

## Taylor Olson

### NSPA 2021 Designer of the Year

I pretty much became a designer by accident. Freshman year I took Journalism 1, where we learn all the ins and outs of working on and publishing a newsmagazine: writing, editing, design, etc. I did not pay close attention or take it seriously. I did not know how to open an adobe design program, let alone create infographics, two page spreads, in-depths or covers.

Sophomore year was my first year publishing articles and being part of *The Highlander* newsmagazine staff. I decided to do an easy-looking sports article, which turned out to be a lot more difficult than I thought. Working on that article required me to know how to use Adobe Illustrator, edit and cut out pictures on Adobe Photoshop, and have moderately proficient Adobe InDesign skills.

The Design Editor-in-Chief at the time, Dasha Makarishcheva, took me under her wing and started teaching me how to use Adobe Illustrator, a skill that most staff members in my grade did not have. I was truly surprised at how much I enjoyed using those programs to design that article. Dasha recognized my potential and continued to pass on her skills and knowledge. That year I was promoted to designer before the first issue even went to the printer. Based on my performance the prior year the promotion came as a shock to everyone me most of all.

That promotion inspired me and gave me the confidence to pursue my newfound passion. At the end of the year Dasha graduated, and I was nervous for what was to come. I had learned so much but was not sure that I was ready to completely fill her shoes and be in charge of all design for *The Highlander*. But I was promoted to head designer in my Junior year. Along with helping people with their individual infographic and design needs, it was my responsibility to produce new and unique designs for the in depth and the cover of the whole publication. It was a lot more responsibility, but throughout the year I learned how to properly manage my time and manage the look of the publication as a whole.

For the 2021-22 school year I will be the Design Editor-in-Chief of *The Highlander*. Looking back, I am amazed and proud of how far I have come and how lucky I was to discover. I am forever grateful to Dasha for seeing the potential in me and allowing me to pursue design as my passion.

I am especially proud of the work we've done as a design team for *The Highlander* this year; I have included some of the work I am most proud of.

- Issue 1 Cover (*Drowning in the Political Climate*)

This issue's main story focused on the local effect of political divisiveness surrounding the 2020 election, specifically in the McLean, Virginia area. Staff Photographer Katie Romhilt took this picture which I edited and incorporated into the design.

- Issue 3 Cover (*As Seen On TV?*)

The main story for our third issue focused on the romanticization of serious issues faced by teens in popular TV series. In my art I tried to capture the glitz and glamour portrayed on screen with the glittery TV static; simultaneously, I tried to capture a feeling of darkness and unease with the gloomy background and frame of the TV.

- Issue 3 In-Depth (*Representation vs. Reality*)

This article focused on the unrealistic and dangerous depiction of high school in popular TV shows. Staff artist Arin Kang took inspiration from the HBO show *Euphoria* for the art piece, which I incorporated into the rest of the design. I created all the infographics, which all fit into the dark, grunge aesthetic of the article.

- *Tea-riffic Boba*

For this article, a couple of fellow *Highlander* staff members and I visited local Boba Tea businesses to compare each location's milk tea. I used a color scheme that incorporated each picture's main colors, and used boba bubbles instead of stars to represent their overall score.

- *Chloe's Closet*

This article was about McLean student Chloe Lahr's Instagram clothing business. I used a selection of pictures from her social media to make a collage for this two-page spread. The images, style, and colors of the collage fit the overall aesthetic of her brand.

# THE HIGHLANDER

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## DROWNING IN THE POLITICAL CLIMATE



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AS SEEN ON TV?

REPRESENTATION VS. REALITY  
OF THE TEENAGE EXPERIENCE  
IN POPULAR MEDIA

# AS SEEN ON TV?

## Representation vs. reality of the teenage experience in popular media

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**CONTENT WARNING: THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES SEVERAL POTENTIALLY TRIGGERING TOPICS, SUCH AS MENTAL ILLNESS, DRUG ABUSE AND SUICIDE.**

Purple and red lights blind you as you walk into a “normal” high school party. Clouds of smoke fill the air, and red Solo cups litter the floor. The camera pans to a group of 20-somethings posing as high schoolers, chugging beers and popping pills.

High school is one of the most crucial—and dangerous—parts of life. TV shows run rampant with the stereotype of teenagers being wild, fun and carefree partygoers. These teen parties commonly contain dim lights, the infamous red Solo cups filled with alcohol, absurdly loud music, risqué behavior, drug use and any other illicit activities the writers can come up with.

Teenagers are more likely than mature adults to take part in risky behaviors and suffer from mental health issues. According to a study published in *Developmental Science*, teenagers peak in risk-taking behaviors at around 19 years old, and popular media doesn’t shy away from representing these things as part of the “teenage experience.”

Over the last few years, streaming services like Netflix and HBO Max have produced multiple shows that portray teenage mental health and substance abuse issues either more or less dramatically than necessary. Some of the more popular examples of these shows are *13 Reasons Why* and *Euphoria*.

“Seeing people taking drugs and that being glamorized, as well as things like depression or [eating disorders], can make people think that these things are normal and cool and almost a necessity to fit in,” junior Harper\* said.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given teenagers more time in isolation to binge TV shows as well as heightened anxiety and depression.

“Overall, the mental health of teens, particularly anxiety, has been prevalent as a result of the pandemic and us being on lockdown,” school psychologist Beverly Parker-Lewis said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, screen time has risen 31% since last year, and 40.9% of the people they surveyed reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral condition due to emotions related to the pandemic.

When handling subject matter as serious as suicide and drug use, TV shows tend to glorify or romanticize certain behaviors, which causes harm to impressionable teenagers.

Of course, this isn’t a new issue. Movies and TV shows have been depicting mental health and drug addiction inaccurately for decades. Movies like *Almost Famous* and *The Virgin Suicides* from the 2000s have become American classics despite their glorified depiction of drug use and suicide.

These instances of glamorization blur the lines between representation and reality.

### WATCHING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

The entertainment industry has long been characterized by its flippant portrayal of teenage drug use. The characters in movies and shows like *Project X*, *Skins* and *Gossip Girl* use copious amounts of drugs and suffer almost no consequences. They contribute to the narrative that substance use is an integral part of the high school experience. ▶

*\*These responses were obtained via an anonymous survey, so names have been changed*

HBO's *Euphoria* has been popular among teens since the first season aired in 2019. In the show, high school girl Rue Bennett uses substances to cope with her mental illness.

In the first episode, Rue is discharged from rehab after a near-fatal overdose. Later, she struggles with withdrawals and addiction.

Rue attempts to stay sober, but she relapses. During her highs, the show's flashy colored lights and her outlandish makeup portray addiction and drug use unrealistically. These scenes make drugs look like a fun and edgy thing to do and like something everyone is doing, which undermines their actual dangerous effects.

"[These shows] made me have a feeling [that] I'm not living up to the right teen experience," freshman Olivia Hollier said. "I'm just sitting at home while these people my age are partying and having the time of their life."

Although *Euphoria* depicts teens taking drugs in a glorified way, some argue that it accurately depicts the negative consequences, which many other shows fail to do. When Rue's 13-year-old sister walks into the traumatizing scene of Rue passed out and covered in vomit on her bedroom floor after her overdose, it is a stark contrast to the colorful drug scenes.

"It showed you the bad road that [drugs] can lead you down as opposed to just being a fun party," *Euphoria* background actor Andrew Young said in an interview with *The Highlander*. "Compared to a lot of other TV shows, it probably did a better job portraying all aspects of drug and alcohol use."

The drug usage shown in popular media is not entirely unrealistic to high school students. According to the National Center for Drug Abuse statistics, 86% of teenagers in the U.S. know someone who smokes, drinks or uses drugs during the school day, and 50% of teenagers reported that they have



**DIRECTORS LIKE TO MAKE THEIR CHARACTERS SEEM MORE DRAMATIC, SO THEY END UP WITH A CHARACTER THAT ISN'T A NORMAL 16-YEAR-OLD."**

- SOPHIE TURSI  
JUNIOR

misused a drug at least once in their lifetime.

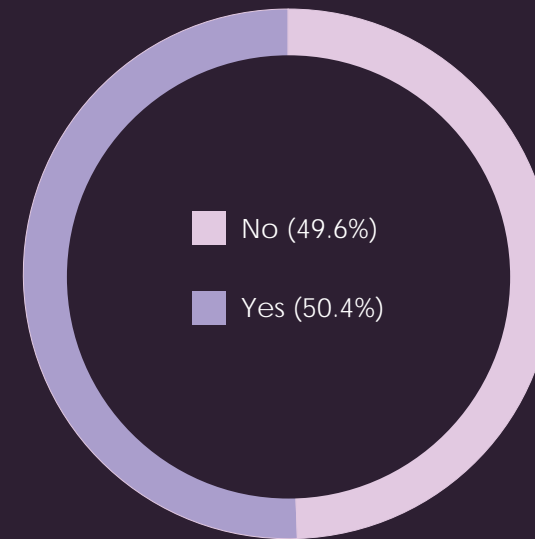
Despite its popularity, *Euphoria* faced additional criticism from viewers who believe that the show depicts "adult" topics that are too controversial or explicit for teens.

"If someone is mature enough, they can watch the show and understand that it is just a TV show, but it is trying to hit on the more realistic elements of that lifestyle," Young said. "Being on both ends of the show, from production to watching the presentation of it as a viewer, *Euphoria* is an awesome show as far as trying to show how the media does portray teenagers and that lifestyle to the general public. However, middle school and young high school kids probably [should not watch it]."

Because *Euphoria* features teenage characters, it attracts a younger audience. Viewers of all ages should be cognizant of the potential overdramatization of the high school experience.

High schools in movies and on TV uphold different stereotypes, distorting what students believe is the quintessential high school experience. Stereotypes they perpetuate include jocks, nerds, cheerleaders, goths, stoners and loners. These

### Has something you've seen in a TV show or movie affected your mental health?



From a poll of 130 McLean Students

tropes negatively influence young viewers by conveys idea that everyone needs to fit a certain mold or behave a certain way to be accepted in high school.

"Most teens [aren't] involved in heavy drug use and don't have these crazy lives," said junior Sophie Tursi, vice president of McLean's Gender and Sexuality Alliance. "Directors like to make their characters seem more dramatic, so they end up with a character that isn't a normal 16-year-old."

Feeling like their actual high school experience isn't living up to their expectations can increase teenagers' insecurities and lower their self-esteem.

### DEADLY DEPRESSION

Mental health awareness has increased throughout the years. As it gains more acknowledgment the inclusion of mental health topics in television has grown as well.

According to *ScienceDaily*, from 2005 to 2017 there was a 52% increase in adolescents with symptoms consistent with those of major depression. This number suddenly increased in 2011, which is most likely due to cultural changes, including the increase in media in everyday life.

Netflix's *13 Reasons Why* is a successful teen show that attempts to address these issues. However, some mental health experts argue that the show's content could glorify suicide to those who already have suicidal thoughts. As a result, the show could affect their mental health and influence their behavior.

The show details the aftermath of high school girl Hannah Baker's suicide. The story follows one of her friends as he listens

to the tapes she created to explain why she took her own life.

Although a suicide letter is commonly shown in TV or movies, *13 Reasons Why* chooses to portray her "suicide letters" as a revenge plot against the people that hurt Hannah, leaving young teenagers with an inaccurate representation of what it means to commit suicide.

"They were trying to show what bullying [can do to teenagers]," Tursi said. "Instead of going that way, they made it seem like if you kill yourself you just know more than everyone else. That's where it romanticizes mental health [problems] instead of portraying the [reality]."

According to Dr. Victor Schwartz, medical director of The Jed Foundation, *13 Reasons Why* is loaded with imagery that could be considered harmful to young adults or children who are dealing with suicidal thoughts. Schwartz also found fault with a scene where a school guidance counselor fails to identify dangerous behaviors Hannah is displaying, which could prevent students from reaching out to their own school counselors and other trusted adults.

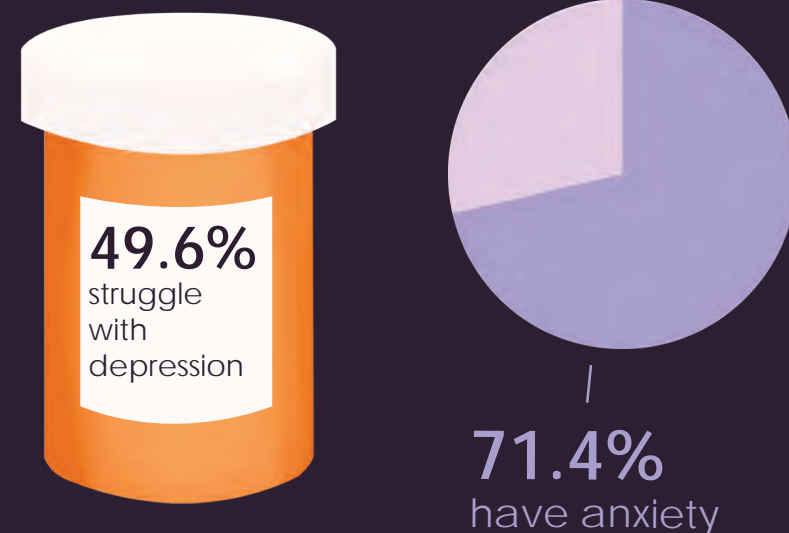
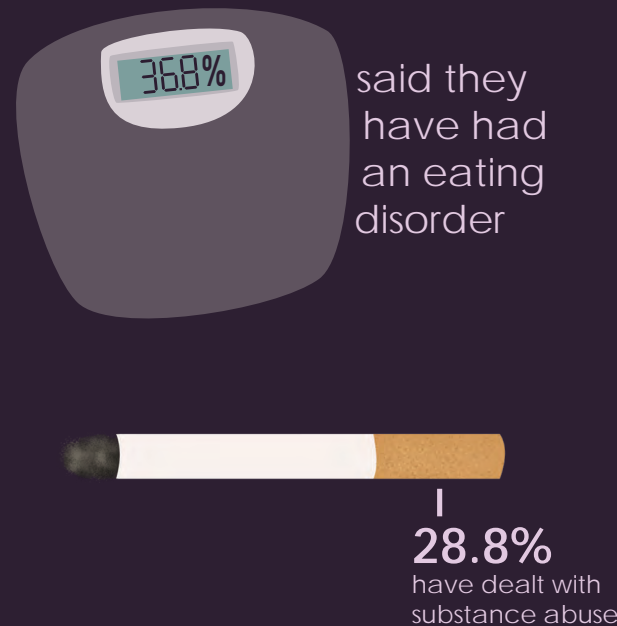
"One of the issues that I have concerns about is how suicide is portrayed in pop culture," Parker-Lewis said. "Sometimes it's really played up, and it does not help suicidal [teens] get the right resources or work through it. That part bothers me a lot."

*13 Reasons Why* includes a graphic scene of Hannah slitting her wrists, which can trigger people who have suffered from mental health problems, causing a negative emotional response. Some even saw it as a step-by-step guide for how to take one's own life.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), suicide is the second leading cause of death for people ages 10-24. The NIMH funded a study that found that "*13 Reasons Why* was associated with a 28.9% increase in suicide rates among U.S. youth ages 10-17 in the month (April 2017) following the show's release."

"[TV shows and movies have] made me question myself and whether what I was feeling was genuine," junior Alex\* said. "I was struggling, and seeing trailers for shows like *13 Reasons Why* twisted my views. No one claps for you, you won't get a medal, you have to live every day with a mental illness. It's truly frustrating." ▶

### In a poll of 130 McLean students:



If you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, please call the National Suicide Prevention lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or text NEEDHELP to 85511.

If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community and are struggling with suicidal thoughts, please call the Trevor Project lifeline at 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678.



**TV SHOWS AND MOVIES DESENSITIZE VIEWERS TO THE WORDS 'DEPRESSION' AND 'ANXIETY' AND ALLOW KIDS TO THROW THEM AROUND MORE, SO PEOPLE WHO AREN'T DEPRESSED ARE SAYING THEY HAVE DEPRESSION."**

- JESSICA DZIEDZIC  
JUNIOR

Some students think the show conveys a false message that mental health is something "fun."

"It frustrated me to see such an inaccurate view of mental health and caused me to think that I was doing something wrong," Alex\* said.

In *13 Reasons Why*, Hannah suggests that the people around her are at fault for her suicide, a particularly damaging idea.

"That is precisely the other reason why we really try to shy away from saying that someone who died of suicide is the result of something someone did," Schwartz said in an *NBC News* article. "It leaves survivors with a horrifying burden of guilt."

*13 Reasons Why* implies Hannah's suicide was not caused by a mental health issue but by her surrounding environment, leading viewers to believe that suicide is the perfect form of revenge rather than the last resort for someone in pain.

"There are some aspects of pop culture that amplify [mental health] in a positive way," Parker-Lewis said. "But then there are [some shows] that really play to the negative side of suicide and do not help teens work through [their feelings] and provide resources for them."

This is a common issue in teen shows dealing with serious topics. The writers are often careless with the script and do not fully flesh out many of the topics that should be dealt with in a more meaningful way. This leaves many topics such as bullying and mental illness with just surface-level treatment.

On the other hand, some viewers think *Euphoria* is more effective in addressing the dreadful reality of depression. At the height of her depression, Rue is so unable to function that she can't get out of bed for days, not even to use the bathroom.

"This depiction of mental illness [in *Euphoria*] is an improvement compared to many other shows because it did not glorify her illness," Tursi said.

Including the negative aspects of drug use on mental health can serve as a deterrent rather than a motivator, because it forces the viewer to see the reality of addiction and substance abuse.

"I don't think that TV shows with explicit content cause teens to mimic that behavior," sophomore Libby Salopek said. "It's got the opposite effect. It shows the consequences, which people would be discouraged by."

*Euphoria* is able to create a balance between the issues many of the characters face, such as mental health problems, and the fun aspects of high school, which, although not completely realistic, results in a more accurate portrayal of the teenage experience that isn't just about partying or struggling teens.

"We established early on that each scene ought to be an interpretation of reality. Or an interpretation of emotional reality," *Euphoria* creator Sam Levinson said in an interview with *Vulture* magazine. "I'm not interested in realism. I'm interested in emotional realism."

### UNBLURRING THE LINES

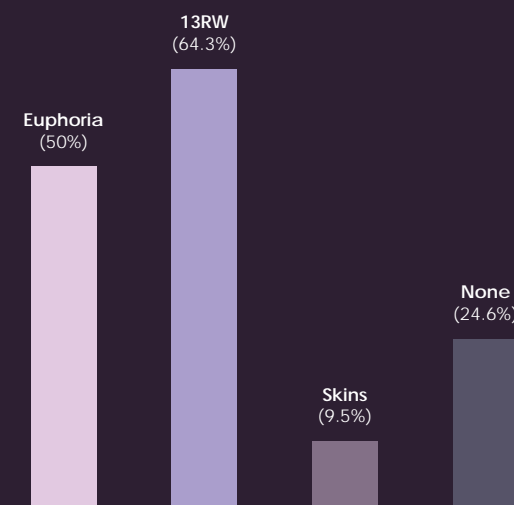
Teens' experience should be reflected in the media they consume, but it's crucial that they be able to recognize the line between reality and dramatization for the sake of entertainment.

In TV shows, a character's mental illness is often shown as a personality trait that makes them unique or interesting. This can cause viewers to admire the character's condition and even self-diagnose while dismissing the true nature of the illness.

"TV shows and movies desensitize viewers to the words 'depression' and 'anxiety' and allow kids to throw them around more, so people who aren't depressed are saying they have depression," junior Jessica Dziedzic said.

The show *Skins* is commonly criticized for achieving this effect. Viewers argue that characters Effy and Cassie have become toxic role models for young teens in both the U.S. and

### Which of these TV shows have you watched?



From a poll of 126 McLean students



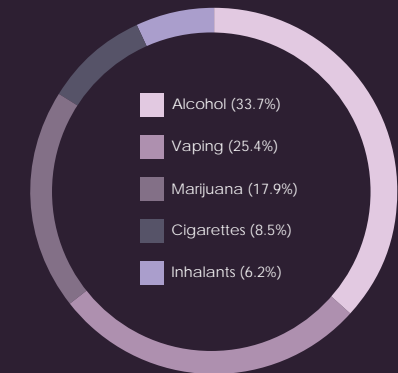
**50%** of teenagers have misused a drug at least once in their life



**86%** know someone who smokes, drinks or uses drugs during the school day

Source: National Center for Drug Abuse statistics

How many FCPS high school students reported use of these substances in their lifetime?



Source: 2019 Fairfax County Youth Survey

the U.K. Presented as pretty and mysterious, the girls struggle with mental illness and eating disorders. As a result, some young viewers admire and even emulate the characters' actions.

"I wanted to be just like Effy and Cassie. I wanted to do everything they do and be just like them," Hollier said. "They seemed so pretty and cool, so I saw that and thought that in order to be a pretty high schooler, I had to also be like that."

Popular media is a common source where teenagers find their role models. When these role models behave badly, their young and impressionable viewers are unable to see the severity of their actions.



**NO ONE CLAPS FOR YOU, YOU WON'T GET A MEDAL, YOU HAVE TO LIVE EVERY DAY WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS. IT'S TRULY FRUSTRATING."**

- ALEX\*  
JUNIOR

When watching these shows, viewers often don't realize that the actors are much older than the average high school age, which furthers the unrealistic depictions of high school students. These actors look older, and when this is coupled with the dramatized version of high school life, it can mislead young viewers.

"Even though we are all portraying high school students, they don't actually have any people under the age of 18 there, so it's not like any young people were around it," Young said. "I'm 28, but I shaved my beard to look way younger. Most people are already mature enough to understand what they're getting into."

TV ratings can help limit some of the negative influence by

warning viewers of what they might see, but they are not enough to keep people—especially curious teenagers—from watching a show. More specific warnings about the content in a show can be helpful for viewers when choosing whether or not to start watching.

"Seeing particular things will give me a great outlook on life and make me optimistic, but being exposed to some of the darker parts really changes my mental health," junior Sam\* said. "I tend to avoid watching things that I know will negatively affect me."

Trigger warnings flag potentially disturbing content that may cause viewers to have negative physical or mental reactions, in order to prevent susceptible viewers from watching. This specific form of content warning became common on social media and is starting to appear on TV and in other forms of media.

Of course, these trigger warnings won't necessarily stop someone at risk from watching the show, but they alert people who may not be comfortable viewing certain content.

"People are still gonna watch, but it's definitely important to have a trigger warning," Tursi said. "At the very least you know what to expect, even if it's not going to trigger you."

In today's society, it is necessary for popular media to reflect the diversity of their audience and their audience's experiences. Showing topics like depression and substance abuse more accurately helps teens to understand the consequences of their actions and to recognize that they are not alone.

Viewers should also keep in mind that these shows are not authentic and note the differences between the representation of the teenage experience and the reality of it. Most importantly, they should not hesitate to reach out when they need help.

"[If you're struggling,] you should talk to a parent," Parker-Lewis said. "You have a ton of resources for you at school, like your school counselor and your clinical team, which consists of two psychologists and one social worker. One of the first things that you should do is talk to someone about it." ■



## ONE TEA HOUSE

**PRICE:** \$3.25

**FLAVOR:** 3/5

**BUBBLES:** 1.5/5

**OVERALL:** ●●●●●

The tea had an okay flavor, but it was a bit watery, and the bubbles were way too mushy. However, it was the cheapest option and had a good portion size.



## INFINI-TEA

**PRICE:** \$4.50

**FLAVOR:** 2/5

**BUBBLES:** 1/5

**OVERALL:** ●●●●●

The tea had a slightly soapy taste and was by far the worst tea. The bubbles were also lackluster and were even mushier than One Tea's.

# TEA-RIFFIC BOBA

## Finding the best boba tea in Eden Center

LAINE PHILLIPS FEATURES EDITOR | ANA PAULA IBARRARAN OPINIONS EDITOR



## VIVI BUBBLE TEA

**PRICE:** \$4.25

**FLAVOR:** 3/5

**BUBBLES:** 4/5

**OVERALL:** ●●●●●

Although the portion size is much smaller than other boba places, the tea had a decent flavor, and the bubbles were just the right texture and sweetness.



## TEADM

**PRICE:** \$5.00

**FLAVOR:** 4/5

**BUBBLES:** 4/5

**OVERALL:** ●●●●●

This was by far the best combination of tea and bubbles. It was a great portion size, and the store has a cool spaceship theme.



# Chloe's Closet



## Senior Chloe Lahr grows Instagram clothing business, @bigfishbowlclothing

HERAN ESSAYAS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF | MICHELLE CHENG A&E EDITOR

In search of custom sweatshirts, unique shirts or one-of-a-kind pants? Well, senior Chloe Lahr has them all.

In 2019, Lahr was struck with the idea to start a thrifting business. After seeing the rise of online thrifting accounts, businesses that sell secondhand clothing, Lahr decided she wanted to be among the sellers. And so, she created Big Fishbowl Clothing.

In her free time, Lahr goes through items at various thrift stores, purchasing clothing based on what she personally enjoys and hoping to provide clothing options that she could see herself and others wearing.

"If I'm in a mood where I know it'll be a good thrift trip, then I'll put in the time and go through every section and look at everything on the shelf," Lahr said. "When I go to the Goodwill bins, the ones that have a bunch of clothes that haven't been sold in Goodwill stores, I'll pretty much go through all of those bins for a couple hours."

Once Lahr has the clothes she wants to sell, she models all of her purchases, taking photos to post on her account. For each post, Lahr takes photos, edits them and writes captions. She also films promotional TikToks occasionally.

Less than two years later, Lahr has gained more than 4,000 followers and has posted more than 400 items. But building this business was difficult.

"[Growing my account] was slow. It took me a really long time to even hit 1,000 followers," Lahr said. "I used to have infrequent drops, but now I'm trying to have at least one a week because posting a lot and getting my content out there is really important for more people to find me."

Lahr uses a 48-hour bidding process to sell her items. She also offers a significantly higher buy it now (BIN) price for those who wish to forgo the bidding process.

"I set a starting bid, and people bid in the comments how much they want to go up by, usually a dollar. I'll let them know when someone bids higher than them," Lahr said. "I've stuck with this process because I think it gives a lot more people a chance to see my [item] and to bid on it. It gives people the chance to purchase it for less than I

otherwise would have listed it for."

Friends and customers say they are impressed with Lahr's work and success thus far. Junior Kylee Majkowski frequently supports Big Fishbowl Clothing not only because she and Lahr are friends, but also because of the extensive and creative collection Lahr offers.

"I have purchased so many things from that account: dresses, tops, skirts, whatever. Chloe is responsible for a decent part of my wardrobe," Majkowski said. "I have always loved Chloe's sense of style, and I thought shopping there was a really great way to open up my wardrobe to some stuff I wouldn't necessarily pick out for myself."

Majkowski is amazed by Lahr's ability to run her business.

**“HAVE AN OPEN MIND. IF YOU FIND A PIECE THAT MAYBE YOU WOULDN'T NORMALLY WEAR, YOU CAN TRY IT OUT. THROUGH THRIFTING, YOU CAN FIND SO MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF THINGS IN ONE SPOT.”**

- CHLOE LAHR  
SENIOR

"Chloe and I already had a personal relationship, so I knew she would be great," Majkowski said. "But when I first saw her account, I was honestly shocked by how professional she was about everything. She's really committed to what she does, which is super admirable."

Senior Lyssa Bass, another frequent customer, appreciates Lahr's dedication.

"Chloe has amazing items and is very timely about delivering items," Bass said. "She also has super cool packaging and puts a lot of effort into her account."

After growing her following, Lahr decided to expand her business by offering custom sweatshirts, and this led her to change her store's name.

"Originally, [the name of my account was] 'That 70s Thrift,' and I decided to change it because I felt like I was putting myself in a box with that name, not only because I wasn't just doing thrifting stuff anymore, but also because 70s wasn't really the vibe of [my account] anymore," Lahr said.

Lahr creates her own designs and uses an embroidery machine to transfer the designs onto the sweatshirts. As she became familiar with the embroidery process, Lahr began investing in the necessary equipment and incorporating more of her unique ideas into her work.

"I saw that embroidered stuff was kind of becoming popular within the thrift community, and I realized that was something I could also do," Lahr said. "I bought my own embroidery machine and I got design software for Christmas that I could use to digitize my own designs and put them on there."

Lahr's thrift business has furthered her awareness and commitment to sustainability.

"When I started my account, I learned more about sustainable fashion and how thrifting is good for the planet," Lahr said. "After learning about all of the negative effects of fast fashion, I [wanted to] help with that. Ethically and environmentally, [fast fashion] is not something that I want to support."

Lahr hopes to continue expanding her store. With her frequent posts, custom clothing and various sizes, Lahr encourages potential customers to visit her store and thrift more often, as there are both environmental and personal benefits to exploring the world of secondhand shopping.

"Have an open mind. If you find a piece that maybe you wouldn't normally wear, you can try it out. Through thrifting, you can find so many different kind of things in one spot," Lahr said. "I think it's really cool that there's a history behind things, and it's more unique than getting the same clothes from [fast fashion brands]."