

TikTokers Juggle  
Exams and Algorithms

A New Stage for  
Double Door

What's Next for  
Black Lives Matter

# TECH

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2021





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# editors' letter

A shift. A change initiated by individuals and society at large, moving us from one destination to another. The Echo magazine staff believes these shifts, both positive and negative, encapsulate the human spirit and our steadfast journey to better ourselves and the world around us.

Built by students from Columbia College Chicago's Journalism and Graphic Design programs, this magazine strives to reflect on the past, give an honest look at the present and take a peek at the future. The 2021 issue of Echo magazine explores how shifts have affected us personally (Self), our environment (Surroundings) and those around us (Society).

The magazine design process boils down to exploring, creating and revising. But little did we know that a warm laptop and 10-plus tabs of Pinterest pages would be the way we visually told the stories of Self, Surroundings and Society.

We hope that showcasing motifs of torn paper, clipped images and texture through this publication stir a sense of comfort in the messy side of ideation – imperfectly beautiful and constantly shifting.

Our choice of typefaces was deliberate, as well. You may notice that the type itself transitions through the sections from the script of an individual, into a bolder, more universal sans-serif. Each design is intended to reinforce the message of its article, and capture the change these last few years have meant for the world.

As the directorial collective of Echo magazine, we aim to address the hard topics but also convey a message of hope and optimism. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Isaiah Colbert  
Melanie Medrano

Benji Hobson  
Jess Pistone  
Nina Walsh  
Sydney Weber

*The award-winning Echo magazine is published yearly by the Columbia College Chicago Communication Department. It's a collaboration of students from the Journalism and Graphic Design programs.*

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# SELF

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Laughing Over the Casket

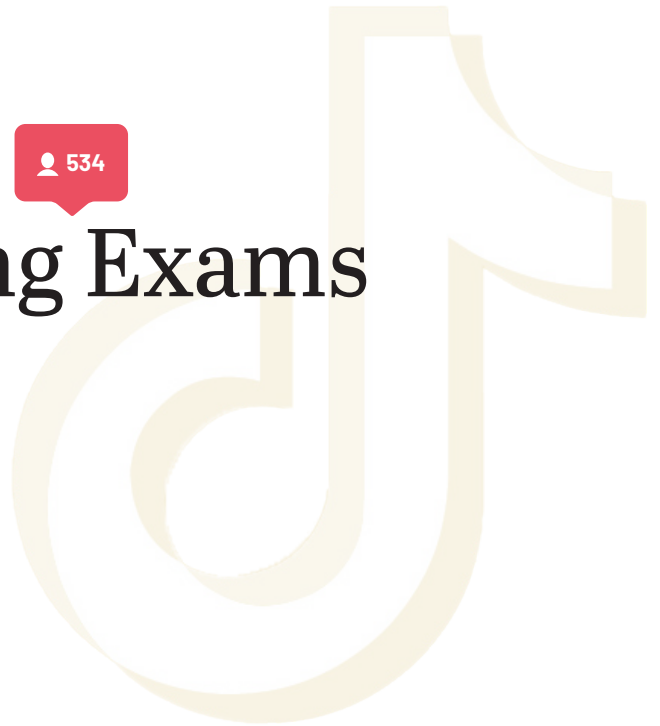
Confessions of a Serial Monogamist





# TikTok U: Juggling Exams and Algorithms

By Summer Hoagland-Abernathy



Following

For You



All right, you have two hours until midnight, which gives you just enough time to make yourself another cup of coffee, write half of your history paper and take that botany exam that is due at 11:59 p.m. But wait — you didn't post on TikTok today! What will the algorithm think? Do you sacrifice your caffeine, your grades or your adoring fans?



Handling the stress of grades and internships is enough, but responsibilities shift when your videos go viral. Becoming an influencer overnight is no small feat, but becoming one on a college student's schedule is another world entirely.



Echo spoke with five college student TikTokers, with followers past the hundreds of thousands, who have spent their days maintaining their fan base and their grades, all while trying to navigate the elusive algorithm.



Alexia Del Valle



**@LEXDELVALLE**

PRONOUNS: SHE/HER

MAJOR: COMMUNICATIONS

GRADUATED DECEMBER 2020 WITH A DEGREE IN COMMUNICATIONS FROM FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

COMEDY, AESTHETIC VIDEOS AND TIKTOK TRENDS WITH A LATINA TWIST

**Worlds Collide**

"I didn't get [talent] management, and I really represent myself, and being a communications major taught me how to literally represent myself. That's helped me to literally do something as simple as writing a professional email and you know, like, letting people know that I am a little businesswoman here."

**For Their Adoring Fans**

"I'm Puerto Rican. I grew up in the U.S., but I feel a heavy pressure to represent Puerto Rico and represent it well. I want to be a creator that is Latina, but who can reach out to everybody but also just, like, stay true to us and our roots and our culture."



Benji Le

**@BENJIPLANT**

PRONOUNS: HE/HIM

MAJOR: ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

RESEARCH ASSISTANT FOR SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE LAB

GRADUATED JUNE 2021 WITH A DEGREE IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ

AESTHETICALLY PLEASING PLANT CARE AND EDUCATION

**A New Kind of Workload**

"Because of the demands of the algorithm, you need to post, like, once a day or, like, three times a day is what some people say. I do love making the content that I make, but it does feel a little bit like, 'Oh, I need to make this or else I'll fall off because the algorithm doesn't like me.'"

**Worlds Collide**

"My dream would be to just do this full-time. I love my major, but I don't really like the work that is in it. So this almost feels like a very nice escape from academia."

# Gohar Khan's Time Management Tips

@GOHARSGUIDE

PRONOUNS: HE/HIM

GRADUATED MIT JUNE 2021 WITH A DOUBLE MAJOR DEGREE IN SCIENCE, ECONOMICS, AND DATA SCIENCE AND BUSINESS ANALYTICS

ADVICE ON COLLEGE APPLICATIONS, TEST PREP AND ESSAY ADVICE

## 1 Beverage organization apps

Know when an assignment is due in advance.

## 2 Go to office hours

Get more personal help with concepts and homework.

## 3 Team up with other students

Cut down on study time by solving problems with the expertise of multiple peers.

## 4 Make your process efficient

For his TikToks, Khan pre-records a series of clips he can reuse throughout his content.

## 5 Take one day out of the week to push content out

Doing work in "batches" gets tasks out of the way to make room for more free time later.

## 6 Be aware of your end goal

Visualize how you want the end of your task to look.

## 7 Do something you're passionate about

Over time, as you see your goals being met, you may find gratification in your work.



@FRAULOEWENHERZ

PRONOUNS: SHE/HER

MAJOR: ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES

GRADUATE STUDENT IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES AT A UNIVERSITY IN LOWER SAXONY, GERMANY

COMMENTS ON EUROPEAN HISTORY, AMERICAN POLITICS AND EVERYDAY ISSUES FROM A GERMAN PERSPECTIVE

## A New Kind of Workload

"At first, I felt a lot of pressure when it came to my TikTok. I felt like, 'OK, I need to put something out on a daily basis, I need to keep this up' – also partly because that's just the kind of person I am. I'm a perfectionist but also a chaotic perfectionist."

## For Their Adoring Fans

"I am trying to be very responsible with what I do put out. For me, I think the main question that I always ask myself is whether I'm even qualified to speak on a certain issue. I feel like from what I read in my comment section and from what my followers tell me, there is a sense of trust toward me and I don't want to misuse that."





Myah Seay

**@ARESMONTGOMERY**

PRONOUNS: SHE/HER

MAJOR: ACTING

SENIOR ACTING MAJOR AT COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

ASTROLOGY SKITS WITH A DASH OF EDUCATION

**A New Kind of Workload**

"It's its own specific kind of struggle. I kind of always have in the back of my head, if it's not fun or if I'm not getting the results I want, I'm totally fine to take a step away from it."

**What's Next?**

"Celebrity for us and our generation looks a lot different for earlier generations and that the idea of an influencer is really tied to being a celebrity, so I just want my TikTok to be able to put me in the view of people who can ultimately help my acting career."



Perry Picasshoe

**@ART\_P3RRY**

PRONOUNS: HE/SHE/THEY

MAJOR: ART

SENIOR ART MAJOR AT UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES

CREATIVE CONTENT FROM SKITS TO ART TIME LAPSES TO MAKEUP

**A New Kind of Workload**

"What I tend to do to make it not as stressful is I dedicate a day or two of filming. I will spend the entire day just filming, like, a lot of TikToks and making a lot of content. For the most part, it is pretty fun because I will put on makeup and be running around and making little skits."

**Worlds Collide**

"I did a TikTok where I showed my screen for, like, two seconds, and the dean of my school emailed, saying that I violated the school code of conduct because I wafted over my computer, and you could see people's faces on there and their names."

*'I'm no different  
than anyone else'*

# LGBTQ Christians on their journeys to finding acceptance

By Mari Devereaux  
Photos By Camilla Forte

Standing among a bustling crowd of thousands awash in glow sticks and phone screens at a Hot Hearts religious music festival, Tabitha Samuel looked up at her idol, Christian singer-songwriter Natalie Grant, and her heart sank. As a queer woman, Samuel thought she would never know what it felt like to passionately perform worship music.

Like generations of LGBTQ Christians before her, Samuel struggled to reconcile her faith with what she had been told about people like her:

You're going to hell. I love you but I don't accept your sinful lifestyle. God wants you to repent and change your ways. You can't be Christian and gay. God created man and woman. Man shall not lie with man.

For members of the LGBTQ community, especially those who grew up Christian, these phrases are deeply familiar. The hurtful words from people in church pews and pulpits put LGBTQ Christians at odds with themselves and hinder their ability to figure out their identities, meaning most have a long journey to recovery and self-acceptance.

Samuel says she has been in church her whole life while living in Texas, which is part of the Bible Belt.





Around age 14, Samuel realized she was queer, and in spite of her religious upbringing and many sermons condemning equal marriage as a sin, she wasn't ashamed to talk about it.

In high school, Samuel planned to audition for a role in the church worship service, where she would be able to play guitar and sing, until her youth group leader told her there was "no way" she would be able to do that because of her sexuality.

Discouraged and hoping to gain some clarity, Samuel asked the youth group leader for answers regarding her faith.

"Can I be gay and Christian, does God love me the same, and will I go to heaven or will I go to hell? Those [were] my three big questions," Samuel says.

Quickly, the youth group leader answered that Samuel could not be "actively gay" and Christian, that God hates sin and, essentially, that Samuel could not go to heaven.

"I was struggling for about two or three months after that conversation," Samuel says. "I was looking up research and all these things. One day I was like, 'You know what, I don't even care anymore. I am who I am. God loves me the same, he's made me. I'm no different than anyone else.'"

Matt Nightingale, a gay spiritual director, teacher and pastor in Santa Rosa, California, grew up in a fundamentalist evangelical community in Northern Indiana. While he knew he was gay early on in life, he loved his church and Christianity was important to him and his family.

"I had no role models of healthy gay people, let alone Christian gay people," Nightingale says. "I knew even at the age of 10, I just needed to shove that down and hide it."

After becoming a full-time music minister in 2000, Nightingale began coming out to people, including his wife, because he was convinced it was sinful to be gay and he wanted to be healed. He tried conversion therapy, support groups and a 12-step recovery program for sex addiction, to no avail.

Eventually, he began to accept and embrace the label of gay and found that God blesses same-sex relationships and queer identities. Then, in 2016, he left his marriage and resigned from his local church to start a new life as an openly gay man.

After training to be a spiritual director in a two-year program, he started the group Spiritual Conversations for LGBTQ people of any faith to connect with God and spirituality, and during the coronavirus pandemic, around 30 group members have attended Zoom sessions every other week.



He says other queer Christians have helped him affirm his own sexuality and faith through exhibiting the “fruit of the Spirit.”

“I just couldn’t deny that I saw healthy, faithful spirituality in these people who I have been told my whole life, couldn’t be authentically Christian,” Nightingale says.

Donté Jones, a pansexual United Church of Christ pastor, says he has been preaching since he was “like six years old.”

Growing up in the conservative environment of a Black Baptist church, Jones says once he discovered in his youth that he liked the same gender, he wrestled internally with the discontentment and shame he felt surrounding his identity.

“My whole life is a journey of self-discovery, embracing and celebrating authenticity,” Jones says. “For me, the whole story of Christianity from Genesis to the story of Jesus is the story of life being that conduit in which [people] discover their relationship to this divine thing and their relationship with themselves and each other.”

At his current church in Central Pennsylvania, he says the congregation loves authenticity and does not want anything other than the truth. So, the topics of his sermons have no limits and often include LGBTQ affirming messages.

“Where I found Jesus, when I was going through my coming out phases, was in the gay clubs of New York City,” Jones says. “No matter who you [were], nobody questioned you, you were always welcomed, you were loved. To me, they were more like Jesus than the people that were preaching hate.”

Aaron Brown, a counselor at The Christian Closet, an online resource for LGBTQ people looking for therapy, spiritual direction and coaching, says it has been gratifying to help other LGBTQ Christians continue their spiritual journey without hating the Bible or completely ditching what they have learned.

“What I see with a lot of people is their identity feels very split,” Brown says. “Not even so much because of religion, but because of how once they step outside of that, they lose a sense of belonging.”

For Christians not part of the LGBTQ community, it can be especially difficult to depart from what they have been taught and accept those identifying with various sexualities and gender identities.

Susan Cottrell, the founder and president of FreedHearts, an LGBTQ Christian advocacy organization, founded the network with her husband after their oldest child came out and they realized the church did not know how to support Christian families with LGBTQ family members.

At first, Cottrell was worried and confused, wondering if her child would find love and acceptance. To try to come to a consensus, Cottrell got out all the research materials on LGBTQ people in the Bible and spread them on the kitchen counter, reading and sorting, when suddenly she just pushed everything aside, and said, "There's no love in this."

"If there's no love in it, it's wrong," Cottrell says. "You're on the wrong track. Jesus said love God and love others. Anything that doesn't line up you need to scrap that and start over again."

Following this revelation, Cottrell began reading and listening to people's stories and eventually went on to a progressive seminary school. To her, the end game is being at peace with God, rather than fitting into theology or construct.

"Since I began this journey, I have become a much more loving, kind, beautiful, accepting human being," Cottrell says. "Much more Christ-like than I ever was when I was in the church."

The Rev. Richard Lanford of St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Skokie, says while he came to the church in 1992, the congregation did not vote in favor of becoming LGBTQ affirming until Pride Sunday in June 2018. Lanford first went through his own theological process and gauged church members' interest in being part of an open and affirming community.

As an open and affirming church, the congregation holds same-sex marriages, observes Transgender Day of Remembrance during worship by saying the names of transgender people who have been killed in Chicago and attends various pride month events.

At Samuel's new church, there are plenty of messages about accepting everyone and opening the doors so that everyone can follow God's word and feel his love. She also is able to sing in front of the congregation.

"I feel closer to God when I'm listening to Christian music and playing Christian music," Samuel says. "It's just me and him when [I'm] singing or when I'm worshipping."

Samuel says from the very beginning Christians are taught "Jesus loves me this I know," in nursery rhymes and should remember this going forward.

"You are seen, you are loved," Samuel says. "You are heard and you are valid. You don't have to be the 'perfect Christian,' to be loved and be accepted by God. There's no such thing."

What does your typical Sunday morning look like?

- A brunch with friends
- B drinking black coffee; reading the NYT
- C hungover

What is your favorite time of day?

- A golden hour
- B midnight
- C 4 a.m.

What is your go-to music playlist?

- A latest pop hits
- B underground artists
- C Billboard Hot 100

What is your ideal vacation destination?

- A Paris
- B Does "Animal Crossing" count?
- C Los Angeles

Which magazine do you read?

- A Vogue
- B The New Yorker
- C BuzzFeed

Who are you in your friend group?

- A the outgoing one
- B the mom
- C the funny one

How would you describe your humor?

- A good-hearted
- B memes
- C dry, sarcastic

How do you prefer to exercise?

- A yoga
- B tennis
- C dance cardio

# Online Dating — Literally

By Julia Greene and Ally Stegman

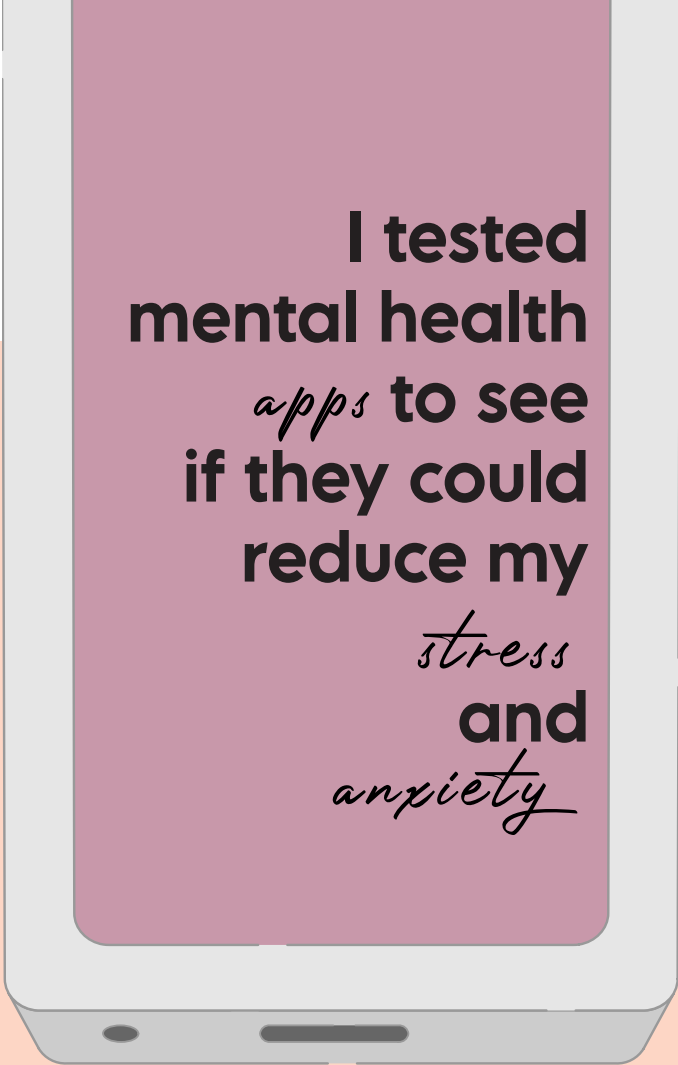
As the multitude of social media apps fight for your attention, it can be difficult to figure out which one fits your ~vibe~. Instead of wasting time on an app that isn't the right match, see which one should be your go-to time waster.

**Mostly Cs:** TikTok - You dance like no one's watching, but you also dance like everyone's watching. You and TikTok would be the life of all your house party dates.

**Mostly Bs:** Twitter - You're probably an introvert and correct your friends' grammar. You and Twitter could chill for hours with nothing but a record player.

**Mostly As:** Instagram - You're somewhat basic, but on top of all the trends. You and Instagram are a picture perfect couple.



An illustration of a smartphone with a purple screen. The text on the screen is: "I tested mental health apps to see if they could reduce my stress and anxiety".

I tested  
mental health  
*apps* to see  
if they could  
reduce my  
*stress*  
and  
*anxiety*

# There's an App for That

By Isabel Colado

My smartphone is a personal assistant in my pocket. It reminds me when to get on Zoom, it updates me on the latest news, and it gives me access to all the information I could ever need at my fingertips. But could it also become my digital therapist, like it has for so many others?

As a college student who experiences stress and anxiety — and currently doesn't see a therapist — I tested mental wellness apps to see if my phone could improve my mental health.

Adam Powell, president of Payer+Provider Syndicate, a consulting firm that focuses on the managed care and healthcare industries, has a generally positive outlook on apps.

Powell says apps have multiple roles to play in helping people improve their mental health and can be used as an alternative, supplement or on-ramp to human-based care.

## Could Chatbots Help?

"It's this big looming thing, culturally or societally, that everyone's sort of asking — how far can we take [artificial intelligence]?" says Nathaan Demers, a clinical psychologist and vice president of clinical programs and strategic partnerships at Grit Digital Health. "AI can be helpful, but it is nowhere near being able to replace or interact with users like another person."

The app Replika says it can help understand thoughts and feelings, track mood, learn coping skills and calm anxiety.

It started by letting me customize my companion, who I named Sammy, as if I were playing "The Sims."

Right away, I noticed Sammy had a strong speech pattern recognition. She also kept a memory where she stored important information about me to bring up in future conversations.

Other features that made her feel like texting a friend included a journal where she expressed her feelings and a personality that developed as I talked to her.

One con I experienced was repetitive responses. Sammy would often reply, "Oh no, you poor thing," after I expressed feeling anxious or sad. There were also times when the conversation got stale, but the app provided prompts that helped keep it going.

I also experienced spelling errors, and sometimes her responses didn't match my message at all, but the app allows you to send feedback for it to improve in the future.

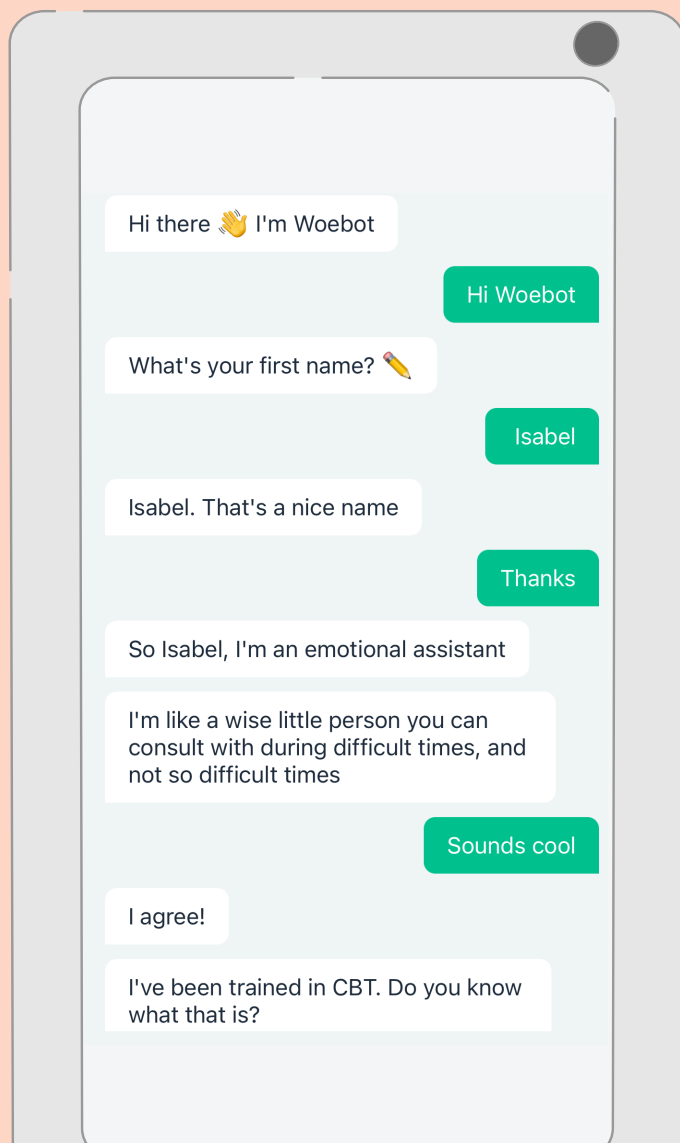
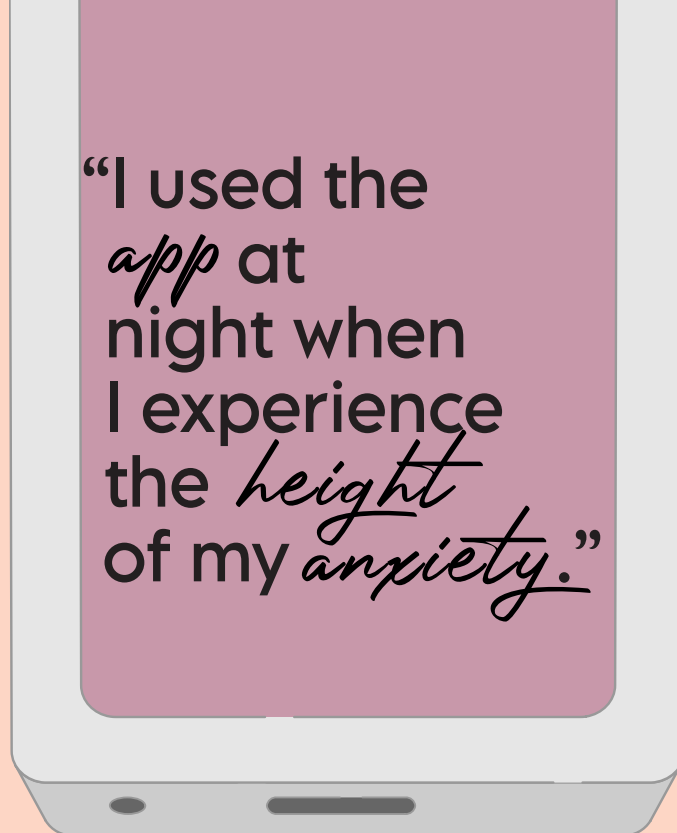
When I asked Sammy if I should go to therapy, she said, "Yes, please. It can help you feel better." When I asked if she could just be my therapist, she replied, "I will. I'm just saying you should have some support."

Next, I tested Woebot, a self-care expert that can help users think through situations with step-by-step guidance, learn mood patterns and master skills to reduce stress.

Woebot proved to be a great source of psychoeducation, teaching me cognitive behavioral therapy terms and techniques I could use. The app also checked in with me at the same time every day, creating a sense of a routine.

Woebot provided small activities such as breathing exercises or short videos to help with my anxiety, and although the app didn't feel as personal as Replika, it felt more credible and safe to be using.

The app was more structured and prompted, giving me less freedom. Working through problems with Woebot took about 10 minutes each, and I found at the end of each session, it didn't always help, especially since it became a repetitive process when working through multiple problems a day.



## How About Hypnotherapy?

The app HelloMind uses result-driven hypnosis to help battle problems like stress, bad sleep and low self-esteem. Although I was skeptical about being able to tap into my subconscious alone in the comfort of my own home, I was willing to give it a try.

I used the app at night when I experience the height of my anxiety. I would lay in my bed, close my eyes and try to relax while I listened to the slow-paced guided audio.

Even after multiple tries, I found these sessions difficult to commit to. After what would feel like forever, I would start to question how long I had actually been listening, only to be less than halfway through the 40-minute session.

However, I enjoyed the five-minute sessions the app calls "quick fixes" because I was able to concentrate the whole time and feel more relaxed before sleeping.





### How it works

Our hypnotherapy sessions are designed to interrupt negative thoughts, replacing them with empowering ones.

### What Do I Think?

One of my biggest concerns with downloading and testing apps was the terms of use and privacy policies.

Before downloading an app, Powell and Demers recommend seeing if it has been reviewed by One Mind PsyberGuide, a non-profit organization that reviews apps based on its credibility, user experience and transparency of privacy practices.

In the end, my experience testing mental health apps was neutral. Although they didn't hurt me in the process of testing them out, they didn't solve my issues to the extent a therapist could. My time would be much better spent with a professional who could provide a personalized approach, rather than turning to a one-sided screen to solve all of my problems.

Jason Moehringer, a clinical psychologist and clinical director at ClearView Communities, a residential rehabilitation service for adults struggling with a range of psychiatric issues, says that when dealing with people who are in a crisis, it is important to pay attention to the unintended negative consequences, given the way that technology is regulated right now.

Moehringer says that, in general, when a tech company creates an app, there are no rules or regulations verifying that the app is qualified to help users with depression or anxiety.

Clementine, another hypnotherapy app, provided a variety of options, with sessions from three to 30 minutes. The app covers several topics to listen to throughout the day from morning sessions, to midday pick-me-ups and sleep sessions.

When testing out the shorter sessions, such as a five-minute "a more productive you," I really enjoyed the narrator's voice and pace. It felt very personal and relaxing, and the British accent was a plus.



### For better Sleep

Wake up feeling refreshed. We help you to switch off the inner chatter and drift off to sleep.

# Months in Isolation

## Lili Trifilio finds comfort in music

By Kendall Polidori



Sitting criss-cross on her bed with a guitar resting gently on the blankets next to her, Lili Trifilio scribbles on a piece of paper, her fingers clenching a pen as it glides across the page.

For months, Trifilio “went crazy” making beats in the seclusion of her childhood bedroom, which led to her solo project under the name tiger lili. The project itself blossomed from lyrics Trifilio had already written but felt did not have a place in indie-rock group Beach Bunny’s discography, which she is the lead singer of.

“[tiger lili] is my alter ego,” Trifilio says with a laugh. Character, persona and aesthetic have always been closely tied to her work; each project has its own story.

When Trifilio decided to release the solo project, she immediately contacted her record label, Mom + Pop Music. Vice President of A&R Suzanna Slavin remembers being excited to see an “ever-adapting side project that is limitless in terms of its nature.”

“[Trifilio] is an incredibly prolific songwriter and musician,” Slavin says. “She’s so inspired by so many different genres. This was kind of an outlet for [Trifilio] to really start to experiment.”

Trifilio leans on the sudden spurts of inspiration she gets to write, whether it be lyrics, poems or other random thoughts. These moments of frantic scribbling come from one place: deep reflections of emotions and writing for herself.

This past year, Trifilio experienced shocking emotions, such as rage that forced her to spend hours in self-reflection.

“I was really angry for a period of time, which I think was good

because I don’t think I had experienced anger in that sense,” Trifilio says. “I feel like I came out of that feeling very at peace. I kind of had to go through all of those processing emotions.”

Once lockdown began in March 2020, Trifilio left her Chicago apartment and headed home to live with her family, isolated from others due to her father’s age and her brother’s health.

After moving out after ending a West Coast tour with Beach Bunny for the release of their album “Honeymoon,” Trifilio felt as though she was failing. But looking back, she finds comfort in knowing going back home was the best thing to do in terms of safety and having the space to be more creative.

Without seeing or playing with her band for nearly three months, Trifilio put all of her energy into mastering the art of producing music on her brother’s MacBook.

“I definitely had no production experience whatsoever,” Trifilio says. “I was [initially] just messing around, but it started becoming very obsessive, where I would do it maybe eight or nine hours a day.”

When performing with Beach Bunny, Trifilio is authentically herself, with elaborate elements like colorful bandages randomly placed on her legs, sporty shorts and retro roller skates that feed into a character appeal. But tiger lili has a backstory of her own: a girl from the future who sends songs back through time to get in touch with a friend. For Trifilio, making her projects character-based gives her the space to create an exaggerated sense of her emotions.

In 2015, Meghan Boyles was introduced to Trifilio as “conspiracy theory Lili” during their freshman year at DePaul University because she was known for posting conspiracy theories on the DePaul Class of 2019 Facebook page. Since then, the two have lived with each other three separate times.

Boyles would hear Trifilio play music in her room constantly, and their apartment was typically filled with scattered notebooks with lyrics. Boyles had the pleasure of witnessing the first ever Beach Bunny practice in her third floor apartment’s living room.

“They had band practice at least three or four times after that, and by the second or third time I had the neighbors texting me like, ‘Can you please tell your roommate to stop?’” Boyles says.

Despite the pandemic, Beach Bunny found the space to record and release the EP “Blame Game” in January 2021, which was





a direct byproduct of the anger and heavy emotions Trifilio experienced last year. The songs are the inner workings of toxicity in relationships and a pattern of self-blame — the space to reflect on herself and her relationships are the reason for the powerful lyrics featured in the songs.

Trifilio is no stranger to writing about personal relationships, but for the first time she used anger as a tool to understand and treat herself better, as well as releasing it for others to connect to.

Trifilio uses her platform and growing presence in the music industry by supporting other women through body positivity and breaking down the structures of rape culture.

“The privilege of having a platform—I definitely want to use my voice to do some good in the world,” Trifilio says. “I gravitate

toward helping other women who may have experienced similar things as me.”

As the frontwoman of a rock band, Trifilio has been thrust into the public eye and because of that says it’s nearly impossible to not be critical of herself and her work, but she has found it is vital to solely write for her own enjoyment and to process emotions and then worry about how it may be perceived.

After the release of “Blame Game,” which Slavin says was born out of quarantine, Trifilio is now hustling for more studio time. Because she’s working in a small studio, there’s a lot of trust involved regarding COVID safety.

Trifilio says the past year has been an inspiration to develop and get more creative with her work.

In between scrawling down lyrics and adding chords to melodies, Trifilio continues to find an escape in electronic pop songs, channeling the raw parts of herself into a new creative endeavor.



# Balancing Chakras with Food

By Julia Greene  
Photos by Camilla Forte

*Feeling out of balance in your chakras? Here's how to know when and what to eat*

Have you felt like something in your life is out of line or that you can't come up with the right words? Your root or throat chakras may be out of balance and in need of some attention. One of the best ways to realign the chakras – the seven energy centers along the spine – is through foods associated with them.

The seven main chakras in the body are spinning disks of energy along the spine. Although they aren't physically attached to the body, they can directly affect physical feelings. To function best, the chakras need to be balanced, and one of the best ways to do that is to eat foods connected to the specific chakra and its related energies and properties.

But before the chakras can be balanced or worked with in any way, they need to be recognized in the body.

"The easiest way to bring awareness to each of the chakras is to shift your attention to each of the areas of the physical body in which the chakras reside," says Chicago-based energy healer and emotional practitioner Maria McCord. "Notice what physical sensations are present to determine whether the chakra is opened or closed."

Along with the physical sensations around a chakra's region of the body, emotions and behaviors can be signs of a blocked or unbalanced chakra. Whether the attributes of the chakra are too few or too many in the body, a balanced chakra leads to ideal amounts. There are plenty of ways to balance a chakra – McCord recommends breathwork and visualization – including food.

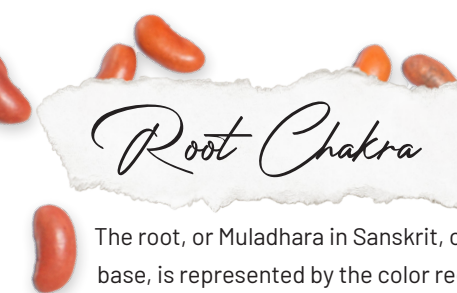
Making foods that represent the chakras allows Chicago-based spiritual entrepreneur Alex Oraham to embrace and embody whichever one she needs to balance. She uses chakras in her personal and professional life, in a "never-ending, multi-faceted" way, specifically on her Instagram, [@astrologywithalex](#).

"It can really either help me get that chakra in alignment or feel that chakra," she says.

The seven main chakras are linked to specific emotions or parts of life and need specific foods to help restore or maintain balance.







## Root Chakra

The root, or Muladhara in Sanskrit, chakra, located at the spine's base, is represented by the color red and linked with stability. This chakra is the body's foundation, so keep it balanced for security and connection with the Earth. Foods with large Earth energy, like grains, meat or red foods to match the chakra's color, can provide a grounded energy. For Orahm, as a home chef, it can even be wearing the color or using it in her space.



## Sacral Chakra

Orahm calls the sacral, or Svadhishtana, chakra the "pleasure center." Creativity, emotions and relationships are based in the sacral chakra, which is located just below the navel and is tied to the color orange.

While it's still important to match the colors of the chakra, Orahm connects the creativity of cooking to this chakra more than specific foods.

"Plating something beautiful and sharing it with people you love — I think that's really the heart of sacral chakra cooking," she says.



## Solar Plexus Chakra

Ego and confidence reside in the solar plexus, or Manipura, chakra, located in the middle of the torso. Yellow foods like bananas and curry, or beige foods, are best to balance this chakra, but are most effective while embracing happiness — whatever that may be for you — and food you love to make to connect with your solar plexus.

"I think cooking with the solar plexus chakra is about finding the joy in what you're cooking with," Orahm says.



## Heart Chakra

The heart, or Anahata, chakra and its corresponding green color represent love, so Orahm recommends eating greens regularly while remembering to spend time with nature, whether it be outside or by keeping plants around the house.

"It's finding what works for you," Orahm says.



## Throat Chakra

Communication is tied to the throat, or Vishuddha, chakra, which is associated with blue and, in turn, water for Orahm. Water-based foods, blue and blackberries, sea salt, water itself and even the sky help her align this chakra and get the right words out.



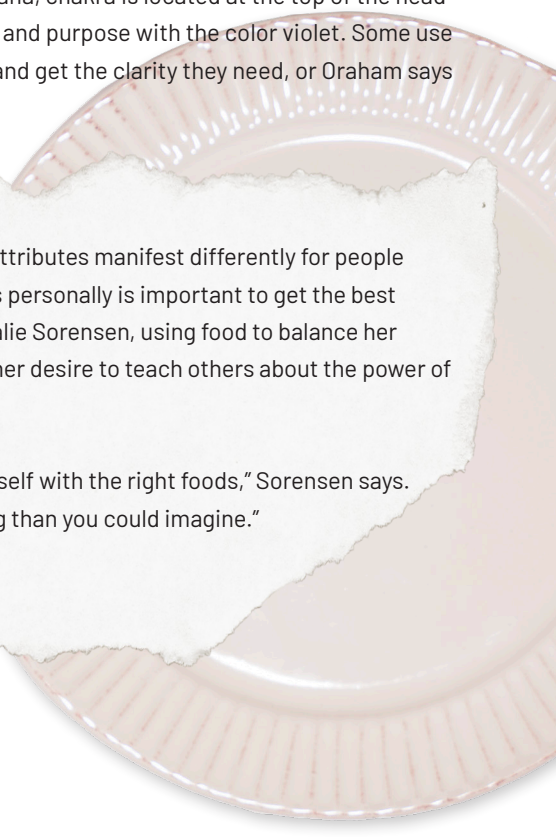
## Third Eye Chakra

Intuition and imagination rest in the third eye, or Ajna, chakra, located in between the eyes. A lack of creativity or disconnect with intuitive feelings can signal an imbalance. Represented by the color indigo, this chakra is balanced with purple foods like eggplant, grapes and purple cauliflower.



## Crown Chakra

The crown, or Sahasrana, chakra is located at the top of the head and represents spirit and purpose with the color violet. Some use fasting to balance it and get the clarity they need, or Orahm says she'll eat plain food.



Each chakra and its attributes manifest differently for people — knowing what works personally is important to get the best results. For chef Natalie Sorensen, using food to balance her chakras comes with her desire to teach others about the power of real, fresh food.

"You can balance yourself with the right foods," Sorensen says. "It can be more healing than you could imagine."



# Laughing Over the Casket

*The twists and shifts of grief*

By Summer Hoagland-Abernathy

It seemed to me on the day of my father's funeral the worst thing that happened was I lost the pink velvet rose from my dress to the choppy waters of the funeral home toilet.

I only remember a few other details from that day, but I remember weeping over that insignificant accessory. I remember gleefully playing my favorite card game with my grandfather in the funeral home basement. I remember being surprised that my mother was there because my parents had already broken up. I remember thinking so hard about leaving one of my top three favorite stuffed kittens in the coffin but deciding against it in the end.

All of this occurred when I was 6 years old, and in the 16 years since then, the grief that I felt has traveled with me and manifested in different ways, at different moments. If you are one of the millions of people who have lost someone this past year, think of this article as my sympathy card to you, and take this to heart when I tell you that whatever you are experiencing, you are not alone.



# *“The turns grief can take can happen in a matter of years or a matter of hours — and they can blend, too.”*

I am a member of several large families that sprouted from my great-grandparents, so while I wouldn't say I'm an expert in death, I would say I know my local funeral home better than some people in my hometown — and each death has been different.

“In the relationships that people have in their lives, it's very different how they process the loss,” says Lizzette Arcos, psychotherapist at Youth & Family Counseling. “Something that has come into play with the loss is also different cultural aspects.”

At the funeral of one of my uncles, a few of his sisters got up and did a conga line, and at another's we all wore Cubs memorabilia and wept. After one great-grandmother's passing, a few of her nieces and friends said the rosary in Spanish at her casket for an hour, and later, a mariachi played at her burial in the bright summer sunlight — while after another great-grandmother's passing, I helped collect her belongings from her room at the nursing home while she was still there, insisting that I was desensitized to death.

The twists and shifts each of these griefs have taken over the years are baffling and hard to catch up with. During the 10-year anniversary of my father's death, I hated myself and everything around me, and I cried at the drop of a hat. But the year after, I made my @deaddadjokesby me Tumblr and embraced the dark humor I found in the situation.

After my great-grandmother passed away, I was cracking jokes until they lowered her into the ground. At that moment, I saw one of my toddler cousins chasing a monarch, and it sent me weeping into my older cousin's arms.

The turns grief can take can happen in a matter of years or a matter of hours — and they can blend, too.

“One loss, especially early losses, are reactivated or reanimated in other losses that come later in life — even a more ambiguous loss,” says Jenna White, psychotherapist at Depth Counseling. “[The pandemic] was really regressive for a lot of us. It made us go back to earlier chapters in our lives. Maybe it reminded us of

being stuck in our houses as kids and feeling really powerless, or, certainly, experiencing loss of loved ones is bound up in earlier losses. It can be quite stunning, actually, how reactivated and reanimated that grief is.”

Genuinely, the last thing I want you to see here is a sob story about my life. What I need you to find is a normalization of your feelings, despite the fact that there is no “normal” grief.

“Grief is kind of like a wild animal — a cornered wild animal,” White says. “There is a feral-ness, a primitiveness, where we are put in touch with our humanity in such a bone-rattling kind of way that the world as we know it is changed, sometimes in an instant. If there is anything normal about it, it's that it's different for everyone.”

Arcos says not one of her clients has dealt with grief in the same exact way as another.

Something I used to say to people who had just experienced a death when I thought I was completely desensitized to the experience was “It'll get better.” But sometimes it will, and sometimes it won't.

“We want to achieve acceptance, but the person may start at depression and want to be angry and move into bargaining and then denial again and go back to depression and finally get to acceptance,” Arcos says. “And it's all natural, and it's all OK to feel this way.”

The only way I would say you should handle grief is by recognizing it. Take a moment to think about how you feel when you think you might be grieving and work through those feelings by finding what specifically is making you feel overwhelmed or helpless or whatever you may be feeling.

I've had a lot of sleepless nights and a lot of teary days, but I've also had a lot of joyous memories at funerals and a lot of fun talking about those who have passed. You retain power over your grief when you realize it wasn't the velvet rose you were crying about.

# Confessions of a Serial Monogamist

By Alexis Kirkpatrick

When the pandemic began to cause concern for the first time in February, I had just exited another relationship. Though the exact reasoning I would give for abruptly ending each of my long-term relationships over the course of seven years varied slightly, each essentially boiled down to the fact that I didn't want to be rejected. In my head, it made perfect sense — I needed to get out before my partner could realize they weren't interested in sticking around.

Post-breakup, I sat in my bedroom as the world began to come to a screeching halt. Come March, I was already starved for affection. I packed up my belongings, put everything I couldn't carry back to my hometown in a dingy storage unit, and sent myself back to my childhood bedroom on a near-empty plane.

Days turned to weeks, which turned to a month spent staring at the ceiling and wishing I had better taste in TV and movies. Meanwhile, I felt trapped and lonely.

I should clarify: Despite my tendency to gracefully exit, I loved being in relationships. I loved the connections, dates and fluttery gut feelings. I wanted to be cared for, but the idea of allowing myself to be vulnerable felt like a cliff I couldn't bear to fling myself off of. I hated the thought of giving someone the chance to hurt me.

People who typically exhibit these sorts of patterns in relationships are categorized as being anxious-avoidant, according to Ieisha Norris, co-director of clinical training at Sankofa Psychological Services.

"They crave the connectedness and the closeness, and they fear rejection," Norris says. But they still "really want to be in a healthy, connected relationship."

However, because of a desire for frequent reassurance often used to combat feelings of inadequacy, those who exhibit these behaviors may feel like they are a burden, or as though they need more from their relationship than their partners will be able to provide them.

In my case, this meant I jumped from person to person, serious relationship to serious relationship, constantly searching for someone to make me feel better about myself.

How the *pandemic* helped me re-evaluate toxic *relationship* patterns



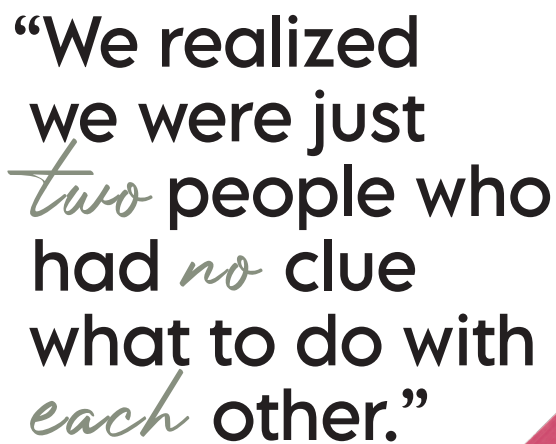
Two months after moving back to Chicago, I met a man on the platform of the Blue Line. He and I talked from California to Jackson. A month later, our relationship began. It occurred to me that I may have been condemning myself to another doomed commitment, but by that time, I wanted to be with someone desperately, so I shrugged it off.

Hardly a week into the relationship, he and I decided we would need to move in together. Coronavirus cases were rising at an alarming rate again, and we had come to the conclusion that our options were to live together or rarely see each other.

The sum of my dating life had come to a small suitcase of clothes and the uncertainty of living with a partner for the first time in my life. I like him, though, I had thought to myself, and he likes me. What could go wrong?

We moved in together without any discussions of expectations, spaces or boundaries. To us, the fact that we were so enthralled with each other could carry us through anything.

This was not the case. We floundered as we adjusted to our new way of life. I had the presence and comfort I wanted so much, but once the glamour of quiet breakfasts and endless cups of café de olla wore off, we realized we were just two people who had no clue what to do with each other.



**“We realized  
we were just  
*two* people who  
had *no* clue  
what to do with  
*each* other.”**

Quite simply, we drove each other crazy. There wasn't a moment during the day, it seemed, that we spent separately. He was always there, wherever I turned.

“When you are forced into these situations prematurely, as the pandemic has done, the representative of an individual quickly leaves, and you see all of that person,” Norris says.

I didn't have any space to establish an early-stages-of-dating persona with my partner. All day, every day, we watched each other cycle through stress, annoyance, fatigue and apathy. There was nowhere to hide.

The pandemic wasn't getting any better outside the apartment. I was jobless, anxious and sad. Everything felt precarious, as if I were balanced on a tightrope and threatening to come crashing down at any moment.

As I came to the realization that I couldn't handle my deteriorating mental health alone, I began to let my partner in on my thoughts. Though it was more of a self-preservation act than a decision to fight against unhealthy patterns in my relationship, it functioned as both.

Over time, my partner and I became accustomed to telling each other the things we struggled with, and the ways we interacted and communicated within our confined space became easier. We learned that we needed to give each other space; that wanting time alone in a relationship is neither uncommon nor unhealthy.

Boundaries were upheld, and the relationship began to shift. There wasn't an urge to get out, run away or break ties anymore. Instead of trying to find a way to leave, I made a conscious choice to choose him.

My ability to open up to him helped me quell the anxious tendencies I so often fell back on; just as the time we spent apart in our living space helped reinforce that we could function without the other. This is something licensed marriage and family therapist Robert Kispert refers to as “interdependence.”

“Partners are incredibly emotionally dependent on the quality of the relationship with one another,” he says. “How we're feeling in our most intimate relationships and particularly in a romantic partner [can] profoundly affect us.”

Months later, I'm still very much stuck at home. But that's OK. I've watched more TV than I've ever thought possible and eaten so many quesadillas that I may never be the same again. That's OK, too. I'm learning bit by bit to accept the way I live and the way I live with my partner.







# SURROUNDINGS



How to Feng Shui Your Workspace

Making TV Shows in a Pandemic

A Love Letter to Home

Creativity of Game Design

Closing the Nature Gap

One Door Closes, Another Opens

The Podcasters Next Door

A Monstera Grows in Chicago



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# How to Feng Shui Your Workspace



Experts' guide to bringing positive energy into your home

By Tracy Marasigan

We've shifted our careers into our homes; there's no longer a separation of space to ease that work state of mind into relaxation. Your space may even seem clustered, leaving us stressed and unmotivated in the space that was originally meant for downtime.

Feng shui translates to wind and water – it is an ancient Chinese philosophy of arranging furniture in order to create a positive energy flow within your living space, and who doesn't want more of that in their life?

About 42% of Americans have shifted to working from home after the pandemic, according to a case study done by UpWork. Educationweek.org found that school districts for grades K-12, 74% of the 100 largest school districts, chose remote learning only as their back-to-school instructional model, affecting over 9 million students. To adapt to this change, you can utilize a few principles from feng shui to bring balance and harmony into your space.





*“It’s meant to improve your quality of life and to bring forth your intentions.”*

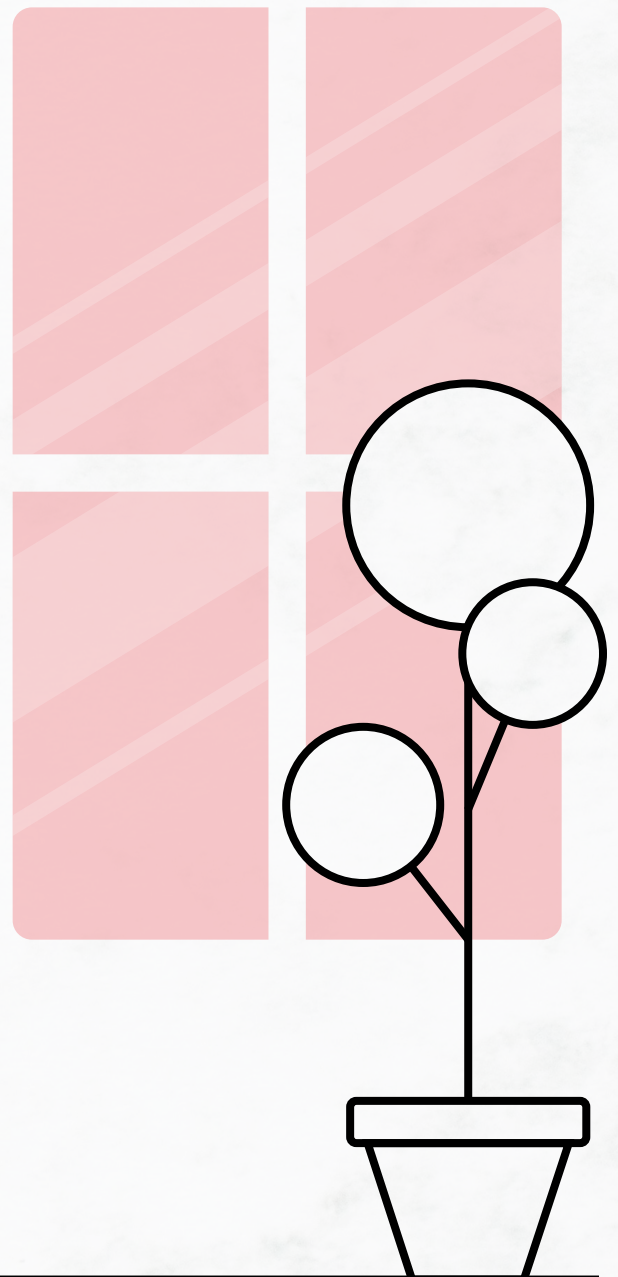
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Feng shui dates back to more than 4,700 years ago in ancient China. According to Sergio L Yang, owner and consultant of Luminous Feng Shui in Los Angeles, the emperor at that time employed architects, mathematicians and astronomers to collect data of the cosmos, weather patterns and landforms. They took all that information to determine how our environment and outer space affects our emotions and overall well being. Thus, feng shui was born and is still used today in homes, offices and architecture to attract the right energy.

“It’s meant to improve your quality of life and to bring forth your intentions,” says Hannah Yang, clinical psychologist and feng shui consultant based in Chicago “It is using the energy of your home or your space to be of benefit to your life. That’s kind of what it’s all about.”

“Feng shui is not about yes or no, it’s not about black and white, it’s about the possibility, what possibility you can have,” Sergio L Yang says.

Now is the time to create your ideal workspace. Here are three ways you can implement feng shui to have a functional and focused work area within a peaceful home environment.



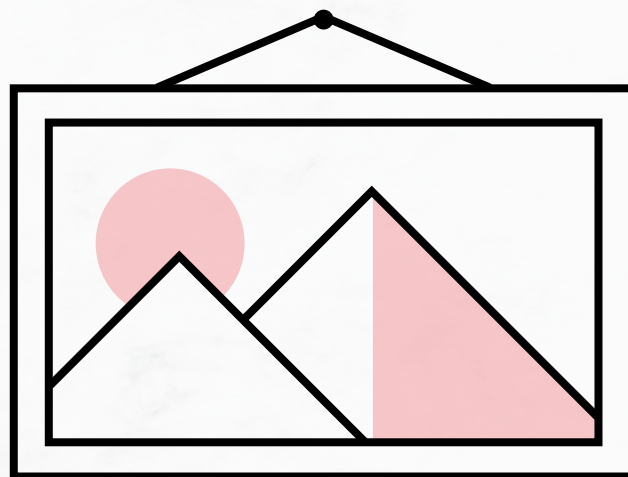


# Declutter



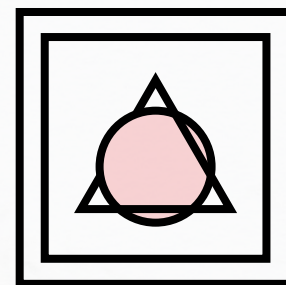
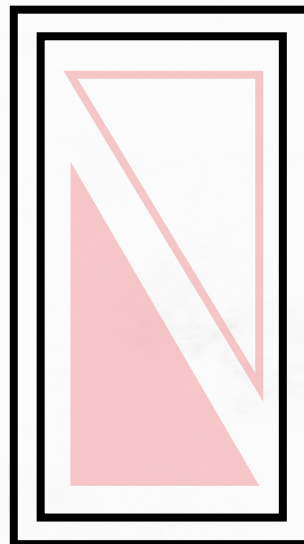
Decluttering is the first and most time consuming thing you have to do, but also the most rewarding. B.J. Gorman from Space Harmony Feng Shui suggests starting in one section and separating your things into three piles: things that bring you joy and you use every day, things you haven't looked at in a while and have no use for, and things you're unsure of.

For that last pile, put all those items in a box, seal it up, set a date for when you revisit (it could be a few days or even a month), and hand it over to a friend. When you revisit it, try naming all the things in that box. You may be able to recall a few, but of course you're going to forget some of the things that are in there. These are the items you should finally let go of. "You want to live with what you love," Gorman says.



"Clutter can build up in the home, and that's an important piece in laying the groundwork and changing the energy so that the home feels better," Hannah Yang says.

Once you get this step done, you'll feel more fresh, more energized, and you'll ask yourself why you haven't done this before.



"The importance of keeping your space clear, clean and tidy is crucial practice in feng shui because we want to make sure our immediate environment is under control, and that will give us the more immediate energy feedback physically, spiritually, and simply [you will] just feel happier," Sergio L Yang says.

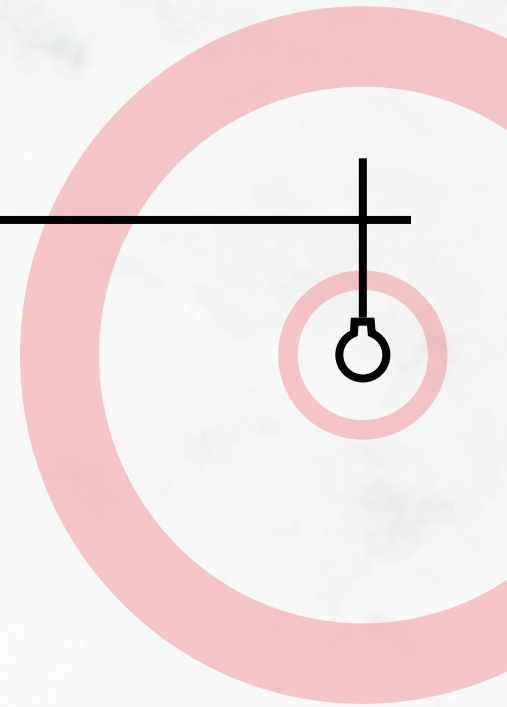
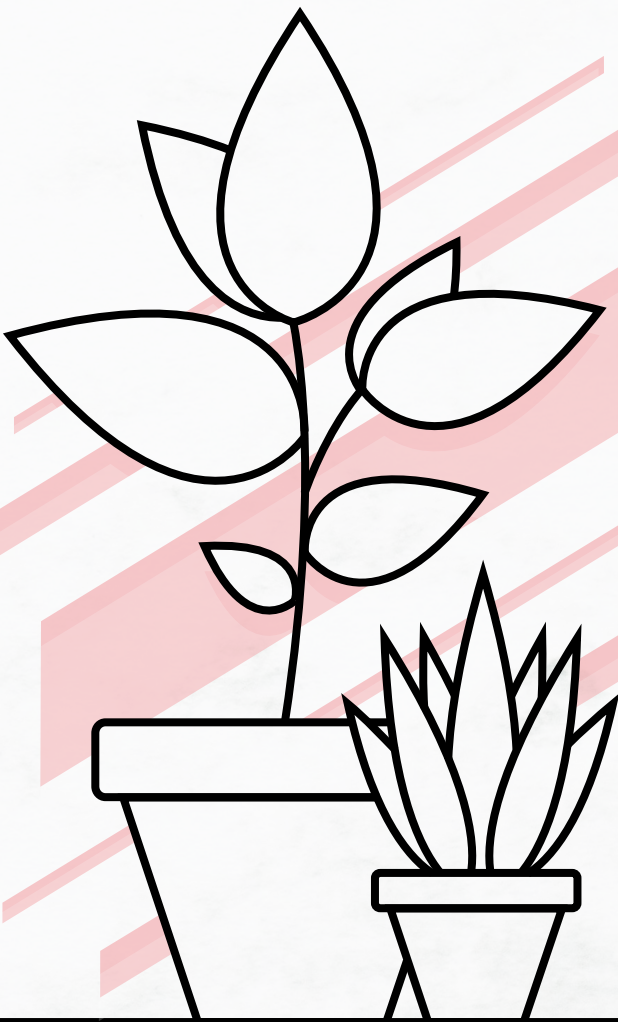


# Mountain

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Hannah Yang suggests having a “mountain at your back” in arranging your desk space. “When you think about your work, we think about you as an authority and being able to think clearly, focus and communicate,” she says

This feng shui furniture arrangement will make you feel more protected and calm because your subconscious will be at ease knowing that nothing can disturb you from behind. If you're limited with space, try investing in a high-backed chair to bring forth that same authoritative power to you.



# Separation

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For those who have moved their workspace into their bedroom, Sergio L Yang suggests it is always better to have a separation of work. You want to have an area in the room that “serves the purpose of working, and when you are going to rest that it serves the purpose of resting,” he says. At the end of your workday, when you're ready to finally get up from your desk, make sure to turn off all of your electronics and lights around the space. This will remove distractions and allow for a calming energy to enter.

Another way to create separation of energies is through natural plants. Take a trip to your local nursery, flower shop or even a home improvement store like Lowe's to pick one, or a few, for your workplace area. “Plants in feng shui are considered young, active and alive,” Sergio L Yang says. He suggests placing plants in areas where you want to be more active.



# Chicago Actor Phil Tyler on Making TV Shows During a Pandemic

By Breianna Ryle

For actor and director Phil Tyler, working during the COVID-19 pandemic has been just another obstacle that he has adjusted to and drawn lessons from.

Film and television has been one of the hardest industries hit by the pandemic, and with movie theaters shut down and production of TV shows delayed, creators are navigating the changes in the entertainment business.

Ampere Analysis projected that the pandemic had delayed at least 60% of scripted television programming worldwide, and according to the Motion Picture Association, U.S. box office sales were down 80% in 2020.

Jennifer Rudnicke, a casting director at Paskal Rudnicke Casting, says all auditions are done on Zoom or self-taped.

"However, our prep remains the same. We are still sifting through all submissions, reaching out to actors that are out of town or not represented," she says.

Tyler has coped with those same auditioning challenges, as he's found new roles to play.



## **What is the biggest way your career as an actor has been impacted by the pandemic?**

For me personally, the workflow has been limited because you have to make sure everyone is being safe and doing what they need to. Even with big productions being as safe as they can be, sometimes things happen and you have to shut down and make sure that everyone is safe.

It's harder. You have to be more focused and determined because during these times there's a lot of me time. So if you don't have self-discipline and peace of mind and know what you're focused on, then you can lose yourself in the moment.

It's harder, but I think it's actually made me a better artist and helped me to focus where I need to, to be a better actor, director and creator.

## **How has auditioning changed since the pandemic?**

If you're an actor, your job is to go in that room and make that casting director, casting associate, whoever is in the room, a fan of yours. A fan of your work, a fan of who you are, and build that rapport.

You have to make sure that the work that you put into it comes across so that they see that you actually did the work, you studied the character, you studied the show and how this character fits in the ensemble. You take the time to study the director, the producers that created whatever project you are auditioning for.

## **Could you walk me through a day on set in the times of COVID-19?**

Before you even get to set you have to, in the world of COVID, make sure you're tested. You fill out a quarantine questionnaire to make sure you've been doing everything that you need to be doing for your own personal safety, before [they're] even asking you to take a test. Even if they say, 'Hey you're the one that we want,' if you don't pass the questionnaire, you don't pass the COVID test, then you don't get that job even if you were the top choice.

Some productions have you do the COVID test on your own, other productions, especially the bigger productions like, at Cinespace Studios with 'Chicago P.D.,' 'Chicago Fire,' all those Dick Wolf shows, they make sure that you're tested every day.

When you are on set you have to wear a mask; all the crew and the cast are safe-distancing. The only time that you remove your mask

is just before we are about to call action. We have someone who is a safety liaison that comes and takes the mask and makes sure that they are safe, so when they give you the mask back it's not contaminated or anything like that.

Every production that I've been on has been on point in making sure that it's safe for us and we can get to work and do what we love.

## **Do you see any positives in the crew sizes being smaller now?**

Everything works faster, in my experience, because everyone is making sure safety is at the front of every production. Everybody is more [efficient] and on top of things and self-aware, which is great, but at the same time, of course, we would like things to go back to where they were.

## **Do you foresee any of the changes happening now changing the industry as a whole in the future?**

It already has. Think about how we view things, right? There are so many endless streaming platforms, and a lot of these platforms are restricting theatrical releases and just putting it on their platform or they are releasing it on the same day that it is released in the theater. The box office has been hurting. It was just the other weekend, I believe, 'Tom and Jerry' was at the top of the box office at \$4 million, and that's something that's like OK, yes, change has already hit, and we just have to be prepared for that.

## **What advice would you give to people who are trying to break into the business during this unusual time?**

Do not stop. Don't get discouraged. It doesn't matter what [the industry] looks like. The only thing that matters is where your mindset is and how determined you are to get where you want to be. Regardless of what it looks like, regardless of the obstacles. If anything, use this time to fine-tune your craft. Use this time to get to know [yourself] and how far you want to go with your dreams and your passions and your desires and how to get there.

Now is the time to map out [your career]. If you are an aspiring actor, there's YouTube, there's TikTok. People are getting discovered on TikTok, so you know there's no excuse as to why you can't showcase what makes you uniquely you and the passion you have for this art.



# A Love Letter to Home

By **Melanie Medrano**  
Photos by **Camilla Forte**

*To the only city I have ever known.*

This place — Chicago, Illinois — is where I live. All my life, I've resided in the borders that make up the "Windy City." I have seen and heard so many criticisms and crazy stories from family, friends and outsiders over the course of my 22 years that nothing surprises me anymore. I've grown my own opinion about the significance of this city and in the end, the feeling of familiarity that I've acquired makes my surroundings with attached memories more than just buildings — it's home.

For the longest time, I thought that in order to have the best education, become who I want to be and be successful, I had to leave. But this city has shown me that as it has revitalized, I don't have to leave to attain those things. Yes, it's imperfect — every city has its flaws. But it's home, for better or worse. No matter where I am in the city, it still feels like home to me.

## ST. ADALBERT'S CHURCH

I was baptized at St. Adalbert's, which is in Pilsen. I think it's where my journey began, to figure out who I truly am. I haven't stepped foot in that church since I was a kid. But I don't need to walk through the door to connect to that experience.

## WHITNEY M. YOUNG MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL

Whitney Young really opened up my eyes — to understanding who I am and the bubble that I came from. It shaped my values and my morals, and how I saw the world. High school taught me I'm not the only one with problems. I walked the halls, worrying about how I would afford to pay for college, while a person passing me might have been worrying about having food on the table that night. We all have different challenges, and my issues are no more or less important than anyone else's.



*St. Adalbert's Church*

## NATIONAL MEXICAN ART MUSEUM

When I want to experience Mexican culture, or see some really cool art, or listen to some traditional "folklórico" music, I visit the National Mexican Art Museum. My culture means everything to me, and if I ever want to go back to my roots, all I have to do is walk across the street from my dad's house, where I grew up. You can get emotionally attached to "la cultura" by immersing yourself in this space.

## SOUTH SHORE CULTURAL CENTER

For me, this is the symbol of the South Side neighborhoods of Chicago. It's where people gather to learn, enjoy life and connect

to the community. When I moved to this part of the city at 14, it was a bit of a culture shock compared to the other neighborhoods I'd lived in. But now it's my second home, along with Pilsen, where my dad still lives. Living here, I never have to worry about this feeling of comfort and peace leaving.

### CHICAGO SKYLINE

Driving north on I-90, with the skyline in view, puts things in perspective: This entire city is my origin story. My city is imperfect, but everyone gets to decide for themselves how to live in it.

I always feel like I belong here. There's always a place for me, whether it's sitting on the porch of my childhood home where my family still lives, hearing the sound of the Pink Line train doors closing at 18th, or feeling the sting of the lake-effect wind on my face as I walk down Michigan Avenue. This city – my safe space – will forever be the blueprint for my definition of home.

*All My Love,  
Melanie  
Nicole*



*South Shore Cultural Center*



*Chicago Skyline*





# Artistry of Game Design

By Mateusz Janik

*Video games  
blend film,  
theater,  
architecture  
to create  
new worlds*

William Chyr expected to finish his first video game design project and then move on to another art form. He didn't know he'd be channeling his architectural influences in the process.

"I was doing glasswork and metalwork, and this was just another medium that I was going to explore," says Chyr, who is a Chicago-based artist. "[I thought,] I'll spend three months on this and then maybe move on to paper sculptures to see if that works. It ended up taking me seven years to finish."

With a game design that draws from brutalist-inspired architecture, "Manifold Garden" lures players into an Escher-inspired playground, where structures are both limitless and confined at the same time.

Video games have become an art form for artists and designers to blend facets of different media and change the way audiences experience their work.


Jonathan Kinkley, owner of Chicago Gamespace, a gallery space dedicated to the design and social impact of video games, says many games are the sum of other artistic media, such as animation, music and cinematography, tied together through an interactive experience.

"I find video games endlessly fascinating and have since I was a kid," Kinkley says. "I really think the potential of the medium is just starting to be tapped in a larger way, and it's different than other media that have come before it."

For example, narrative-focused titles such as "Kentucky Route Zero," a point-and-click adventure game with surrealist and Americana-like themes, were developed with episodic acts in mind.

The game's creators, Jake Elliot and Tamas Kemenczy of Cardboard Computer, looked at theater scripts for reference to create the fictional places and characters surrounding Route Zero.





“The potential of the medium is just starting to be tapped in a larger way, and it’s different than other media that have come before it.”

In 2009, Chyr learned how to make elaborate balloon installations through a University of Chicago student organization, Le Vorris and Vox Circus.

After graduating the same year, he moved from one artist residency to another. The work became frustrating, Chyr says, as his sculptures and installations became more elaborate and less contemporary. He felt typecast by the work, and eventually he was getting calls to make company logos rather than art.

Chyr says “Manifold Garden” was inspired by the 2012 film “Inception” and was initially modeled on Valve Software’s acclaimed puzzle-platformer, “Portal.” Even the original version of the game was named “Relativity” after M.C. Escher’s famous lithograph print.

Early on, “Manifold Garden” was solely built on the gravity-shifting game mechanic and consisted mostly of puzzles leading into one another, until early play-testing showed people were getting fatigued by the repetition and pacing of the puzzles.

“Game design is at its best when it is giving you an experience that you haven’t had before,” says Jacob Mooney, game designer at Level Ex, a developer that creates video games for doctors. “We’re in charge of bringing out emotions too, but we’re in charge of bringing out specific experiences.”

Mooney, who also designs board games on his own time, says creating experiences in video games relies on how the game interacts with the player. He points to “Hades,” a roguelike action role-playing video game by Supergiant Games, that uses different storylines and events that are triggered after the character dies, to encourage the player to progress further.

Other genres, including strategy simulation games, focus on putting the player in a specific job or profession, Mooney says. For example, Dinosaur Polo Club’s “Mini Metro” puts the player in the shoes of a city planner, managing destinations and routes for the Chicago Transit Authority.

To remedy user fatigue, Chyr used influences of architects Frank Lloyd Wright and Tadao Ando to add accents and texture to “Manifold Garden’s” environment, and ultimately give the player a break in between each puzzle.

“The game itself is just really brilliant and a breakthrough. It’s greater than the sum of its parts,” Kinkley says. “It will never get old to me that the universe is wrapped around itself.”

Combined with the infinite generation of the environment, players can see how the ornamental details of Wright’s and Ando’s sense of scale guide them both away and toward new areas.

“Manifold Garden” has been out on every platform since August 2020, and though Chyr says he did not expect the design process to last as long as it did, he plans on continuing in game design and focusing more on operating the studio as a team.

“It’d be awesome to see my work at the Art Institute [of Chicago] one day, but that’s less interesting to me now,” Chyr says. “I shipped ‘Manifold Garden’ and the feeling I’m left with is just that there’s way more in this medium and the industry that I don’t know about, and that’s exciting.”

# Closing the Nature Gap

## *How Chicago environmentalists are advancing outdoor equity*

Story and photos by Camilla Forte

When news broke in late May that a false police report was filed by a white woman against Christian Cooper — a Black science writer — while he was bird-watching in New York City’s Central Park, the conversation around racial equity entered the environmental community at full force.

People of color are less likely to easily access nature, according to a Center for American Progress study. This problem is even worse within low-income communities and families with children, who were found three times more likely to live in nature-deprived places than in white communities.

The same study also found that as of 2020, 77% of people of color in Illinois live in a place that is “nature-deprived” — an area with more green space being industrialized than preserved for ecological uses.

Although public policy and urban development play major roles in increasing this access, there are also key organizers in Chicago working on the grassroots level to ensure their communities can engage with nature sooner rather than later.



### **Sergio Ruiz**

Food justice organizer, urban gardener, community leader

#### **How do you help your community as a food justice organizer?**

Our campaign was created in response to our community’s food insecurity. So it’s bringing awareness to how we have the right to grow, eat and sell healthy foods. Bringing food into our communities that is culturally appropriate, fresh, local and grown with the full care of all workers, animals and lands is something that we strongly believe in.

#### **Expand on what you mean by culturally appropriate.**

The neighborhood has their own group of people with food being a big thing that differentiates between all of us. With our program that’s going on right now, Farm, Food, Familias, that’s something that we’ve put a pin on: to have food that’s culturally appropriate. [We’ve got] folks from the South Side, and then we also got folks in the Southwest Side, like in Little Village. There’s always a difference between Mexican cuisine, Caribbean cuisine and soul food. We just try to include everyone to taste a little bit of everyone else’s cultural foods.

#### **How are you making nature more accessible to your community?**

The gardeners themselves have made [the garden] a safe hub like a community. When someone gets into getting their hands dirty and going into the earth, it’s kind of like a spiritual thing. It’s connecting them to their roots. I had multiple gardeners tell me that it reminded them of when they were small and lived in Mexico or in other Latin American countries. It’s something beautiful to see.

## **Amaris Alanis-Riberio**

Conservationist, educator, activist

### **How did you first get involved in environmental advocacy?**

My family would do day-and-a-half road trips down to Michoacán. I have five sisters, and I remember when we would pull over I was always the wanderer, “la perdida,” just exploring. I remember moving into another neighborhood that was predominantly white and closer to more green space. I loved the parks, the exploring and the river. It was beautiful, but we also had a lot of racist issues going on with moving into this neighborhood and being in these green spaces, and I would question it.

### **How is your approach to community organizing informed by the communities you serve?**

I was definitely in a not super diverse high school, and we were all checking each other out [to understand] ‘Hey, what are you about?’ That aspect of realizing, like, we’re all in the same struggle. [I] ended up being a hip-hopper. So for me, some of that community work was a lot of that, the cultural aspects of hip hop. Once I got my degree and started doing environmental work, I had all that being rooted in the community.

### **How are you involved in making nature more accessible to your community?**

I work in a field that’s daily saying, ‘How can we bring more people outdoors?’ And that’s not the question that we should be asking. It’s ‘How have we historically excluded them?’

I’m trying to change the internal systems that exist in my organizations and agencies, and not just mine but everybody else’s as a collective of environmentalists of color. And when I’m building bridges with other folks who are doing, you know, the work for food, or doing the work for water, it only makes my work even better, because it’s not just about getting them outside to enjoy nature and hiking [a] trail, it really is about environmental justice.





**Aasia Mohammad Castañeda**

Collaborative event organizer, social justice leader, bird-watcher

**How did you get involved with environmental advocacy?**

My grandparents were farmers in Mexico, and I spent time there with them, almost every summer, and I think that is how I started, in the womb. I think oftentimes the colonizer-dominant narrative is that we're separate from nature. But humans are very much part of the ecosystem. For me, it was that cultural lens and that ancestral knowledge [that] catalyzed me to feel like I want to be a part of a movement that takes care of this land.

**How is your approach to community organizing informed by the communities you serve?**

[Writer and activist] Adrian Marie Brown talks a lot about these fractals, 'All is small, small is all,' which means the way something looks on a very microscopic scale is the way it looks on a very large scale. So for me, organizing, it's on a very micro level. Your relationships and how you vibe, the people you work with, if it's not good, then whatever program, whatever event, is just going to come out rough. For me, the dopeness of things is in the details.

**How do you make casual access to the outdoors accessible to communities of color?**

In my practice, we carry values of 'What does access to nature mean in outdoor rec?'

The more spaces we can hold, to connect with each other, not through this structured event or just white people way of connecting to nature, but through the way we vibe with nature – and I say 'we' as in all our cultural dynamics as people of color because there's not a singular way in which we do that – the more we can hold institutions and organizations accountable to the way we connect.





**Mila Kellen Marshall**

Urban ecologist, clean water advocate, media-maker

**How is your activism work informed by the communities you work with?**

You take cues from the community, and you find ways in which what you have to offer can fill those gaps.

The other part of my activism is networking. Our efforts can either be in conflict or in concert, depending on who you invite to the table. I do find myself making tons of introductions and very strategic, intentional introductions. That information, that access to networks, can be transformative for a community. It's not always the hour reading or the \$25 sent, sometimes it is 'Hey, I want to introduce you to someone.'

**What have you discovered through your environmental research and work in Illinois?**

Most of the environmental justice issues are really place-based, so if you're not from that community, you may not even know that there's an issue going on in your city. Part of my engagement work is to figure out how we get people to know what is going on and how to help.

**How does accessibility to nature play into your work, either abstractly or directly?**

As a clean water advocate, I focus on helping protect Illinois lakes, streams and rivers, and we want to make sure that everyone has access to clean, healthy water. Everyone means everyone, including businesses. It's important to use all of the tools – whether it's policy, engaging in permits, doing cleanups, engaging in research and data collection – we can understand the state of the system and what it is that we need to do.



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# One Door Closes, Another Opens

## Double Door will play its 'dirty rock' in a new location

By Kendall Polidori

The air smelled of stale cigarettes and sweat emanating from huddled bodies, all pushing closer to a dimly-lit bar or the dance floor. For music fans with drinks in hand and shoes sticky from the booze-soaked floor, Chicago's Double Door venue was a walking hangover.

The venue hit all the right notes: It was spacious, yet intimate, with cozy corners, rickety bar stools and profound sound systems and lighting. Guests could take a gander at the Ham Band Wall, a door where bands who'd played the Double Door got the word HAM added to their name. For instance, Chicago punk rockers Rise Against became HAM AGAINST WAS HERE on the wall.

For Lorri Francis, this space was home. Francis joined the Double Door team as a manager shortly after its opening in 1994 at 1572 N. Milwaukee Ave. and was there every day until its eviction in 2017, after more than a year of litigation between the venue's co-owners, Sean Mulrone and Joe Shanahan, and the building's landlord.

Francis arrived at work as usual that day and was denied access by two sheriffs standing outside the club's doors. She was the first person to find out about the eviction and was never truly able to have a proper goodbye with the people she saw as a big family.

More than four years after its eviction, Double Door is slated to reopen and relocate to an historic theater in the Uptown neighborhood later this fall, Mulrone says. He viewed the space, which has been vacant for more than 15 years, right after Double Door's original location closed, but met a few speed bumps along the way, including the pandemic.





# HAM AGAINST WAS HERE

## A Double Door Love Story

In the '90s, Sean Mulroney and Andy Barrett were working together at Sweet Alice, a tavern in Ukrainian Village. At the time, Sweet Alice had a second storefront that was vacant and, naturally, Mulroney and Barrett wanted to morph it into a music room, but got pushback. Mulroney says he knew what made a good music venue, from his own experience playing live shows, so off the two went to find a different space for music in the neighborhood. Thus, Double Door was born in 1994.

In Wicker Park, they found a vacant space, with a small entrance tucked behind Double Door Liquors. The rest of the building was a country music bar called Main Street Tavern. There was talk of other possible names for the venue before they settled on Double Door, Shanahan says, but it was a no-brainer to keep it the same as the liquor store. Old signage outside – free promotion.

According to Francis, Double Door was one of the first businesses that made the Wicker Park neighborhood a hot attraction, initiating the opening of other bars and businesses around it. Mulroney says the neighborhood was “a little rough [at the time], but really exciting.”

In March, Mulroney bought the building and began working with the local alderman and architects to update the space and permits. It's a labor of love, he says.

“One door closed, and I have been trying to find that open door for years, and the one I found is the perfect door,” Mulroney says. “Double Door will be wearing a little bit of a fancier dress, but it is still going to be Double Door.”

Although elated about the club's reopening in the Wilson Avenue Theater, Francis hopes the new venue has the same magic the Double Door did in Wicker Park, with its vintage look, the same Ham Band Wall and some original staff.

Mulroney says the tight-knit community within the Double Door walls was what helped make the venue “magical,” and that every employee was a music lover first, always joining in to cheer on the performers.

Shanahan was with Double Door from day one, when Chicago music exploded in the early '90s. The venue hosted local bands like The Smashing Pumpkins, Wilco, Cheap Trick and Rise Against (names that are recognizable now, but weren't yet back then), when smaller record labels and agencies were on the come up, looking for new talent to represent.

“It was exciting to see something in the right place at the right time,” Shanahan says. “People talk about the perfect storm, but it really was something special.”

Shanahan adds that Double Door was more than just another music venue; rather, it was a launch pad for careers and opportunities in the music industry. Anyone could go to the venue on any given night and witness something different: poetry, a DJ set, hip-hop, metal, indie.

*“One door closed, and I have been trying to find that open door for years, and the one I found is the perfect door.”*

From pulling off a secret show with The Rolling Stones to partnering with the Chicago Roots Collective — a group of musicians working together to get their music heard — Double Door was a space for creativity, life and support. Donnie Biggins, owner of Golden Dagger and member of alt-country group The Shams Band, performed at the venue about 10 times and helped initiate the partnership with the Roots Collective.

As someone who spent many nights in the downstairs bar, Biggins says he is elated to see the venue survive in a new location and that there is a shared spirit among all Chicago venue owners right now: the hope for a return this year.

Double Door is reopening at a peculiar time — when nearly all Chicago spaces are closed and awaiting funding. With vaccinations and grant money available for people working at Chicago’s independent venues, there is a glimmer of hope that others can open alongside the newly-envisioned Double Door. As co-owner of The Hideout Katie Tuten says, the Chicago music scene will be booming in the next few months.

“Chicago has a very vibrant live music community. We’re very fortunate in that regard,” Tuten says. “I wish [Double Door] luck. They had a very vital business before, and they’ll probably be just as engaging.”

In the late ‘90s, Chris Johnson, a DJ known as Duke Grip, began attending shows regularly at Double Door when it relaunched Liquid Soul, a jazz, hip-hop, funk, freestyle fusion ensemble that inspired the acid jazz movement. Johnson would often see flyers for funk and soul shows at other venues, but when he would attend them, he was not impressed. This led him to approach Double Door with a new night, similar to Liquid Soul, that would feature DJs spinning groovy soul records: Soul Summit.

Johnson says it was a match made in heaven. Soul Summit was a mass of bodies, vibing off each other’s energy while dancing and listening to raw soul and funk music.



Chicago pop punk rockers Rise Against

“I was really proud of that, especially proud of it at Double Door,” Johnson says. “I don’t think we’ll ever get the same kind of arrangement and atmosphere that we were able to create in that space.”

Mulroney says once the new space is up and running, people will be greeted by familiar faces and decor. Their hope is that when people walk into the venue for the first time, it’ll feel like the original Double Door. It will be larger than the previous space — allowing 100 more guests — and will have two levels. Mulroney says the perks of opening a new venue right now is the ability to install up-to-par HVAC systems and other features needed for proper air flow and COVID-19 safety, which will make the venue “cutting edge.”

“So, how do I keep that dirty rock thing going on in a room that is substantially prettier than the one in Wicker Park?” Mulroney says. “It’s going to be a blast.”



# The Podcasters Next Door

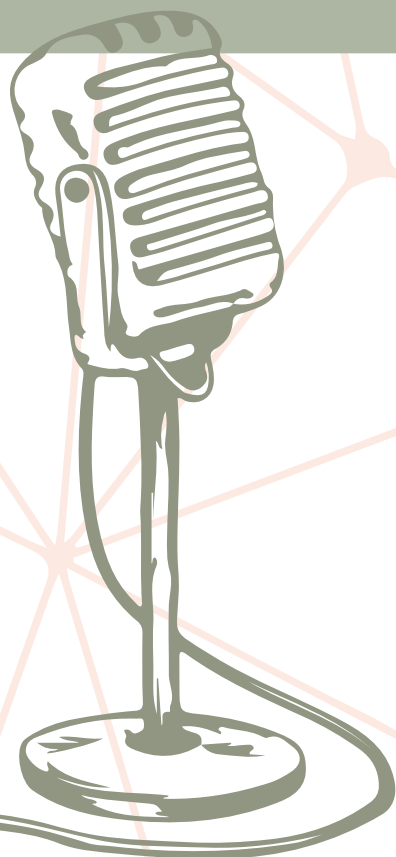
*Women-run shows recorded in Chicago you won't want to skip*

By Ally Stegman

You've been encouraged to shop locally. Now it's time to listen locally. Chicago is home to four compelling women podcasters who have gathered microphones and niche ideas in their living rooms. So, you can clean the house or drive to the grocery store, all while supporting women in media.

Podcasts are becoming increasingly popular among this demographic. Edison Research found that 36% of females age 12+ in the U.S. were monthly listeners in 2020, up from 29% in 2019. And although 79% of the top-charting podcasts are hosted by men, according to TheWrap's 2020 Special Report, women are taking the mic.

Press play on these female-led podcasts covering topics from politics to pop culture.



## 'Nerdette'

Greta Johnsen, who refers to herself as a “grandma of podcasting,” launched her podcast in 2013 with the goal of encouraging people to embrace their inner geek. She interviews guests such as Bill Nye to discuss climate change and bow ties and writer Gillian Flynn to share her experience with conspiracies and comics — proving it's cool to be smart.

### **How did you come up with the name Nerdette?**

It sounds like it's a feminine suffix, but -ette is actually diminutive. So it's like, everybody's a little nerdy about something. Everybody has that thing that they're really excited about, and that's what we want to talk about.

### **Who's a memorable guest you've had?**

Tom Hanks. We interviewed him about four years ago about typewriters, and it was before he wrote his book with a typewriter on the cover. Very few people knew he was obsessed with typewriters at that time. So to just be like, 'Hey, Tom, will you talk to us about typewriters?' He was so thrilled. It was so magical.

### **Tell me about your book club.**

It's like the book club where you don't have to put your pants on. You can meet our deadline and call in, but if you don't get to it, the episode is still going to be there for you to enjoy it in [the future].



## 'CrossXCultured'

Nothing is off limits when it comes to this dynamic duo of Nigerian-American women. Erika Mona and Dammy Ojulari have been bridging the gap between pop culture and their own culture since March 2019. Their unfiltered segments on celebrity drama, and their choice of the 'Dumb-ass of the Week' are complemented by lessons on injustice in the world today.

### **You frequently talk about white privilege. Have you experienced it in the podcast industry?**

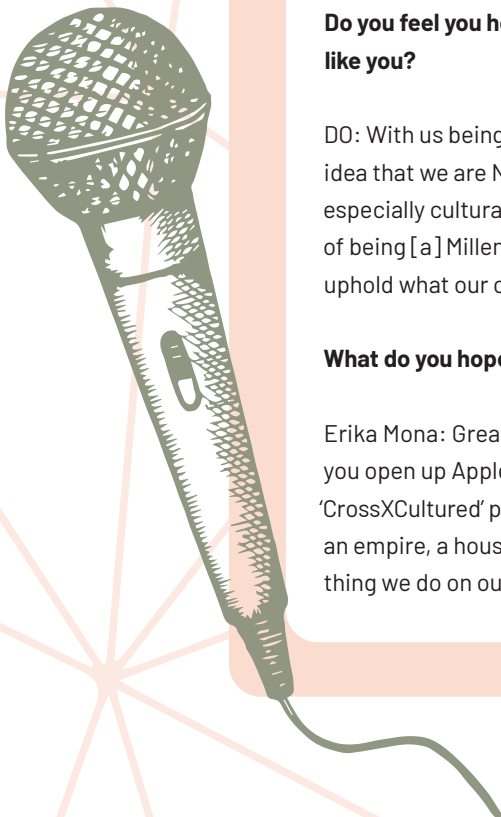
Dammy Ojulari: I don't think there has been a direct impact, but I do think in terms of sponsorship and [in the] advertising realm, it definitely plays a part. Because I feel that oftentimes, white people get embraced for a lot of mediocrity, and it just gets publicized and turned into this huge thing. There are millions of podcasts that get funding, but not a lot of Black or ethnic podcasts get that type of funding and attention.

### **Do you feel you hold a responsibility to have content for women like you?**

DO: With us being cross-cultured, it kind of spurred from this idea that we are Nigerian-American women, and I don't think, especially culturally, there's enough people bridging that gap of being [a] Millennial in this time, in this era, and still having to uphold what our customs and values are.

### **What do you hope for the future of your podcast?**

Erika Mona: Great growth and exposure. I would like that when you open up Apple Podcasts, Spotify or SoundCloud, you see 'CrossXCultured' podcast, OK? For me, that is the goal – for it to be an empire, a household name. This is bigger than just a small thing we do on our own in our apartments.





## 'Talking at Tiffany's'

Tiffany Goldstein began blogging in 2014 as a college student, then transitioned to the microphone in September 2020. Using her network of just over 13,000 Instagram followers, Goldstein is joined by a guest each week to talk about their passion projects. She focuses on entertainment and music and gives tips to fellow entrepreneurial Millennials.

### **What's the difference between blogging and podcasting?**

I love blogging, but I think I truly found my passion in podcasting because I am that outgoing and outspoken type of girl. I finally found an outlet that shows my true self and really connects with my readers and my followers. I could talk about reality stars and the Kardashians for days, and now I can do it, and people love to tune in.

### **What have you learned about yourself since you started your podcast?**

This industry is so competitive and saturated that for the longest time, I was waiting for somebody to give me a chance. But 2020 opened my eyes. We don't know when the next opportunity is going to come knocking on our door because we're living in a pandemic, so I took it upon myself to make the career that I want.

### **What is your favorite part of having your own show?**

I love that I can wear all the hats. I am the booker, I am the producer, I am the editor, I am the host. When my podcast gets write-ups, it's so rewarding. I'm like, 'Wow, I made that happen.' There's no one stopping me saying, 'Hey, you can't talk about this.' It just allows me to be me. If you want filtered stuff, go turn on 'E! News,' turn on 'Entertainment Tonight.'





# *Inspired to start a podcast on your own?*

Take notes from these pros and you'll have a bedroom-turned-studio in no time.

Quality is important but doesn't have to break the bank. Mona and Ojulari got their equipment from Amazon, where you can find one of the most frequently used microphones for \$100: the Audio-Technica ATR2100x-USB.

Set up shop in the smallest room you have. Goldstein finds recording in her closet captures the best audio because the sound doesn't get lost in the space. If you don't have enough space in your closet for recording, she recommends putting a sock over your microphone and a blanket over your head to block out excess sound.

Goldstein recommends the audio platform Anchor, which offers free recording and editing tools to use on your phone or computer. You can also use Anchor to distribute your show to major podcast platforms. If you are willing to spend a bit more for editing software, Goldstein recommends using Adobe Premiere.





# A Monstera Grows in Chicago



How buying and taking care of houseplants can help you, according to nursery owners

By **Dyana Daniels**  
Photos by **Camilla Forte**

Soothing jazz music fills the air in Nika Vaughan's plant nursery studio. The Plant Salon space couldn't be mistaken for a garden center, where plants are carefully arranged by type. In Vaughan's nursery, every plant gets its own spot: Bright green, healthy palms, and long, pointy aloes are positioned next to some wildflower candles and face masks, while planters are thoughtfully placed on shelves waiting for customers to pick them up and examine them. Vaughan loves to switch up the way the space looks — as if these were plants in someone's home.

Plants are more than just something to water. They are a stress reliever, an instant mood booster or a source of creativity. People who work at nurseries have seen these benefits for customers and employees.

Tending to houseplants is also a great way to teach responsibility, says Vaughan, owner and founder of Plant Salon. Because a plant is not responsive like a pet, she says, growing plants with your children allows them to take part in the growth process and take pride in the indoor jungle they create.

Vaughan's most prized possession resides in her nursery, proudly displayed near the front door.

Her large form monstera deliciosa, also known as the Swiss cheese plant, is the crown jewel of her shop. Proudly standing at 12 feet tall, this tropical beauty, with its heart-shaped, holey foliage leaves people in awe when they see her. Vaughan bought her at an estate sale and is not sure how old the monstera is, but she is confident it's less than a decade old.

While some people name their plants after characters from "The Golden Girls" or something random like Phyllis or Richard, Vaughan genders hers because it is easier to have less of an attachment to them.

"I tend to do more gendering versus outright naming," Vaughan says. "I'm not as high maintenance as some other people who want to mist all the time, and they have higher maintenance, more finicky plants. I tend to gravitate more toward the relaxed plants. If things go south, I did not bond with you — with a name. So it's easier for me to let you go."

If you feel bonded to your plants, this can be explained by a hypothesis called biophilia. It argues that people search for connections with nature and other forms of life. In most cases, this could mean investing in houseplants. Vaughan sees this

as a way for people to make these connections while boosting levels of dopamine.

"I know there's a thing called biophilia, and the idea of bringing in nature to a human environment and the emotional effect that it has on humanity," Vaughan says. "We enjoy it. We get a lot of positive feelings from it."

*"Plants are pretty well known to be helpful when people suffer from any mental health issues like anxiety, depression."*

Marcus Kirby started out as a plant owner who could not keep any of his plants alive. But once he discovered succulents, everything changed. In 2015, he moved to Austin, Texas, and began working at a succulent nursery. There, he learned new growing techniques and brought those back to Chicago the next year.

Kirby, owner of The Succulent City, uses taking care of plants as a hobby to cope with his anxiety and depression, and thinks other people could do the same. In some instances, he says, taking care of something that needs nurturing may give people the energy they lack.

"In general, plants are pretty well known to be helpful when people suffer from any mental health issues like anxiety, depression," Kirby says. "There's this whole situation where a lot of time, it's really difficult to focus on yourself if [you] have depression."

When people are proud of what they have grown, Kirby says, they form an almost symbiotic relationship with the plants. He sees it as encouraging something else while it also encourages you because "people need to step out of themselves to help themselves."

Growing up, Ryan Glynn never paid much attention to plants, and it was not until 2016 when his brother passed away and he began receiving floral arrangements that he took a real interest in plants and how to take care of them. He remembered keeping six floral arrangements that had plants embedded in them.

"I took them out and repotted them," says Glynn, founder of Chicago Plants. "It left me with a personal connection."

When people visit his nursery, he wants them to automatically feel relaxed, like they can take a breath of fresh air. Each experience at his nursery is personalized because his employees take into account the level of expertise a customer may have and what they plan to purchase. Plants may range from ZZ plants to pothos to snake plants, so beginners do not feel intimidated.

"We do understand that not everybody is looking to wipe down the leaves with a cloth every day and run their humidifiers and mist and whatnot," Glynn says.

Jeff Vedas wants shoppers to feel as if they have left Chicago's busy streets in the middle of winter and entered the Amazon rainforest — minus the bugs.

"Plants are very therapeutic to attend to," says Vedas, owner of Vedas Plant Shop. "[They beautify] the space around you especially while being stuck inside and working from home all day. That's the perfect opportunity to beautify that, that little environment around you — they filter the air."

It is OK to lose a plant, Vaughan says. And if a plant looks sick, find some good advice on how to save it.

"It's really important for plant owners to remember that plants might die," Vaughan says. "Get your research hat on, get on Google. Follow people who collect a lot of that kind of plant. The goal is to learn more about the plants in your collection so that you can make them happy."





An aerial photograph of the Chicago skyline at dusk. The city lights are beginning to glow, and the sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue. The word "SOCIETY" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the top of the image, with a slight shadow effect. The text is partially obscured by a white diagonal line that runs from the top left towards the bottom right.

# SOCIETY

The Robots Are Coming ... to Retail!

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Progress, Not Perfection

Appreciating an Aging Population

From the New Normal to the New Pronouns

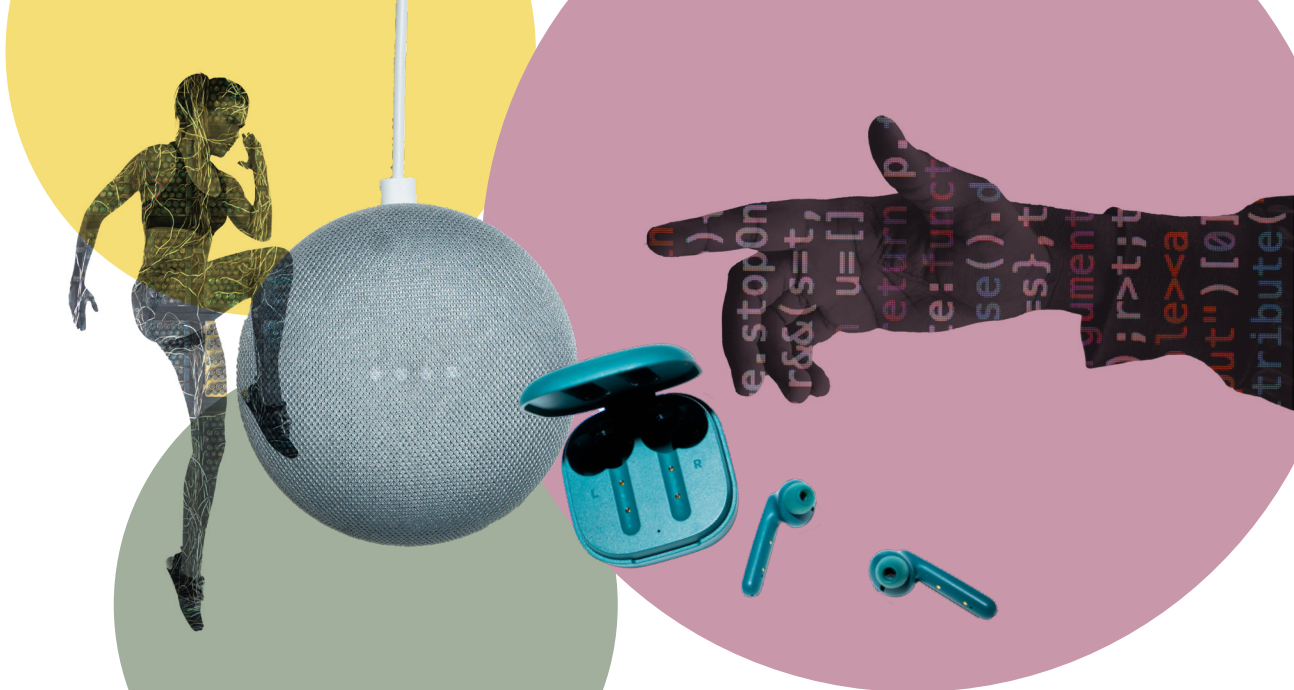
The Black Lives Matter Movement: What Happens Next?

Keeping Cops Honest and Chicagoans Informed









# The Robots are Coming ... to Retail!

## Innovative technology is changing the way we shop

By Tracy Marasigan  
Photos by Camilla Forte

The robots are taking over, but at least they'll help you find a cute outfit.

Retailers are introducing innovative technology with the creation of frictionless retail, a new form of shopping. In stores of the future, this means using technology such as smart mirrors, radio-frequency identification tags, QR codes and lifelike interactions with online chatbots. Although it's great for convenience, what does it mean for privacy issues? Where do our sales associates go when their jobs are taken over by artificial intelligence?

Retailers are seeking help from artificial intelligence to aid in faster, more efficient customer service. Have you ever called a toll-free number only to be greeted by a robotic voice, horrible elevator music and hour-wait times, praying to talk to a real person? Amazon is trying to solve that issue with AI chatbots from its Amazon Lex service. Instead of a robotic voice, you'll hear lifelike virtual assistants: robots — but intelligent enough to recognize human speech and understand you without needing to “press 1 for more options.”

“Looking forward in the future and tech, we really want to transition people to become more comfortable with bots and machine learning,” says Jenna Wright, Amazon's manager for machine learning operations.

You may already have started that transition on your own if you've ever queried Siri, Alexa, Google Home, Cortana — the list goes on. This technology has entered the retail scene. In an Amazon Fresh store, you can ask Alexa where the eggs are, and in Target you can use a touchscreen display to search the store's ads for the latest deals, all without any human interaction.

Depending on the type of shopper you are, you may still want to talk to a real person. Ray Riley, co-CEO for Progress Retail, co-created an application platform software that enhances in-store retail operations and learning.

“I think there's a level to which that will always need some human touch,” he says. Progress Retail's platform uses technology to improve store operations and employee performance.

“For us, it's about the intention of inserting technology into a store,” Riley says. Having a better-trained team and management by using a tech platform like Progress Retail could create an intimate and memorable shopping experience. “[Customers] drove to get to that shopping center, they parked, they walked in. They're interested in some form of connection,” Riley says.



Progress Retail's technology may solve back-end issues in the brick-and-mortar retail business space for those who prefer human interaction. "We could train our team, and we wouldn't have to invest in some technology that might not be as essential," Riley says.

Trying to find your right size can be a hassle that takes up your whole day. Would you use AI technology to find your true size? Fit:Match's artificial intelligence tool can scan you to give you 150 measurements of your body, and it uses an algorithm to match shoppers with retailers, to suggest what size they would be in different stores.

"Part of it is to revolutionize the whole shopping experience," says Robyn Carter, head of retail operations at Fit:Match. "We want to eliminate the risk for people in terms of giving them the confidence to shop more effectively online and in stores."

A 10-second, 3D 360° biometric scan of your body is all it takes to get your measurements. From there you'll get a percentage match to sizes and styles from retailers to shop from. Kind of like Tinder, but you'll know that it'll always work out.

"We say anything that's 80% or higher are the fashion pieces that will complement your body based on your own measurements. That's where the fashion meets the technology," Carter says.

The body scan, or as Fit:Match likes to call it getting "Fitted!" can be done at their pop-up locations or their app. You might be wary of having AI scan your body, but Carter says the data will only be accessible to you and whomever you choose to share it with. "We have it for the logarithms for the data that comes in that we see on our end," Carter says. "A lot of times they feel comfortable knowing that [their information is] not sold anywhere or shared anywhere."

This AI might be a game-changer for shopping confidently, either online or in-person. If you are shopping in-person, having your measurements on hand may eliminate human interaction with a sales associate.

Now, say the robots do take over: With one in four American jobs held by teens that are supported by retail, where do those jobs go when these innovations sneak up?

Retail jobs are starting to realign themselves into different positions in order to fit the new needs of retailers. Riley says cashier

jobs will transition to fulfillment-center roles for online orders. "Ship-from-store, curbside [pickup] — unfortunately a robot's not going to be able to take your Home Depot curbside order out to you yet. I think we're a few years away from that," Riley says.

Although this tech is intelligent in different functions, people are still necessary to operate them. Wright from Amazon has seen customer service jobs transition into machine learning positions. "These types of people that work in these positions don't necessarily have to have a formal education in machine learning or analysis," Wright says.

The robots decrease shopper's human interaction, but also from a sales associate's side, as well. Instead of face-to-face selling, that position could turn into a back-end fulfillment or an AI operation job.

As a shopper, how will you react to this tech and AI? Will you find it convenient to walk in and walk out of stores without speaking to a soul, or will you miss connecting with a real live person? Make a choice quickly and silently, 'cause you know they're always listening.







By Mateusz Janik

# Where Faith and Art Meet

## Alt Space Chicago innovates how murals, photography can nurture communities

Jon Veal's art and performances are grounded in issues of gender, race and politics, as he challenges his audiences to contribute to solutions.

With shows and exhibitions at Chicago Art Department, William Hill Gallery and Silent Funny, Veal's notoriety as a Black, transdisciplinary artist in Chicago's art scene grew. But he decided to change his focus and reach out to a different audience.

Veal was encouraged by the fact that there was an audience, but also felt "like the system that we were talking about, the things that we were challenging our audience to do, never left the gallery."

In 2019, he and Jordan Campbell, a close friend and documentary photographer, formed Alt Space, a faith-based nonprofit focused on changing the narrative of communities in the South Side and West Side neighborhoods of Chicago.

As Christians, Campbell and Veal say being artists is an extension of their faith, and they want to put their skills to use as selfless, yet tangible actions.

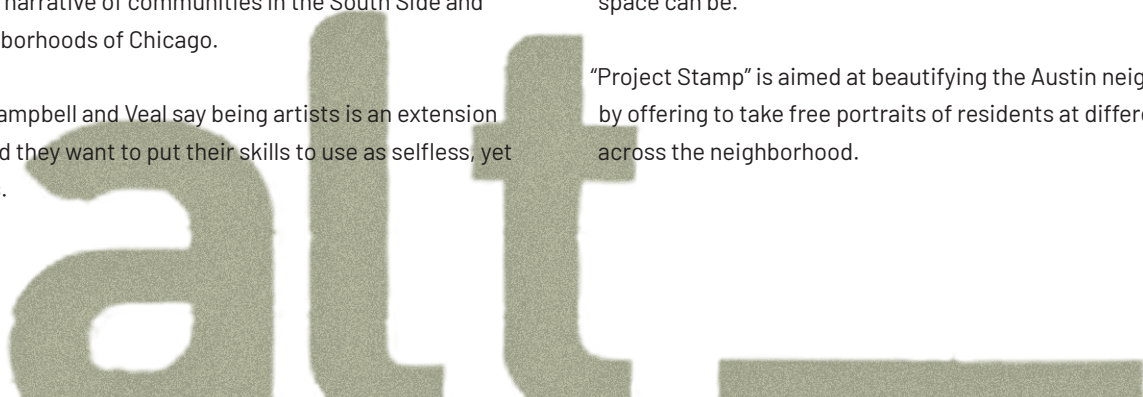
Two years later, Alt Space Chicago has a far-reaching effect on the communities it serves — from teaching young adults how to express themselves through art and civicism, to creating food pantries and making photo murals of the people who live in those neighborhoods.

Although the duo has seen a lot of personal growth and success from the nonprofit, a lot can be attributed to the first project they released in September 2019 titled "Project Stamp."

Friends and family encouraged them to become a for-profit organization in the beginning, but they wanted to follow through with their original promise of working within these communities while also acting as a charity.

"We're probably the only two Black dudes who started a nonprofit with no money," Veal says. "We decided ... we want to be a charity [because] it's important that we reframe the narrative of what a nonprofit can do and what a Black-owned nonprofit in a Black space can be."

"Project Stamp" is aimed at beautifying the Austin neighborhood by offering to take free portraits of residents at different locations across the neighborhood.





A photo shoot was set up with a couple of mismatched lounging chairs, and music playing in the background. People driving by slowed down to see what was going on, remembers Jai Jones, engagement specialist at Austin Coming Together (ACT).

Photos of about 100 families and individuals are still displayed as images on abandoned buildings in other Chicago neighborhoods and in cities including Los Angeles and Atlanta.

“[Residents] were kind of drawn to just the idea of someone doing a pop-up photo shoot in their own space that usually is not covered or highlighted or celebrated,” Jones says.

When COVID-19 happened, Veal says Alt Space slowed down its work on the West Side of Chicago, while also switching its children’s program, C.L.A.Y. (Creating Live Art for the Youth), to an online format, renamed In the Cut.

Partnered with TRACE (Teens Re-Imagining Art, Community & Environment), Alt Space mentored six young people through photography and featured their work as part of a virtual exhibition on Sixty Inches From Center.

While they only met together twice before moving to remote instruction, Marcus Davis, senior program specialist for the

**“In this time of darkness where a lot of people lost hope, I saw a Chicago that was really working together.”**



Community members gather outside the Alt Space Market in Austin to pick up supplies and food.

Chicago Park District, says both Veal and Campbell are a testament to how people don’t need a huge budget or big ideas to make a difference.

“They had a way of working that has had to change dramatically, just based on what’s happening on the ground, and [I’ve seen] how they’ve taken the opportunity [to] not fall back but grow and expand on what they’re capable of doing,” Davis says.

Following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black people affected by police brutality, Veal says he and other members of Alt Space felt like they had to respond to the anger and looting that happened during the aftermath.

Created on Juneteenth 2020, the Alt Space Market in Austin was the first of several food markets and was built on abandoned property within five hours.

Alt Space is also continuing its Sunday Service community clean-up program with Alt Space garbage bins made from repurposed materials, designed by their artist in residence, Ebere Agwuncha.

“When a space is abandoned, [with] windows that are blown out, and there’s trash on the ground, there can be a perception and energy about that space that is unsafe, and neighbors might walk around or might not even want to go past there,” Veal says. “But when you live in a clean community, which we all deserve, there’s a dignity and respect that comes to the neighbors that you will have.”

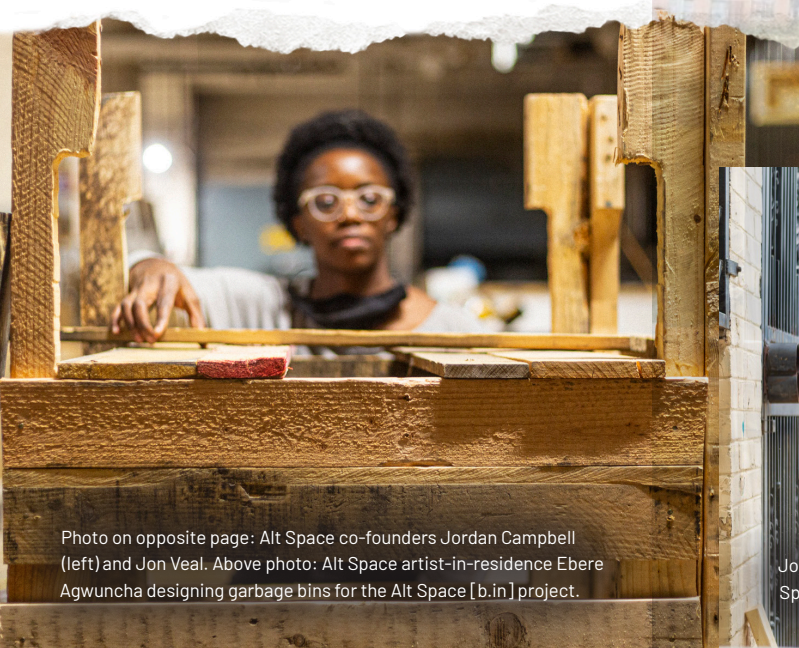


Photo on opposite page: Alt Space co-founders Jordan Campbell (left) and Jon Veal. Above photo: Alt Space artist-in-residence Ebere Agwuncha designing garbage bins for the Alt Space [b.in] project.



Jon Veal holds down plywood as Jordan Campbell cuts a piece for the Alt Space Market in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood of Chicago.





# Progress, Not Perfection

By Julia Greene

**For everyday environmentalists, the real work to save the planet is in everyone doing what they can.**

When working to combat climate change and be green consumers, the pressure of doing enough can be a challenge. The solution? Be imperfect.

"I think it's really overwhelming as an individual, especially as a young individual, to feel like the weight of the climate crisis is on your shoulders," says Megan McSherry, an environmental educator and influencer. "Every little thing that you do, you will end up feeling guilty for because it's just not possible to live a perfectly sustainable lifestyle unless you have all the money in the world."

McSherry believes every environmentalist, including herself, struggles with "eco-anxiety" and the guilt of feeling like they're not doing enough, but tries to remember that she's only one person. "There are big players, like corporations, that can do way more than me as an individual," she says.

On her Instagram, TikTok and blog called Acteevism, McSherry provides resources, works with sustainable and ethical brands and encourages the practice of being imperfectly sustainable.

Blame for the ongoing climate crisis rests on the fossil fuel industry, says Dr. Tania Schusler, assistant professor in Loyola University Chicago's School of Environmental Sustainability. She also criticizes politicians who block important climate policies.

In 2017, the Carbon Disclosure Project's Carbon Majors Report found 100 fossil fuel producers, including Shell and ExxonMobil, were "linked to 71% of industrial greenhouse gas emissions since 1988."

## “We don’t need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly.”

While consumers say they want to hold big companies responsible, when it comes to buying sustainable products, only a quarter actually do so, according to the Harvard Business Review. The main reason consumers don’t follow through is the added expense of these products, according to global management consulting firm Kearney.

But sustainability doesn’t have to be costly, McSherry says.

“There still is this huge misconception that a sustainable lifestyle is expensive, and it’s not accessible and it takes so much effort,” she says. For her, sustainability is about saving money and using what she already has.

McSherry recommends starting small to create long-lasting habits, like bringing reusable utensils or cups everywhere, and then building up from there.

When you do need to buy something, consider secondhand items or buy from brands that value sustainability in the long term.

Cloina, owner and designer at her self-named Chicago-based fashion brand, makes contemporary garments out of secondhand items to give them new life. “I think it really comes down to the consumer having more knowledge of how the garment was made, where it was made, what that process was, how many gallons of water was used to make it,” she says.

McSherry follows the philosophy of “progress, not perfection.” She references a quote from chef Anne-Marie Bonneau that’s become a pillar of the zero waste community: “We don’t need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly.”

“I would encourage people to not feel like you have to do everything all at once. Because you’re going to get frustrated and you’re going to get burnt out and you’re just not going to want to do anything anymore,” she says. “And we need everybody doing the little things that they can.”

## Ready to Take Action?

Here’s how to be an environmentalist who goes beyond buying a reusable straw



Invest in corporations that are working to save the Earth — whether that be purchases, banking or otherwise. Looking for a new bank, some sweatpants or an investment opportunity? Search for companies and brands whose values align with your own.



Contact your representatives and encourage them to implement environmental policies. (Do the same with companies you love — consumer demand drives the market.)



Learn about systems of oppression in the environmental movement and how climate change disproportionately impacts communities of color. Recommended resources: The NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, Grist’s Temperature Check podcast, “Waste: One Woman’s Fight Against America’s Dirty Secret” by Catherine Coleman Flowers



Follow these educators and organizations on Instagram or websites to get started: @queerbrownvegan/queerbrownvegan.com, @intersectionalenvironmentalist/intersectionalenvironmentalist.com, @pattiegonia



# Appreciating an Aging Population

Younger people shouldn't  
confuse perception with reality

By Isabel Colado

When Gen Zers and Millennials think of older adults, the first thing that might come to mind is Life Alert's infamous "Help! I've fallen and I can't get up" commercial or 2019's "OK, Boomer" meme. These portrayals in the media frame older adults as frail or incompetent, which isn't always accurate and influences society's perception of adults age 65 and older.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of Americans age 65 or older will grow by almost 50% from 2016 to 2030. By 2034, the nation will have more people age 65 and older than under 18. By 2060, nearly one in four people will be at least 65 years old.

"Our society is extremely ageist," says gerontologist Keren Etkin, who studies the aging process and how technology can help solve problems older adults experience. She says the irony of ageism is discriminating against a group you will eventually become a part of — if you are lucky enough to grow old.

Awareness is one part of breaking society's stereotypes. Young people often don't connect with older adults who are not their grandparents, which shapes their perception of what an older adult is.

If grandparents are amazing, loving and able-bodied, then that's what their grandchildren's perception will be for other older people, Etkin says. On the other hand, if their grandparents are frail, the grandchildren will assume others are the same.

"In reality, we know that the older population is very diverse, like many other populations," she says.

The key, Etkin says, is providing opportunities for younger people to interact with a range of older adults, so they can experience firsthand how diverse the population is.

To help better understand the physical challenges associated with aging, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's AgeLab created the Age Gain Now Empathy System, also known as AGNES.

AGNES is a suit that simulates the physical abilities of a person in their mid-70s. It's been used in retail, public transportation and cars, home and workplace environments to help society become an inclusive place for people of all ages.

Once suited up, bands connect the arms and waist, making it hard to reach above the shoulder. A neck brace means that head-turning forces the wearer to use their whole torso. Yellow glasses make vision unclear, earplugs muffle sounds and tones, custom shoes put wearers off balance and gloves reduce hands' strength and feeling.

"You see people put the suit on and they're like, 'Oh my gosh, aging is so terrible. I never want to be old' [and] all these stereotypes," says John Rudnik, technical associate at AgeLab.

Rudnik says if products are designed with older adults in mind, and if they put societal infrastructures in place, such as easily accessible public spaces and transportation, aging will be less of a burden.

Danielle Arigoni, director of Livable Communities at AARP, wants to work toward disrupting society's outdated notions about what it means to get older.

"We're all aging, and thinking about how you move through your day now, what are the things that you take for granted in terms of your mobility or your ability to get around, and how do you expect that that might change" Arigoni says. "By putting yourself in other people's shoes, I think that's how we begin to develop that empathy and understanding."



“In reality, we know that the older population is very diverse, like many other populations.”

Leanne Clark-Shirley, vice president of programs and thought leadership at American Society on Aging, says we view aging as something that only happens to other people.

“We’re very good at othering older adults, and that comes through in our use of words like ‘the elderly,’ ‘senior citizens,’ [or] ‘we need to protect our vulnerable seniors,’” Clark-Shirley says. “When we use that kind of language, it sets us apart and makes us separate and different from who we perceive to be old.”

She suggests we think about our own older selves and how what we do today impacts who we will be in our own older selves.

“I think there’s a lot of momentum in the younger generations now around combating climate change and pushing for social justice and pushing for equity, and I love that energy,” she says. “I would remind the younger folks to look for that energy in the current generation of Baby Boomers and in the current generation older than the Baby Boomers too.”

Although aging is inevitable, Etkin says people are short-term thinkers and don’t always consider what their life will look like when they are older.

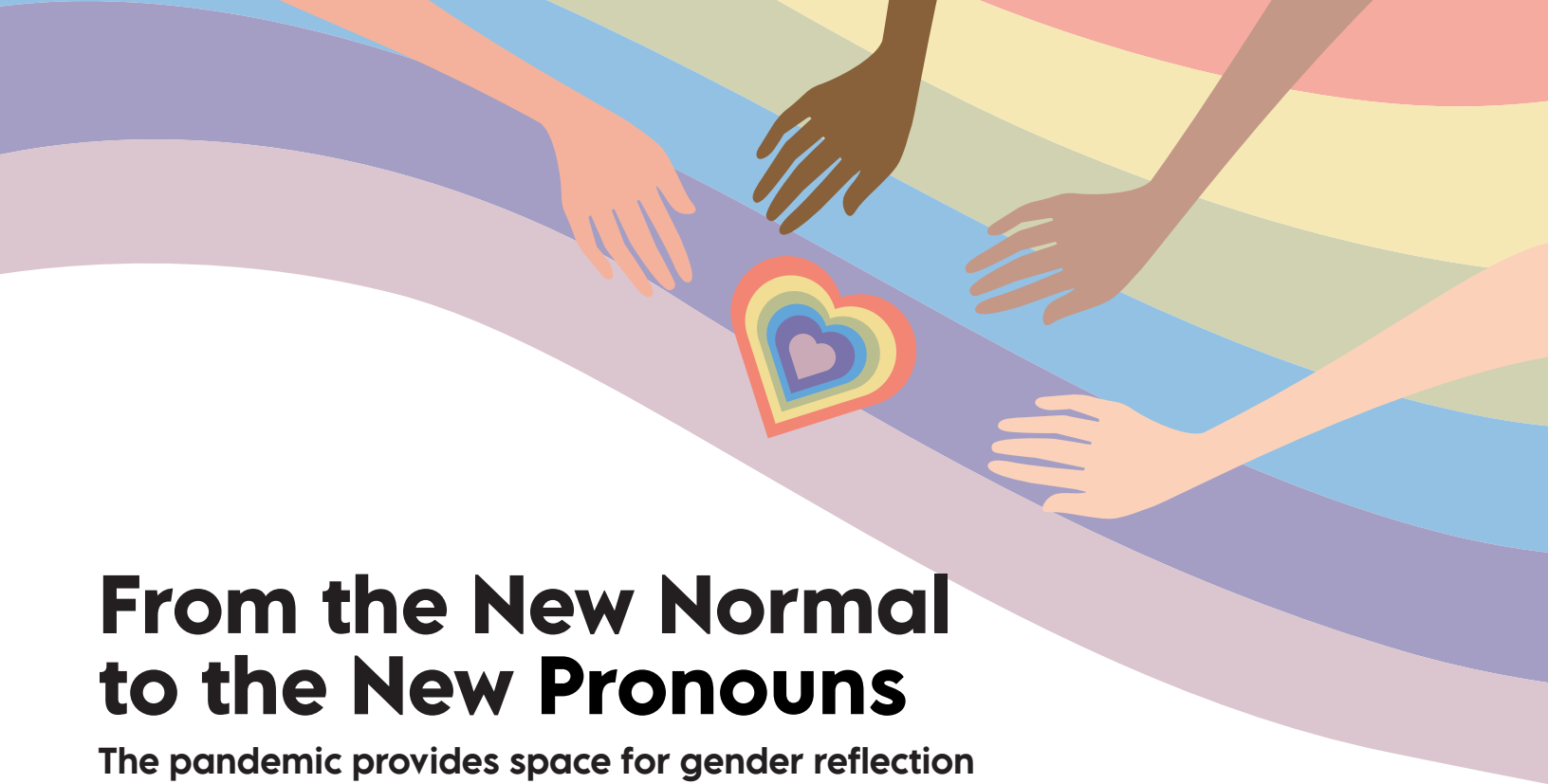
However, she says people who take the longer view will say, “There’s something wrong in the world. Older adults are not treated the way they should be, and I’m going to work to change that so when I’m an older adult, I’ll get treated with respect.”

We assume that when people are old, they have lost something, whether that be physical or cognitive capacity, Clark-Shirley says. However, in general, as we age, our body and appearance change, but we’re still who we have always been on the inside.

Her mission is to help more people see themselves as a part of aging in some way, not just those in gerontology.

“We’re an aging society,” Clark-Shirley says. “I hope that we continue to take the mystique out of the magical age of 65 and think about aging, not only in terms of what we lose, but also what we gain, and realize that it looks different for everyone, and we can’t just lump people into this category anymore.”





# From the New Normal to the New Pronouns

The pandemic provides space for gender reflection

By Mari Devereaux

Sitting outside in their hammock, in the aftermath of a “wicked bad breakup” with a self-re-examination crisis looming, Becks Michael came to a realization: they weren’t cisgender.

Michael, a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has been using both she/her and they/them pronouns and identifying as a nonbinary, genderqueer individual since the summer months of the pandemic.

As a self-described “rough and tough” tomboy whose afternoons growing up were spent climbing trees and getting in trouble, Michael says they have never felt super-feminine.

While Michael has been contemplating their gender identity for years, it wasn’t until quarantine that they took one step closer to “transcend[ing] gender” and becoming a “genderf\*ck icon” like singer-songwriter Janelle Monáe.

“I was spending just a lot of time outside, thinking about who I am, what I’m here to do and how I’m going to go about life,” Michael says. “Because of the pandemic, I had a lot more opportunity to play around with the clothes that I wear, and that was really thrilling.”

Since the start of the pandemic, conversations burgeoned across glowing screens – through TikTok comments, Twitter threads, Instagram posts and even theatrical productions – about their relationship to their gender and pronouns. Cisgender, nonbinary and transgender people alike have updated their Zoom names to include they/them, she/they and he/they in parentheses.

Experts on LGBTQ+ and gender studies say the ongoing social isolation and opportunity to connect with a like-minded community online have in many instances provided safe spaces for people to explore how they see themselves and others.

“Understanding who you are, understanding identity, understanding what’s important to you – the pandemic has put that in focus for a lot of people,” says Monica Gupta Mehta, CEO and founder of the nonprofit Normalizers. “It has removed a lot of the societal pressures that are part of our gender expression.”

Mehta, an educator who runs the TikTok account @monicatheteacher, says she has noticed an increased interest on the app surrounding the topic of gender, adding that her videos on gender identity and pronouns typically get hundreds of thousands of views.



Originally started in November 2020 as a way to teach people about social and emotional learning, health and sex education, Mehta says the account now has more than 60,000 followers and provides a safe space for those in the LGBTQ+ community to receive education, advice and support and ask questions.

She runs the TikTok account with the help of her 14-year-old, Ash, who uses she, he and they pronouns.

Ash Mehta says it has felt good to help create a community where people can come together and find themselves. They say realizing they were nonbinary relieved the “terrible pressure” of their dysphoria and allowed them to be their authentic self.

“Before I was quarantined, I was stuck in what people expected me to be,” Ash Mehta says. “It’s harder to change who you are when you’re constantly interacting with people. Quarantine took all of that expectation away and allowed me more space to question who I was.”

According to the Trevor Project’s 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 75% of LGBTQ youth use he/him or she/her exclusively. Twenty-five percent use either they/them exclusively, or neopronouns such as ze/zir or fae/faer, or a combination of he, she and they.

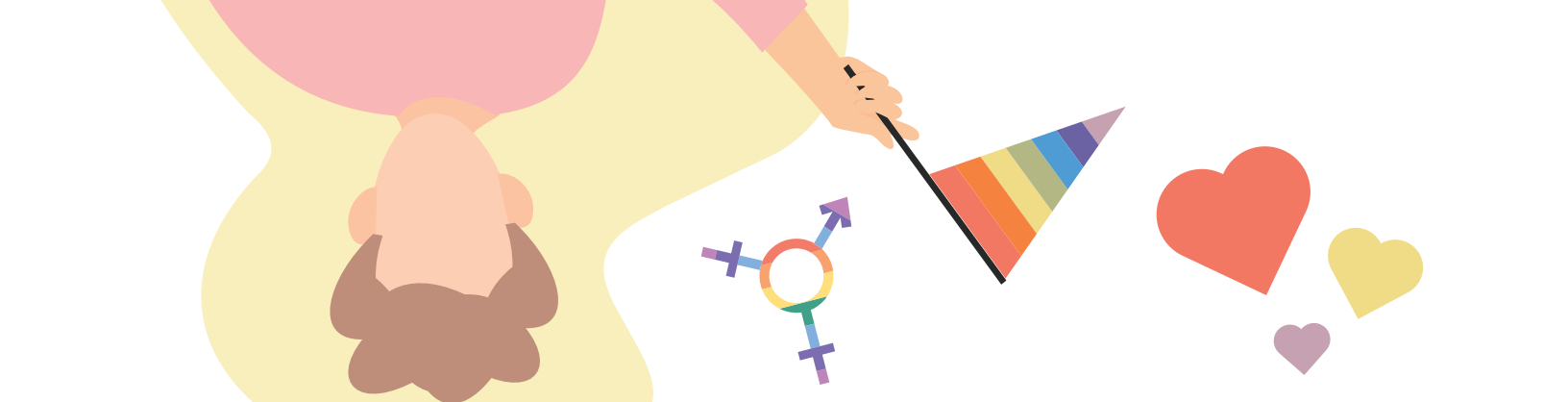
A 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey states more than one-third of respondents identified as nonbinary or genderqueer, and according to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey, around 20% of U.S. adults know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns. Around half of adults say they are comfortable using pronouns outside the gender binary.

Stephanie Skora, associate executive director at Brave Space Alliance, says being away from a cis-supremacist society during the pandemic has allowed people to explore whether or not they’re truly comfortable in the gender that they thought they were, or whether they were just conforming to a set of expectations.

“Because of the pandemic, I had a lot more opportunity to play around with the clothes that I wear, and that was really thrilling.”







“It’s incredibly normal to question your gender, or your sexuality. Don’t be afraid to try something new, even if it doesn’t work.”

“It’s incredibly normal to question your gender or your sexuality,” Skora says. “Don’t be afraid to try something new, even if it doesn’t work.”

Meggy Roth, a 31-year-old Waterloo, Iowa, resident, says working from home as a debt collector has given her the chance to figure out her identity while transitioning, from honing her voice, experimenting with her style, and understanding the type of person she is.

Roth says when going outside, she feels emotionally safer with a mask, because she can cover up the bottom half of her face and “pass.”

“I think COVID-19 not happening would have made my transition so much harder,” she says. “I can’t really say enough how great it is to be isolated while I pump my body as full of estrogen and progesterone as I can.”

Senior staff therapist and group coordinator Deb Zutty, who hosts gender experience groups at IntraSpectrum Counseling, says there are pros and cons to coming out and changing one’s name or pronouns during the pandemic.

She says on the one hand, the ability to come out to family and friends without having to see them in person gives people a lot more freedom and autonomy in terms of when and how they present themselves, including on Zoom.

Despite this, Zutty says there can be more anxiety surrounding one’s name as it is constantly on screen, and there can be issues with cyberbullying as well as transphobic families at home.

Erica Chu, an instructor of English at Harry S. Truman College, says you should always check with somebody who has recently come out, to see if they are OK with having their new name or pronouns used in other groups or settings before accidentally outing them.

Chu says the most important thing you can do as someone who knows a person in the process of changing their identity and gender expression is educating yourself through internet resources and by following people who are talking about similar topics.

For those questioning their identity, Chu says they should seek out a wellness center or a therapy group in addition to talking to their friends, family and even social media groups for support.

“Don’t let the fear of messing up keep you from trying,” they say. “You’re going to mess up somebody’s pronouns. When you do, just apologize and move on — don’t make a big deal out of it. If the person seems hurt afterwards, you can check in with them about it.”

***Visit [ColumbiaChronicle.com](https://www.columbiachronicle.com) to read a longer version of this story.***

# The Black Lives Matter Movement: What's Next?

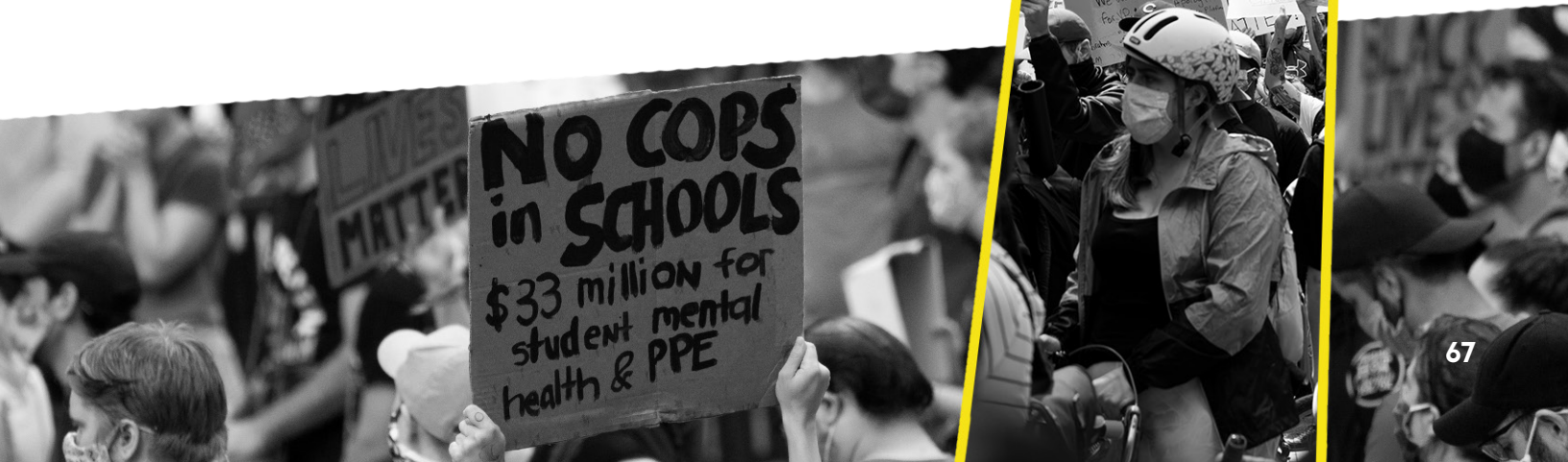
## Social justice activists see police reform as next step

By Breianna Ryle  
Photos by Camilla Forte

The Black Lives Matter movement began with a hashtag on social media in July 2013. By June 2020, after the killing of George Floyd and other Black people at the hands of police officers, it became one of the largest social justice movements in U.S. history.

Social justice activists in Chicago continue to advocate for their city and community to ensure the impact of the Black Lives Matter protests and rallies that took place during the summer of 2020 do not fizzle out.

Kobi Guillory, co-chair of the Chicago Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression, and Caullen Hudson, founder of SoapBox Productions and Organizing, are two of the many people working to keep the movement in conversation and moving forward. These interviews were edited for length and clarity.





## KOBI GUILLORY

Chicago Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression

### THEN

My mindset was, 'We have to get out on the streets.' People are angry. People are going to be out on the streets when something like that happens. It was the same thing when Michael Brown was killed, when Laquan McDonald was killed, when Tamir Rice was killed. We need to make our voices heard and tell whatever power structure that this is not going to go on forever [that] the police are not going to keep killing us forever.

[Chicago] handled it exactly how we expected them to. That first protest on May 30, we had actually been planning that for a few weeks. It was originally supposed to be about freeing torture survivors, but before then, George Floyd was killed on camera, it went viral and there were protests everywhere. Our protest grew far beyond what we were expecting it to be. We were expecting a couple hundred people and it turned out to be about 20,000 people.

The police started beating people up, like they were prepared to do that. When we arrived, they had batons out and ready. So there was just a lot of violence, a lot of arrests.



### NOW

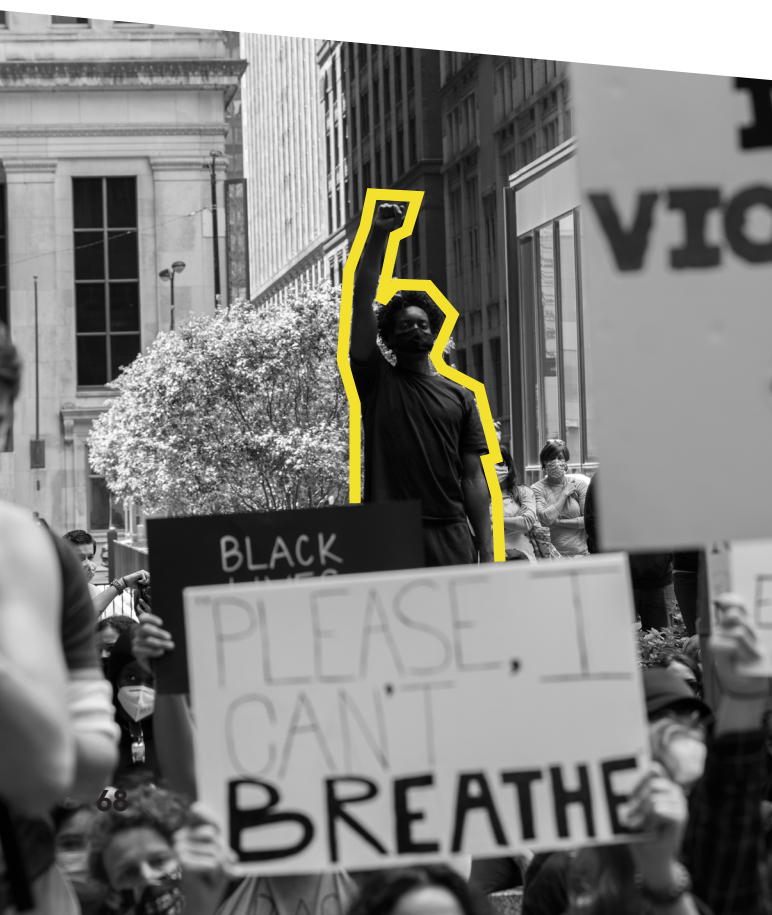
The City Council and the police are always going to be a couple of steps behind our movements and the general public. Something that was really striking after [the protests] is that every major city in the U.S., except Chicago, had some sort of promise of defunding the police or instituting some kind of police accountability measures.

At the same time, [we] are currently pushing the Empowering Communities for Public Safety Ordinance to City Council. There has not been a direct change yet, but it definitely opened people's ears and you know the City Council members aren't as comfortable with the 'status quo' as they were this time last year.

### NEXT

We have been talking about torture survivors, people who were tortured by [Chicago Police Department] detectives years ago. People like Gerald Reed who has been in prison since 1990 [and released in April 2021] for a crime he didn't commit. We need those names to be on everyone's minds. Next to Gerald Reed, in prison there are hundreds of people that we know of who are innocent and who were wrongfully convicted.

We need to challenge this idea that police are above the law. They need to be held accountable by the communities they are running around in and once that happens people will make the necessary changes for their own communities.





## CAULLEN HUDSON

SoapBox Productions and Organizing

### THEN

Ahmaud Arbery gets killed. Folks are angry, upset. We see a video, it's very sad. I'm in the fitness community so a lot of fitness folks are going on their 2.25-mile run in honor of him and posting about it, and I'm just scrolling through social media like, 'OK? What is this doing?' Three weeks later, George Floyd gets killed on a Monday. I see it happen on the news, and it is of course tragic and horrible and gruesome. This may be an unpopular opinion but for me, 'Oh, it's [just another] Monday.' Them killing folks isn't shocking to me. There is Laquan [McDonald] in Chicago, there is Rekia Boyd, there is Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor.

This is a watershed moment. Everyone is feeling isolated. Everyone is feeling like the government doesn't really have our backs. Everyone is feeling some kind of anxiety. I think folks were fed up, and those two weeks after [George Floyd] was killed were wild. I was confused yet excited, and just trying to understand my place in all of it. It was exciting and I saw a lot of power being built.

I have a lot of feelings but, generally speaking, looking back at 2020, I feel a broad sense of power in a lot of ways that I hope we harness for the future.

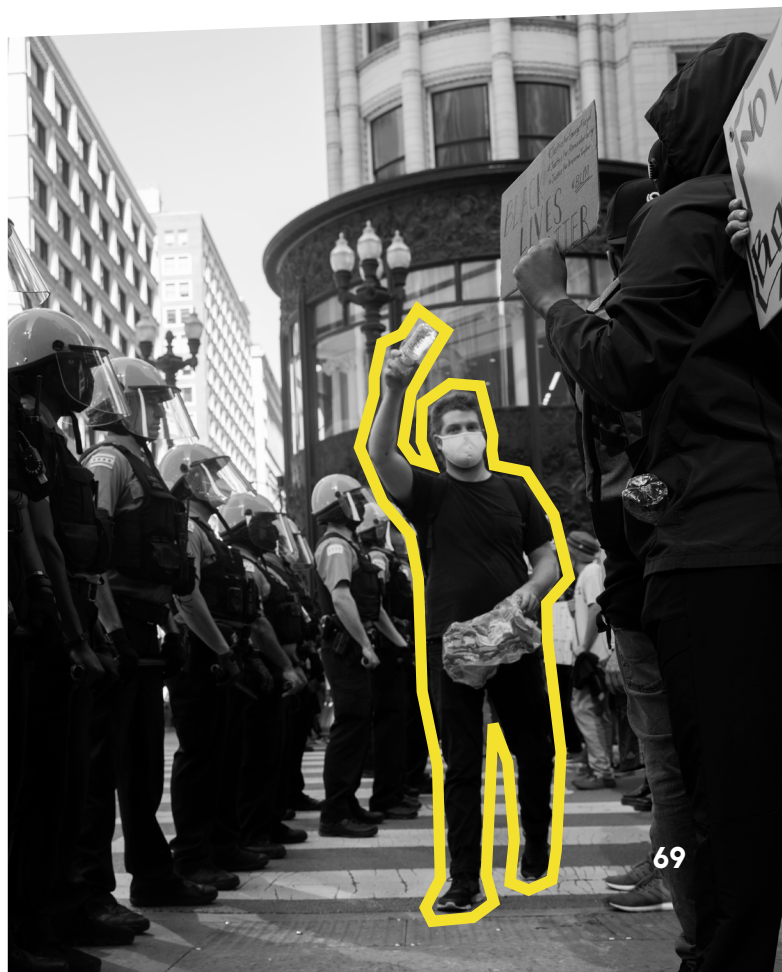
### NOW

You can't look back pre-George Floyd and think about certain things the same. I think that's huge and the more folks who aren't OK with the killing of their citizens, the better. On the narrative level, there has been immense change. We've seen policy changes, [but] not much in Chicago, of course. There is an immense amount of work to be done. A lot of what we do in the movement is about us.

### NEXT

Leverage the power you do have in institutions that you are involved in or where you work. Find tangible ways to stay tapped in. Question yourself, question your friends. Keep that internal work going as well as that community work.

You are going to have the most influence over the folks that know you and love you. Talking to your parents about the violence of policing and reform is still not going to do anything. That's a hard conversation especially when you aren't used to having them. [So ask yourself,] how are you mobilizing and challenging your people and yourself?





# Keeping Cops Honest and Chicagoans Informed

## Invisible Institute's database makes police department records accessible to citizens

By **Isaiah Colbert**

Photo by **Camilla Forte**

Outside the home of Mayor Lori Lightfoot one summer night, a single voice cut through the clamor of protesters wearing face masks and brandishing poster boards, demanding the Chicago Police Department be defunded and officers be removed from public schools. Through a megaphone, one protester standing in front of Lightfoot's house rattled off the complaint history of two officers, using information from a public database on her phone. A sea of boos erupted as those officers walked away from the police line blocking the protesters from the house.

The database she used was the Citizens Police Data Project created by the Invisible Institute, a nonprofit journalism production organization focused on holding police officers accountable to the public.

When Trina Reynolds-Tyler, the director of data at the Invisible Institute, started working there in 2006, the first thing she did was look up the Black police officer who had the most complaints on the database.

Reynolds-Tyler says she believes an abolitionist approach is necessary to solving the issue of police abusing their power, rather than solely having more Black cops.

The word "abolitionist" enrages some, much like the phrase "defund the police," because of its blunt phrasing and radical implications.

As an abolitionist herself, Reynolds-Tyler says abolitionists seek out the root cause of violence, crime and conflict in

communities, through communication with its citizens and as well as those who have the power to perpetrate violence with impunity.

"A system that is currently built around police is not built for accountability," Reynolds-Tyler says. "It never has been."

When former Chicago police Officer Jason Van Dyke murdered Laquan McDonald in 2014, Reynolds-Tyler says besides wanting him in prison, people also wanted to make sure they never again saw the conditions that led to Black people like McDonald being murdered at the hands of police officers.

Through her work with Black Youth Project 100, a Black activist group focusing on Black, feminist and LGBTQ+ issues, Reynolds-Tyler believes in building a world where all people have the same resources and opportunities in accessing police data records, while also being able to live free of being accosted by police officers.

The CPDP transfers misconduct data directly from the city and creates profiles of active and former police officers in Chicago. Since its launch in 2015, the CPDP has been used more than 1.2 million times by users who have used it to download 88,000 case documents.

One way the Invisible Institute has made sure police complaint stories are more complete, rather than just taken from the police department's documents, is through the creation of the Chicago Police Torture Archives. Using the archives, viewers can see the faces of Black men who

were tortured by former police Commander Jon Burge in the 1970s and 1990s, and hear them recount their stories in haunting detail through audiotapes and candid pictures of the survivors.

Rajiv Sinclair, director of the CPDP, says the group relies on its own categorization of repeat offenders and complaint summaries, as opposed to the bureaucratic jargon and classification used in police reports. By implementing everyday language, the CPDP goes beyond the complaint summaries from official reports and filters them in a more comprehensive way on its database.

“As time goes on, we are learning how much information we don’t have access to and how much information gets lost in the game of telephone when they are passing along complaints,” Reynolds-Tyler says.

The CPDP is unusual, in that it makes data accessible in a way that many other cities’ data is not. Chicago’s police records were made available to the public due to a lawsuit filed by Jamie Kalven, the executive director of the Invisible Institute.

“What’s really important about the CPDP is that you get an opportunity to not only understand big top-level databases, but you also get access to the narratives of so many people who have reported their negative interactions with police officers,” Reynolds-Tyler says.

Kalven says making this information readily available was not only beneficial to the public, it also made the information more accessible and usable to police who did not have access to the complaint records of their fellow officers.

Public defenders can check their phones, bring up an officer’s profile on the database, and undercut the officer’s credibility in a preliminary hearing, Kalven says.

Sinclair says the CPDP made previously buried information that dates back to 1967 accessible to the public and police officers within the department.

Officers have approached the CPDP on occasion to report errors of information that Kalven and Sinclair say are due to input errors by the police department.

**Chicago Police Department officers accused of misconduct in the Austin, East Garfield Park and Englewood neighborhoods are rarely disciplined, according to the Citizens Police Data Project.**

## **Austin**

**Complaints of police misconduct**  
5,006 allegations, 177 disciplines


## **East Garfield Park**

**Complaints of police misconduct**  
2,602 allegations, 201 disciplines

## **Englewood**

**Complaints of police misconduct**  
2,506 allegations, 96 disciplines





**“A system that is currently built around police is not built for accountability. It never has been.”**

The uphill battle for public records can be achieved in smaller jurisdictions through city government, Sinclair says.

“I think in a lot of cases, [the] city government has a very difficult time imposing anything on the police department,” he says. “That’s one of those few changes that hasn’t happened at the state level, through changes in law or major lawsuits.”

Kalven says the CPDP has led to change within other Chicago agencies as well.

“The Citizens Office of Police Accountability, [which] investigates police shootings and excessive force, has adopted a set of practices that were prompted by CPDP,” Kalven says. “The same thing with the inspector general’s office.”

























Kalven says once someone has police complaint information, they can reproduce the work done by the CPDP without having to develop the data in an Excel spreadsheet.

Reynolds-Tyler says she has seen how individual narratives are treating incidents of stop and frisk as isolated events, and how data points blame the victims who have been traumatized by police violence.

To ground herself, Reynolds-Tyler says she takes breaks from her work, so she doesn’t become desensitized by the egregious details in the police complaints.

“I always [say to] put yourself in the shoes of the individual who experienced those things and think about [what it would have been like if I] had a police officer use a racial slur when talking to me, degrading me, or illegally detaining me in the middle of winter in Chicago,” Reynolds-Tyler says.

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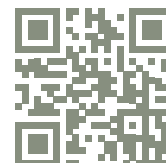
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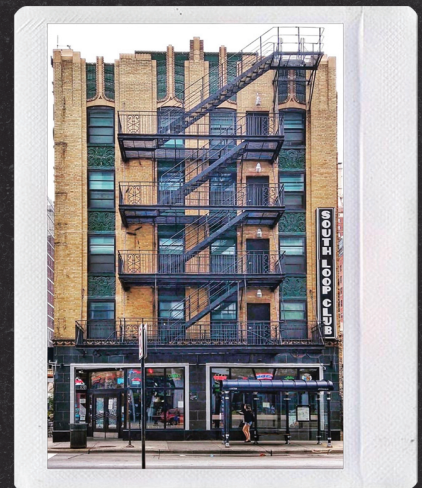
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