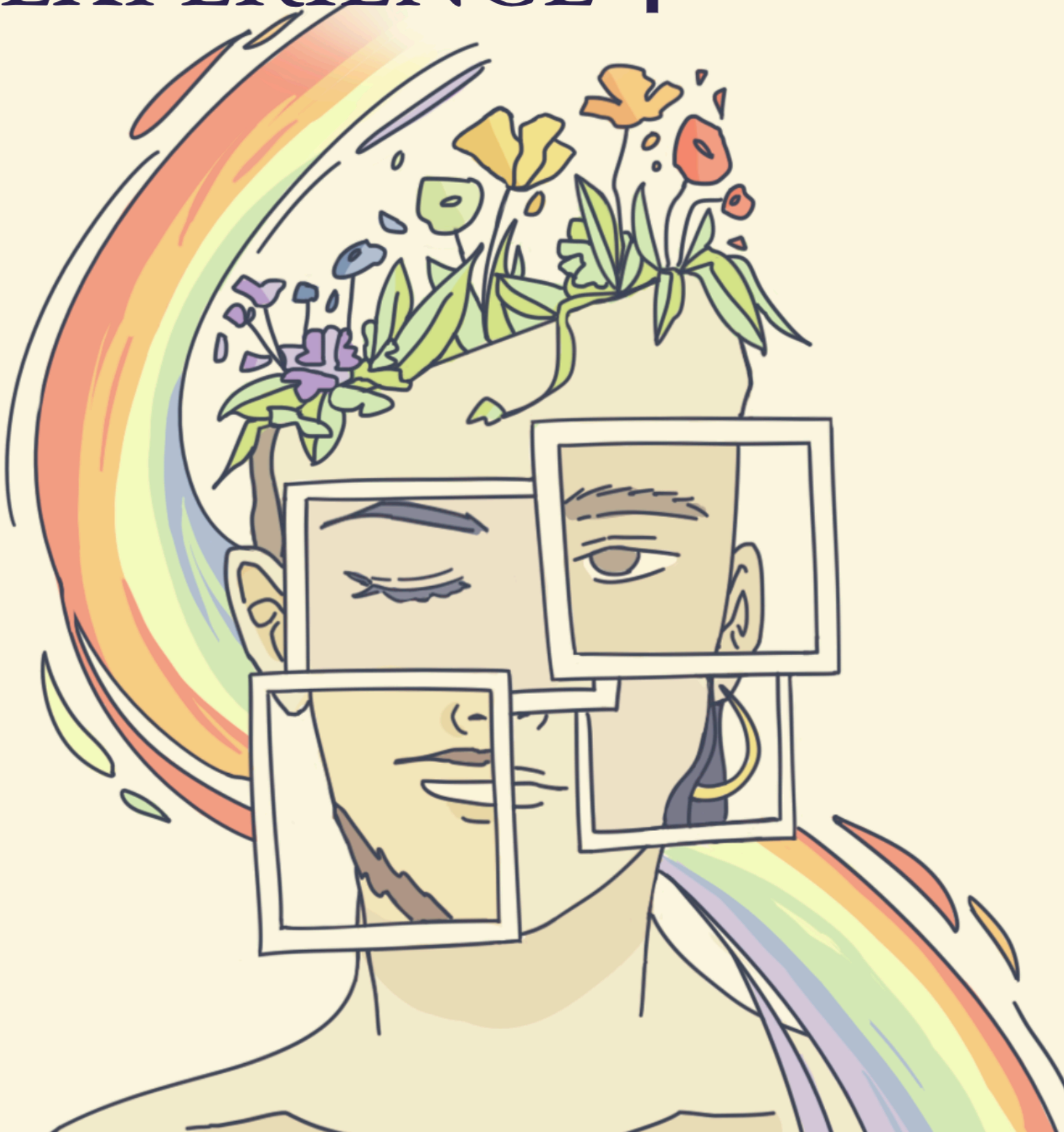


WHAT WE EXPERIENCE | FINDING SELF



Artist Reflection:

Gabriella Ignacio

This cover aims to reflect the issue's overlying themes, namely gender and sexual identity. The colors of the rainbow represent pride, the LGBTQ+ flag, and the diversity that pride encompasses. I also added a "collage" of varying faces in the center to express how many people struggle with their identity and how gender is a complex topic. Finally, the flowers represent the freeing of one's mind of societal binaries and allowing their true selves to flourish. Overall, I wanted the cover to be a bit more experimental than covers of past issues, and I hope you all enjoy it.

Happy Pride Month!



Letter from the Founders

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking valuable time out of your day to read our magazine! We are so grateful for all your support and engagement.

If you are new to our magazine, our names are Jeenah Gwak and Hope Yu, and we are two high school juniors, now rising seniors, in the greater Seattle area. Our project began as one of our many ideas. As Asian adolescents living in American society, we have witnessed countless instances of discrimination, xenophobia, and social injustice against people of Asian descent within our communities. Despite living in a relatively Asian-dense region, we have been exposed to various forms of social injustice against Asian Americans, such as the lack of Asian representation in academic curricula and recent COVID-19 related events. These occurrences galvanized us to take action.

Taking into consideration our abilities, we decided that promoting awareness through written works would be the most appropriate for our course of action. Through our magazine, we seek to share the untold stories of Asian-American experiences surrounding racism and societal pressures that are often overlooked in society. We hope to educate and inspire you to take action.

Our magazine, *What We Experience*, is released on a quarterly basis covering the experiences of various Asian identities. This fourth issue, titled "Finding Self," explores a variety of gender and sexual identities of Asian-Americans. Some articles dive into the history of different Asian cultures and their perception of gender and sexuality, while others guide us through a journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance. Society, at times, can be cruel and judgmental; we are dedicating this issue to celebrating individualism and unique aspects of what makes us all human. Through interviewing, doing research, and educating ourselves, we've quite enjoyed putting together this issue.

Thank you for supporting us in our journey to advocate for the Asian-American community. We hope you enjoy our magazine and feel inspired to share it with others.

Sincerely,
Jeenah Gwak and Hope Yu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Passion of the Cut Sleeve
Eric Ma 6

Editors' Commentary
Minari 9

Decades of Hidden Stories
Meilan Uyeno 12



The Desexualization of the Asian Male
Jeenah Gwak 16

Too Often Overlooked
Kaila Karns 19

LGBTQ+ Asian-American Fantasy Book Recs
Hannah Dy 24



Wrong Education: Queer Asians and the Model Minority
Ashley Chen 26

Art and Healing
Hope Yu 29



Poem: "A Match Against Time"
Eric Ma 34

Art Corner 35

Meet the Team 38

PASSION OF THE CUT SLEEVE

BY ERIC MA

Societal attitudes toward sexuality have varied over the course of history. Recently, the Weibo Incident of 2018, when its censorship of homosexual content was overturned after receiving heavy criticism, has been seen as a step forward for the LGBTQ+ community in China. But, the history of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people has spanned across thousands of years. Notable historical homosexual figures has existed across many cultures, from the ancient times of Rome with the famous story of Emperor Hadrian to the Chinese Emeperors of the Han Dynasty.

The Roman emperor Hadrian is known for his relationship with Antinous, a Bithynian Greek. Antinous was born in modern day Turkey, then taken to Italy for a higher education. Historians believe that Antinous met Hadrian in 123 AD. Lambert suggests that they did not become lovers during the first few years of their acquaintance.

By 128, Hadrian left for Greece with Antinous as part of his personal retinue.



A Ming dynasty illustration of the “Cut Sleeve” story. Photo Credits to VCG.

Married to Sabina, Hadrian did not seem to enjoy his marriage. Instead he showed an early inclination toward same-sex relationship, later developing “a mystical-religious need” for Antinous’s companionship (Lambert 84).

In Ancient China, homosexuality has been documented since the Han dynasty. Historian Bret Hinsch stated that many emperors during the Han Dynasty engaged in bisexual relationships. A monumental history of ancient China, the Records of the Grand Historian, recorded not only women but also men who used their looks to “attract the eyes of the ruler” (Sima Qian).

The story goes that by the last years of BCE, in modern day Xi’an, Dong Xiang lay asleep on the Emperor’s robe. Having awoken before Dong, Emperor Ai slit his sleeve, so as not to disturb Dong Xiang’s sleep. The story spread, and the term “passion of the cut sleeve” became a euphemism for intimacy between two men in Chinese history.



"Woman spying on male lovers." Photo Credits to Louis Crompton.

Emperor Ai’s reign lasted from 7 BCE to 1 BCE, and Dong’s political career did not outlast him long. Dong began as an imperial attendant, and though his introduction to the Emperor cannot be dated, by 4 BCE he had become Emperor Ai’s favorite.

Dong attended the Emperor, followed him to and fro. His clan received power and wealth: Dong’s wife had the power to come and go inside the palace, her sister was made an imperial consort, ranking just below Empress Fu (the highest rank inside the imperial harem and wife to Ai), and Dong’s father became the minister of palace supplies. By 3 BCE, Emperor Ai concocted a plan and granted Dong the title of marquess — this involved the demotion and later suicide of the Prince of Dongping. Many officials opposed Dong’s quick rise to power and received even quicker rebukes.

By late 2 BCE, Emperor Ai granted Dong, at the mere age of 22, the commander of the armed forces. Dong’s faithfulness did not diminish and continued accompanying the Emperor till 1 BCE — when Emperor Ai collapsed, with no heir. Dong, shocked by the speed of events, could not exercise his nominal power. He was seized by the Empress Dowager that day and dismissed the next day and committed suicide that night and soon buried. The Dong clan then faded into obscurity.

Some historians believe that evidence of homosexuality first emerged during the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE). For example, Mizi Xia’s love for Duke Ling of Wei was the most famous story of same-sex love from the Zhou dynasty. Mizi Xia, known and favored because of his beauty, was praised highly for his filial piety when he forged orders from the Duke to obtain a fast-enough carriage so he could catch a glimpse of his dying mother. Once, walking along the Duke inside the orchard, he bit into an especially delicious peach and immediately presented it to the Duke as a gift so both could taste its sweetness.

The phrase of the “bitten peach” later became an idiomatic phrase for homosexuality. Yet, age did not take mercy on Xia’s beauty. As time worked against him, in old age and solitude, Xia found himself without support and stripped of his favor with the Duke, who eventually accused him of thievery for stealing the carriage and took insult to the half-eaten peach as well. Though beyond this story, nothing warrants Mizi Xia’s historical existence, the implications resonate with many other stories: the cruel nature of time.

History has documented many homosexual royalties. The famous stories of Antinous to the tales of Mizi Xia denote these notable figures and their influence. Although society has perceived them differently in different periods, the history royalty in the LGBTQ community finds its roots thousands of years ago and across cultures.

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EDITORS' COMMENTARY:

MINARI

This past February, movie production company Plan B publicly released a heartwarming film titled *Minari*. Written and directed by the renowned director Lee Isaac Chung, the movie follows a Korean family that moves to Arkansas in search of the American Dream.

Starring Steven Yeun (as Jacob Yi) and Yeri Han (as Monica Yi), with Noel Kate Cho and Alan Kim in the roles of the children, Anne and David, the film begins with the arrival of the family to a farm in Arkansas. They had moved from California, seeking bigger and better opportunities, with Jacob aspiring to grow a farming business. He explains to his wife that he wants to grow produce that “tastes like home” for the 30,000 Koreans that immigrate to the United States each year. He seeks to grow Korean produce to sell to vendors. While the parents work at a local poultry processing factory, sorting chickens by sex, the children spend their time at home or attending a local White church. Eventually, Monica’s mother, Soonja (played by Yuh-Jung Youn), comes from Korea to live with the family in Arkansas. Because of her “old-country” ways of living and eating, the family dynamic shifts completely. The children are set back by their grandma’s unusual lifestyle, and David, especially, initially despises living with her, complaining that she isn’t “like a real grandma,” since “she doesn’t bake cookies.” However, their bond deepens in a non-traditional sense; Soonja teaches him how to play a card game and David gets her hooked on Mountain Dew. They explore the forest together, even planting minari in the stream, as Soonja claims that it will grow best there.

Minari (미나리 in Korean; often referred to as water celery or water dropwort) is a Korean leafy green vegetable, popularly used in many Korean dishes. Soonja plants this vegetable in a creek bed in the forest closeby their house, perhaps serving as a metaphor for the Yi family’s circumstances. Like minari, the family members are transplants in American society.

The film was a huge hit; it had its world premiere in January 2020 at the Sundance Film Festival, winning both the U.S. Dramatic Audience Award and the U.S. Dramatic Grand Jury Prize. *Minari* also earned six nominations at the 93rd Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Score, Best Original Screenplay, Best Actor (Steven Yeun), and Best Supporting Actress (Yuh-Jung Youn). Youn won for her outstanding acting performance, which made her the first Korean actress to win an Academy Award. In addition to these nominations and awards, the film was nominated for the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance along with six other nominations at the 74th British Academy Film Awards, and won the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film.



Han Yeri (from top left), Steven Yeun, director Lee Isaac Chung, Yuh-Jung Youn (from bottom left), Alan Kim, and Noel Cho at the Sundance Film Festival. Image Credits to Taylor Jewell.

MINARI

Regarding my perspective on *Minari*, I don't have much to say. It isn't that the movie itself wasn't interesting; rather, it was the opposite. *Minari* encompassed numerous aspects of immigration to the United States and the reality of it all, and quite frankly, the rawness flustered me. No, "The American Dream" doesn't always come true, and I was fully aware of this. But this movie laid out the harsh journey step-by-step, and I wasn't exactly ready for it.

As the film opened with the Yi family driving to their new home on a farm in Arkansas, my mom, my sister, and I sat in my room. A month after *Minari* was released in theaters, my mom, sister, and I had found the movie online. My mom had been wanting to watch it since its release, but never quite had the chance until that Saturday evening. We each settled into our seats, eager for the movie to begin.

I don't remember the fine emotions I felt during each specific scene in the film, mostly because I felt a wide range of emotions. But personally, the aspect of this movie that stood out most was its sense of familiarity. Sure, my family didn't immigrate from Korea to a farm in Arkansas. But just like the Yi family, we practically abandoned our stable lifestyle in Korea to move to the States, seeking bigger and greater opportunities. Like David and Anne, English was mine and my sister's second language. Like Jacob and Monica, my parents started their lives anew in the United States, building their way from the ground up. Just like the Yi family, we were foreigners among a community of natural-born citizens.

While my family was fortunate enough to find our way through American society and establish a stable home in the States, as this movie depicts, not everyone is as lucky. This film, for the truth it exposes, deserves the countless awards it was recognized for.

- Jeenah Gwak



The Cast of *Minari*. Photo Credits to the film, *Minari*.

MINARI

I was not shocked nor blown away when I watched *Minari* in the dark corner of the living room with the rest of my family. Instead, it invoked a sense of sad understanding within me. Though I hadn't personally experienced every single thing depicted throughout the film, it wasn't too far off what I had heard from others, including family members. Each twist and turn to the plot didn't surprise me, but instead, confirmed the narratives I had heard. For example, I found myself nodding when the fire burned down their farm alongside their chance at financial success. When they went to the river bank to obtain the minari, it all made sense, because of course that is how it would end. Any sort of complete happy ending would feel inaccurate or insincere.

I saw the initial movie reviews from random Google users when I was attempting to purchase the movie. The majority were positive, ranging from drawn out paragraphs full of admiration to people conveying how grateful they were to have stories so similar to their own depicted on such a large screen with such a wide audience, especially at this moment in history. However, there were some comments that stated that the film was too slow, or that they didn't really understand why everyone thought it was so revolutionary. To the latter, (depending on the perspective) I understand your point of view. Many who directly experienced events such as the ones depicted in the movie may not consider it life changing but the fact that it has the potential to be revolutionary for the many who never even considered a storyline like that is what makes it so important.

Sometimes people complain about how teen movies don't truly depict what it means to be a teenager. If they were to be accurate, there would be a lot of anxiety and

a lot of studying. Even if that isn't the demographic the movie is about, it would still be a lot less interesting than more fantastical and romanticized plots. Now, it wouldn't exactly be revolutionary for a student to watch someone on screen doing homework, failing tests, and having their entire mental efforts revolve around college. However, for those who haven't experienced this sort of lifestyle, this narrative would introduce a new perspective. In that sense, those who haven't experienced immigration or a Korean family setting will be introduced to completely new narrative.

To the people who call the plot slow or boring: life isn't fast nor is it always exciting. Things constantly go wrong and life is not perfect for anyone. That's what it means to be human. That's what makes this movie so well done. It shows what it means to be human from a demographic that doesn't have many narratives in the public media sphere.

All in all, I really liked this movie. Perhaps I wasn't gripping the edge of my seat to see what would happen next, but that is because I personally didn't need to. I would consider this movie part of a much larger narrative that needs to be told.

- Hope Yu

DECADES OF HIDDEN STORIES

BY MEILAN UYENO

“People decide what you’re like before they even get to know you.” -Celeste Ng

When I was born in Chongqing, China, I was abandoned on a doorstep by my birth mother and later put up for adoption along with thousands of other girls. For years, I wondered what was wrong with me; why would a mother give up her baby girl? What I didn’t realize was that China was undergoing a massive surge in population at the time, and with the government’s attempts to curb this overpopulation, several million children were put up for adoption. Primarily female babies were left at orphanages, aborted and abandoned. China’s history of female infanticide, spanning over 2000 years did not begin with their one-child policy, nor will it end with it.

This one-child policy came into effect in 1979, implemented by one of China’s most powerful figures – Deng Xiaoping – in an attempt to reduce the population. Mothers were forced to give up their second, third, fourth children, and males were preferred over females because they could purportedly provide better for future generations and were generally said to be stronger both in body and character. In the 2000’s, a demographic census showed that up to 50 million girls were abandoned or given up by the end of the decade. Mothers believed that females weren’t as strong as males, and therefore wouldn’t be able to achieve as much. This belief translates heavily into many other cultures, and Asian women are often overlooked regardless of their capabilities.

For example, although India is progressing away from a male-controlled culture, male births remain highly applauded and celebrated while female births are frowned upon. Men are defined as the dominant figures in India, and they are taught to be strong and affable while women are prepared only for the household, pressured to be subservient and reserved. This gender discrimination extends beyond childbirth, affecting education and employment. The male literacy rate in India is above 80% whereas the female literacy rate is only 65%, and the labor force participation of women is remarkably lower than that of men.

Additionally, in Korea, females are also discriminated against because they are not considered as “professional” or “capable” as males. They hold only 17% of the Korean parliament, and many women are told not to pursue jobs in certain industries because companies prefer men. Most women applying for jobs in Korea, similar to those in other countries, are immediately assumed to be less capable or weaker than their male counterparts.

There are several millions of Asian-American families that reside in America whose heritage dates back to earlier centuries when waves of immigrants entered the United States. The suppression of Asian-American women was blatantly apparent in the United States’ Page Act of 1875 that restricted female immigrants from entering the country on behalf of their “lack in

moral character." Asian-American women have long since been objectified, labeled as submissive, incapable, and incompetent, and are often disrespected. The roots of these sexist judgements can be traced back for years to interactions between White men and Asian women. In the mid-twentieth century, the US had several male military regiments stationed throughout Asia in Korea, Japan and Vietnam. These soldiers often collected Asian wives to show as "war brides" and objects of battle, and the Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese women were viewed only as sexual objects by the soldiers. But an Asian woman is not a toy designed to live up to anyone's standards. Why should she be classified as worthless or lacking in moral character?



After war, White men would collect Asian women to show proudly as an "object of battle". Photo Courtesy of Yayoi Lena Winfrey.

The discrimination of Asian-American women is evident as they are treated different simply because society has defined females by non-exclusive weaknesses.

As world renowned Asian-American author Celeste Ng wrote, "people decide what you're like before they even get to know you." Influenced by societal gender norms and America's history with Asian women, people automatically judge female Asian Americans by race and by sex regardless of their character.

Not only are the identities of Asian-American women suppressed by societal norms, but people of many other genders and races also face discrimination. Males are taunted for a variety of possible flaws in their masculinity, and members of the LGBTQ+ community are constantly disgraced. Many preconceptions of these people have been formed from histories of systematic stigmas.

Various sources, ranging from news and social media to the film industry, influence our perception of masculinity and femininity. Through these sources, society has established its ideal man and woman, labeling each with certain characteristics.. Men such as Kurt Chew-Een Lee have been labeled as strong, dominant figures while women such as Anna May Wong have been considered as unintelligent, dependent characters.



Anna May Wong was originally cast only for stereotypical roles such as the yellow-faced daughter in "Daughter of the Dragon". Photo Courtesy of Everett.

America's classification of the strong, dominant male has been influenced by centuries and centuries of patriarchal society. Men were expected to build a strong foundation for their wives and family and courageously go to war. Kurt Chew-Een Lee is one such example. He was the first Asian-American marine officer in American military history. In 1950, he single handedly saved thousands of lives in the Korean War, indisputably becoming one of America's greatest military officers. For years, men have entered the battlefield as strong soldiers fighting for their country, and their influence is one of many that extends to young boys everywhere. These boys are often expected to live up to the powerful standards of masculinity, set by male war heroes before them. For years, men have entered the battlefield as strong soldiers fighting for their country, and their influence is one of many that extends to young boys everywhere. These boys are often expected to live up to the powerful standards of masculinity, set by male war heroes before them.

On the other hand, women have consistently been objectified in American history. Anna May Wong was one of the first Asian Americans to rise to fame in the film industry in Hollywood. Originally cast only as an extra in various movies, she played the stereotypical role of a female Asian American. In these roles, she was continuously discriminated against for her race and gender, both by legislation preventing interracial interaction at the time, and by her film crew. Wong was only asked to play roles of Asian "yellow-faced" Americans in films where her female character was stereotypically unintelligent, objectified and fetishized. It took years for studios to give Wong lead roles, and it wasn't until after her death that Wong was recognized as a truly talented Asian-American female.

Growing up, I often read news stories about white male "celebrities" – famous actors, rising stars from

Hollywood, and male astronauts venturing out into space. I realized the media tends to focus more on male accomplishments and often does not applaud the talents or discoveries of women as highly. Additionally, the achievements of Asian-American women specifically are generally ignored, partly due to the perception of Asian-America women as weak and submissive characters. Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu, for example, was an Asian-American nuclear physicist who played a critical role in the Manhattan Project, developing nuclear weapons for the United States. She was known as the "Queen of Nuclear Research," as she made significant contributions to the study and research of nuclear physics. Although she was awarded a medal for her work in physical science, Dr. Wu is not one of the names that roll off our tongues when we think of important historical figures.



Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu spent most of her life contributing to America's study of nuclear weapons and physics. Photo Courtesy of Marta Macho Stadler.

Few people recognize Wu's major contributions to science, and the media refuses to acknowledge several Asian-American women as it continues to portray them as visual objects rather than intelligent individuals.

As Sojourner Truth once said, "I am as strong as any man that is now... I can do as much work as any man." Clearly it is not workload or strength that defines a woman. Today, while women of all ethnicities and identities achieve goals as high, or even higher than any man, they are still widely ignored, being stereotyped as ignorant, subdominant females. Anna May Wong was an extremely talented actress. Why should she have been cast only as a stereotypical subservient Asian female? In the same sense, Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu contributed so significantly to a major part of America's scientific knowledge. Why shouldn't she receive the same recognition and praise as her male and non-Asian counterparts?

When my parents arrived back in America after my adoption, they were often told "that baby won the lotto" by many strangers. But the truth is, there is no winning when it comes to devaluing a life because of a child's gender. Asian-American women are constantly devalued if they are not the ideal desirable person projected by the media, and society continues to perpetuate the norms that confine Asian-American women and girls.

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DESEXUALIZATION OF THE ASIAN MALE

BY JEENAH GWAK

My favorite series growing up was *Diary of Wimpy Kid*, written by Jeff Kinney. Every time a new book was released, I dragged my mother to the nearest Barnes & Noble to purchase the newest addition to the series. Upon exiting the store, I raced to the car, took my seat, and eagerly flipped open the book. As a third grader, I was greatly entertained by the adventures taken by teenager Greg Heffley and his best friend.

The overt racism present throughout the series only now dawns on me. As the sole non-White character in the series, Chirag Gupta, is the butt of all jokes, being made fun of for his scrawniness, height, and accent. While his race or ethnicity are not made clear in the novels' illustrations (although his ethnicity is hinted at from his name), films based on the series cast an Indian actor, Karan Brar, in the role. He represents the commonly stereotyped Indian male in society, one of which is constantly perpetuated in media and film.

Karan Brar playing Chirag Gupta. Photo
Courtesy of *Diary of Wimpy Kid* films.



In the media, younger Asian males are often perceived as “not masculine enough” or “feminine,” while older Asian men are considered “foreigners” with thick accents. For example, on TikTok, Asian teenagers are referred to as “pretty boys,” which indefinitely attributes a common feminine trait to them. To Westerners, these younger Asian males are stereotyped as cute, innocent boys who haven’t gone through puberty yet. On the other hand, older Asian males are usually considered nothing more than clueless foreigners.

Perhaps these stereotypes are rooted in the first portrayals of Asian men in Western media. More often than not, in films and television shows, Asian males play particular roles, constricted to martial arts masters and uncultured foreigners with thick accents. Unsurprisingly, these Asian actors are cast in supporting roles, of which the role just needs to be filled. For instance, in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, a 1961 adaptation of a novella with the same title, a White actor, Mickey Rooney, played the role of an Asian man, Mr. Yunioshi, with certain facial features and a thick accent. From just the opening scene, he is seen as a klutz, clumsily heading for the door and, with his giant camera, accidentally taking a picture of himself. He is then seen tripping against a lamp and murmuring incomprehensible English. To other characters in the film, he is seemingly undesirable due to his looks – thick glasses, slanted eyes, and buck teeth – and actions. Though Mr. Yunioshi captivated the attention of many audience members and gave them a huge laugh, Asian people among the audience weren’t so pleased. Andrew Kung, a Chinese-American photographer based in New York, reflects on this instance of yellowface, discussing how “thick, stunted accents and exaggerated mannerisms” are used “to reinforce existing stereotypes, ridiculing or villainizing Asian men as a form of entertainment.” At this time, however, this wasn’t unheard of. In fact, many Hollywood films featured non-Asian actors and actresses in Asian roles. These early depictions of Asian males were just



Mickey Rooney as Mr. Yunioshi in "Breakfast at Tiffany's." Photo Credits to Bettmann Archive/Getty Images.

the beginnings of the ridicule and discrimination that Asian men face today.

Another source of this inaccuracy traces back to when Chinese communities began immigrating to the United States. Chinese men were often seen as evil males who steal the jobs and women from White men. To minimize this so-called “threat,” society began to characterize Asian men as “passive, effeminate, and weak” (Kung).

So, how did this inaccurate portrayal of Asian men transform into Asian males being desexualized? For one, older Asian men and Asian teenage boys are given completely distinct identities. Whereas older Asian men are “unattractive” and “creepy” with thick accents, Asian boys on TikTok are referred to as “cute” and “pretty,” with “feminine” characteristics such as pale, white skin and slim bodies. Manliness is a part of neither description. As this pressure to show traditional visual displays of masculinity arose in American society, Asian-American males have continuously sought to portray themselves as masculine, emphasizing sharp jawlines, elevated cheek bones, and fit bodies. In turn, these efforts to live up to standards of the Western world often have harmful impacts on the mental health Asian males.

The ideal masculine person featured across broader mainstream media is White, physically well-built, extroverted, and charismatic. In other words, this male is perfect in every aspect. However, Asian-American men in the media never fit this mold, nor do males of other races and ethnicities. Quite frankly, the “ideal” male standard that is perpetuated by Western society is unrealistic and disrespectful. Each individual has their own identity. Each individual expresses themselves in ways they deem fit in a respectful manner. Each individual is different and unique. Just as American society values individualism, there shouldn't exist a “mold” that Asian males must fit into because each individual is unique in their own way.

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TOO OFTEN OVERLOOKED: THE TRANSGENDER ASIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

BY KAILA KARNS

When the topic of transgender representation or the experiences of those who go through that process are brought to attention, people always have something to say, but rarely do they attempt to consider the perspectives of the very subjects of discussion. There exists a lack of representation of trans-identifying people in media, as their experiences tend to be overshadowed in the realm of literature and media giants. The following are the experiences of two Asian Americans, one identifying as an AMAB (assigned male at birth) transfemme, and one identifying as an AFAB (assigned female at birth) trans man.

The first person interviewed was a woman who is now from the Bay Area but was raised in Orange County, California. Maddie Liu is a transfeminine artist, multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, and composer within the intersection of jazz and hip-hop. Her family escaped prosecution from communist China (maternally from Jilin, paternally from Shanghai) to the states, and she is the firstborn child of her parents in America. We opened dialogue with her process in coming out and the journey of finding the words to better identify herself.

She spoke of the lack of trans representation during her childhood in a conservative county in Southern California. She had only been exposed to media that depicted trans people as inhuman, often as the butt of jokes or evil deceivers. She recalls a constant inclination to be feminine, but because it was always treated as a quirk or as a fetish, it was something that elicited an equal if not more powerful feeling of shame. When it comes to finding one's gender

identity, Maddie makes clear that signs aren't always necessary to indicate whether someone is trans. For some people, it's a discovery they only uncover later in life. However, Maddie feels that she did somewhat fit the "typical" trans narrative. For example, she remembers having idealistic dreams of being Disney princesses. She began crossdressing fervently as early as late elementary school, as she usually felt a stronger connection to femmes in the media. She additionally tried over-compensating this self-prescribed weakness by becoming somewhat abrasive, and being a "serial flirt," but the more she suppressed these feelings and thoughts by trying to live life the way it was prescribed to her, the emptier she felt. Towards the end of high school and into the beginning years of college, Maddie entered a deep depression. She broke up with her high school sweetheart and dealt with many themes of death and rejection in times of hardship. She reached a point where the feeling of emptiness overpowered her will that she was unsure if she could even continue to live. Meeting other queer and trans people, however, granted Maddie a glimpse of a possibility that she had never allowed herself to consider. One of her most powerful memories was at a crossdressing club in San Francisco. There, she met a supportive, older crossdresser, who was on the path that Maddie was still on at the time (or more accurately, the path Maddie's father had set for her) of being married with kids and in tech. Maddie imagined for the first time a frightening future where she had gone down the same path as her and as her father: a loveless marriage based on a lie, children born into familial conflict, a soul-sucking job in order to support the family. Towards the end of the night, she confessed

that if she could go back in time to her twenties, she would transition without a second thought. Since making that statement, she has come out and is now living authentically. She felt she could no longer hold any pretense about who she was, and the truth felt in that moment was so incredibly freeing.

Maddie feels that “being cis, trans, or non-binary is a somewhat arbitrary definition.” She believes everybody exists amorphously and undefinably, with both sexuality and gender constantly shifting and evolving, and that people only attempt to define themselves in order to relate to others in society. In other words, she holds a firm belief that everybody exists somewhere on some spectrum, slightly cis, somewhat trans, a little straight, and a tad gay. Despite the conception that our identities are so immutably defined and innate to our being, Maddie believes that many of us fail to recognize just how much influence our society, upbringing, and surroundings have on the way one positions themselves in the world. Our identities have been conditioned to us from a young age and defining anything always reduces a certain level of nuance and understanding.



Maddie. Photo Courtesy of Maddie.

Moving towards a different lens of introspection, we migrate towards what it was like for her specifically in relation to being Asian American and coming out, of how her experience differed or how her family reacted to her gender identity. My inquiry on this subject stems from how a variety of Asian cultures have historically treated trans-identifying people, both in the past and present. For Maddie, this journey was full of hardship. On one hand, her siblings have been supportive since the beginning, and things went surprisingly well with her mother. While her mother didn't really understand, she immediately went to the local LGBTQ center to attend classes for parents of trans children. Maddie was touched by that effort her mother put in, as “she may still have certain ideas of what it should mean to be a man or woman, but she is trying her best, and that means the world to me.” However, when she came out to her father, they got into a huge argument. He told her that if this was the lifestyle choice she wanted to make, then she would have to support herself on the endeavor. He called her selfish, too sensitive about her identity, and made little effort to use her name or preferred pronouns. She recalls painfully that at the time, it felt like he had left her to die. There has not been any improvement in their relationship, and presently, no one in their family speaks to him (as Maddie's parents divorced three years ago as well).

Regarding Maddie's feelings about her Asian identity and how it compares regardless of being a trans woman, she reflects how she grew up hating the stereotypes of Asian men being feminine and remembers letting that prevent her from transitioning. When she finally transitioned, she was doubly fetishized for being both trans and Asian. People expected her to be subservient, to be docile and feminine and weak, and it was all “so annoying.” As a result Maddie often feels pretty disconnected from other Asian Americans. When it comes to facing how dark the world can be towards trans people, she wants to have some optimism, but admits

to being somewhat existential, or “shadow-zoned, as [her] friend would say.” Maddie shares that being trans is not a monolithic experience, adding, “There is no prerequisite to being trans than a knowledge of your personal truth, which can take time to figure out – and is absolutely okay to take your time on. Our collective liberation comes not from conforming and molding ourselves to the powers that be, but in proudly and unabashedly celebrating who we are.”

In contrast to that of Maddie’s experiences, trans men often feel that they get overlooked in popular media. One such trans man, Kayden Satya Ortiz, opens up about his story. He is presently a student, but also a singer for the band Sigil, which is based out of Anaheim, CA. His family is originally from Puri, India. We opened up with the same dialogue as I did with Maddie, asking about how it was for him when he first came out about his feelings – and how his Indian family reacted to them.

Kayden stated that he came out in 2011 to his family. He knew prior to then at about as early as second grade that he was trans, but didn’t have the words to verbalize that yet. Kayden remembers thinking he “was an alien or something, which [he] thought was cool, and then [he] got made fun of and then it wasn’t so cool,” and Kayden laughs. It took him till the end of seventh to the beginning of eighth grade to learn what the meaning of trans was to really realize how he had been feeling. His first introduction to trans people, that of Adam Torres from a popular television show called *Degrassi*. Adam’s role was the “aha” moment for Kayden, as this was the first trans person he had ever known. He recalls, “Back then there weren’t reading options available in the way there is now. This was really pivotal for me.”

Because Kayden’s upbringing was so conservative, he wasn’t shown anything else and as a result felt that he couldn’t identify with anyone. For the most part

though, his family took it really well. “My mom,” Kayden recalls, “was really cool with it because her uncle was gay and it definitely helped her to understand it better, as a stepping stone for her to me.” Kayden’s grandfather had initially struggled to use the correct pronouns, but eventually got used to it, and respected his wishes in coming out. They were, unfortunately, quite hesitant to tell the extended family in India about it though, mostly out of concern for Kayden due to their conservative background and the country’s problem with trans people in general. India has a history of punishing queer identifying people as a whole, so this was something Kayden’s family did not want to risk putting him in danger with. This being said, his extended family did learn of it eventually, and as expected, didn’t take it too well. His older relatives therefore do not accept him at all.



Kayden. Photo Courtesy of Kayden.

When it comes to the nature of his homeland being the way it has been against trans people, Kayden feels that it’s all tragic. “Such beautiful people are hurt and murdered with life taken before it has the chance to grow!” He explains that Indian politics play a part in this issue, as India’s current prime minister, Narendra Modi, is essentially the Trump of India (with his slogan even being “Make India great again,” much like that of former President Trump’s).

His ideals are extremely conservative, and while the younger generation of Indian people are pushing back against him, the trouble is that a lot of the older generation still exist and keep him in his position. Narendra uses a lot of anti-trans rhetoric, which in turn influences how trans people get treated in India, and there are no protections available to protect them. It's at the extent now where the people attacking trans citizens are not even being prosecuted, even if they took the life or another solely because to Narendra trans lives don't count as life to begin with. Kayden is angered by this as, "it's insane enough that even while not being charged for a hate crime they're also not even being charged for the murder of another human being in of itself."

On the topic of Asian American trans representation, Kayden feels that there is significantly more literature available than in his younger years, but when it comes to trans Asian American representation, it's virtually nonexistent. Trans people in the media are predominantly white and very infrequently a person of color. "A lot more representation is needed, for sure." Maddie does feel that trans representation is getting better with shows like POSE, but that there is still a long way to go. Most trans people shown in the media tend to fit into the binary, and this is something she feels could be expanded upon. Maddie also sees the lack of Asian trans representation in Hollywood, and notes that there is a lack of gender balance in trans media representation, and that transgender women and transfemmes have more representation within media. Some say it's because transmasculines generally have an easier time blending in post-transition, but she's not entirely sure this is the case. Though Kayden's interview reveals that there may be some truth to that thought. In Southeast and East Asia, being a trans woman of color is extremely dangerous, but as a trans man can pass easier, as people don't assume Kayden to even be trans just based on appearances alone. But because of how trans women are seen as more brave for undergoing what difficulties they go

through, they're given more media attention. In the US, Kayden feels that the patriarchal belief system similarly is so ingrained in our society that when it comes to trans people, trans men aren't being given the same space to talk as trans women are either. In Maddie's opinion however, she feels it has to do with the positioning of manhood as power, and how transfemmes threaten that by willingly giving up that power. Additionally, many men are so terrified of being gay that they see transgender women as a real threat to their existence, especially if they find them attractive, as this defies "traditional" western gender norms to feel that way. Thus, more violence is enacted on transfemmes. He also believes that, because trans men are raised as women, they feel that they have to stay quieter due to societal pressures – and are less inclined to speak up about it as a result.

Kayden has consistently been involved with trans activism. He's spoken at school board meetings, for newspapers like the Washington Post, and different news channels. Kayden had also worked in support groups and was briefly involved in an affidavit for a Supreme Court case about trans bathroom rights. These experiences have helped him to better understand how to approach the issues surrounding his community. "More often than not, it's very difficult." Anti-trans literature is prominent in the US and has created a number of problems for trans people. "Sometimes though, you hear really wholesome stories about trans people being treated with actual respect and decency." Kayden recalls a time where he was at his favorite bar called Barcode in Garden Grove. "We were all showing old pictures of ourselves to each other and the bartenders. I showed them a picture pre-transition and they were very surprised, but they gave me a free round of shots and were totally cool about it." These good things happen from time to time, which makes things easier and gives hope for the future. However, it's not always uplifting. "My mom has been trying to get us to India for a while because we have yet to go, and my grandfather assumed my passport said female and

not male. He really told me I'd have to shave my beard and dress female in order to come into the country safely." Kayden's passport does say male as his gender but the fact that he wouldn't be able to come into the country safely was heartbreaking to face. "Trans people are just like everybody else, and being trans isn't the only thing about us. It doesn't define us as a whole. It absolutely shouldn't."

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LGBTQ+ ASIAN-AMERICAN FANTASY BOOK RECS

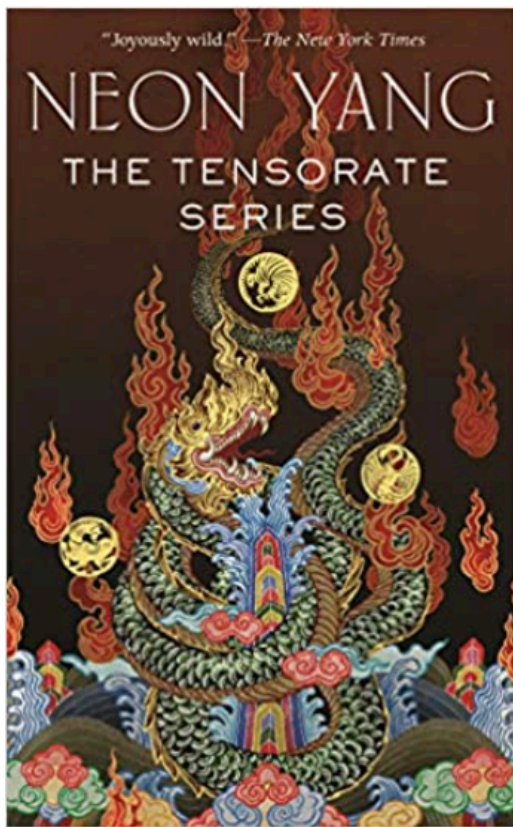
BY HANNAH DY

There's nothing like recognition and validation drawn from the pages of a book, especially when representation seems so rare for members of the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ community. As the entertainment business attempts to amend poisonous stereotypes and diversify narratives beyond the norm, it's critical to elevate the narratives of minorities that might otherwise become ignored. Despite the United States being home to over 23 million Asian Americans, the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism found that only 1 out of 20 speaking roles in movies go to Asians and only 1% of lead roles. Poor representation in the media has been found to foster negative emotions and invoke "a psychological toll on the groups who are portrayed." To elevate these narratives, the following recommendations and reviewed books feature LGBTQ+ Asian-Americans protagonists in the YA genre, starting with an avid fangirl and social wallflower, Jessica Tran.

Not Your Sidekick by C.B. Lee follows Jess as she tries to live up to her family's superhero legacy, get her high school crush to notice her, and manifest superpowers. But without any outstanding gifts of her own, she resigns herself to local internships in order to polish her lackluster resume. In-between discovering reality-shattering secrets about superhero society hidden in her small, desert town and confronting her personal demons, Jess navigates a first relationship, expectations, and what it means to be a hero.

At first, with its hidden identities, romances, and blurred lines between villainy and heroism, the premise doesn't seem completely unique amongst other superhero, Young-Adult fiction. However, *Not Your Sidekick* is first and foremost a high school love story between Jess and Abby Jones, the academically brilliant and popular volleyball captain. The modern fantasy and action serve more as a backdrop to a narrative about pursuing self-identity, whether that be in Jess's family, at school, or within a crumbling, tension-high society.

The narrative is relatively straight-forward and while its plot twists may appear cliché, the story still clearly delivers its message of self-esteem and bravery. It's a light and casual read despite its dystopian setting and also offers LGBTQ+ representation from a bisexual author. Lee's perspective enriches her narrative and characters with authenticity that's all-too-rare in the YA genre and American media overall. Jess is also a second-generation Chinese-Vietnamese American who struggles with conflicts many Asian-American readers will empathize with, including a scarce language comprehension and feeling isolated from both cultures. LGBTQ+ and Asian-American readers may find solace in the relatability of Lee's truthfulness and the book also simultaneously offers an opportunity for outgroup readers to develop sympathy. All in all, C.B. Lee inputting her own personal experiences into the novel by basing her own identity around the protagonist provides refreshing, true representation. There's something



for everyone to resonate with, whether it be friendship drama or Jess's creative, over-the-top daydreaming of confessing to her crush. Her struggle of being "...caught up with [her] ridiculous, impossible ideas because it meant she never had to try for something real" (Lee, Chapter 7) is a universal feeling that anyone who's ever liked someone can relate to.

Overall, *Not Your Sidekick* is the *X-Men* meets *Eleanor & Park*. It merges superheroes and combat-packed action with crushes, high school projects, and first kisses. When grim dystopias and complex, high-fantasy seemingly reign over bookshelves, C.B. Lee's work serves almost as a palate cleanser with its simple yet satisfying story about a fantasy high school romance with the side of saving the world and everything else in-between. C.B. Lee has also written another fantasy romance, *Seven Tears at High Tide*, featuring another Asian-American bisexual protagonist and his slightly-mythological summer romance with a boy named Morgan.

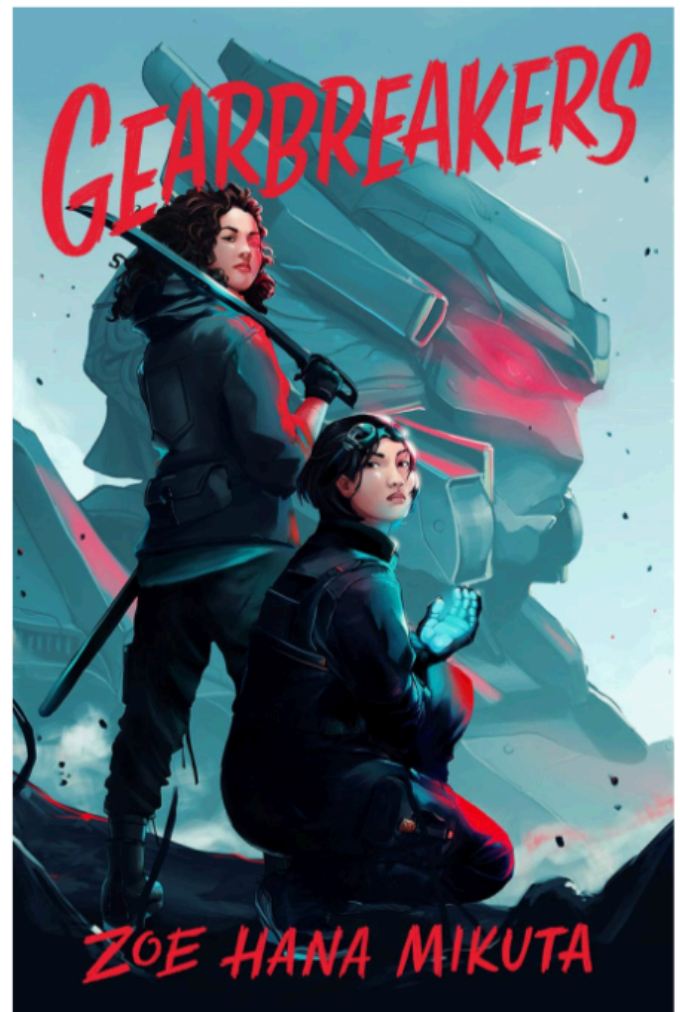
But if contemporary romances with a twist of fantasy isn't your style or you've already devoured C.B. Lee's works, these are a few books with LGBTQ+ Asian-American representation written by authors

who identify with both the communities. The *Tensorate* novellas from award-winning, Asian-American, non-binary author, Neon Yang, provides LGBTQ+ representation in a unique, fantastical science-fiction universe. The series begins with "The Black Tides of Heaven," where two twins with different gifts struggle to find their place in a brewing war. *Gearbreakers* is the debut novel of Korean-American author, Zoe Hana Mikuta. This found family story follows two half-White, half-Asian soldiers tangled in a conflict between mechanical deities with ulterior motives and an enemies-to-lovers romance while the world burns.

With the demand for accurate and meaningful representation increases, it can only make readers wonder hopefully about a future in which children of all genders, ethnicities, and sexualities will be able to immerse themselves within the pages of a novel, grin broadly, and announce, "The hero is just like me!"

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WRONG EDUCATION: QUEER ASIANS AND THE MODEL MINORITY

BY ASHLEY CHEN

Photo Courtesy of NBC News

Every Asian American is likely sick and tired of hearing about it now: the model minority myth. For us, when someone of another race looks at us, we assume that all they see is a successful race. With that comes a necessity to lead a normal and stable life, not stir trouble with others, and quietly go on day to day. Except, just with an Asian being queer, a counterexample to the model minority myth is presented, and qualms with America's broken societal norms start to arise.

The model minority myth stems from Asian Americans pulling ahead of other races in education. To understand more about queer Asian experiences in education, I interviewed Simon Wu (he/they), a student at the University of Washington who identifies as queer. When asked of his identification within queerness, he answered that he "could be gay or homosexual" but then explained that although many folks use "gay" in nonbinary terms, the term can be binary with gender. Simon feels that he occupied "queer" more. He also points out that many times when other people referenced "gays" in his youth, it referred to predominantly white homosexuals.

For him, the media's representation and other queer folks in his community became associated with a certain feminine persona that Simon didn't embody rather than a question of attraction. Queer Asians were defined by how "skinny," "submissive," and "twink" they were. Without other types of queer representation, Simon says that being gay was exclusive, and he felt excluded from it. He only felt more open about expressing his identity when he entered high school.

Regarding media representation of queer Asians, Simon discussed structural components - like homonormativity - that prevent representation. Homonormativity, the concept that there exists a certain way to be queer, establishes that within queerness, there is a hierarchy. Simon identified himself to be an economically secure, cisgender man which put him at a privileged position in society. However, these attempts to categorize and contain queerness have articulated queerness into whatever society is comfortable with, even though queerness itself is defined by defiance. Society's acceptance of one type of queer only ends up invalidating the rest of it.

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The result was Simon feeling that he was “too Asian to be queer, and too queer to be Asian.”

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Being Asian meant being anti-queer; at least, that seemed to be the narrative the liberal West was perpetuating. Simon notes that the Western hemisphere prides itself in being liberal and a free place for all identities under the guise of the “American dream.” America is juxtaposed against China, a perceived backwards and communist society that blocks individual rights. Only recently has the world begun to reconstruct their understandings, realizing that China is not homogenous, especially given the recent proliferation of BL and GL entertainment. While some parts of China might be anti-queer, not every Chinese person is anti-queer.

Just as China is not homogenous, America is not either. American liberalism is only exemplified in big cities, namely New York City and Los Angeles. Smaller cities in the midwest, especially ones with conservative leadership, are against queer rights. This is made evident by them being against trans rights in recent bills that discriminate against trans youth by barring access to healthcare and participation in sports. The same nuance we apply to America should also be extended to countries in the Eastern hemisphere. A lot of this must come from our education system, especially a decentralizing focus on America and having insight into other countries.

Education is meant to socialize youth, as schools are the main space for identity development (Ocampo 481). Our current education system lacks any

nuanced AA education (483). Only recently have schools integrated AA literature into education, through celebrating AAPI History Month with books by AAPI authors and mandating AAPI history be taught throughout primary and secondary schools. On top of that, education lacks literature on LGBTQ+ folks, thus even less literature for LGBTQ+ Asians (483). Education instead becomes a space of defining the correct ways of “doing gender” and “doing race” (481) rather than a space for identity exploration.

And education has been enforcing the correct methods of doing gender and race, evidenced by their lack of harassment and bullying prevention against queer Asians. As the model minority, Asian Americans are more likely to be verbally and physically harassed, but action to solve harassment remains non-existent due in part to the complicity of teachers and staff (482). Bullying and harassment intervention of whites differs from non-whites (482). Unlike white students, race is an important factor for bullying for Asian-American students, a topic missing from bullying and harassment prevention resources. In a LGBT K-12 survey conducted, 82% of queer students said that they were harassed for their sexual orientation, 18% said they were physically harassed, and 37% said staff took no action (484). Though suicide and bullying prevention has brought attention to LGBTQ+ harassment, there hasn't been anything that has addressed the interplay between being a POC and queer (484).



Red - 82% of queer students said that they were harassed for their sexual orientation

Yellow - 37% said staff took no action

Blue - 18% said they were physically harassed

Our initial interactions with our identity are with our family and the Asian community, the breeding ground for cultural pressures and the model minority. Asian-American students feel the need to excel academically to honor their parents' sacrifices to come to America (483). Displaying a non-heteronormative sexual orientation to parents might seem to be a "distraction" from what is necessary to from "success" (484). To students, performance in school affects their desirability in both society and their parents. Poor academic performance would lead to not being an "ideal" child (484), which renders a non-heterosexual orientation as "not ideal." Consequently, not being a golden, straight-A student would invalidate both their Asian-ness and queerness (484).

Many of the solutions to these problems just include unrooting the model minority myth, such as dismantling the assumed socio-economic advantage, establishing ethnic-based institutional resources within the immigrant community, and classifying positive stereotyping as harmful stereotyping (483).

All things considered, we always seek to validate ourselves somehow, as hard as it may be. Simon still has insecurities being queer and Asian as someone who is not skinny enough and too tall to cohere to the image of queer Asians in popular media. These resulted in an eating disorder because he didn't feel that his body type was desirable. But through academics and learning about the history of queerness, he has found intersections between queerness and Asian-ness as well as looking up to his queer Asian peers. Though he is unable to relate with the dominant society nor challenge it, he has found pockets and spaces to explore identity to relate with his own.

Other people might have not been able to find those spaces. In some cases, gay Asian-American men pass as straight to avoid gossip, even if they "didn't feel any spark" in their relationship (490).

Being a cis man and Chinese-American, Simon says that he has had the ability and chance to explore himself past the broader dominant society, being able to figure out what he really wants to be identified as.

The advice Simon would give to queer Asians who are beginning to experience similar things is to find a support network. There are many support networks out there but using them is the hard part. He extends the same advice to queer folks of any race, and even straight people seeking mental health resources. Specifically, for Asian Americans, it might be a cultural tendency to feel ashamed to ask for help with personal struggles, including topics like mental health which are often highly stigmatized in Asian cultures. However, this is a barrier that must be overcome.

Simon Wu writes for *It's Real Magazine*, a digital magazine that supports Asian artists and mental health through art, prose, poetry, and more. You can check them out on Instagram @itsreal.official or www.itsrealmagazine.org.



Check out *blue suit* (2020) directed by Kevin J. Nguyen, a gay Asian American short film about the coming of age film between two friends that's wrapped up in unspoken romantic feelings.

Photo: Courtesy of Kickstarter

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Art and Healing

Interviews by Hope Yu

When I began to brainstorm the concept of this article, my main goal was to emulate the intention of this publication. In previous articles I had chosen to represent groups of people through my writing. This time I knew I wanted to share a sort of intersectionality and true personal narrative that isn't shown in the media, regardless of how progressive many outlets claim to be. Furthermore, I wanted to showcase other peoples experiences directly through their words. As you continue to read, you will get to learn the stories of four different LGBTQIA+ Asian American people from around the West Coast. I hope you leave this article with a sense of respect for them as individuals and feel a little more at comfort with your own identity.

SAM CHOI

My name is Sam Jungwoo and I am a trans and queer first-generation Korean-American living in Seattle! I am also a recent graduate of UW with a degree in psychology. I love to watch movies with people I love, make art whenever I have the chance, and to explore new places and new food!

What sort of art do you do?

I do line art, sometimes with one line, without taking the pen off the paper. More recently, within the last year, I've started doing more digital art! I'm still trying to find a 'style' that feels good to me, but for now, I'm okay exploring all different kinds of style!

How did you decide to pursue this/these art form(s)?

I started drawing during a particularly difficult and lonely winter in 2017. I began drawing in a small sketchbook from Daiso to cope in my own way. It helped to start with one line drawing because I didn't have to think about anything too much and just allowed the pen to find a flow. Now, I really like to be intentional about all the art that I do, especially incorporating the love I have for my communities and my family. I like how it can range from being able to be clearly read, to being more abstract and allowing people to interpret it in however way they see it.

What is your favorite part about your art form?

I think my favorite part of my art form is that other people are able to relate to it and take away meaning from it in ways that make sense to them. I draw through my own experiences and emotions, and to know that there are others who can tell me that they have felt seen or heard or understood through my art makes my heart swell up with joy.



I think my relationship with art has taught me to be more patient. To be patient with my emotions, to be patient with not knowing, to be patient in accepting my cultural and gender identity.

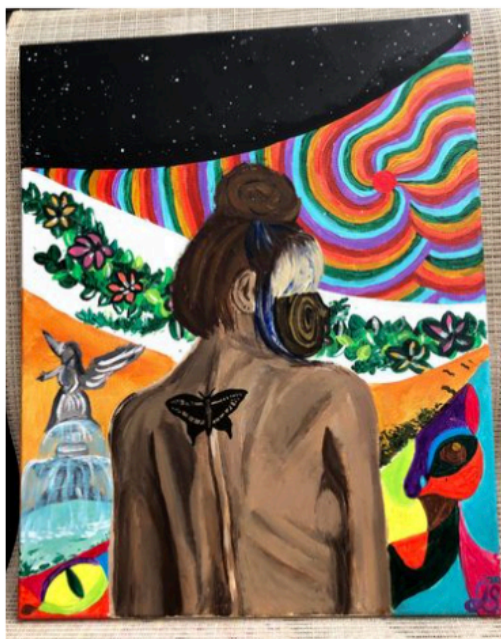
What is your relationship with your art and how has it affected your life and identity?

I think my relationship with art has taught me to be more patient. To be patient with my emotions, to be patient with not knowing, to be patient in accepting my cultural and gender identity. It has also allowed me to freely explore my feelings and to an extent, feel comfortable sharing them. When I first started doodling, I was ashamed of being trans, of being queer. I wanted to hide the part of my identity that made me feel outcasted and different. But doing art and sharing my art has opened my eyes again and again, allowing me to connect with the queer community and especially the people of color within those spaces. It has allowed me to really revel in my identity as a queer Korean-American and to find comfort in who I am.

What is something you have performed or created that you are proud of and why?

For my senior thesis project, I created a zine with fellow queer Asian-American artists from all over the U.S. The zine was titled "Love, self" and was an exploration of self love. All artists got to submit their own form of art, whether that be in writing or painting or drawing or lyrics to an original song. The process of putting the zine together was beautiful, and being able to witness everyone's vulnerability and love through their art was so powerful.





JACQUELYN STUCKEY

Hi! My name is Jacquelyn Stuckey and I am a Chinese-American artist from Southern California! When I'm not doing art or thinking about it, I'm probably roller skating. I'm always out skating and seeing new places and creating connections with others. I also love the beach and although I've been raised on the sand, I unfortunately cannot surf :(.

What sort of art do you do?

Is all of it an option? Mostly I paint, but I have a love for so many art forms that it's hard to choose just one, I also love mixing mediums. Adding sculptures to paintings, drawing on top of collages, or painting onto skirts that I've sewn. Honestly, I would like to try every art form. I've tried my hand at photography/videography and digital media arts, but sadly I'm not too tech savvy. I feel like an old person trying to handle a camera; I want to get better at it because I want to release a roller skate part onto YouTube. I do consider my skating art. The amount of thoughtfulness and creativity that goes into creating a line at the skatepark is definitely an Art form. Skate edits are my favorite videos to watch, the cinematography is always amazing.

How did you decide to pursue this/these art form(s)?

I've been in love with painting since I was small. I was homeschooled for a while and so my mom let me paint when I wanted to. She has always been a big supporter of my creativity. I have taken a few art classes as well. A watercolor class with my mom when I was small, ceramics in 8th grade and my senior year, just a few things that were great breaks in school. My mom has been a huge inspiration for lots of things. She is the one who got me into skating. When she was small and had first immigrated from Taiwan to Los Angeles she picked up roller skating. She lived in Venice beach so it really was the best way for her to commute, taking the bike path and bombing hills, she was a Badass.

What is your relationship with your art and how has it affected your life and identity?

Art has been a part of my life forever. I have loved it since I was a baby playing in fingerpaints. But I haven't always considered myself an artist. I was always so caught up in comparing my art to others that for a few years I stopped almost all together. When I started to get back into art, it started as doodles on my arm with a sharpie, I was that kid in 8th grade that always had stuff all over her arms, and I loved it. Other people loved it too, I would draw things on my friends arms and we would have matching "tattoos" for the day. I started to love the idea of sharing my art with my friends. I slowly got back into painting, creating small works of scenic places that I had been, or trying to copy Bob Ross tutorials. Fast forward a few years and I had once again fallen in love with painting. After creating paintings for all my friends for Christmas my junior year, it was over. It really changed my mindset on life, everything was much more beautiful and exciting. I wanted to go out and I wanted to be around my friends, so I could be inspired. It was a fantastic thing for my mental health. It helped me see the beauty in the small and the mundane things and it helped me stop and slow down and really think about things from the beginning

If you could tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?

Get up and Do It. Stop thinking about doing things and do them, it does not matter if you fail, because you will learn. Keep working hard on the things you love, it will turn out well in the end, you just need to put in the work. The work will be worth it. Finally, you need to stop worrying so hard about what the people who love you think about you, they will love you no matter what, and they are so proud of you.

What is something you have performed or created that you are proud of and why?

I have a painting that I created in the summer of 2020 that I am the most proud of. It was my first time attempting any sort of realistic human anatomy and I did get help from a YouTube tutorial, but I was using acrylics and she was using oils, so I had to change a lot of the steps. It took me a few days to finish, and by the end of it I was covered in paint myself. It sits on my wall in front of my bed and I get to see it everyday and remind myself that I Did That.



What artists are you inspired by and why?

I would say my biggest inspiration is nature and the beauty around me. I'm constantly inspired by my friends and the places we go. There's just a certain feeling of stillness and peace when you find a place that you know will become a painting. The internet is also a beautiful place from which I draw so much inspiration. There's also plenty of artists on Instagram and tiktok that inspire me everyday.

LANDYN ENDO

Hello! My name is Landyn Hikaru Endo and I use they/he pronouns. I live in California and am a transmasculine non-binary Japanese-American artist. I am a professional dancer and aerialist. I went to college for theater, dance, and acting; however, I started to feel as if the roles for queer or trans Asian characters were not present in many of these acting based spaces so I decided to focus my attention on dance.

What sort of art do you do?

I am a movement artist! In this sense, the space around me is a canvas and my body is the brush to paint it. My dance style is acrobatic modern which weaves together dance and other acrobatic elements, such as tumbling, flying, and partnering. I find it satisfying to defy gravity with my body, particularly as a trans person, because it is a form of resistance to just exist in that space. The choreo I do incorporates themes around gender and queer related topics that generally don't get a lot of exposure. For me, my art is a reflection of my identity. Furthermore, the spaces I perform in often have never encountered anyone like me. One of my goals is to open their eyes to all the equally valid different ways of being. Additionally, I want to be able to inspire and support young trans artists and dancers to be able to see themselves on stage.



What is your relationship with your art and how has it affected your life and identity?

Personally, I feel like my art kind of saved my life in a lot of ways. In the sense that coming out as transmasculine and non-binary was something that was really difficult; it felt like there was a lot of pushback and I began to feel like my body was unacceptable due to the ways in which other people were reacting to my gender identity. To do this type of acrobatic dance and aerial arts I had to get really strong and put on a lot of muscle — which helped a lot with dysphoria. It made me feel a lot better, because I had much less need for the external validation of others being okay with my body when I like it more.

What artists are you inspired by and why?

I am deeply inspired by Loretta Livingston. I feel that she exemplifies the ability to understand that the most crucial element to creating art is to know what you want to say, and part of finding your voice is first understanding and accepting who you are. I was lucky enough to have her as a professor at university, and instead of grading us on some externally imposed metric, she let us set our own goals for how we wanted to progress as artists and grade ourselves on these criteria as an exercise in self-reflection at the end of each term. When I was transitioning, I was struggling with mental health and lack of motivation/energy to keep up with my studies. I couldn't come up with a single part of my art I wanted to work on, and she said that it sounded like my project for the term would be to work on figuring out who I wanted to grow into before I could expect to find my own voice as an artist. She gave me a book on the dancer and choreographer Elizabeth Streb, who also became a huge inspiration to me in the way that she was so unapologetically herself in every piece she created. Her work looked nothing like anything we were learning in school, and it made me realize that my ability to look like everyone else was not an accurate measurement of the value of my art.

If you could tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?

You are enough. I say that to people all the time these days, and it's really what I would have loved to hear when I was younger. You are enough as you are right now, and wanting to grow doesn't mean that the place where you are at this moment is somehow bad or shameful. We are always doing the best we can at that moment in time, and what our best looks like varies from day to day, from moment to moment. You were enough as your egg self when you had no idea who you were or what you were doing or how to express yourself; it was a necessary part of your journey. In every snapshot of your life, you are enough. When you did things that you feel shame around in retrospect, you were doing your best in that moment, just now you have the grace and ability to make different choices that align with your current set of values. When we look back at our old art and it feels so embarrassingly poorly made, it just means that we have outgrown that phase of our development as we continuously become more skilled in expressing ourselves. You are enough always, past, present and future.

What is your favorite part about your art form?

I love the rush and sense of absolute freedom that I feel as a mover. I love the way that I am reminded that my body is capable of these incredible things, and it's a really effective way to combat gender dysphoria. When I am dancing or flying through the air doing aerial silks or lyra or trapeze, I feel like I am no longer at odds with my body, and in order to do these things safely I have to be really present in my own skin. I love introducing other queer and trans people to dance and aerial arts, because they often find it profoundly healing to be offered an opportunity to come home to their bodies in a safe space of exploration without expectation.

What is something you have performed or created that you are proud of and why?

I really loved getting to perform in Japan in "Dreaming Forward," which was a choreographic collaboration with Motoko Hirayama, a Japanese choreographer whose work I greatly admire. It was one of my first opportunities to choreograph a full-length work professionally, and I learned so much from sharing ideas with the dancers I met there. It also helped me to see the thematic possibilities available beyond the American lens through which I had been taught.



DANI JORDAN

Hi! My name is Dani (: I am 26 years old and I am a teacher. I teach Transitional Kindergarten! I am half Japanese half Chinese, bisexual and have been diagnosed with Bipolar 2, Depression, and Generalized and Social Anxieties. I love creating art in a variety of mediums such as drawing, painting, and writing poetry, but my favorite medium is music. I also love roller skating, dancing hula, and hanging out with my dog, Liliko'i.

What sort of art do you do?

My main art outlet is music and poetry. I find they sort of go hand in hand. Oftentimes I'll write out ideas for poems that will eventually find their way into songs. I'm most comfortable with playing the guitar for my songs, but I also have incorporated ukulele and piano parts in my recent EP.

What is your relationship with your art and how has it affected your life and identity?

My art is very personal. When I first sent my completed EP to my family, my brother and my dad cried while listening haha. I think that growing up in an Asian household, I was taught to keep my emotions in and to not really talk about them. To not be a burden and not be dramatic. But when I was in college, my mental state became so bad I could barely function as a "normal" human. I was skipping classes and calling out from work because I just couldn't get out of bed. This is when I first started writing music. I remember writing "tiny toy cities" (track 1 off of my EP) at 4 am with tears streaming down my face, just trying to calm myself down.

One of my favorite songs off my EP, "wildflowers & weeds," talks about my struggle with being bisexual and mentally ill while a part of an Asian (and conservative, Christian) family. One of my favorite lines that sums up this struggle says "I'll be here when you're ready for me, just not the version that you used to adore." The whole song talks about this struggle in a positive and hopeful way, and I think writing it really helped me gain the understanding that I am who I am regardless of the values and ideals drilled into me growing up. That I can be happy being me even if it does not meet the cookie-cutter version my family might have wanted from me.

How did you decide to pursue this/these art form(s)?

I've been dabbling with music since middle school. I would usually just look up chords or tabs to songs that I liked at the time. In college, I took a poetry class which made me fall in love with the art of writing. During this same time, I was diagnosed with mental illnesses for the first time. Writing poems gave me a healthy outlet to express exactly how I was feeling. Slowly, I began incorporating my poems into lyrics and playing around with different melodies and chord progressions! When the pandemic hit in 2020, I had a lot of time to write music. I made it a goal to release something, anything, publicly on Spotify by the end of the year. And so I did (:



What is your favorite part about your art form?

My favorite part is being able to perform my originals, and for people to respond positively towards those performances. When doing so, I just think about the long process of writing and recording and practicing those songs, and how nice it feels to have an end product I am proud of.

I performed in a discord open mic night in 2020 where I sang "wildflowers & weeds" for the first time. I got so many positive comments and messages telling me how relatable the song was and how lovely it was, it made me smile so big ^-^

What artists are you inspired by and why?

I listen to a lot of different artists. I like the way Cavetown talks about being queer in a way that it is not explicitly stated, nor is it the main message of the song, but it is just a fact. I love how Flatsound is able to write about mental illnesses in a way that does not evoke pity. I admire Field Medic's melodies, and the perfect wording and descriptive nature of Fox Academy's lyrics. So many lovely artists have inspired my music!

If you could tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?

I would tell little me that it's okay to feel. It's okay to be sad and it's okay to be anxious. It's okay to ask for help. I would also tell her that love is love no matter who it is for. I remember that my first kiss was in 4th grade and it was with my best friend, who was a girl. Our parents saw and told us that it was wrong and that we shouldn't kiss girls, and I just blindly listened. Growing up, the same message was drilled into me from both Catholic schooling and church. If little me was able to love whoever I wanted, I think her anxieties could have been less.



What is something you have performed or created that you are proud of and why?

I am extremely proud of the music I have available on Spotify! My EP called "the slow filling of an empty space" contains 5 songs in a very carefully thought out order. It's an album about slowly gaining hope through mental illness. Some have told me it is a sad album, but I like to think that it is extremely hopeful.

My most recent single on Spotify is called "Laika" and I am also proud of that! I was inspired by Laika the space dog (the Soviets sent her to space for science with no hope of ever returning home alive). I heard Wil Wagner's song "Laika," which was written from the dog's point of view, and decided to write this song from the spaceship's point of view as a dedication to Laika (:

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every age has its disease
that infests the minds
of so many babes and old men

is it worse to fade out?
when the wind blows west
where the plains and the rain and the pain
wash away, like waves battered
on some lost Trojan field

not matches that shadow-beam, gentle flicker
that puts the light to rest
but we, the caged generation, too

for our flames do not rage against the night
nor the august guns
but the blank skies and empty screens

if I can dream - be free - even in my dreams
then I shall step across river-road;
it's better to fight the blaze,
then watch it burn out.

A Match Against Time

by Eric Ma

Burnout is the disease of our age. It used to describe battle fatigue: those soldiers who fought and fought and cannot fight anymore. Now it means constant battles against ourselves. Our souls are not candles that die in the dark nor flames that cry into the night. We fight not against the evils of the world, not for a better world, but live in a caged one full of restraints. We stare into the sky. We stare into the screens. We feel burnout. But - 'it's better to burn out than to fade away.'"

- Eric Ma

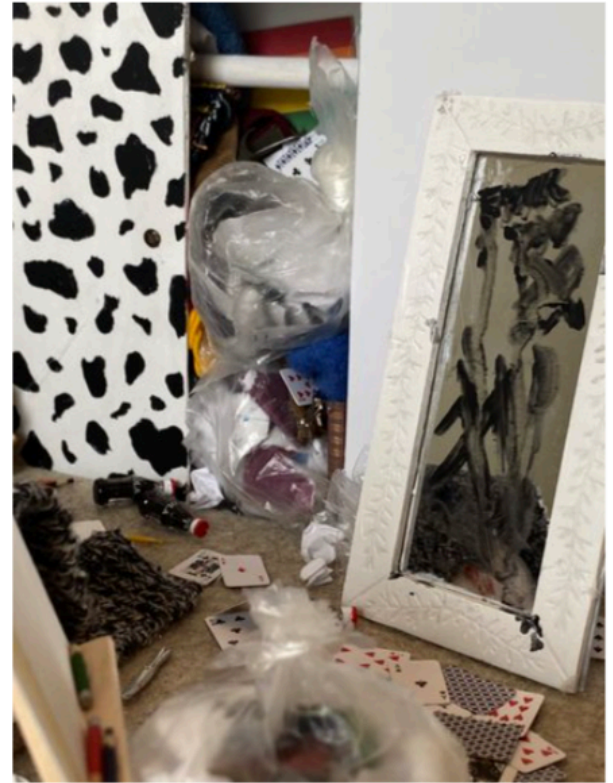


ABOUT THE POET

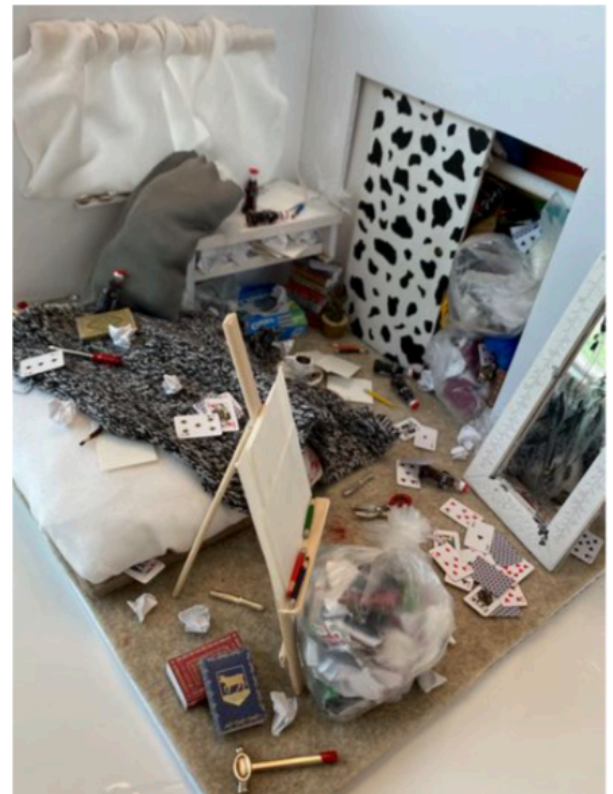
Eric Ma is a rising senior at Bellevue High School in Bellevue, WA. He joined the magazine as a writer in hopes of telling unheard stories about the Asian-American experience. In his freetime, he enjoys reading and rowing.

ART CORNER

1 x 1.5 by anonymous



"39% of LGBTQIA+ youth have considered suicide, which is higher than the national average. Mental health in the young LGBTQ+ community has only continued to worsen with discrimination aggravating it each day. As a queer gender-fluid person, my mental health is reflected into this piece: a replication to my room. My room is always in a constant state of disarray, with month old utensils, piles of trash, food, and others; among these scattered items. I, myself, identify as a transgender individual, with body dysmorphia in the community more often common than not, and the crossed out mirror represents that and the battle of self image and lack of recognition looking in the mirror. Self-harm and mental illness have been evident in my life for years, with little to no motivation to clean my room, often depressive states continuing for months or even years at a time. Like many others, I have not come out to my family. Although openly queer with friends and at school, I feel I have to hide my identity at home; there is an LGBTQ flag hidden in the back of the closet both in my piece and in my room. I hope that my piece resonates with fellow members of LGBTQIA+, particularly youth, that struggle with mental illness."



Work of a high school junior in the Greater Seattle Area

ID Please



"Most people, including the ones that will be reading this, have no problems going to community pools or local fitness centers but me, as a trans person living in Korea, can't really go to either."

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Ashley is a creative soul that loves science, music, and technology. Currently in Year 11, she hopes to become a biochemical engineer one day while pursuing passion projects in her spare time

We Show Up, No Matter What

by Michelle Ip



"This is a digital drawing of five queer Asians and an ally at Virtual Pride. The participants are in front of a large computer screen which represents the virtual celebrations happening in 2021. This year's Pride is also the 5th anniversary of the Orlando mass shooting that occurred on June 12, 2016. Orlando has motivated activists on social media to advocate for the further protection of queer identities. They are represented by mobile devices at the very front and are determined to achieve greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ in society."

This year's Pride is still impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, leaving many participants to celebrate and support one another in the safety of their homes. Self-isolation offers so much time for someone to explore many aspects of themselves, sexuality and gender identity included. Unfortunately for many queer Asians, the rigidity of family expectations convinces them to play a role without them wanting to reveal their true selves to the world. When you are queer, you alternate between complete compassion towards yourself and fear of condemnation from anyone around you, even when it's not the case at all. This back-and-forth dance within the self leads many to constantly invalidate themselves. Concealing yourself this way feels like constantly placing a lid on a bubbling pot of boiling water, preventing it from messily overflowing when you least expect it. Fortunately, once queer Asians find supportive communities, they flourish and realize they truly deserve to live peacefully, happily and authentically. Being queer should not be entirely composed of fear. The fight to live continues, but it is a worthy one.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: Michelle is a freshman college student at the Emily Carr University of Art & Design. She graduated from Sammamish High School in 2020. Art is her greatest passion. She explores creative narratives with a focus on original character design. Outside of art making, she enjoys writing, watching TED talks, and listening to music.

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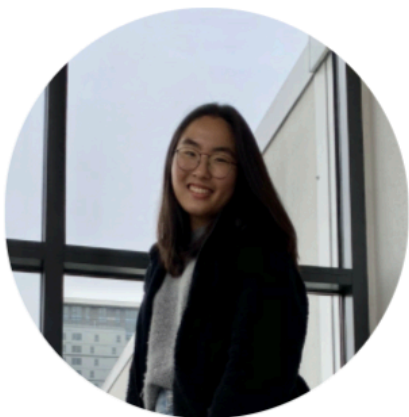
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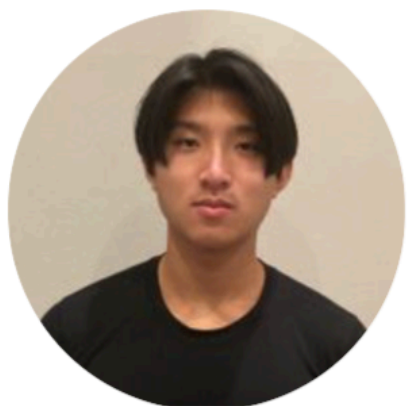
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