other generations, is vital for the future that can be created.

Pamela, at the end of the novel, chooses to pursue a law degree and become a lawyer, working in a sect of law that is revealed to be especially important to her. Her tragic and tumultuous experience throughout the novel inspired and motivated her to embark on this career path, in which she had great success, not solely pertaining to her career but personally.

This success establishes the fact that, as a young person at any time, the experiences one has can shape an individual to strive for significant and meaningful change, particularly regarding situations similar to the one(s) they have been affected by. This is a motivating and poignant message that holds notable relevance in today's society. Given that Gen Z has been tasked with the responsibility of inheriting societal structures, amongst other components of civilization and the earth, this message of empowerment is critically relevant for Gen Z readers. Reading how this character has transformed the difficulties of her—and many other people's—pasts into actions that improve the system and the lives of those who have experienced it after her provides a powerful model as to how someone can create and establish meaningful change.

Through her novel, *Bright Young Women*, Jessica Knoll presents a commendable and noteworthy example of how previously established narratives can be altered for the purposes of truth and justice amongst a system perpetuating their manipulation. The work that Knoll has done with this text is particularly relevant for Gen Z readers. Knoll's novel is a brilliant model for identifying when and how narratives must be adjusted to reflect the unbiased truth as accurately as possible; the support that women can lend to each other, and others, in the face of adversity; and create meaningful change despite, if not because, of what they have experienced. This is a poignant and brilliant text that inspires the empowerment of oneself and others through the prevalent and significant narrative that Knoll has woven. This work provides a compelling and necessary model for Gen Z readers, inspiring a future of hope despite the active systemic injustices that are perpetuated. Ultimately, the novel presents a provocative narrative significant for its ability to evolve from grief, struggle, and awareness into action. Action that would alter lives and carefully unweave strands of a malicious system.

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GENERATIONAL STRENGTH

BY: BRIANNA TSANG

This photo shows generations of women in kimonos. This empowers women through intergenerational strength, and cultural identity. This proves that traditions can be empowering by overcoming Europeanized cultures. It focuses on the labour and creativity of women through honoring the art of wearing and even making kimonos. This debunks the idea that tradition limits one's free will by seeing one's past as a sign of strength. Feminism is complex, and this photo shows that strength takes different forms through generations.

WITHIN THE "SETTLED" ASHES

BY CAPRICE STRGAR

can you hear their screams?
over this *discussion*
where you have sat *languid* and *poised*
confident and
comfortable pale eyes
stark
white
skin the comfort held by a man of privilege
imposing
words pour
from your lips speaking allegations of their naivety
 their foolishness
 their stupidity
how you could stand to carry around the weight of
your tongue through the world after so
confidently declaring that it was their fault that
they were murdered in masses
that they were sent to camps to die
because you're lying.
and no one knows enough to deny it
don't know enough not to be compliant
but I **can not** hear you over their dying
and you are too busy defying
their pain
assigning them the blame.
you wash out their stories with the piercing
ignorance coating your voice.
engulfing their aching hearts.
trying to raze their triumphs to ash.
the suffering that has plagued them for years
that has carved itself into the fractures of
future generations stuck in countries
without their true names
and not knowing why.
of people in pain because their ancestors were
burned alive
for trying to survive
Why will you not let their stories survive?
How do we keep them alive





CAGES

by Caprice Strgar

woman of valour
woman of value
woman of love
woman of use
woman of desire
woman of wombs
nurture the world;

come,

we've got a nice place for you

*climb into this cage;
it's a pretty one, too.*

GIRL MATH : PERPETUATING HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

By: Kaitlyn Shen

Let's say you're at Starbucks, about to pay for your iced coffee when you find a ten dollar bill in your wallet that you forgot you had. Instead of using your credit card, you use that ten dollar bill to pay for your drink. Girl math: you just got a free iced coffee! "Girl math" is a social media trend popularized by TikTok, which uses bad logic to justify poor spending habits. But don't get me wrong: I'm not here to point out the trend's bad logic. In fact, I myself use some of the concepts of "girl math" to justify my spending. However, "girl math" is among other viral social media trends that are unintentionally demeaning. Underneath the fun and silliness, these gendered social media trends have sexist implications that perpetuate harmful stereotypes of women.

While these trends attempt to reclaim stereotypical femininity that is often used against women, they tend to be counterproductive and reinforce those damaging patriarchal standards. Trends like this fall under the category of "bimbo feminism," an attempt to redefine and reclaim the derogatory word "bimbo." However, by embracing feminine stereotypes of being dumb or "air-headed," we adhere to patriarchal stereotypes of women. I'll admit, I found "girl math" to be funny at first, but soon, the trend left a bad taste in my mouth as women began to have their male partners react to the concepts of "girl math."



2025 Autoshow
Brianna Tsang

Cars have always been a male predominant topic, from fixing cars, to even driving them. Stereotypically it has always been to leave the cars to men so "women don't get ripped off" or "women don't ruin the car." Gen Z has done a good job in leaving these misogynistic views behind as many women are in the mechanical field now. While this viewpoint is left in the past, many content creators make fun of these stereotypes, seemingly calling the men in their lives to tell them they paid extra for "premium air" or putting diesel in a gas car.

Their common reaction of disbelief and shock showed that men were not interpreting the trend as the joke their partners meant it as. Instead, it has left them with the idea that their female partners should not have control of their finances; that women do not have logic when it comes to spending and will use any excuse to splurge. Similarly, "girlspaining" began as a way to make complicated topics more accessible for the general public. But soon, it evolved into using analogies of stereotypically feminine things such as boys and shopping to explain topics for girls to better understand. What started out as innocent trends have now boiled down to this: girls cannot handle their

finances responsibly and complex ideas need to be dumbed down so that girls can understand. These are ideas that have kept and continue to keep women across the world confined to gender roles. According to Statistics Canada, the barriers that women face in the workplace and the gender pay gap have been well-documented in the last century (Thomas 2014). Although the gap is narrowing, it was still recorded to be at a whopping 12% in 2022 (Statistics Canada 2023). Discrimination against women is not just a thing of the past; it is something that continues to affect women and something we are still fighting against. By creating the idea that women lack knowledge and thinking skills, we contribute to the culture that has denied women the right to vote, access to education, and manage their own lives.

So, how can a simple social media trend perpetuate all these significant ideas? Oftentimes, what is meant to be a light-hearted joke says much more. Social media is full of young and impressionable girls and women. The “girl math” trend is just a silly joke and its ideas are supposed to be exactly that: jokes. It is easy to misinterpret things on the internet and with the age of social media users getting lower and lower, you never know when a young girl might take something she sees on the internet as a real fact. Additionally, although the “girl math” concepts are meant to be lighthearted jokes, there is a very real underlying commentary on gender and stereotypes (Willingham 2023). Young girls are not blind to these ideas: a recent TeachFirst poll showed that more girls lacked confidence in subjects like math and science compared to their male peers (Busby 2024). Likewise, many “girlsplaining” videos have taken serious topics and portrayed them as something lighthearted. The original concept of “girlsplaining” can be rather helpful, but the issue started when people began to use analogies of shopping or fighting over boys to explain complex wars between countries. For example, during the height of the Israel-Palestine war, TikTok content creator Nikita Redkar took the opportunity to create a video “girlsplaining” the historical conflict. In the video, she used “an analogy of two girls – “Izzy” for Israel and “Patty” for Palestine – fighting over a birthday party to explain the conflict.” Understandably, Redkar received backlash on this video for her tone-deaf explanation. (Kim 2023). I cannot even begin to imagine how the families of those who were injured or killed would feel about the use of those analogies. These kinds of videos can shed light on an important topic, however, that should be done in a way that gives those situations the gravity they deserve. These tone-deaf analogies using stereotypically feminine things or having a heavy association with women support the portrayal of women as lacking knowledge and critical thinking skills.

Now, you might ask: “why do we care what men or other people think about the trends we find fun?” TikTok content creator and real estate developer Samantha Jane was one of the creators to contribute to the original idea of “girl math.” She told BuzzFeed in an interview, “Girl math is fun logic. It’s not meant to be about good vs. bad financial decisions...Girl math reframes the narrative and takes away the shame around spending money” (Heinrich 2023). 28

Many other women across social media platforms affirm that “girl math” is just a joke and those critiquing it are missing the point. I can agree that the concepts of “girl math” are fun ideas to help justify purchases that make us happy, but just because something is meant as a joke does not mean it will be taken as a joke. Believe it or not, no actions exist in a vacuum and everything on the internet is up for the interpretation of millions of internet users. There is no way to prevent people from interpreting things in a certain way. In her article “TikTok’s ‘girl’ trend must end,” India Parmar recounts her experience of when a man commented on her decision to skip WhyNotWednesday and its £10 entry fee, but reward herself with a £30 shopping spree, calling it “girl math.” She said, “[H]earing those nauseating words from a man’s mouth infuriated me. These ‘jokes’ we partake in about women being financially incompetent do not only reach our female peers, they show some male users of social media that we too believe their sexist gibberish.” (2024). The core ideas of “girl math” and “girlsplaining” are influenced by the long history of sexism that is still prevalent now. These trends can be silly, fun, and even helpful, but portraying them as things “just for girls” does more harm than good. We want to show everyone that while we can participate in these fun trends, women are also just as intelligent, responsible, and competent as any man.

Gendered social media trends with sexist implications work counterproductively to demean women rather than uplift them. We do not need to feign incompetence and portray ourselves as unintelligent to have a good laugh. Women deserve to be taken seriously and to be treated as distinct individuals with the ability to think critically. The road to gaining rights, opportunity, and respect for women is long, and it is not over yet. Surrounded by many hard-working and incredibly capable people every day, I want to show the world that women are more than the stereotypes say we are.

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ENCODED

by Caprice Strgar

Climbing the corporate ladder:
it's as if its scripted
that I'll falter.

And the codes have been set.
I am one of many tests.

A series of encoded If-Then statements:

If she falls

Then he'll take over;

If she succeeds

Then he'll never love her.

Ingrained in binary systems of

success or failure

family or career

past or future

ambitions or a-bitch

leader or power-hungry

obsessed or passionate

too much?

Not nearly enough.



GENDER NORMS

by Brianna Tsang

The idea that men don't receive flowers reflects outdated gender norms that limit emotional expression. Traditional masculinity discourages vulnerability, framing flowers as "feminine" rather than a simple gesture of appreciation. However, Gen Z challenges these stereotypes, promoting emotional openness and rejecting rigid gender roles. Recognizing that everyone deserves kindness and beauty, many social media trends encourage giving men flowers. Gen Z pushes for a more inclusive world where men can embrace weakness without judgement and break free from the social norms associating emotional expression with weakness.

THE MORE WE RISE, THE HARDER WE FALL

BY: GRACE POOTHULLIL

I walk on fallen petals on Pavel, brand new
The flowers withered from its bright blue

My eyes fluttered around searching
Falling onto needy eyes deserving

No one said you were a problem we just needed help
No one said you caused issues though you made our children
welp

I stare into grey as colours fade away
Struggling to eat, live, breath day by day

There won't be reconciliation there won't even be doubt
I have even lost my appetite to scream and shout

My pride stripped from the core
And beaming families existing no more

People hate People, Yes it's true
Open your eyes even if it's hard to do

This is the world, you should be ashamed
Humans are those who can't be tamed

It's not in our darkest days that we should build upon the
ground
But let the flowers bloom all around



“I’M JUST A GIRL”: HOW INTERNET TRENDS HAVE SET MODERN FEMINISM BACK

By: Grace Lowe

If you’ve been anywhere on the internet lately, you’ve probably heard the phrase “I’m just a girl.” It’s used as a term to express the feeling we have when we just simply don’t know how to do something or when the things we do are a little dumb. It’s a non serious way to say that we have no idea what we’re doing in life, but that it’s okay because we’re just a little silly, we’re just girls. Doing math problems, having overdue assignments, getting upset easily, bad money habits and frivolous purchases, even hitting curbs have all been used as examples alongside this phrase. We say that this stuff happens: we’re just girls. And yes, this is true. These are all scenarios that the average woman today can heavily relate to. As we struggle with adulthood and growing older, the everyday tasks we are required to do seem impossible. It is a uniting factor to all women of our generation. Life is hard. No one taught us how to do these things. But the problem with this trend and with this phrasing is that it states clearly that to be a girl is to be naive, incompetent, incapable, ditzy, overemotional and dumb. To be a girl is to not be able to drive, not be able to do math, not be able to manage money and not to be able to control emotions. And these are ideas that have been around for hundreds of years. Ideas that are still too prevalent especially to men. Why on earth are we as women marketing ourselves as this to men who already (even subconsciously) see us as second class citizens, as not the same as the rest of them?



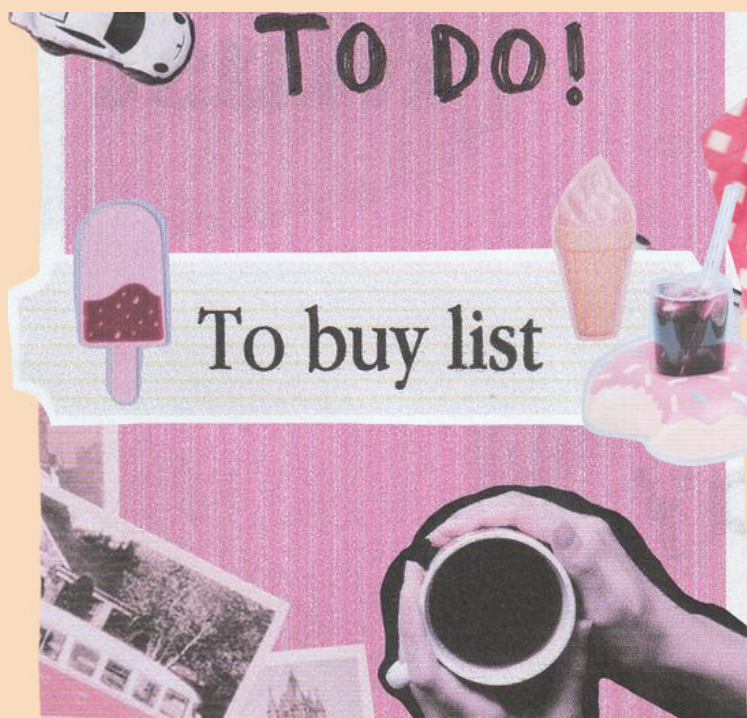
Gender Discrepancy Brianna Tsang

The “pink tax” exposes the hidden inequalities women still face despite having the same legal rights as men. The “pink tax” refers to the higher prices charged for products marketed to women (razors, deodorant, self-care items etc) despite being identical to men’s versions. In this photo, my friends and I collected these plushies purely because they were pink. This further pushes these issues where women are financially disadvantaged. Using social media, Gen Z works to call out these issues and pressure brands to change.

So much of being a woman is begging to be taken seriously, working tirelessly to prove not only that you are capable in your area or field but also that the things that you care about and that are important to you are not frivolous or stupid. Already, so much of what is deemed “women’s work” or “women’s interests” are seen as easy, unnecessary or dumb. Cooking, ballet, fiber arts, beadwork, nursing, all incredibly difficult and important skills that simply are not valued or taken seriously. This is because of how we as a society view women themselves. Our beautiful empathy, deep feeling, and understanding of emotions is viewed as overly sensitive and dramatic. America’s cold, unfeeling, work focused culture has no place for that.

Not understanding or being into what is seen as men's interests or hobbies is seen as just being plain dumb, even when the woman in question is incredibly intelligent in other areas. The standards for our society have been placed by and set for men and therefore to be anything else is to be second class. Not as serious, not as smart.

There's a lot of people that would say that I'm reading too much into this, that I'm taking this too seriously. It's just a silly trend people use to express feeling a little naive. But this kind of thinking comes from a place that denies that misogyny is still a problem in the world today and that is not something we really need to worry about. This is dangerous and untrue. It causes us to ignore things that influence us subtly and that is exactly the effect that trends like this can have on people. In a lot of ways, it really does subliminally signal to us that women really are all these negative characteristics. And the more that we are influenced towards this, the further down the misogynistic pipeline we go. "Girls are dumb-they're quite literally telling us this themselves." Yes, in most ways this is just a silly trend. But its harm is not zero. We cannot afford to advertise ourselves as incompetent and incapable even just a tiny bit to a gender who already believes as such. We must advertise the idea that to be unsure, confused and a little dumb aren't traits of a girl. They are traits of a human. We all err. We all spend a little too much money on things we probably shouldn't. We've all been confused when presented with something we're supposed to just know how to do. Especially at the age Gen Z is, we are all unsure and learning how to navigate and operate a world that hasn't really been built for us. This is why this trend is so popular; we all feel incapable faced with the tasks of getting older. But that doesn't mean that this is who we are all the time. It means that we are just humans.





WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED!



What do you love being about a female-identifying person, if applicable? What do you love about being a feminist? How do you think the future of feminism, humanity, and supporting others will change in the years to come in a positive way?

Gender is a social construct, and so in that sense, I love the culture of being a woman. The way girls lean on each other, support each other, and show up for each other and themselves in ways that matter most is the best thing about feminism. I believe that our bonds will only become stronger and more safeguarding in the years to come.

– Kayshini, 17, Southern Ontario, Canada



Feminism is like a second nature, because no matter gender people are well, people. If you were to look back centuries ago it is very prominent how feminism has changed the world and society as a whole. Feminism is a very powerful tool that will bridge equality in the near future between genders in professions and higher educational programs and beyond.

– Shaila, 16, Southern Ontario, Canada

What I love about being a female-identifying person is the ability to carry stories, strength, and resilience that generations of women before me have fought for. There's something powerful about embracing both softness and strength while breaking barriers that society once set for us. Being a feminist allows me to uplift other women and support those whose voices have been silenced. I think the future of feminism will be rooted in unity and education, where we not only fight for equality but also create safe spaces for women of color and marginalized communities to heal and thrive.

– Anushka, 14, Southern Ontario, Canada



Everyone needs a support system, and being a woman means I will always have a community of lovely female-identifying people to lean on. In the same way, we all have to be there for each other, and that includes advocating for our rights. The sense of community that we share is uniquely powerful and unbreakable. Our efforts in feminism are not in vain, and I am confident that humanity is progressing towards a more compassionate and inclusive world.

– Alyssa, 17, Ontario, Canada



Being a woman means there is an unspoken, yet undeniable bond between us. It is a connection I can turn to for support in uncertain times or for hope when I need it most. Despite the differences that may exist between us, this bond remains unbreakable. This is what I love about being a woman: in each other's eyes, we are all one.

– Abisha, 16, Ontario, Canada



In a world where men are usually the ones in control, where women are usually put down behind them. Being a woman and a feminist means supporting each other and fighting against the ones who believe less of us. Being strong and powerful in the name of justice for the progress of the world needs to become a much more peaceful, inclusive, and healthier world.

– Shakira, 16, Ontario, Canada

Being a woman means carrying an unshakable strength, one that's woven into every challenge we face and every victory we claim. It's the shared experience of resilience and the unspoken bond that ties us together. Whether it's navigating expectations, fighting to be heard, or simply moving through the world in our own skin. We understand each other in a way that needs no words, a silent sisterhood built on knowing glances and shared struggles. No matter where we come from, we all walk a similar path, and that connection is our backbone that keeps us all going.

– Trisha, 16, Ontario, Canada



Being AFAB is like having an unspoken support system when you need it most, and I am happy to be seeing modern efforts changing the scene and society. There's a connecting sense of relatability, openness, friendliness, but also knowing we share the same struggles with misogyny. I believe that we all need to band together to fight for not just equal rights, but to be seen as socially equal, capable, and powerful. Misogyny brings down and discredits the hard work that AFAB or similarly-aligned individuals have put into this world, and I wholeheartedly support feminism movements along with pushing for equal rights and to be viewed fairly.

– Anonymous, 17, Ontario, Canada

I see being a female as being a light. Many cultures revere their Goddesses as those who bring forth growth in every imaginable form and beyond. We are the learned lanterns that bring forth societal progression. We are the invaluable streetlights that lead our communities. We are the dazzling fairy lights that celebrate each other in times of joy. We need not dim our own presence, or tear down those of others and make ourselves small to allow each other shine – the brilliance of one woman does not eclipse another. We are the ones that, together, illuminate the world. There's nothing more empowering than that. Yet it must not be forgotten, that together, us women are a vast, marvelous constellation. But without each and every one of us cheering each other on, our world would lose its radiance.

– Khushi, 18, Calgary, Alberta, Canada



To me, the strength that comes from being a woman is sourced from the community. Women are able to unite each other and act as a support system in a unique and special way. In the years to come, I hope that feminism will be more accepted and recognised for the beauty it brings to the world.

– Anonymous, 17, Southern Ontario, Canada

I love the community that I am connected to through being a woman. Our shared experiences, hopes, and fears mean that we empathise with each other, celebrating each other's victories or offering support in difficult times. Whether we are actively involved or not, I know that feminism has had and will continue to have a positive impact throughout girls' lives.

– Anonymous, 17, Ontario, Canada



Strong communities providing support, encouragement, and uplifting reciprocity to each other will help to elevate us all to a more positive future. Feminism, and the relationships people have with it, are complex, intricate, and layered. This means that it has the sure potential to make everyone feel valued, important, and heard. Feminist lenses expose injustice and discrimination, holding people accountable and allowing people to learn. It is necessary for the future of humanity. Humanity must remove the blindfold that prevents it from seeing itself in its entirety. We must—as parts of humanity—support each other, honouring our identities, and believing in our future.

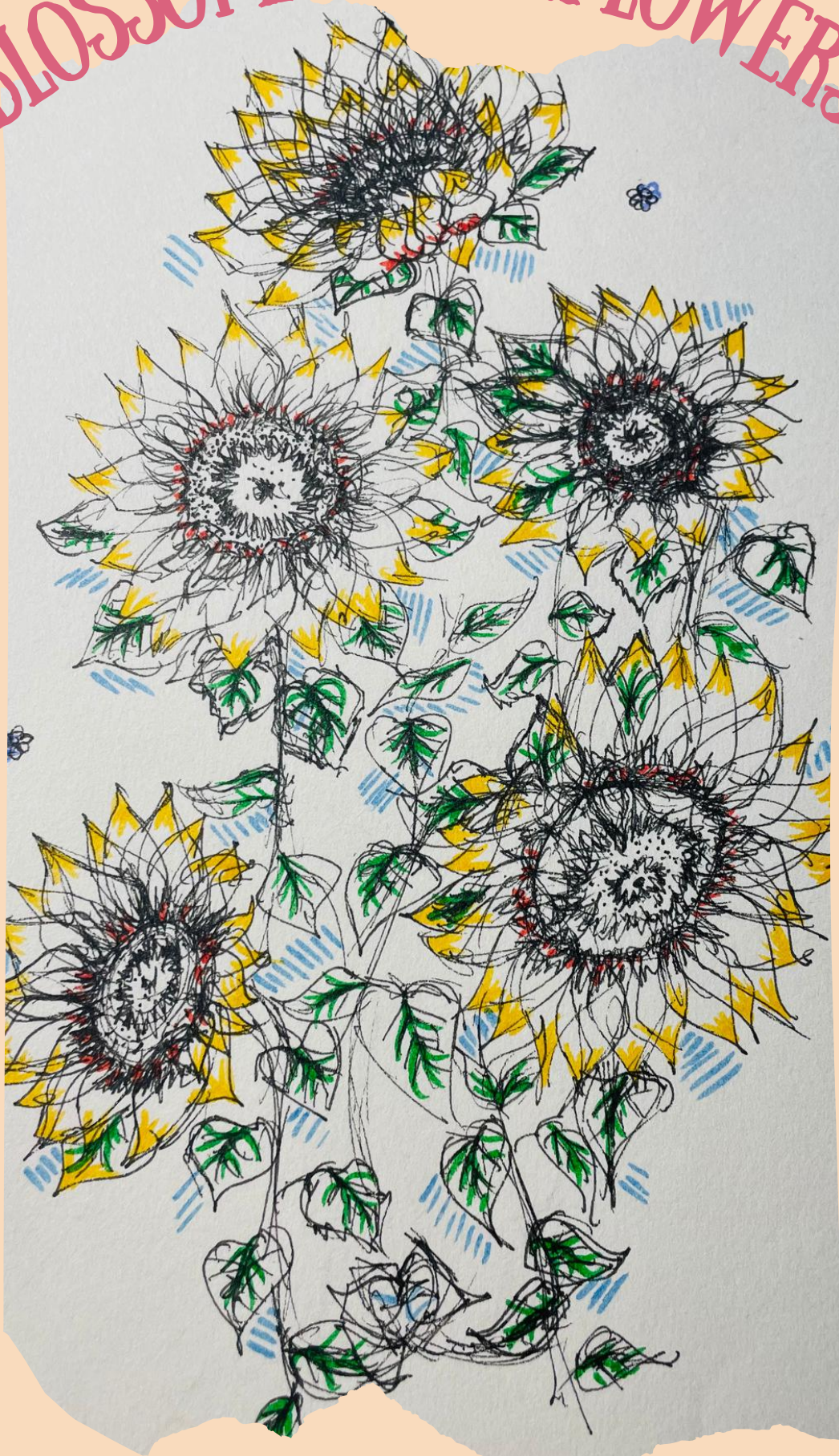
– Caprice, 17, Southern Ontario, Canada

RAISE THE FOCUS UP

highlighting the creativity of
femmes of color and their
unique experiences



BLOSSOMING SUNFLOWERS



This piece was originally made as a Father's Day gift to my father, as a display of my gratitude and love for everything he has done for me. The sunflowers are an homage to my late grandmother, who was extremely passionate and fond of these flowers. They symbolize the joys that can always be found in life, the growth and milestones accomplished throughout the years, and the hope for happiness in years to come.



BY CAITLYN CHIANG

MAMA SAYS



Mama says, *doing it scared is doing it brave.*

Mama says there's nothing left for her back in Hong Kong. Mama listens to Wong Faye after dinner. Mama says crying is for babies. Mama says, *you'll always be my baby.* Mama says she keeps money in her pocket for the Chinese newspaper sold at the supermarket. Mama says she's not good with words. Mama says she doesn't follow religious dogma. Mama says she keeps her catholic school uniform in her closet. Mama says she doesn't like the way her smile looks in pictures. Mama says, *get over here, let's take pictures.* Mama says, *my mother never braided my hair, didn't have the time for it. For me.* Mama says, *so I'll braid yours.*

Mama says, *you better call me when you leave me.* Mama says, *don't talk to me, I am so mad at you.* Mama says she watched her mother die. Mama says you'll watch yours too. Mama says she doesn't believe in many things. Mama says, *but I believe in you.* Mama says she doesn't trust prophets or gods or fate. But Mama says she's started hoping. Mama says the bump on her shoulder isn't a big deal. Mama says the doctors say she needs surgery: Mama says, *gáu séi yāt sāang.* Mama says she hopes it's not cancer. Mama says she's hoping because that's all she can do. Mama says, *sometimes it's all you have.*

Mama doesn't say it but both of you are so scared. So you say it to yourself: *we're doing it brave.*



DIWALI

BY ACINTYA SHENOY



I am the autumn leaves,
the shapes and colors shifting and swaying
across a pinterest board.
Not beautiful, not aesthetic, just
brown, lying on the floor.
I have never really known loss, but of course
I know fear. And I fear loss.

The red and orange and yellow dance
before my eyes, but they are far away. Their
dance so lively, twinkling like the Diwali lights
that tell me of more to gain,
dresses, jewelry, gifts,
and the like.

The red and orange and yellow shimmer like the glitter
of a new lehenga¹, bangles clinking
like bells. They dance, swirl in
a circle around a diya² illuminated
with their reflection:
old, wrinkled, crinkling.

The flame dies out.

The rain has come, pittering and pattering on my windowpane
and silently snuffing the candle out.



1: a traditional Indian dress consisting of a delicately embroidered blouse, long skirt, and shawl
2: Indian oil lamp used during the festival of Diwali

DIARY OF A MAD BLACK GIRL

BY EBITIMI FETEPIGI

Poem 1

I am in love with something I was taught to hate, I fear
The tight, springy ringlets in my heart-shaped hair
Eumelanin deeply embedded in my outer shell
Jackson 5 nostrils too, oh how deeply in love I fell.

Umber eyes rivaling the rich pigment of chestnuts,
A well-rounded frame that Aphrodite herself would envy,
Cheekbones distinguishing themselves from neighboring
features,
Wonder what I did in the past life to deserve such beauty.

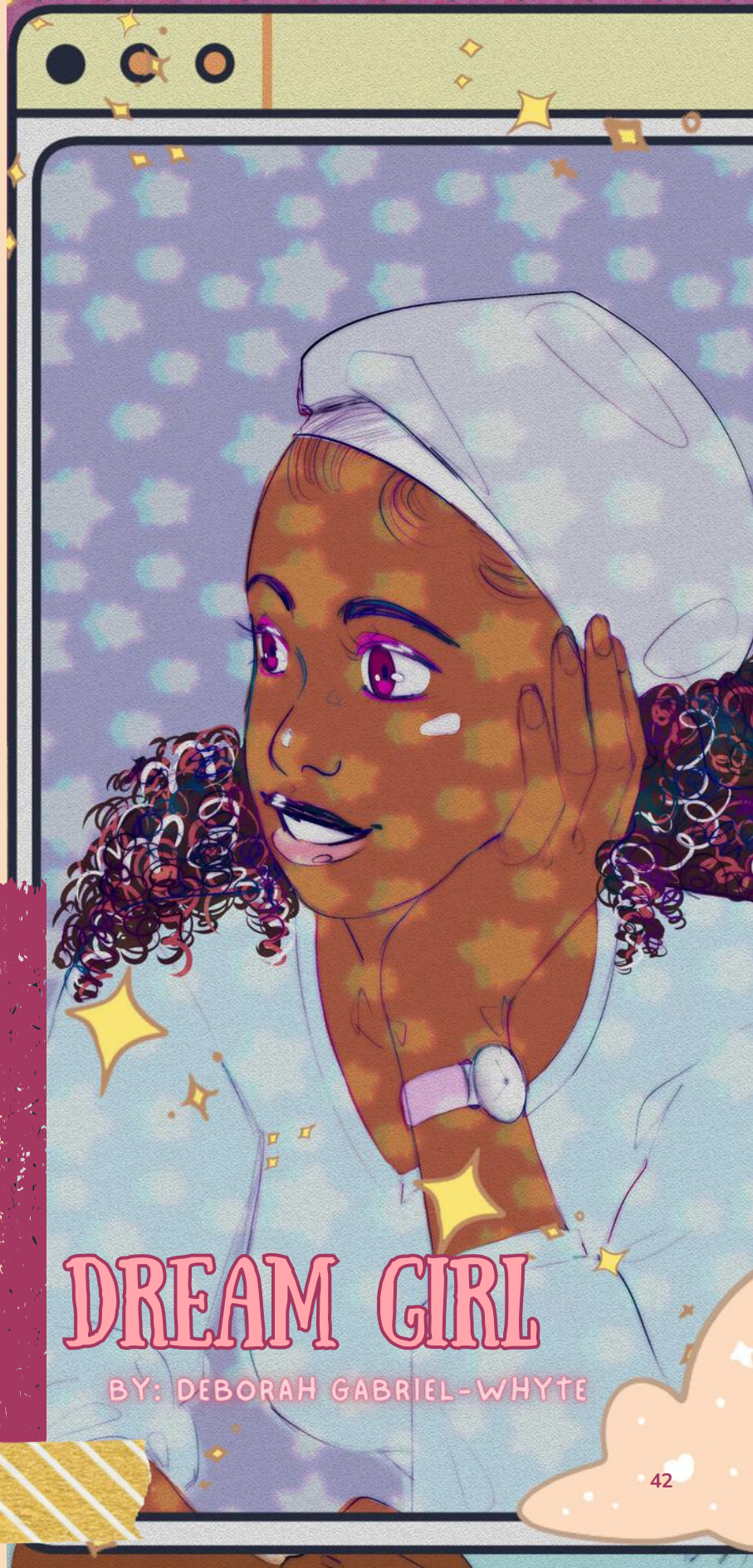
Poem 2

They called us devilish beasts
'Primitive', 'barbaric', called us everything but children of God
Desecrated our bodies and defiled our minds
As they bowed, on the Sabbath, to their benevolent Lord

They told you that your dark hue was evil materialized
Called you uncouth and filthy
Whilst they immolated their own at the stake,
And degraded you with no mercy.

Psychological bondage did a number on me,
Took 40 days and nights of trials and adversity,
Until I was finally able to break free,
From the lies, the myths and deception,
All rooted in resentment and insecurity.
So, I promise to spread the word to my heirs
I promise to tell them about our vibrant traditions
Our deeply rooted spiritual devotion
I promise to tell them that Home created life itself
I promise to reclaim my humanity.

This artwork was inspired by the truthful idea that Black women can be someone's dream girl. Being someone's screensaver on their phone, stars in their eyes when they look at you, the soft and almost dazzling effect you often see in older romance anime. It's really a reminder to Black girls that enjoy the romance genre, we can be, and we are, somebody's dream girl :D.



A CHOCOLATE BAR IN WHITE SAND

BY: FIZA RAFEK

Smooth milk chocolate covered flesh
Dark blackberry eyes hoping to see a different light
Tinted night sky hair, the length of our travel to this land
Wrinkles and ridges that hide our broken stories
We are immigrants in this land
Not knowing the ways of the foreign white sand
We're brown coloured pebbles that fall between the nooks and crannies
Trying to make a life out of nothing but our rustic and worn-out hands
So we faced each and every wave but remained in our place
Our feet stood strong with cuts and bruises that we collect along the way
This is a different country but it honestly feels like outer space
We are treated as aliens
Even though people state that racism is not in our society anymore
It lurks in the shadows of my family and I
Because of our smooth milk chocolate covered flesh

Racism is seen as an unacceptable issue in my society
and I have avoided it all my life
I just wished that everyone else did too
But all we can do is cross our fingers and pray
That our loved ones don't become the aftermath of the weak racist mind

But sometimes in the dark
Unacceptable thoughts creep into the minds of these people
"Society can't read my mind so I am free to think what I want"
This is what the weak whisper to themselves
Forbidden thoughts are the reality of these people
And hidden demons appear out of the dark holding the hands of them
Frail and injured
They use the demons to try to fix their own shattered souls
Hand in hand, face to face they're all alone
And the demons mumble...
"Look at your own skin, so fair and beautiful. You deserve to stay in this country, but them... with their milk chocolate covered skin. They are bitter inside, with dark chocolate encasing their heart. Whatever they do, they will never get your white chocolate skin."

Hate becomes embedded in the cracks of their shallow souls
And now these weak racist minds are released into our society
Ugly and repulsive words against us
We are surrounded each day
We concede in defeat and crumble to the first sand our bruised feet touched on this new found land
A label plastered across our bodies and mouths
Immigrants
There's nothing left to protect my
Smooth milk chocolate covered flesh
Dark blackberry eyes
Night sky tinted hair
Because these demons in the dark could be inside the souls of my classmates and peers

So I hide away from the world
Wishing for white chocolate to wash away the unknown sins of my milk chocolate flesh
I do not understand the bullets the demons shoot at us but I collect the bullet casings and wear them as a necklace
A reminder to myself that it's best to tape shut my mouth, cut off my ears, and tie down my arms
I have lost this war because
Our society may become more modern and advanced
But my bullet wounds and bruised knees will always remind me
Souls are weighed upon our chocolate skin
Whether it's
White,
Milk,
Or Dark...



PERFECT?

By Shanti Ramsahoye

My piece is called "Perfect?" and it illustrates society's expectations of femmes of colour, specifically brown and black women. My piece has two sides: a blue and red side. The blue side focuses on meeting academic standards and expectations, like getting good grades and being a diligent student. The red side focuses on meeting society's standards, like having an attractive body, getting enough likes on Instagram, and so on. Putting them together, my piece depicts expectations and standards you have to live up to, otherwise you are not considered a "perfect" daughter.

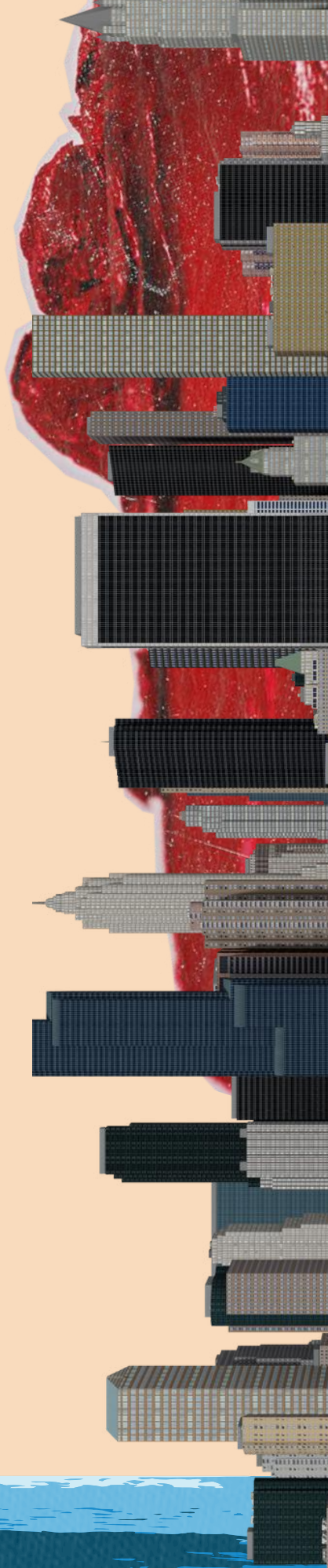
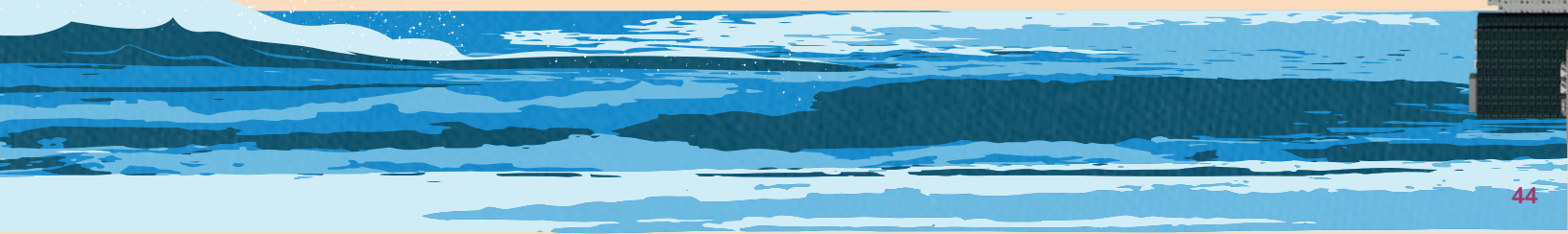
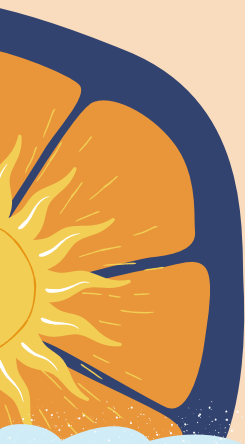




MY BROTHER DOMINIQUE

BY ARMANI COBB

You were a little boy at first,
Who just grew into the wrong lifestyle, cursed.
I liked to call it, victims of circumstance,
Others just label you, without a second glance.
A thug, a criminal, the "N" word they shout,
And many other distasteful things, no doubt.
Underneath, a heart so pure,
From the handcuffs bound, a fate destined from birth,
A journey so rough, but momma crying wasn't enough,
The idea of a brighter future slowly earned, is tough.
With each step taken, strength is found,
Breaking free from the handcuffs that are bound.



IS REPRESENTATION REALLY ALL THAT?

BY ACINTYA SHENOY

Representation.

It's the magic word; sprinkled throughout social commentary video essays, online media reviews, and marketing department meetings at film production studios. It's been incorporated into most mainstream media of the past decade, with more characters of color being portrayed on big screens and pages. Media that includes a diverse cast of characters (think *Arcane*) are heralded as the symbols of progress in popular culture, and media that doesn't (infamously *Harry Potter*) is dragged through the mud before being left to rot and be forgotten. Representation is the goal; accurately portraying as many of the world's infinitely complex and intersectional identities in a single piece of media translates to automatically successful media, at least among today's youth. But does this thought process reflect reality? Does the inclusion of a major character of color in a piece of media itself uplifting to people of color in real life? Take, for example, Mindy Kaling—a popular Indian-American screenwriter who has created blockbuster TV hits like *Never Have I Ever*, *The Sex Lives of College Girls*, and *The Mindy Project*. She has been heralded as one of the first South Asians to become prominent in the film industry and one of the first screenwriters to feature South Asians as main characters in their work, rather than stereotypical comedic reliefs such as Baljeet from *Phineas and Ferb* and Ravi Ross from *Jesse* and its spinoff *Bunk'd*. She's also been berated and slandered by South Asian media critics and general public members, alike with reasons ranging from her personality to the patterns of internalized racism and desire of white male validation in her work. Many of her main female protagonists hate their South Asian-ness, dreading cultural and religious events and feeling more “like themselves” when engaging in Western culture among their white friends. A major facet of their character arcs feature having to learn how to love a culture they've been ingrained in since birth; overcoming internalized racism seems to always be at the forefront rather than tackling the racism pushed by other groups. This phenomenon is not unique to South Asians, however—the repeated, stale storyline of a non-white child having to learn to love their non-whiteness permeates across countless forms of media depicting a wide variety of races and ethnicities. It's true that exploring these perspectives are not just valuable but necessary, as internalized racism remains a significant issue in most marginalized racial groups today, and depictions of

defeating it in art do empower people in real life who struggle with it to do the same. All the same, this cannot be the only storyline expressed for a character of a certain race, no matter how large the issue is. This portrayal assumes that assimilation to Western culture, or worse yet, desire for Western validation is a struggle that every single person of color faces, and that it's somehow “natural.” Hint: it's not. To progress as marginalized communities, regardless of race, it is necessary that the significance of Eurocentrism is diminished—only when the oppressor is removed can the oppressed live freely. Continuing to tie ourselves to colonial hegemonies in the name of “relatability” means continuing to hold ourselves back from progress. Most white characters do not have to “grapple” with their whiteness when living in a non-white country, so why must characters of color do the same? Why is it that whenever a South Asian character gets the privilege of being the main one, the conversation always shifts towards their race? Is it impossible to have a character who is comfortable with themselves, whose conflict is ingrained in something else, who can simply exist as a person of color without having their race be brought up? White characters don't always have to do it.



I'm using the fountain water to wash my skin in this photo. The purest water is said to be found in the shishi-odoshi (fountain), which also purges pollutants from your skin. Many women's stories and experiences give the unvarnished truth, or the true you, free from societal distortion or oppression, much like the water symbolizes clarity and regeneration. Their complicated identities can be better understood with the help of these voices. By doing this, we let their genuine viewpoints come through, in the same way that clean water nourishes and renews the environment.

There is no reason why it should not be the same for non-white ones.

Defenders of Kaling criticize diasporic South Asians for placing the “responsibility of representing the entire South Asian community” on the writer, asserting her right to express her personal experiences through storytelling. And this is completely fair –art created solely for the approval of the audience can come across as shallow and lacking substance if not done well. It is precisely this that Kaling suffers from when she does consciously attempt to engage in “representation.”

For instance, Devi from *Never Have I Ever* experiences a fleeting but impressionable romance with the only Indian love interest on the show–Nirdesh, whose name purposefully sounds like “nerd.” Nicknamed Des (because apparently Nirdesh is too difficult to pronounce), he and Devi initially hit it off before eventually breaking up due to...mommy issues. Des is a momma’s boy–his mother berates Devi for being crazy, and his inability to stand up to her is the final straw in the camel’s back. The South Asian community does face a plethora of issues when it comes to marital culture, from domestic abuse to weaponized incompetence to strict patriarchal structures. Filial piety, or completely obeying one’s parents, is viewed as the standard for children; thus, even in adulthood and marriage, people value the opinion of their parents higher than they do of their significant other. While these issues are extremely important to discuss, Kaling’s decision to include them in the show comes at a cost.

Almost all of Devi’s love interests are white, with the exception of Ethan, who is Hispanic, and Des. In an era where female characters of color are almost always paired in romantic relationships with white characters (Kate and Anthony from *Bridgerton*, Bela and Haley from *The Sex Lives of College Girls*, Joe and Georgia from *Ginny and Georgia*), and unhealthy relationships continue to plague the South Asian community, Des presented himself as a valuable opportunity to depict a healthy romantic relationship between two South Asian characters. However, in the name of representation and being “brutally honest” about the nature of South Asian men, Kaling instead pushed him out of the picture. This decision did nothing to raise “awareness”–rather, it a) paints a negative stereotype of South Asian men as spine-lacking momma’s boys who make horrible romantic partners, and b) tells its audience that it is pointless to pursue a relationship with one. Obviously, white men you barely get along with make much better partners.

To clarify, this article is not meant to be a personal or professional attack on Kaling–simply existing as one of the first major South Asian women in the Western film production industry is progress in itself. Her work has amplified more South Asian voices and given them a greater platform to tell their stories and bring light to many more issues. The issue is not with Kaling herself–rather, it is an issue that persists among characters of all non-white races, whether East Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, etc. Representation does not create any progress unless it actually elevates people of color from being butts of a joke to being complex, nuanced people with ideas, hopes, thoughts, and dreams that aren’t governed by their race. It must move beyond overused narrative templates and move towards uplifting all facets of people of color. As Kevin Leo Yabut Nadal of *Psychology Today* brilliantly puts it, “Representation should never be the final goal; instead, it should merely be one step toward equity.”

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MEET THE TEAM BEHIND

CHERRY VENUS



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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Currently an Ontario-based writer, **Caprice Strgar** believes that her work centralises around the power of experience, interweaving various themes in an exploration of their complexities. Caprice has been published in Poetry In Voice (PIV)'s 2024 Voices/Voix journal, Gently Mad Literary Magazine, and is currently an editorial intern for Cherry Venus Magazine and a publicist for Gently Mad. Her work was recently featured—selected from an international call for submissions—at a UNESCO Cities of Literature event hosted by Pigeon Publishing in Heidelberg. As a FutureVerse alumni and PIV ambassador, she runs poetry workshops for middle and high school students, inspiring her community through creative expression.

Born and raised in Ontario, **Brianna Tsang** is a seventeen year old girl who enjoys the simple pleasures of life. Her hobbies include reading, thrifting, listening to music, and collecting cute, seemingly useless, trinkets. Check her out <3 @bribrimelo on IG

As a published writer, color guard captain, and professional Tumblr user, **Acintya Shenoy** has no shortage of passion for the arts. After high school, she hopes to double major in marine science and English literature or poetry, perform with DCI and/or WGI, and hopefully do a study abroad program in Singapore. When she's not writing, dancing, or studying, you can find her trying (and failing) to make the ultimate grilled cheese sandwich, crying to Rick Astley's cover of "Pink Pony Club" by Chappell Roan, saving dance reels she'll never be able to replicate, and adding more books to her "Want to Read" list on Goodreads.

Irina Tall is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter."

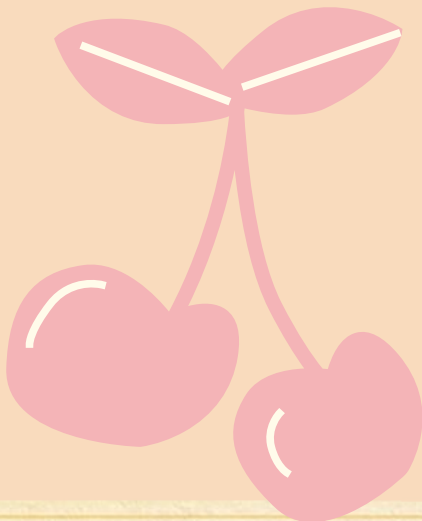
Rooted in Moh'kinstsis (Calgary), **Khushi Sidhu** is a French and Education student at the University of Calgary. A lover of languages, she strives to find beauty in the little things, using poetry as her vessel. Her work has been published in Voices/Voix and Estuaire in French, and in Cherry Venus Magazine in English. Her identity as the daughter of immigrants, her Punjabi-Sikh heritage, and the shared threads of humanity inspire her writing. She is rarely spotted without a chai in hand.

Chainka, born in Ukraine, has been writing since childhood, crafting stories and poems that explore the depths of human emotion. She is known for her ability to delve deeply into themes of sadness, desperation, and resilience. She writes in both English and Ukrainian about the fragile intersections of war, peace, love, and loss.

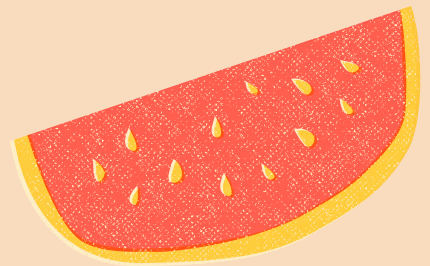
Ray is a student from Assumption High School in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Their poetry was inspired through their experience and their emotions through life as someone who struggles to stay on top and motivated. They get inspired to write about many painful memories from their past and current events going around the world. One of their biggest achievements is slowly getting better and not letting their depression take over their life! They got motivated to write and try to publish poetry by a close friend of theirs and they don't think they could have done it without her! They hope their poetry is inspiring enough for others to write as well!

Debbs enjoys creating comics, storytelling, and bike rides. When she's not creating, she's researching and learning about mental health and self care through art-therapy.

Fiza Rafeek is a poet, scientist, and storyteller currently studying Biological Sciences at the University of Calgary. Born in Kerala and raised between cultures, she laces her work with the echoes of migration, the weight of inherited silences and the unspoken language of belonging. When she is not writing poetry, she captures the unseen choreography of the world through her paintings, which she has started the company FRCosmos for to allow others to see through her lens. She is the oldest in her family with a loving younger brother and supportive parents. For her, poetry is not just ink on a page but the bridge between disciplines, between past and future, between what is known and what still humans beneath the surface of our skin, waiting to be discovered.



Jovina Zion Pradeep is a poet, photographer, and editor at Blossomer Literary Magazine and at Polyphony Lit. She is the 2025 National Youth Poet Laureate of the Western United States and Youth Poet Laureate of Alameda County (2024-25) who has performed at the Beast Crawl Literary Festival, been featured as a guest poet on Alameda Island Poets, and read at the Alameda City Hall. Her poetry has found a home at Poets for Science, United States National Youth Poet Laureate Newsletter, The Wave, The Louisville Review, Tri City Voice, Moonstone Arts Center Spring 2024 New Voices Anthology, San Francisco Youth Anthology, The Howl, SeaGlass Literary, The Dungeness Press, and elsewhere.



Ebitimi Fetepigi is a Grade 12 student at St. Ignatius of Loyola Catholic Secondary School. She is an aspiring lawyer and businesswoman who takes pleasure in contributing to the communities that have served her. Her passions include film, research, music, and of course, social justice activism. As a Black immigrant girl, she uses her personal experiences, along with historical records and narratives to inform her beliefs and worldviews. Poetry is her favourite creative medium through which she relays these beliefs and communicates her thoughts/ideas. She hopes her writing serves as a channel for people, Black women especially, to connect through shared experience and engage in deep introspection!



Since she could say her ABC's **Grace Poothullil** was eager to become the best speaker she could be. Day by day, she was falling in love with the English language and later on the French language. She is now a driven and award winning public speaker. Now sharing her love for English and helping others in finding the joy in public speaking. Her passion of encouraging other young writers pushes and inspires her own writing and changes the way she views her words. Our words have more impact than imaginable, speaking and writing is more of an art than given credit for.

Shanti, born in Canada, is a Guyanese Indo-Caribbean artist who has been expressing her creativity through visual arts since she was small. As a woman of colour, her art reveals the societal and familial pressures associated with growing up in a brown household. She hopes that all persons, but especially femmes of colour, can grasp and resonate with such subject matters in her piece "Perfect?"

Caitlyn is a second generation Chinese-Canadian sapphic who has a passion for collecting trinkets, and loves all things cute (especially idol rhythm games and fish). She is also a huge tea fanatic, talk to them @caitvql on Instagram!

Amanda Kameoka Ungaro is 16 years old. They are from Brazil, and have loved art for as long as they can remember! She began to consistently draw after watching anime and animated shows, and began redrawing or creating their own characters. They mainly do cartoonish traditional and digital renders, but she intends to expand their knowledge and learn new mediums and art styles. They want to continue growing as an artist, to hopefully one day have their own animated series and movies.



IN ADDITION:

Kaitlyn Shen
Armani Cobb
Grace Lowe

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LET A FEMINIST FUTURE FLOURISH <3

how gen z's art is refining self-identity and representation



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This isn't the end of Issue 1 - stay tuned on socials for website updates, podcast features, interviews, and more!