

Oct 2022 Vol XX Issue I  
Syracuse, New York  
Your student fee

THE OCT ISSUE

# JERK



I'm a member of the LGBTQ community, and this is my friend *Jerk*.

Talk, *Jerk*! "Ally!"

**JM**

# JERK

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When I was 16, I wrote the piece that made me pursue journalism. It was not for my high school newspaper, although I was an editor on that (because of course I was) — it was an in-class assignment for my AP Lang class. As soon as I heard the prompt at the top of the hour, I began smashing the keys on my school-issued Chromebook. In a flash, 750 words were done, sitting pretty in Times New Roman 12 point. Google Classroom had never seen a paper submitted so quickly. My chest burned with pride, a writer's high. My teacher, who I adored, pulled me aside after the bell rang. "I want to talk to you about your assignment," he said. I tried to steady my breathing. Had I messed it up in my excitement? "It's... really good. You should consider submitting to something, like a magazine."

The prompt for that piece was "tell a true story." My piece was entitled "A True Coming Out Story."

As you'll read on pg. 63, I came out as a lesbian when I was 12 years old, and I've been writing since I could hold a pencil. So it was a natural progression that I ended up writing about it and then realizing I could write about it professionally. Then I got to Syracuse and began writing for my major and, more importantly, *Jerk*.

And, well, here we are, with an entire issue about LGBTQ+ identities and community. If you've made it this far, then I should thank you. Right now, you're reading my senior thesis project for SU's Renee Crown Honors Program. Aside from the serendipity that both my first-ever magazine-style piece and my capstone piece are about the same topic, this issue and the representation of diverse LGBTQ+ people are indescribably close to my heart.

You know what else is important to me? The fantastic and beautiful members of Jerk, many of whom are LGBTQ+ and many of whom are not. They represent people from across the country, the LGBTQ+ community, and the SU community. These are their true stories and the true stories of those in all our communities. Read

about one of our staff's experiences with her mom coming out on pg. 27, learn about the history of queer sex and sexuality in America on pg. 61, and hear from LGBTQ+ tattoo artists in Syracuse on pg. 53. On digital, read about the way our staff empowers others to combat internalized homophobia, critique our social media habits by delving into TikTok lesbian 101, and hear firsthand how transitioning students are treated on SU's campus.

Telling the rainbow (pun 1000% intended) of stories from across the community brings visibility to it and highlights just how unique each of us is. As state and federal governments across the country and the world continue to abuse LGBTQ+ people, it is of utmost importance that we uplift each other, and we start by listening to each other. As you read, I hope you keep in mind that each person's true story is unique and ever-changing and that some truths for some people are not true for others. I also encourage you to reflect on your own stories and always keep your eyes open for new ones within you and around you. Who knows? Maybe those true stories will lead you to the places you were meant to be.

With love and Jerk always,



Zoe Glasser  
Editor in Chief (she/her/hers)



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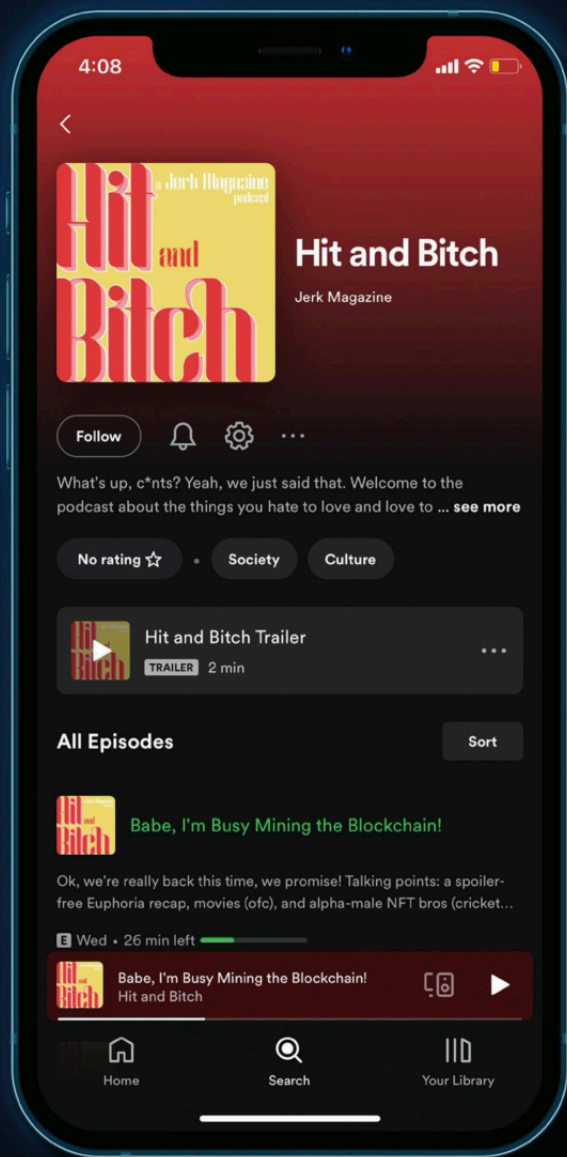
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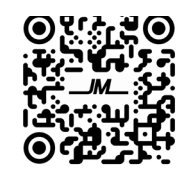
Listen to *Jerk's* weekly podcast, *Hit and Bitch* — where Zoë, Emma, and Kenny discuss the things you hate to love and love to hate — on Spotify today!

# JERK ON THE INTERNET

Bringing you the latest and the littest @jerkmagazine



*Jerk Magazine* is exploring new ways to compliment our print mag. Find additional content on social media and our website [jerkmagazine.net](http://jerkmagazine.net).



# HIT

What we love

## NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY OCTOBER 11

We know we're a little late but this is a big one! This is like when they say the name of the movie in the movie because it's what this issue is all about. It's not just about "coming out" though, because hey, coming out isn't even necessary. This day is just about celebrating the LGBTQ+ community - it's pride 2.0!

## THE CROWN SEASON 5 NOVEMBER 9

The passing of a certain monarch (we don't want to name names) has made this series of The Crown the most anticipated season of television in a while. We're ready to work through Princess Diana's trauma and call out the longstanding history of colonization... but we can be a little excited for the costumes too, right?

## RIHANNA ON THE BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER SOUNDTRACK MARCH 20

This movie could be great or awful - Marvel has been very unpredictable in terms of quality lately - but if there's one thing we can count on, it's Rihanna. After a 6-year hiatus, more Rih is absolutely necessary!

## BLINK-182 ORIGINAL LINEUP TOUR 2023

The original lineup is back, and yeah, maybe they're a little corny, but this is HUGE. The tour is gonna be full of the kids who wore checkered Vans and all black and they are likely married with kids now - wow! Old habits die hard, and band groupies die harder.

## WEIRD: THE AL YANKOVIC STORY NOVEMBER 4

For accordion fans and people who love comedy, parody, and polka, we're anticipating this movie to be incredible. His story's a weird one, pardon our pun, and the storytelling should be riveting. It drops on Roku this November, and trust that we WILL be seated.

Words by Megan Adams

## GET ROLLIN' BY NICKELBACK NOVEMBER 18

The next Nickelback we never needed. With classics like "look at this photograph" and "rockstar," this album promises to be another swing and a miss for the musical tragedy that is this rock band (if you can call it that).

## NATIONAL STEM DAY NOVEMBER 8

Nothing is worse than your Arts and Sciences-mandated lab science and math credits, and we at Jerk recognize that. Props to everyone who's a STEM fan, especially the -women in STEM- but tbh, it's just not for us. Mag writers don't typically love math like you nerds do.

## MACY'S THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE NOVEMBER 24

As much as we love the Snoopy balloon, there's no way that the energy it takes to blow him up is less than what Kylie Jenner uses on her private jets. Plus, the amount of corporate shilling, awkwardly lip-synched performances, and cringy Santa Claus references is nauseating enough to make us feel like Grinches.

## AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER DECEMBER 16

James Cameron, it's time to hang up your hat because no one wants to see this atrocity. Nothing called "Avatar" will ever come close to "The Last Airbender," and we as a society need to accept that and move forward.

## BABYLON DECEMBER 25

Can we just cancel Brad Pitt already? What did Margot Robbie do to deserve a co-starring role with TMZ's favorite scandalous man of the season? If we wanted to watch another bygone actor prance around in a tux, we would just gaslight ourselves into watching *Wolf of Wall Street*. Sorry, Leo.

What we hate

# BITCH

## OCT HOROSCOPES

### ARIES

Mar. 21 - Apr. 19



Aries, life has been a LOT lately (you've had three situationships and they've all ended in a drunk screaming match at Lucy's), and that paper-thin temper has not been helping. Apologies go a long way, and people can be more forgiving for things than you might assume. Maybe avoid notes app apologies though.

### CANCER

Jun. 21 - Jul. 22



It might be time to distance yourself from certain people this month, Cancer. For the love of Lana, do not text your ex-boyfriend back - he still doesn't wash those navy sheets. Turn off those post notifications and break the internet with a thirst trap like you always do (we'd be happy to supply a ring light).

### LIBRA

Sep. 23 - Oct. 22



Libra, that imposter syndrome is ruining your lovely skin. Stare deeply into the mirror and remind yourself that you're more than just a pretty face (much prettier without stress-induced hives though!). Nothing a little lavender incense can't solve.

### CAPRICORN

Dec. 21 - Jan. 20



Miss Capricorn, your mom told you to find a new hobby and stop watching every gruesome crime documentary on Netflix. We know it's tempting, but we agree with mama bear. Apparently juggling is good for the soul, so maybe that's a good start?

### TAURUS

Apr. 20 - May 20



Well, you know what they say about bulls - they're stubborn AF. If you put half of the energy you've spent holding grudges over silly issues (like your roommate never unloading the dishwasher) into productivity, you'd be moving mountains. It's time to let it go and move onto better things babe. Maybe aromatherapy?

### LEO

Jul. 23 - Aug. 22



Darling Leo, we can hear your houseplants screaming for water all the way from here. Get proactive and find yourself a plant-mama in the tofu aisle at Trader Joe's like the rest of us. You could probably use a little water yourself, fire signs need hydration too.

### SCORPIO

Oct. 23 - Nov. 21



Let's embrace cuffing season as it approaches, Scorpio. Allow yourself to be intimate and stop leaving that sweet boy from Recess Coffee on read (he wrote you a poem for God's sake!). Let him take you out for an overpriced oat milk latte and have your hot girl moment. A free coffee's a free coffee.

### AQUARIUS

Jan. 21 - Feb. 18



We know you're feeling lucky, Aquarius, so it's time to take some risks! Channel your inner Whitman and invest in some stocks or something. Who knows, if you start now that Victoria Paris Pinterest lime-green kitchen could be yours.

### GEMINI

May 20 - Jun. 20



We know you've got a reputation for being two-faced, but that's not true. You're allowed to wallow in T-Swift's new album and turn back time to your preteens to hyperfixate on the new Arctic Monkeys album! As our wise blonde leader said, we have this thing where we get older but never wiser.

### VIRGO

Aug. 23 - Sep. 22



Oh, Virgo. We just know your upper traps could use a trip to the chiropractor. Maybe that's because you spend your nights staring at the wall reliving when you peed your pants at your second grade spelling bee. Drown yourself in a bevvvy and pull yourself up by your bootstraps, babycakes. We're sure there will be something else to relive soon.

### SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22 - Dec. 21



We know you're the main character, Sag, but you need to stop sharing your location with everyone on Find My Friends. We love to follow your coordinates as they prance around campus, but it's getting old. The cute barista that took your order doesn't need to know that you live on Walnut.

### PISCES

Feb. 19 - Mar. 20



It's a bit too predictable to be a fish out of water right now, Pisces. Share that google calendar with us and let's get after it! We've seen you girlboss before, and we have no doubt that you will do it again. \*\*Insert inspirational Lizzo lyric.\*\*

Words by Sarah Dolgin & Eden Stratton | Art By Paige Toglia

SEX:

# THE QUEERING OF VIRGINITY

In which Jerk mythbusts virginity.

Words by Margo Moran

Art by Kodah Thompson

Let's start with a baseline, *Jerk*-endorsed truth: virginity is fake. The idea that a single thing changes when your genitals interact with someone else's genitals is a weird myth made up by the Catholic industrial complex to sell indulgences. It also doesn't consider the fact that people define sex differently, especially in the case of sex between two people with penises, two people with vaginas, and any dynamics in between. "Sex" has as many different definitions as there are people in the world. For many, when you have penetrative sex for the first time, you are "losing your virginity." So what does it mean when you've been having sex one way, and then you have sex in a completely different way? Have you grown a new virginity that you can now lose anew, or are you continuing that original sexual journey? No, really, I'm asking, because there is no one right answer for what it means to have sex with a gender you haven't had sex with before.

For some, this is a life-affirming experience: for a gay man who has only ever slept with women, sleeping with a man for the first time is like having a crazy itch on your back. People have been scratching right next to it, which has felt fine but not quite right and you weren't sure why, and suddenly, someone is clawing away at the middle of that itch. Yes, you've had your back scratched, and you thought that it was supposed to feel a bit "meh," but now you find out that other people have been getting their itches directly scratched the whole time. For people who are sexually attracted to more than one gender, having sex with different genders can be like getting an itch scratched vs. taking an extremely meddlesome rock out of your

shoe that has somehow been tucked in there for a week. Both feel good, both are different, and both are valid ways to feel pleasure. Whether you want to consider this a new virginity is up to you, because that shit is made up. You have every right to make it up as you go, it's nobody else's call but your own.

Two years ago, someone asked me how lesbians lose their virginity. I have thought about this question ever since for two reasons: One, it was a stupid question and seemed to imply that any form of sex that lesbians have will never be as valid as heterosexual sex. Two, I honestly had no idea how to answer it. Now, at my mature age, writing this from the retirement home (read: my senior year of undergrad) I realize that there isn't a right answer, just like there isn't one uniform correct answer of how straight people lose their virginities. All that we can say for sure is that, when moving between the sexual cultures of different gender configurations, there is a learning curve. Entering the gay sex cinematic universe (the GSCU, if you will), you'll hear the same question, over and over: top or bottom?

An article from *them* provides insight into the history of the terms, which originated as labels of power dynamics as well as preferred sexual position. A top penetrates a bottom and often enjoys being more in control and dominant, while the bottom assumes a more submissive role. If you enjoy playing both roles, you're classified as a vers, a term that didn't enter the vocabulary of the queer community until the 1970s. *GQ*'s Nick Levine wishes death to top/bottom discourse, because it reinforces heteronormative ideas of

every relationship having the masculine one and the feminine one, and is heinously outdated. Queer rhetoric has come so far, so why do so many people still feel comfortable forcing gay men into boxes of which gender role they play in their relationship? For a community looking to move beyond the binary, this is an extremely old-fashioned and constricting idea to grip onto. The way that consenting adults have sex with each other does not have to make sense to you, or make you feel comfortable and soothed, in order to be valid. Moreover, you have no

say on how someone else classifies their virginity, their body count, or anything else. Straight people have breathed down the necks of their queer counterparts since the invention of gay people, often with some mix of performative allyship and morbid and/or fetishizing curiosity. Don't force queer sex into boxes to make it compatible with how you fathom heterosexuality.



FRAMED:

# SIIRI POMBAR

Words by Megan Adams | Photos provided

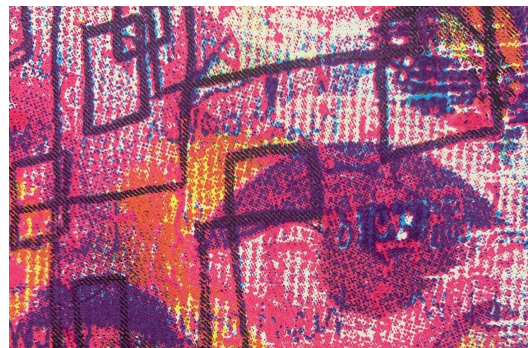
**Siiri Pombar**, an SU studio arts and art education double major, specializes in screen printing, a type of art she describes as a lot like a puzzle – organizing, strategizing, and eventually laying the pieces into place by intricate design. Screen printing more literally is taking mesh and using it to transfer a design onto a flat surface. But for Pombar, it's more than just mechanics.

"I was really into art in high school and really close with my art teacher," Pombar says, "I was going to go into business and she told me to 'save myself.'" A self-described printmaking "addict," Pombar credits her high school art teacher with her decision to study art and art education. Falling in love with screen printing was something she discovered coming from a background in 3D art.

Starting out digital, hating photography and eventually transitioning to screenprinting, Pombar is still evolving as an artist and learning even more media. "I do a lot of digital sketching and [have] historically done a lot of screenprints and I've recently been learning relief," Pombar tells us. Reliefs are technically defined as any work where the figures project from a background, but where Pombar is concerned, they are wooden panels carved and sculpted intricately. It is something different and meaningful to have this relationship with media when making art, Pombar tells us, "You're carving something out to put something back on [top]."

In terms of what she creates and why, Pombar deals a lot with grief and femininity in her work. When asked about her favorite projects, she cited a set of screen prints from her not-too-distant history. "They weren't technically the most advanced or anything, but they meant a lot to me personally," Pombar tells us. Inspiring this piece was a loved one of Pombar's who had passed that didn't want anyone to be "too sad" about their passing. "It's a really conflicting thing to try and celebrate someone in their death," Pombar says, "[Art] really helps with how to deal with death I think." Her current project focuses more on femininity rather than grief as she pieces together a project based on the bathroom at her house. "I live with three other people, two who are women and one who is not," she tells us. The piece is turning out to be something of a portrait of a messy, 20-something's bathroom, littered with makeup, hair products, and other items. The femininity in this piece is not necessarily the focal point, but Pombar tells us her art typically has an undertone of "what it is to be perceived as a woman or femme-presenting in this world," and it's clear this piece reflects that.

As she continues her art into her future, her goals aren't completely clear yet, but she sees herself going into art education. Pombar says she has concerns, however. "I see a lot of teachers stop their creations," she tells us, "I don't want to ever stop making."



21 +/-

# LESBIAN FLAG JELLO SHOTS

Words by Taylor Benjamin and Megan Adams

Photo by Ellie Stern

If there's one thing we at Jerk celebrate, it's pride! These jello shots are the perfect way to show off your pride while still ensuring you'll be carried home from the pregame. The sweet nostalgia of jello combined with the punch of vodka is a surefire way to get people talking about their queer awakenings.

P.S: Take a shot if you just thought about Hayley Kiyoko in Lemonade Mouth.

## INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz Orange Jello
- 3 oz Raspberry Jello
- 0.25 oz or 1 packet of unflavored gelatin
- 7 oz condensed milk
- 2 ¼ c vanilla vodka
- 3 ¼ c boiling water
- 2 oz plastic portion cups

## PROCEDURE

### Pink Layer:

1. Combine raspberry jello with 1 ¼ cups hot water and mix until fully dissolved
2. Add in ¾ cups vodka and mix again
3. Fill each cup ⅓ of the way full and refrigerate for one hour

### White Layer:

1. Combine unflavored gelatin with ¾ cups hot water and mix
2. Add in ¾ cups vodka
3. Add condensed milk to the gelatin mixture and stir until fully combined
4. Pour over the set layer of raspberry jello mixture
5. Refrigerate for one hour

### Orange Layer:

1. Combine orange jello with 1 ¼ cups hot water and mix until fully dissolved.
2. Add in ¾ cups vodka and mix again
3. Fill each cup to the top and refrigerate for one hour





# SWIPING LEFT ON FATPHOBIA

LGBTQ+ SU students in bigger bodies are often pushed away from the dating pool.

Words by Zoe Glasser  
Art by Marisa Goldberg

When one anonymous SU student (he/they), heard the familiar brrrup-brrring of a Tinder notification, their fingers scrambled to unlock their phone. Anticipation swelling in their chest, they tapped the red-and-white flame to reveal the identity of their newest match. Maybe this would be the one. But as they swiped over to the direct messages section, the red notification dot by their match's name began to look more like a stoplight than a beacon of love. "You look like a disgusting person," the message read, black letters branded on a pale-gray speech bubble. Then, another message: "I wouldn't touch you with a pole."

The student now holds up the screenshot of this encounter to his laptop camera, showing me over Zoom. The letters wiggle slightly because of the three layers of LED screens, distorted by a strangely fitting rainbow moiré effect, but the message couldn't be clearer.

This student, a bisexual and transgender biology major, regularly experiences hate like this. Potential partners match with them on dating apps just to call them names or liken them to an animal, then unmatch and block. On the rare occasion that they do go on dates, they receive comments on their weight or are ghosted after a couple cups of coffee or CoreLife bowls from Schine. While they cannot prove that ghosting is caused by their weight, they suspect it plays a role.

I had heard anecdotal evidence from students at Syracuse University who experience fatphobia like this in their dating lives, but it's hard to put a number on stories like this. As a lesbian who is not

perceived as fat, I have never experienced fatphobia in the dating world— or at all, for that matter— but I wanted to shed light on these stories. So I put on my reporter's hat (thank you, Newhouse) and created a survey to analyze the differences in self-reported romantic satisfaction between thin and fat LGBTQ+ college students. Among 73 students surveyed, 20 identified as both fat and LGBTQ+, and 80% of those students said that they believed their weight negatively impacted their dating lives. Another 15% said it had no effect, and only one student, who declined to be interviewed, reported that it positively affected their romantic pursuits. For reference, about 71% of the 45 thin LGBTQ+ respondents to the same question said that their weight either neutrally or positively impacted their dating lives. Translation: SU students need to unlearn their fatphobia, like, now.

Although scholarship on fatphobia in LGBTQ+ spaces, especially in terms of dating, is all but non-existent, there are a couple of things we already know. Like their cisgender and heterosexual peers, LGBTQ+ people in bigger bodies (some of whom self-identify as fat, reclaiming the pejorative term) experience discrimination in many aspects of their lives, including romance. Though we do not know exactly why, fat liberation activists argue that the systems we live under are built to exclude and oppress fat people, and all people have internalized bias against fat people as a result. Caleb Luna (they/them), one such activist and academic, is not even slightly surprised by the numbers I found in my survey. In their research, they've found that the

fat liberation movement of the 1970s and 80s was spearheaded by fat lesbian and bisexual women to remedy this exact problem.

Interestingly, the aforementioned anonymous student said that he has never received rude comments about their weight from women or femme people they have seen in a romantic capacity; only men or masc people seem to make overtly fatphobic remarks. This trend held true among SU students I spoke to who identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, or are otherwise attracted to men, regardless of gender. Tori Barnes\* (she/her), a freshman PR major and a cisgender pansexual woman, had a similar encounter during her first semester at SU.

"I was going out with this guy for a couple of dates, and then he sent me a text by mistake when he was talking to one of his friends," Barnes said. "He basically said, 'I've gone on a couple dates with this fat chick, but she's too chubby for me.' I told him he'd sent it to the wrong person."

On the gendered flipside, Karina Peterson\* (she/her), a biology and forensics major and a lesbian, says that she has never had any of her femme partners comment outright on her weight. But women still slide in fatphobic remarks, just in different, more socially acceptable ways.

"I've had women date me for a little bit and then really zone in on food. If we eat together, they would [ask,] 'Hey, what are you eating there?' and just put a lot of focus on that in an 'I-can-fix-her' sort of way," said Peterson. "It was like, okay, so you want to date a version of me that isn't here yet."

But social norms about politeness haven't stopped the ladies from being cruel, too. During her freshman year, Peterson was unexpectedly asked on a dinner date by a friend from a club. She obliged, surprised that this person took interest in her, and the pair shared a slightly-awkward meal later that week. Peterson felt it had gone well enough for a first date. Later, though, the friend texted her with a confession. They had asked Peterson out as a dare.

"A day or two later, they were like, 'I wasn't really serious about that. I would never actually do that,'" Peterson said. "It's high school bully energy, except in a queer body. There was a part of me that kind of idealized LGBTQ+ people where it's like, once I'm in college, it'll all be better, but it's just the same

energy, even within the same sexuality."

Notably, not all LGBTQ+ SU students in bigger bodies have perceived weight-based discrimination in their dating lives. Human Development and Women and Gender Studies alumnus Tamia Parsons (they/them) said that they have noticed more discrimination based on their identity as a Black gender non-conforming lesbian among SU's majority-white LGBTQ+ community rather than based on their size.

"Especially at Syracuse, the queer community is predominantly white, because we are a predominantly white institution. There's a very skinny, white gay person that people associate a lot with non-binary identities or queer identities in general. Being black and not skinny, I don't fit into those ideals," they said.

Parsons has found very little overlap between the Black community and LGBTQ+ communities at SU, an issue worthy of its own article. This has made it uniquely difficult to date and find community in college because of the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality.

But again, Parsons' experience in terms of weight seems pretty unique. Not including them, almost everyone I spoke to who reported a negative overall dating experience because of their weight has sworn off dating apps, and some have sworn off dating in general. While their thin friends have the luxury of swiping through Tinder without receiving an onslaught of vicious messages or flirting in class, they have found various ways to manage their expectations around romance.

"Watching all my friends get into relationships around me and then trying my best but not having anyone...that kind of took an emotional toll on me," the anonymous student said. "I've tried Bumble, I've tried Tinder, and whenever I match with someone, I think seven out of 10 times, I've been asked about my weight. I've been told 'You look disgusting.' 'I would never date you.' 'You look horrible.' So I deleted the apps four days ago. I know it's not right, but it's something I've just become used to."



TW: sexual violence and abuse, grooming, pedophilia, homophobia

# SEVENTEEN, TWENTY-NINE

Unpacking the romanticization & normalization of grooming in queer relationships.

Words by Julia Reedy  
Art by Lindsey Smiles

The topic of grooming is one that we, as a generation, are all too familiar with. Modern-day *Lolita*-esque relationships are frequently ignored and not dissected until after the fact. Unfortunately, the instances of grooming seem to be endless: Demi Lovato and Wilmer Valderrama's 12-year age-gap relationship, which began when she was 17 and he was 29; Elvis Presley and Priscilla's 11-year age-gap, beginning when she was 14 and he was 25; and more recently, Ezra Miller has been accused of verbally and physically abusing a 12-year-old when they were 20.

I hope I'm not wrong in saying that mostly everyone agrees that grooming is wrong, and that any and all forms of abuse should be dealt with accordingly. However, we seem to walk a fine line between age gaps and grooming, especially in the context of queer relationships.

For example, when we look at Hollywood — age gaps in lesbian and gay relationships are depicted so often that it feels as though this is the norm. Heterosexual relationships with age gaps are seen as an anomaly and tend to garner much more concern and insight than queer ones, so my question is this: why is it, when we discuss victims of grooming, queer people are so often left out of the narrative?

I want to be perfectly clear in saying that inciting every queer relationship with an age gap is a form of grooming is incredibly harmful. This further perpetuates the homophobic notion that queer people are inherently predatory, and that, by

some belief standards, queerness is equated with evil. By no means is this acceptable, nor is it fueled by any reason or research — there is not a single scientific study that provides evidence that queer people are any more likely to molest children than heterosexual people.

Grooming, by its definition, refers to an act of deliberately establishing an emotional connection with a child to prepare that child for abuse and exploitation. More times than not, the abuse comes in the form of repeated sexual encounters, and the exploitation comes in the form of threats. Children do not know when they're being groomed — the process is subtle and slow, and begins with gaining trust — that's why groomers are typically people that the victim already knows. Once trust is established, groomers begin to isolate the child and sexualize the relationship while maintaining a power dynamic where the groomer always has the upper hand. For this reason, groomers will prey on considerably more vulnerable children — and unfortunately, LGBTQ+ youth often belong to this category.

According to a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, LGBTQ+ people are about 6 times more likely to experience violence by someone who is well known to them and about 2.5 times more likely to undergo it by the hands of a stranger, compared to non-LGBTQ+ people; and in a nationwide sample of US adolescents, the AAP also found that transgender adolescents had higher odds of reporting psychological,

physical, and sexual abuse than heterosexual cisgender adolescents. Transgender adolescents assigned female at birth had the highest odds of psychological abuse.

Additionally, the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey reports that nearly half (48 percent) of bisexual women who are rape survivors experienced their first rape between 11 and 17.

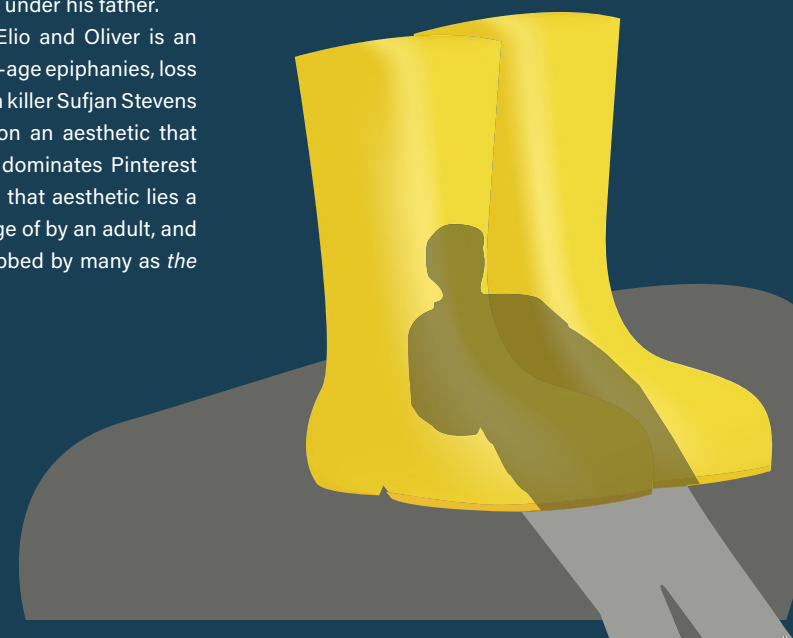
These statistics alone reveal just how exposed LGBTQ+ youth are to violence and sexual assault. Statistically, grooming is a hard subject to quantify. Like I mentioned earlier, children do not know when they are being groomed. If and when they do become aware, it is usually because they are told by someone else that they are or were a victim of grooming.

It is extremely difficult for victims to differentiate between what is grooming and what is a genuine relationship, not only because groomers tend to assure victims that what they have together is the latter, but also because of the way age gaps and grooming in queer relationships are romanticized in the media. Most notably, in André Aciman's romance novel *Call Me By Your Name*, which was later adapted into a film starring Timothée Chalamet and Armie Hammer (like his predatory character, Hammer has not aged well). For those that haven't seen the film or read the book, the story follows Elio, 17, as he enters the most formative summer of his youth as he begins a romance with the 24-year-old graduate student studying under his father.

At a glance, the story of Elio and Oliver is an innocent one, full of coming-of-age epiphanies, loss and longing, accompanied by a killer Sufjan Stevens soundtrack and not to mention an aesthetic that is so visually pleasing, it still dominates Pinterest boards today. But underneath that aesthetic lies a story of a child taken advantage of by an adult, and what's more, this film was dubbed by many as *the* LGBTQ film of the decade.

Although it is repeatedly said that Elio is precocious and is wise beyond his years, this, in no way, disregards the fact that he is 17 (a minor) and Oliver is 7 years his senior. Over the course of the film, we see Oliver use manipulative tactics in order to make Elio want him that much more — his hot-and-cold, on-and-off-again behavior reaches its peak when he tells Elio that he needs to grow up to have sex with him, and then proceeds to have sex with him shortly thereafter. The power dynamic between the two is palpable— time and time again, Elio is at Oliver's disposal, a toy to be played with when Oliver desires, and to be cast aside when he does not.

It's stories like these that perpetually fetishize grooming among the queer community, especially when they serve as the standard of LGBTQ films for a younger generation. When we look to cinema, we are looking to see ourselves and our love depicted on the screen — and conversely, this affects the way others might perceive the way an entire community's love manifests itself. By highlighting these depictions, it is disregarding the pain so many victims feel, and lessening the consequence for the abusers. It is imperative, then, that certain nuances that imply that grooming is taking place are exposed and issues of grooming become more transparent.



# GLOWING UP, LOOKING BACK

Life is full of growing pains, for better and for worse.

Words by Russell Tom Sun

Art by Ben Herbert

**Look, I know** I wasn't the ugliest duckling in high school, but I had braces, hormonal acne, short, greasy hair, and wore way too much Hollister to ever be considered "conventionally attractive." Even though in my freshman and sophomore years of college I did get prettier, it wasn't until my junior year of college that I noticed people started looking at me more, complimenting me, hitting on me, and asking me out and believe me when I tell you, I am so damn confused. Men who would typically ignore me have now taken an interest in me and I have no idea how to react. Like, thank you, but also, what the hell?

My appearance now doesn't seem too far off from what I once looked like —my hair is a little longer, I have a skincare routine (Thanks CeraVe!), my face and body are more toned, I've started dressing more elegantly and trendy, and I occasionally wear glittery makeup. Yet when I look at myself in the mirror, I don't see what other people see. I still see that acne-faced, 16-year-old boy struggling and crying to get the attention of a man who was 5'6" (that's a long story, I was desperate— let's move on). Yet here I am, getting noticed at restaurants and bars, getting asked out, and being treated much more kindly. I know I sound vain, but hear me out.

Going from receiving virtually no attention in high school to getting an unlimited amount of male validation in college messed with my head and I didn't know how to cope. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was worth something and I felt like I was finally loveable. Unfortunately, I was so touch starved and desperate, I'd give in to any man who called me beautiful. I would let men use me for my

body just so I could finally have my first kiss or for one night I could sleep in someone's arms. I felt like I was living the dream...until I wasn't. My newfound beauty and confidence landed me in some very toxic situations, and led me to some very dark periods of my life. It took me a long time to accept that they didn't really care for me, they only cared for the five minutes of pleasure, and then they could roll over and go on their phone and text somebody else. I had never felt more worthless and used in my life, and it felt like it was all my fault. I was



so confused, because I was doing what I thought everyone else was doing. I should have felt happy, right? Sexual liberation? Taking back the power? Embracing my beauty? This is what everyone was doing online, but I still didn't feel whole. I felt so damn empty.

It took me a long time to realize that I didn't just want to have sex; that can be so boring, and after ten minutes I just want to leave. What I really wanted was love, I wanted a man to notice the small things about me and fall in love with me for who I was deep inside, not for just what my body offered. Because I had fallen down that path where my only sense of worth came from my beauty, I am quite traumatized, at least according to TikTok. Any time a guy is interested in me, I don't believe him. My brain instantly thinks, "He just wants to sleep with you! He is going to leave you! You are worth nothing to him! He probably has a plethora of hoes! He will find someone hotter and better than you!" I simply refuse to believe a man could ever show interest in me. Yet here I am, talking to a guy I've known for a while. He's kind, and amazing and puts in all this effort and wants to see me, yet my brain still

thinks he wants nothing more than sexual favors and will dip the second he sees the real me and he will go off and find someone prettier. That's so unfair to myself. Sometimes I examine these stupid thoughts and think, "How the hell did I become my own worst enemy?"

The truth is, I am not alone and there is no real answer to this problem. Growing up ugly is a part of life that everyone handles differently. Everyone struggles to recognize their own beauty. And once we do realize our true beauty, it's too late and we are pining over our former selves. Sadly, we don't fully appreciate what we have until it's gone. But I'm here to tell you to hold on to that hairline before it recedes, and appreciate your beautiful self, luscious locks and all.

There's just a few things I wish I could tell the younger version of me. Firstly, that below-average-height man is not the love of your life, MOVE ON. Secondly, your skin will clear up and the braces will come off (in three years, but they will!). Lastly, you are really beautiful.

You may not feel beautiful all day everyday, but you're still beautiful. Don't settle for meaningless hookups. You are loveable, and you are loved. Be gentle to that little boy inside you who's still dreaming of his first love; others will come and go, but he will always be with you.

OBITCHUARY:

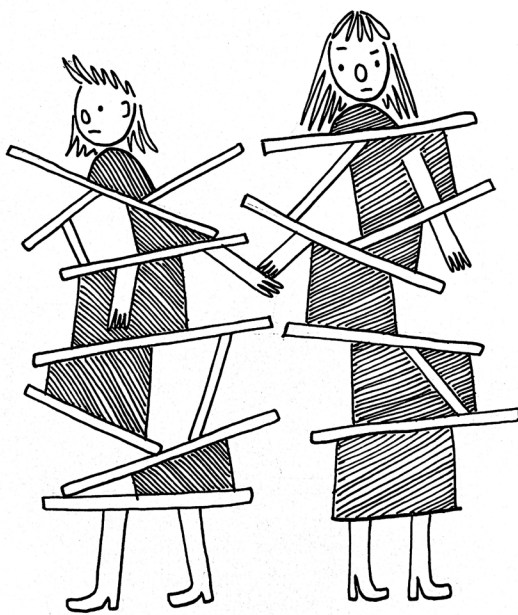
# LABELS

Death to default heterosexuality.

Words by Margo Moran  
Art by Lilly Chidlaw-Mayen

**Mom, Dad, Grandma,** we have something to tell you. Assuming heterosexuality to be the default sucks. In fact, we here at *Jerk* have, decisively and in cold blood, gutted it. The cause of death? Being an antiquated idea and a silly remnant of an era where queer people existed in loveless marriages for their entire lives and experienced an unbelievable suicide rate. I shouldn't have to summon my parents, close friends, and playfully homophobic cat (she's a product of her time) onto an emergency Zoom call to tell them that sometimes, I kiss girls. I shouldn't have to accompany an announcement of my relationship with a man with the caveat that I am still queer, I promise. Why wouldn't someone want to share such a meaningful part of their identity with the people close to them, our maybe seven straight readers wonder? Because you didn't sit anyone down to tell them that you're straight, although your attractions and relationships are probably just as big a part of you as mine are of me. Your straightness was presumed, it was your birthright.

With all love, we humble Jerks are taking a knife



to the jugular of that birthright, and calling bullshit on the idea that almost everyone is straight, so it should be the normative sexuality. In 2021, NBC News reported that nearly 1 in 5 Gen Z adults do not consider themselves straight, and predicted that number will rapidly increase in coming years. The only thing more loathsome than demanding queer

people to come out to you is demanding that they label themselves so that you can feel more comfy with their identity. People are ever-evolving, and sexuality is a fluid and nebulous thing, bigger than a word on a nametag that tells that world how to experience you and how you experience it. As we lay the institution of "coming out" to rest, we eulogize her fondly. Thank you, you strange and slippery ideology, for *Love, Simon*, *Love, Victor*, a handful of pretty good coming of age books and a

lifetime of trauma. May you rest in the same peace that you gave queer individuals (none at fucking all).

# SMUT

## FEATURES

In *Smut*, we deep-dive into aspects of on- and off-campus life that affect you (yes, YOU!).

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Photoessay

# BREAKING BINARIES

Young people are redefining coming out by exploring their identities online.

Words by Zoe Glasser  
Art by Hannah Landon

The five-second video shows a young person with a teardrop-shaped face contorted in an expression of discomfort, or perhaps anxiety. Their bone-straight black hair cascades down to their collarbone. Their blue-jean-covered knees are tucked up to their chest. With wide eyes, they lipsync the words, "Cheer the fuck up, you beautiful loser." Julia Paing, a 23-year-old student who uses both she/her/hers and they/them/their pronouns, watched this year-and-a-half-old TikTok draft of herself as the New York City subway rumbled under her feet. They held their phone in front of them now, their hair recently chin-length and bluish-gray, their eyes crinkled in a grin. They sat back in their seat and pressed record. Though a white surgical mask covered her mouth, the song continued, "Sincerely signed, you from the future." Paing posted the complete TikTok to their account @theycallmejuliapaing. The TikTok, which now has 340.6K likes, bears the caption: "And that's on coming out and acceptance!"

With that video, Paing joined the approximately 164 million TikTok users who have viewed or posted under the hashtag #ComingOutStory. She and her fellow members of Generation Z dominate TikTok, with about 32.5% of its user base between the ages of 10–19 and another 29.5% between 20–29 years old. Gen Z also makes up the largest age-demographic proportion of something else: the LGBTQ+ community. As of 2021, Gen Z makes up approximately 20% of the total U.S. population, which means that about 10.5 million American Gen Z-ers identify as queer. Then, factor in the COVID-19 pandemic, when young people were forced out of physical community spaces where they could navigate their identities, and landed on apps like TikTok and Twitter. In the absence of these spaces, LGBTQ+ Gen Z-ers have flocked to

online spaces to express themselves, learn about their identities and connect with others like them. In the process, they have revolutionized the way their generation perceives coming out. "[Gen Z] has an amazing and vibrant online community, a virtual community, and that's a lot of the ways that queer folks find each other," says Kelly Anderson, a Professor of History and Women and Gender at Smith College.

The sheer availability of information about the LGBTQ+ community on the internet plays a major role in the surge of people coming out virtually. Prior to search engines, a young queer kid would have had to go to their local library, complete with the risk of someone recognizing them, in order to find information about their identity. These days, young people can explore their identity in an anonymous environment. "You can't know that you're queer or trans without information," Anderson says. "It's not a lightning bolt that hits your head, it's some combination of reaction to the world around you and feeling like something is amiss and that you might be different from the cultural messaging that's coming your way."

Anderson says that a sense of community serves as a crucial support network for someone in the process of coming out. Prior to the internet, these spaces included piers, parks, and bars rather than group chats and hashtags. Today, though, these community centers have moved into online forums on social media. In this way, queer activism itself has shifted from spreading awareness through rallies and marches during the AIDS crisis to the education-based digital activism of the new age.

Social media websites can also make coming out more straightforward (ha, get it?) because they broadcast a message to hundreds of people with



one click of a button. This can also be more discreet than sitting friends down and having a heart-to-heart. If someone wants to explore using different pronouns, they only have to edit their pronouns in their Instagram bio — a feature the platform added in May 2021. This editability has contributed to Gen Z's perception of coming out as a casual process that may happen multiple times rather than a one-and-done revelation. "I think for older generations, we were more wedded to this sense of, once you came out, you were out, and that was it, and you were now that way forever and ever, and that's just not true for a lot of people," says Anderson. "It wasn't about living in the gray area in between, and that's a really exciting development that's come in the last couple of years, not having to fit into either category."

Social media has also helped shine a light on the truth that queer people of color experience unique struggles because of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination that target their intersecting identities. Thomas Mondragon, a practicing psychologist and professor at Antioch University who specializes in LGBTQ+ mental health, says that finding peers on social media can become a lifeline for many

Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) to share their emotions and experiences with those in their community. "Even just finding someone on TikTok can give that impression, like, 'Oh, I'm not alone,' and some of the biggest hindrances and contributions to mental health issues is feeling lonely and isolated and cut off," he says.

It was with the help of a community like this that Gaia Tabron realized their truest self. Tabron, an Afro-Indigenous pre-vet student at Boston University who now exclusively uses they/them/their pronouns, spent hours every day at the beginning of quarantine discussing gender and sexuality with other Black LGBTQ+ people in Twitter group chats. Through these conversations, they finally understood that they, too, existed outside of the binary mold of "boy" or "girl." They posted to their Twitter account, @lesfemmeffatale, where they had over 3,000 followers at the time. The tweet simply read: "She/they," with no further explanation, but everyone knew what they meant. They received an outpouring of support in the comments section, which they would receive again when they decided to stop using she/her/hers pronouns and then again when they came out as bisexual in 2021. They would come out IRL later, but



their Twitter followers were among the first to know every time. "It was kind of weird for me to be like, 'Okay, I'm going to tweet about this,' but also, I just felt like that was the best way for me to do it," says Tabron. "A lot of my connections and a lot of people I care about access me through Twitter, and so it was kind of like sitting your family around the table and telling them the news, but virtually."

Today, Tabron has over 40,000 followers on their new account, @nonbinarybooty. They attract followers for their memeable, often raunchy Tweets about pop culture mixed with leftist political commentary and peppered with selfies. One of their most popular tweets, which has over 28K likes, reads: "if u have a crush on me and it's genuine speak now or forever hold ur peace cuz i'm bout to go outside in this thunderstorm and hold a fork to the sky." They continue to support other trans and nonbinary people online by encouraging their followers to donate to crowdfunding campaigns, sharing petitions, and sending them encouraging comments.

As the younger members of Gen Z and the following generations grow up and come out, Anderson thinks binary labels likely won't be so strictly defined. Many young queer people refuse to take labels at all, and, if they do, their labels often change over time. Coming out may also become more casual for some; after all, you may not need to sit down with your parents and have a discussion about coming out if they see that you've changed your pronouns in your Instagram bio.

Before the pandemic, Mo Wood, a Syracuse University alumnus who uses they/them/theirs pronouns, did not know anyone who used gender-neutral pronouns. In the months prior to coming out as nonbinary, their all-knowing TikTok For You Page began to trade their regular content about pop-punk music, anime, and Dungeons and Dragons for dozens of videos about nonbinary and gender non-conforming people discussing their identities. Wood, who had struggled with their gender identity in high school, felt seen by these TikToks. The more they liked, the more would show up on their algorithmically-curated FYP. They can't pinpoint the moment that they realized they identify as nonbinary, but the videos stirred something fundamental in them. They first expressed their newfound identity to their boyfriend at the time,

with whom they shared these TikToks. Eventually, they came out to their mother and certain members of their extended family. They also made their own TikTok about the process. It begins with a photo of Wood from January 2020. Their shoulder-length chestnut hair and gold hoop earrings frame a pouting face. Then, the video cuts to another photo of them from December 2020 sticking their tongue out in a laugh while pulling down on a beanie that covers their turquoise, ear-length hair. The caption reads: "Amazing what trauma does to a person."

Just as social media can overflow with support for LGBTQ+ youth like Tabron and Wood, it also contains plenty of hate and prejudice that can damage someone's psyche. After all, just because positive spaces exist on social media does not mean that all anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice will disappear. Because of their Twitter following, Tabron regularly becomes involved in heated quote-tweet battles with users who try to invalidate their identities. When one user told them that they were "a grown ass woman confused on their gender" in November 2021, Tabron retorted with "i'm non-binary and you could really cry about it cuz i'll never be so insecure about myself and my identity to the point where i sit around in the internet trying to tell other people who they are & what they should be." Tabron is somewhat used to the virtual vitriol, but they recognize that other, younger queer kids may be more sensitive. Both Anderson and Mondragon also worry about this, as well as long-term psychological effects that online spaces may have. While they agree social media creates valuable community, apps like Twitter and TikTok cannot replace the psychological need for face-to-face connection. "My concern about gay and trans folks [nowadays] is, how do you discover [your identity] when you can't touch somebody? How do you discover that when you're physically by yourself?" says Anderson.

Regardless, Gen Z continues to use social media as both a mirror and a diary through which they can see themselves reflected and reflect on themselves. Sometimes, posting it online to strangers might be a lot easier than telling people you care about. That's the thing with social media; there's this whole platform of people you don't really know but have a connection with."



# DINNER TABLE DISCUSSIONS

Pack it up Love, Simon – adults can come out too.

Words by Sarah Dolgin

Art by Hallie Meyer

As I meandered upstairs following the scent of freshly made quesadillas, I noticed that my mom had set the table for dinner.

My heart sank.

To some, setting the table for family dinner may not seem out of the ordinary, but in my household, a set table is a surefire sign that there is going to be a serious conversation. Growing up with a single mom who works late at her multiple jobs and a younger sister, we spent most evenings recapping our days from the couch eating late-night takeout while engaging in casual and hilariously inappropriate banter.

I went through all of the possible scenarios in my head as I filled our water glasses and placed them on the table. There were even coasters, which fed my anxiety beyond belief.

The first thing that came to mind was that she was sick. Or maybe she lost her job? Was she getting back together with my dad? Ha — definitely not. The cold sweat accumulated as I waited for the impending news.

My sister glanced at me with a look that perfectly encapsulated my inner monologue of concerns. *Shit — she felt it too.*

Finally, my mom finished cooking her famous cheese quesadillas and took her seat at the table.

*Does she have on makeup?* I thought to myself. It seemed like she had even put effort into her appearance at our typically casual family dinner, which was a very alarming breach of our big-t-shirt-no-pants dress code.

She cleared her throat.

"Girls, I want you to know that you always come first," she began. "You know that, right?"

We nodded reluctantly as she started to speak again.

"I wanted to tell you girls that I've started seeing someone... I've started seeing a woman," she said quietly, shrinking into her seat as she uttered the last word.

We almost didn't hear her.

My sister and I simultaneously sighed with relief.

"Mom, are you kidding me? I thought you were going to tell us something bad," I said.

I felt so disheartened that she thought we were going to be disappointed or upset with her that she had found someone to be with, and had found out something new about herself that she had not been able to explore when she was married to our dad. She hadn't been with anyone since she had left my dad five years prior and we had been worrying that she was holding herself back from finding companionship and romance on our behalf.

Thankfully, we were wrong and she found someone — no matter her sexuality, we were simply happy that she was happy.

Although she was relieved we took the news well, she worried about what people in our small town were going to say, and how people would react at the elementary school she taught at if they found out.

It was then that we realized she didn't really want us to tell anyone because she didn't feel comfortable or safe outwardly expressing her identity. She didn't owe it to anyone to let them know that she discovered she was also interested in women, but I also felt so proud of her and wanted her to feel comfortable sharing this part of herself

with others when she was ready.

When friends would ask who the woman at my house all the time was and I would say my mom's "friend," it felt weird and forced because anyone with half a working brain cell could tell that she was more than a friend.

One night, I called a trusted friend of mine to catch up and mentioned my mom's girlfriend. The silence on the other end of the line was deafening.

"That's so random and weird," she eventually said. I couldn't believe my ears.

The next time I spoke with this so-called friend, she let me know that she and her family discussed the matter and also thought it was "weird" that my mom was seeing a woman.

My face burned.

To no one's surprise, my dad didn't take it well either. Before my sister and I passed our driving tests (which was a miracle when it finally happened), my dad had to take us to and from his apartment every other weekend. Yes, I'm referring to the lovely divorce arrangements where every child loves to haphazardly pack a bag to accommodate each parent's respective weekend.

As if it wasn't awkward enough, my dad refused to ever meet my mom's girlfriend. He couldn't even

bring himself to set foot in our house to wait if we were running late when he picked us up. I told myself it was just too painful for him to meet my mom's new love interest, but I knew deep down that he was also confused and hurt by my mom's embracement of her newfound identity.

Oh — and let's not forget my super religious uncle's uncanny timing when sending my mom YouTube clips about saving herself in the eyes of Jesus after meeting her girlfriend at our family Fourth of July party.

If my family and friends couldn't pull their shit together to support my mom in her new relationship, even from a distance, how would we safely navigate the world of people who knew her peripherally?

I also didn't anticipate the fact that my straight teenage self would become instantaneously hypersensitive and attuned to discourse about queer, specifically woman-loving-woman

relationships. I wish I had always been aware of the harmful rhetoric surrounding relationships stemming from heteronormativity, but I developed an extra ear for problematic statements and would feel a heightened sense of rage knowing that these nasty judgments would be passed on to my mom if people knew.

In the hallway, I suddenly noticed whispers: "When is X gonna come out already— did you see what she was wearing today?" or some other wild and stereotypical commentary for a high school hallway.

While the harsh reality that not everyone was going to accept my mom was something that made me both discouraged and scared, I came to appreciate the household of acceptance that I had taken for granted my entire life.

Although our house may have been smaller and more modest than the rest in our town, with less fancy furniture and fewer gadgets to impress

friends and family with, my mom made our home the home. Friends of mine who did not want to tell their parents about anything from new developments in sexuality to issues involving drinking and other teenage taboos in our town would seek out my mom's perspective and support.

Having a parent come out later in life and shamelessly be herself in the face of adversity not only inspired me to advocate for people who are not as lucky to be able to do the same, but helped me weed out the people in our lives whose small-mindedness came to light.

In the years since my mom set the table to announce her new relationship, our table no longer has places set for the same people. Some places have been removed, and others have been added. But what's remained the same is our ever-growing love and respect for my mom and her kickass quesadillas.





# DELVING INTO "DAYS OF GIRLHOOD"

*Jerk* dissects backlash over Dylan Mulvaney's sharing of her trans experience.

**Words by** Julia Walker and Fifi Azzara

**Art by** Thelma Gies

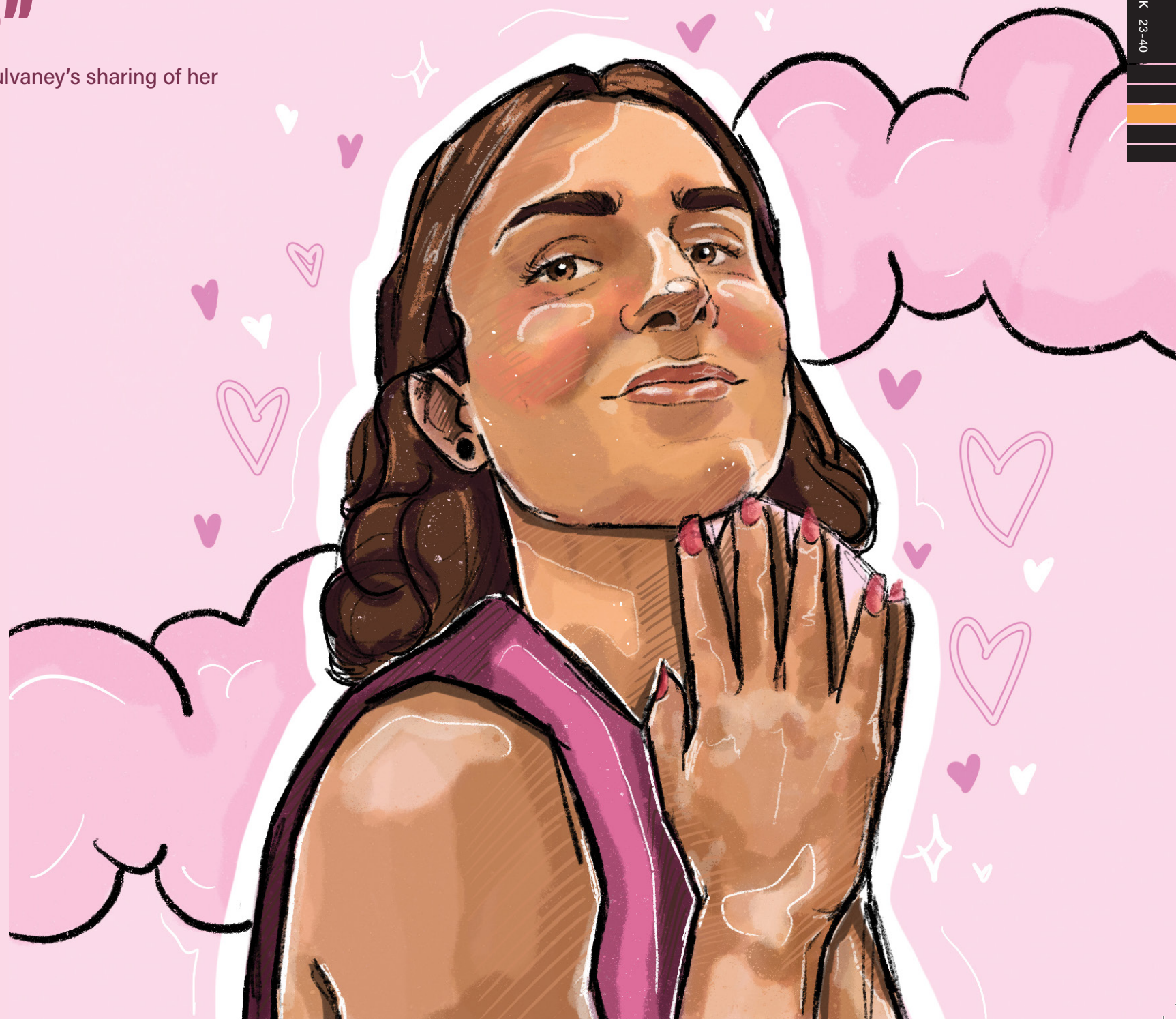
**Decked out in** red lipstick, gradient pink nails, and a white turtleneck, Dylan Mulvaney announced to TikTok that she was on "day one of being a girl." To describe this milestone, she noted:

"I've already cried three times. I wrote a scathing email that I did not send, I ordered dresses online that I couldn't afford, and then when someone asked me how I was, I said 'I'm fine!' When I wasn't fine. How'd I do ladies? Good? Girl power!" She used grand hand gestures and nodded her brunette bob up and down while she described what she thought to be the most difficult parts of being a woman.

It has now been 216 days of Mulvaney documenting her journey on Tik Tok, racking up 8.2 million followers since early this March. Mulvaney's series, "Days of Girlhood," consists of Mulvaney announcing how many days it has been since she transitioned and explaining something new she's learned since transitioning.

Transgender creators on TikTok are overfamiliar with backlash from the cisgender community. Many of the negative reactions to Mulvaney's "Days of Girlhood" series, however – are from the trans community itself. Much of this retaliation focuses on Mulvaney's glamorization of transitioning genders, which is increasingly hard for those with less privilege or those in minority communities, over-simplification of what it means to be a woman, and the use of the word "girl" in her videos.

These points underscore the trans community's main point of contention: Mulvaney is an unrealistic representation of the trans experience.



"Trans folks are not a monolith," said SU professor Chaz Antoine Barracks, who has a research focus on the power of joy in media representation of marginalized communities. "A white woman in this country has a very different experience in this country than a Black trans woman."

Mulvaney's videos are usually happy – prancing around in swan dresses, trying out Hailey Bieber nails, excitedly pulling Trader Joe's items out of paper bags for grocery hauls, dancing and singing in her living room.

"My life is going pretty well," Mulvaney announced in a TikTok this October. "I'm pretty happy."

Mulvaney shows a transition experience that is joyful, beautiful, and mostly positive. Some people believe it is hopeful to see someone have such a positive transition experience, others find Mulvaney's content challenging because they did not have such positive transition experiences themselves.

Chloe Ryan, a transgender woman who addressed a video to Mulvaney, feels the latter. "I think what you're doing is really important," Ryan said. "I also think that your content scared me because I don't remember having your optimism. Watching your content hurts a little."

Ryan has a GoFundMe set up because she does not have insurance to pay for hormone replacement therapy. Ryan is raising money for this therapy and possible surgery to help her gender dysphoria. She states in her GoFundMe description these things would make her feel safer, since having more feminine features from hormones and surgery will lessen the chance of someone immediately recognizing her as transgender and behaving violently toward her. With 9,000 followers on Tik Tok (significantly less than Mulvaney), Ryan has been unable to reach her fundraising goal.

For someone like Ryan to watch Mulvaney film her surgical consults or electrolysis for her facial hair with ease and without financial barriers can be hurtful and confusing, as Ryan shared in her video.

Other members of TikTok's transgender community have said it's distressing for Mulvaney to represent transitioning in a rainbows and butterflies fashion, when for transgender people with depression, anxiety, or other mental struggles,

transitioning can be extremely challenging and even a low point. Dylan has addressed the depression many transgender people face when addressing those who cyberbully members of the transgender community on TikTok.

"I'm very glad that you're doing it to me, and not to another trans person," Mulvaney said while addressing creators making mocking videos about her. "But if you had made this video while I was maybe depressed or, God forbid, suicidal ...that would be on you. That would be evil of you. It is evil. And I can't have you making these videos about other trans people. That's why I'm glad it's about me and not about them. Because I don't know how other trans people's mental health is right now."

Another source of backlash toward Mulvaney is the fact that she might, at times, oversimplify what it means to be a woman. This concern started after her first video in the "Days of Girlhood" series, when she said her first day of girlhood consisted of buying clothes she couldn't afford, being afraid to send emails, and suppressing her emotions for the comfort of someone else. She has since come forward admitting that some videos in the beginning of the series were problematic, highlighting major stereotypes about women and framing them in a way that convinced viewers that fitting into these stereotypes is what – in a way – qualified her as a girl.

Since her first video of the series, Mulvaney has spoken up about her experiences with catcalling, being sexualized while taking an Uber, and being misgendered as a trans woman – parts of being a woman and transgender woman that are much more central than buying clothes she can't afford.

Lastly (well not lastly – but there are more criticisms than we can cover), are those offended that Mulvaney uses the word "girl" in her Days of Girlhood series rather than the word "woman." Being 25 years old, people found it strange that Mulvaney was considering herself a "girl" and thought this may be linked to the exploitation of young girls in the media and the problematic cosplaying of grown women as children (ie. the slutty student Halloween costume, Melanie Martinez's obsession with acting as a baby in her music videos, TLC's My Strange Addiction episode of a woman who sleeps in a jumbo crib).

The transgender community has faced an

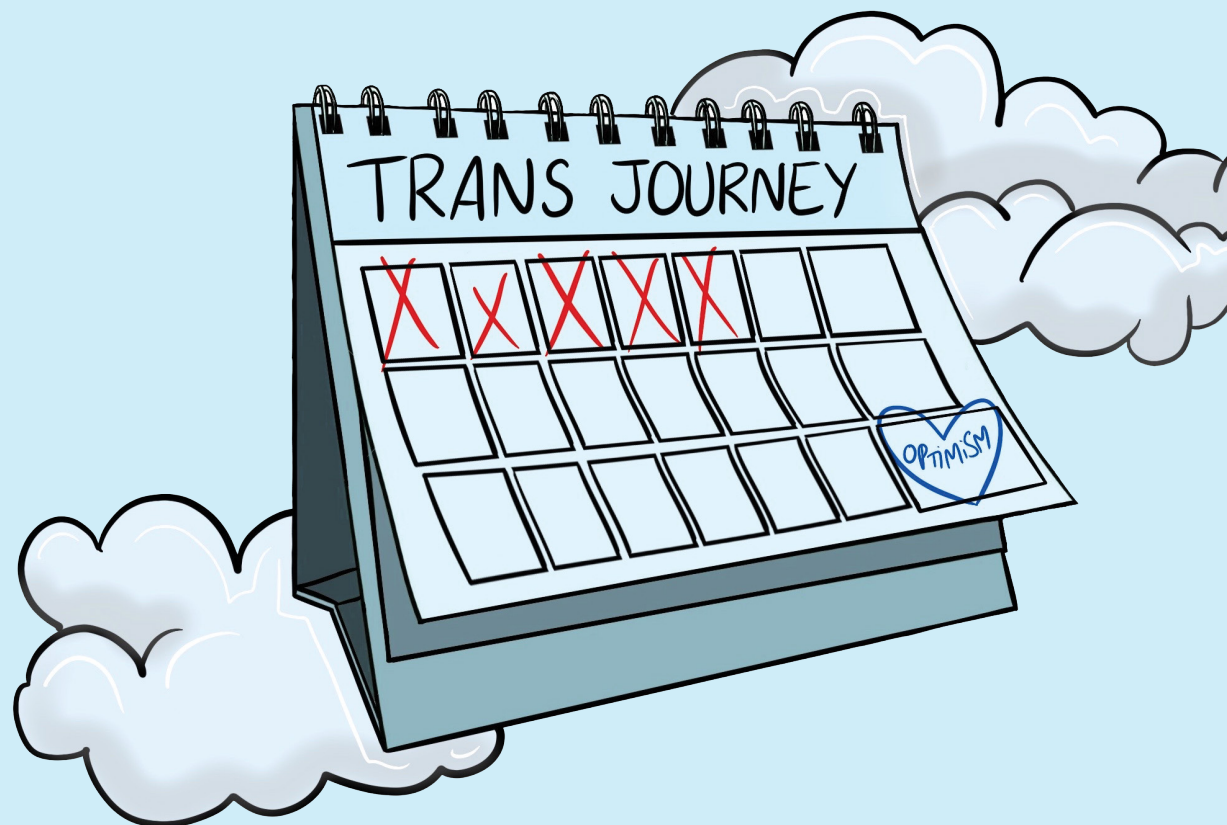
extremely harmful stereotype that transgender people are sexually predatory in nature. This stereotype arises when cisgender women claim they do not feel safe with transgender people using their bathrooms, thinking that men act as transgender women in order to gain access to a women's environment. This stereotype also reaches to stereotype transgender people as more likely to be pedophiles and sexual offenders. Mulvaney herself said she has gotten comments and messages calling her a "predator." Some members of the trans Tik Tok community worried that Mulvaney labeling herself as a "girl" had the potential to propel these stereotypes.

However, Mulvaney had a reasonable explanation as to why she decided to call her series Days of Girlhood rather than "Days of Womanhood."

"For me, the 'girl' feels great because I never got to be one growing up," said Mulvaney. "It feels very able to make mistakes, growing and changing and evolving," Mulvaney said that during her transition, she was exploring both what it means to be a woman and enjoying some parts of being a girl that she missed when she was younger.

The transgender community (especially minorities within the community) is more vulnerable to stereotypes, prejudice, and violence than any other community in the country. Mulvaney has offended members of the community by downplaying the weight of being transgender in America and feeding into the stereotypes of what it means to be a transgender woman, but has addressed many concerns about her content and apologized repeatedly.

Mulvaney's transition does not represent all transitions of every transgender person in the world. This is because no transitions are the same. Many criticize her for overglamorizing transitioning – which can be very difficult for those with less privilege. However, many of the other mistakes Mulvaney has been condemned for have been just that – mistakes. Mistakes that come with learning what it means to be "a girl."



PHOTOESSAY:

# REST IN PIECES, LABELS

Words by Karla Perez  
Photos by Grace Hayden

**Gay. Straight. Trans. Bi. Queer. Non-binary. Cisgender.** Some people find comfort in labels, some people find pressure. Labels can be empowering in finding a sense of belonging, or, depending on the person, they can stifle individuality and self-expression.

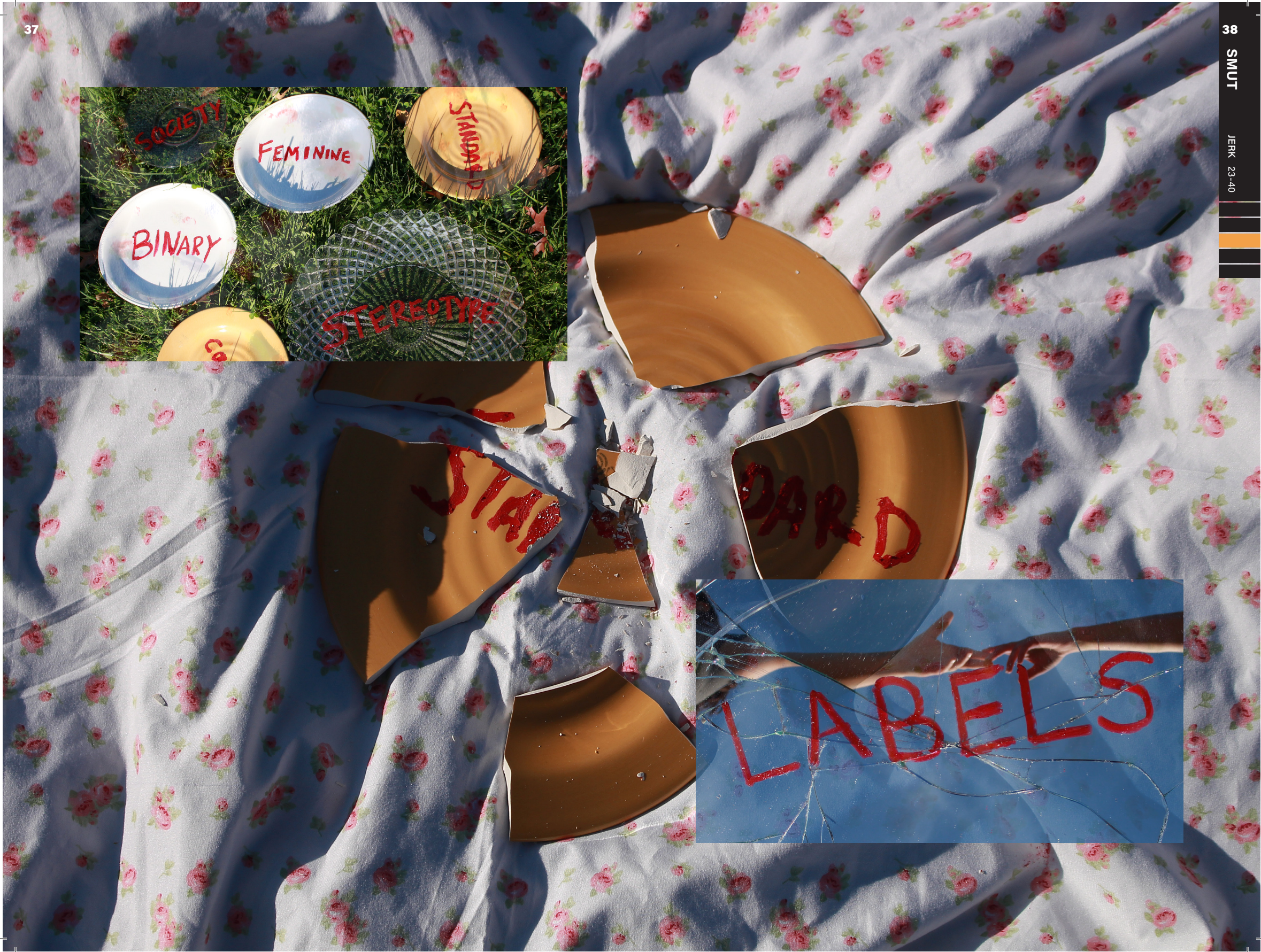
With labels come stereotypes and expectations that limit the changing nature of identity. For those who feel suffocated and restricted by labels, breaking out of them finally gives a feeling of liberation. This photo essay symbolically shatters the confining side of labels with the hope of freeing all those who find themselves restrained by them.

In celebrating the act of coming out, it is important to recognize the individual decision of not coming out, or coming out multiple times. For some, labels feel like a definition set in stone, undermining the fluidity of their sexuality. They

might even feel like coming out is more of a burden they owe to our heteronormative society. Labels can be a guidebook on how to act, talk, dress, and even love, creating mental shortcuts that associate ways of behaving or negative connotations with a word. Nobody should ever feel forced to act a certain way to conform to the dictionary definition society gives to labels. So whether you decide to embrace your labels or break out of them, the key is to remember that You. Decide.

No one word – or label – can encapsulate the complexity of a person. Especially if the person themselves did not choose that label. We should be the ones to dictate the labels we select for ourselves or the ones we don't. In the grand scheme of things, labels are just words compared to the colorful, undefinable essence of identity. And with that, rest in pieces, labels.





SPEAKEASY:

# LORRAINE'S LASTING LEGACY

Lorraine Koury's vision survives through her employees, fashion, and impact on the queer community.

Words by Lily Menk  
Photo by Elijah Sykes

To her friends, family, and employees, Lorraine Koury was the neon light of Westcott. Founder of Boom Babies, a women's clothing store known for lavish dresses and eccentric vintage items, she lit up the community with style, kindness, and inclusivity.

36 years ago, Koury became a business owner. The store, standing on the same strip it was founded on, is in the light of her death on September 15th.

Her "Boom girls," the women Koury entrusted and loved to work under her, remember her as a role model.

"She was very fun, very giggly. She loved to dance," said employee Erin Vanzandt, who has worked at Boom Babies for two years.

Koury was always an active supporter of the LGBTQ+ community, welcoming gay and trans youth since the start of her business.

"Someone that transitioned had worked here, and that was back in the 80s," Vanzant said. "Early on, she was very progressive."

This progressiveness continued into how Koury marketed her clothing and hired her employees. To her, fashion had no gender. Employees were hired without question of their sexuality or how they expressed themselves.

"Her space is just so welcoming that it helped people come out," said Vanzandt.

Koury was known to many for the roles she played in employees' lives – as a businesswoman, ally, friend, second mother, or all of the above. She

welcomed people into her life and community and supported them unconditionally.

Vanzandt recounted her favorite memory of Koury. "We had a Christmas party where we all dressed up as cowboys or aliens, and I wore one of her costumes that she wore when she was in her twenties."

Businesses around the Westcott and greater Syracuse area expressed their heartbreak over the loss of Koury.

"She was a true force and left an incredible impact on so many people," Recess Coffee posted to their Facebook page.

"Everyone seems to be coming in asking if they can do anything for us, other businesses, asking if they can do anything," said Vanzandt. As an owner for almost four decades, her commitment to the store never wavered. "It's definitely hard. Like realizing how much she actually did without us noticing," said Vanzandt.

Lorraine Koury's legacy will undoubtedly be one of glamor, acceptance, and fun. Boom Babies, still loud and bright on the main strip of Westcott, continues to have its doors open to anyone who may find their way there.

DISCOVERY SYR:

# NECTAR ESPRESSO BAR & VINTAGES

Marginalized identities have a space to bloom at Nectar Espresso Bar & Vintages.

Words by Emane Haque  
Photo provided

Most of the tote-wearing, relatively with the times, 20-something population seems to be obsessed with either coffee or thrifting. Nectar Espresso Bar & Vintages, located on Salina St., conveniently has both. But unlike most 20-somethings (and we're calling ourselves out here, too), there is no air of pretentiousness with Nectar. Instead, customers have described the cozy space as reminiscent of a grandma's living room.

Tucked under the stairs of McCarthy Mercantile, Nectar is a Harry Potter-style nook filled with aged gems of all kinds. Depression-era dishware, eclectic knickknacks, and amusing artwork line the walls, many of the pieces available for purchase. Not only is Nectar styled with thrifted items, but it embodies all things antique by serving customers with vintage glassware and teacups as well.

Actualizing the concept of a joint coffee bar and vintage store was a leap of faith for sisters Nicole and Kayla Guindon. Returning to their hometown of Syracuse, the Guindons felt a creative push during the COVID-19 pandemic to venture into entrepreneurship. Although the sisters had enjoyed thrifting and coffee as personal hobbies, they began Nectar for the simple reason they "couldn't find the kind of coffee that we wanted in Syracuse," says Kayla Guindon.

Coffee connoisseurs, especially those with a taste for European-style beverages, can delight in Nectar's Espresso bar, which favors cortados and

macchiatos over the typical cup of Joe. Patrons can also enjoy one of Nectar's original creations, which are often seasonally based.

Beyond vintage finds and caffeine, the Guindons wanted their business to be a place for those overlooked. Kayla, who identifies as LGBTQ+, feels that Nectar allows people to feel comfortable embracing their identities. Nectar hosts various monthly clubs, such as "Bored Gays and Board Games," open to only those queer identifying. It's meant to be just a safe space to hang out, amongst classic and quirky board games alike. They also have hosted a plus-size inclusive clothing vendor event, fabulously titled "Fatties and Baddies." Their mission statement reads: "the goal is to provide exclusive products for plus-size humans to peruse and purchase without any parameters." Their weekly clubs include the Yarn/Textile Club and a Fantasy Fiction Book Club, both of which are open to all.

The Nectar staff didn't expect how popular the monthly club would become. "We thought it was going to be us and our friends, but we've met a lot of new people. It's been really fun seeing people come in, and they're making friendships. That's cool for us to be kind of facilitating this," said Kayla. "We created this weird little community, and that's made it worth it for me."

# Screen Queens

Photos by Carmen Miller  
Modeling by Maya Terzi, Matt Latvis,  
Russell Tom Sun, Rachel Arauz











STRIPPED:

# ODE TO THE MIDRIFF

Time for men to up their fashion game.

Words by Russell Tom Sun  
Art by Kodah Thompson

Men have been dressing like SLUTS these days, and we are all for it. It is about time men start embracing their sexuality and we see a change in how men wear or style their clothes, especially their tops. For a long time, men have been expected to wear baggy and unflattering clothes that cover up their body, and more often than not (on this

campus, at least) it's a flannel and irrelevant graphic tee. But the flannel thing has been a bit overdone and the t-shirt your mom got you for Christmas two years ago is not doing the job anymore.

Trends come in and out of style, and so do hemlines. Short shorts are an example of a clothing trend that was huge in the 80s for all men and then

after a couple decades was stereotyped into being something for non-hetero men. But now.. all of the straight men came crawling back to the five-inch inseam...and we're glad they did. Although the hypebeast-Yeezy-wave gave (a disturbing amount of) emphasis on oversized outfits, it once was much cooler to show off a little skin \*wink\*. I mean, it doesn't help, especially on a predominately heterosexual campus like Syracuse, where wearing a Bass Pro Shop t-shirt and shorts is the standard for party outfits. We have had enough of these bland looks, and we know that you can do something more original. The fact those types of outfits are even considered attractive... that's a conversation for later! Now is the time to bring up the length of shorts and shirts. You'll look sexy, trust us. And if you're brave enough, maybe take inspo from Thom Brown's jockstrap runway look.

Thankfully there has been a resurgence of 70s and 80s menswear in major fashion trends and we are starting to slowly (like, turtle-pace slow) see men become more experimental with their choices of tops. Firstly: the crop top. You can never go wrong with one! It's simple, you can make one at home, it makes your outfit look proportionate, it's easy to throw on, comfy, you don't get too hot or too cold, and when men stretch their arms you get to see their slutty waists, happy trails, and their torsos. It's the perfect staple! Another trend making its rounds is skin-tight, sheer shirts. Sheer shirts are such a cute look; they allow people to see you have a sense of style while also giving them a slight preview of their

body beneath the light layer. Plus, sheer shirts are incredibly comfortable when you're in a packed, hot place like a club, a house party, or at the Orange Crate when we occasionally win a game.

Now let's discuss the famous cropped tank tops. Usually you can see people wearing these to the gym and looking all hot and sweaty (we don't mind), but as of late, we've recently seen the boys wearing them out and about, and why the hell not? The cropped tank shows off the arms, allowing people a preview of who you are, and the cut-off length allows you to subtly show off your midriff. It's the best shirt for those who are interested in slowly tapping into their inner slut, where you're showing a little but not too much just yet! We at Jerk believe everyone should take their time stepping into the slut world: being a slut is an ever-evolving art form, but we're here to help you.

Another trend that has really taken over the fashion scene is the deep-V button-up shirt. We LOVE the deep-V shirts. The reason we're such avid fans is because men get to show off their chests while drawing your eyes to the center of the body. You can even spice it up by layering some chains, some body glitter, or just show off that growing chest hair.

These fashion options are as daring as they seem, so don't get spooked. Men are too often put into boxes based on the fabric they put on their bodies. Just because a man wants to wear crop tops or sparkles does not mean they have to identify with the queer community; although it is worth mentioning the trend of adapting queer aesthetics for the purpose of attracting women or attention (or both!). We all saw the stream of TikTok videos in quarantine of men painting their nails and advertising them as a genius way to pull women. Some critics of Harry Styles even call out his use of flamboyant costuming and makeup, arguing that he shouldn't be profiting off of a persona specifically catered to LGBTQ+ audiences without himself coming out as one. But he doesn't owe anyone a label and neither do you!



FORM AND FUNCTION: How to dress like...

# FANCY NANCY

**Words by** Cassia Soodak  
**Photo by** James Hutchinson  
**Modeling by** Ashlee Cypress

Although **Fancy Nancy** is kids media and doesn't necessarily talk about gender and sexuality, her way of living – her celebration of the extravagant – is inherently queer representation. For **Fancy Nancy**, personal style isn't about standing out, it's about being authentic to who she is. As a child she isn't "supposed" to be obsessed with fancy culture, but her unapologetic self-expression is similar to the way queer people have always stood out regardless of the norm. Drag and ballroom culture are just a few examples of how queer people, specifically Black and brown trans women, have revolutionized queer culture. **Fancy Nancy** follows in their footsteps.

**SKIRT OVER PANTS:** Fancy or early 2000s, either way you'll be thanking us in the colder months.

**PATTERNED SOCKS AND HEELS:** Lost a sock in the dryer? Mismatched socks are highly encouraged to pair with your most fabulous heels.

## EXCESSIVE ACCESSORIES:

More accessories = fancier fit. It's simple math (and the only math Nancy is willing to do).

**PUFFY SHIRT:** Big sleeves, lots of lace, and lots of layers. Wear it like royalty.

**FLUFFY TUTU:** The pinker and fluffier the better. Consider this your ballerina era.

**BLANKET AROUND WAIST:** Blankets are more versatile than you might think! Tie one around your waist for warmth, a nap, or a picnic on the quad.

CLOSET CASE:

# TWIN FLAMES

**Words by** Makenna John  
**Photos by** Noa Putman  
**Art Direction by** Makenna John

*It takes two to make a thing go right, two is better than one, you've heard it all. So why not elevate your self-expression by multiplying it by two with your best friend?*

**SAM OATS:** I met Megan the first night of freshman year and our friendship has become synonymous with my time at Syracuse. We love to go thrifting together, and sometimes one of us will pick out something that makes the other one go "Oooh, if you aren't getting that, I am." I feel like we are just drawn to the same things. We joke about combining our closets and basically do whenever we're getting ready for a night out.

**MEGAN KAYSER:** We always say that we're synonyms because we are so alike, and we've been besties since the first day of freshman year. The matching shirts were inspired because we go almost everywhere together even when only one of us was invited (buy one, get one free).

Coordinating outfits isn't always intentional and I feel like it's a product of being best friends and roommates for so long. We like to call it "having our Bluetooth turned on" when we have the same thoughts or get ready separately and end up wearing outfits that complement each other.





# INKED, OUT, AND PROUD

The good, the bad, and the fabulous within the queer tattoo industry.

Words by Sadiya Kherani and Teddy Ryan  
Photos by Maya Lockwood

Tattoos are a form of self-expression. Whether gay or straight, man, woman, or nonbinary, and no matter your ethnicity, tattoos are something you can use to tell a story on your body - and that body mod starts with the artist.

Most of the tattoo industry remains hidden behind closed doors, including the experience of queer women. While these women are helping to tell clients' stories, the artist's background plays an important role in their work too.

Jennifer Cordero (she/her) is the co-owner of Cordero Collective Tattoos and Beauty Bar. Run by Cordero and her wife, the pair design tattoos and permanent makeup. Cordero specializes in portrait designs, hand drawing all of her pieces, while her wife works in cosmetics.

Jennifer Cordero is welcoming, eccentric and chatty. Her door had a huge pride flag, and cute Halloween decorations were hung up around the studio, along with plants and gorgeous displays of

# Cordero Collective



some of her personal art. Cordero's career began in Dallas, TX. While her work ethic was always compared to men, she was hardly ever given time off, and she was forced to do a lot more cleaning than her male coworkers. "I only hired you because having a brown person is a gimmick and having a female is a gimmick," one of the owners once said to her, recalling he was: "literally using me as a sideshow."

No one wants to hear they were hired for their identity, rather than what they offer. Working in the south, the sexist environment didn't end there. "If one of the guys was having a threesome with somebody that night, [they'd say] 'I need tomorrow off I'm having a threesome' 'alright dude cool.'" When Cordero requested time off work, she was usually disregarded.

Becoming a tattoo artist wasn't always in the cards for Cordero. Originally thinking of going to art school, she decided to learn the ropes from her local shop in Texas to make some money for school. She eventually decided to stay in the tattoo space. "A lot of artists make money after they die, like their work is important after they die, but with tattooing it is instant, I am creative every single day." While working as an artist, Cordero nearly quit three times due to the boys club culture, and blatant homophobia she faced.

After many years in Texas Cordero made her way up to Central New York and landed in Syracuse. She worked at a studio here for about five years before meeting her wife. Eventually, the two decided it was time to move on to bigger things and opened their own business. Her parlor is

truly unique to the area, as Cordero's wife runs the cosmetic side of their business, offering permanent make-up services in the back room of their studio. Together, the two have become a voice for the queer community in Syracuse. They represented their studio in the Central New York pride parade as well as an event called *Still Not Asking For It* where all proceeds went to sexual assault victims.

While she hasn't had a ton of opportunities to design queer-themed tattoos, she enjoys incorporating her sexuality into her work whenever possible. "I don't tattoo that many queer people... I have a relatively diverse, but straight clientele. When they walk in the shop, we try to make it a point to represent [the queer community]."

Looking ahead, she and her wife intend to

move to Toronto, which was cited in recent polls as the second most LGBTQ+ friendly city in North America. Cordero and her wife are excited to bring their perspectives, culture and business experience to Canada, and distance themselves from the concerning trends they see with women and LGBTQ+ rights in the United States.

Cordero Collective Tattoos is a family-run, pride-loving tattoo parlor in Syracuse. The owner has come from such an interesting background, puts the love of tattooing into all the work she does, and engages in the local community however she can. You can find her on instagram @corderocollective and, of course, go get some fab tattoos from her!

# WE'RE HERE, WE'RE QUEER

A dive into queerness – past, present, and future.

Words by Gray Reed  
Art by Lang Delapa

**To sum up** queer history and culture in a single piece of media is likely impossible. To do so would require understanding queerness in every sense of the word, a feat that no member of the LGBTQ+ community would be able to accomplish. There is so much more to the queer community than fighting for same-sex marriage rights – there are unique experiences held by each individual and differing perspectives as a result of intersectionality.

In this issue, Jerk hopes to explore different facets of the queer experience. You will read a first-hand account about experiences with queerness, hypersexuality, and prudishness. Let us walk-through through the history of queer criminalization, examining through a unique lens just some of the legal discrimination the LGBTQ+ community has overcome. Jerk will explore media representation of queer individuals – are these portrayals harmful or beneficial to the community?

Discussing these experiences of the queer community is one step in the right direction, although it is important to note that the discussion does not end here. Actively listening to queer people and their stories, regardless of whether or not their life experiences mirror our preconceived notions of queer identity, is crucial in understanding our multi-layered, complex community.

While major strides have been made toward equality for queer individuals, the pursuit of equality continues. Findings presented by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law reveal LGBTQ+ individuals in the United States

are more susceptible to socioeconomic struggles than their non-queer counterparts, with 27% of the community reporting some form of food insecurity and 25% reporting an annual income of less than \$24K in 2017.

Additionally in various regions across the country, self-identifying queer populations contain more people of color percentage-wise than straight populations, according to the Williams Institute. In the Northeast alone, 31% of the queer community reported identifying as either African-American or Latino in comparison to 23% reporting from non-queer communities.

The struggles queer individuals face are not solely based on their queerness, but on how that label intersects with class, race, and other identities. This means the fight for LGBTQ+ rights is an intersectional issue.

In addition to recognizing intersectionality when fighting for queer rights, it is equally important to ensure queer youth are provided with the support they need to find acceptance in society. With the passing of the “Don’t Say Gay” bill in Florida this past March, legislation which largely prohibits the discussion of LGBTQ+ topics in schools across the state, it has become apparent that some of those in office do not have the best interest of queer youth in mind. Queer youth already face higher than average mental health concerns, with the Trevor Project reporting in their 2022 National Survey on Queer Youth Mental Health that 45% of LGBTQ+ youth have seriously considered suicide in the past

year, with those who actually attempted more likely to be POC. Additionally, 60% of the community's youth who attempted to seek mental health care were unable to access it. Increased education on these subjects is necessary if we want to normalize the community's existence and ultimately secure proper support. Without including queer narratives in media, individuals will continue to be alienated by their peers and risk developing serious mental health problems.

Queer communities must remain at the forefront of discussions around equality. It is vital that queer stories continue to be shared, queer history is accessibly taught, and that queer representation

in the media can be a part of carving the path for normalizing our community in society.

Allow this package to be a starting place if you have yet to engage yourself with the LGBTQ+ community and their continued fight to be recognized as equal. Take the time to embrace new perspectives and to further educate yourself on the community. It is not too late to contribute to the cause, and I truly hope what we here at Jerk present to you in this issue helps to encourage you to do so.



# LOVE, ACTUALLY?

Despite recent pushes for inclusivity, LGBTQ+ people are still left out of entertainment.

Words by Chloe Langerman  
Art by Lang Delapa

The modern rom-com is a predictable production: boy meets girl, their eyes link, and it's love at first sight. While girl isn't looking for love, boy just perfectly falls into her lap. Despite the typical plot points that may get in their way (disapproving parents, all-too-convenient job transfer across the country), we're always expected to believe in these characters' love. But where do queer people fit into this narrative?

Historically, LGBTQ+ people have rarely been represented in the media, if at all. With the rare LGBTQ+ rep that is out there, it's most

often ignorantly written and stereotypically portrayed. Although in 2022, nearly 12 percent of all TV characters have been LGBTQ+ according to a GLAAD study, this does not mean that all representation has been accurate. Often, when queer characters are on screen, their roles are minimized to caricatures and tokenization. Even if a queer couple is at the center of a work, their romance takes second place to themes surrounding struggles regarding their sexuality as the main narrative arc of the relationship.

Many fan-favorite films, applauded for their

romanticized settings and beautifully shot cinematography, such as *Call Me by Your Name* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* end with heartbreaking endings for queer characters. The assurance in many straight-led films that the main love interests will always find their way back to each other is nowhere near guaranteed in movies centered on LGBTQ+ relationships. While these films may be stunning in their own right, it is also true that they are popular depictions of queer relationships that do not center on love. This absence of wholesome queer love stories leads to invalidation as LGBTQ+ people grow up and do not see queer love represented in the media.

"I experienced a lot of internalized homophobia growing up. Not seeing representation made me feel like I was not normal," says Seth Wintermute, a sophomore at Syracuse.

Many young people consume the majority of their media online, such as on YouTube and Instagram. In the earlier days of these websites, when today's college-age students were in middle or elementary school, a phenomenon of coming-out videos swept YouTube's platform.

"At the time, you had to definitively say if you were one sexuality or the other," says Wintermute.

These often-emotional videos were one of the only places Wintermute says they actually saw queer representation growing up. While these videos often helped young queer people feel validated, it is also true that heteronormative society still largely expects everyone to be straight unless proven otherwise. Coming out videos turn LGBTQ+ people's personal experiences into something very public.

In today's media, strides have definitely been made in representing queer characters. Two thousand sixteen's *Moonlight*, a film that centers on a gay black man and had the first all-black cast to win an Academy Award, is one shining example of representation. 2022's *Fire Island*, a queer adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* that is raunchy and fun unapologetically. Despite the film's flop at the box office, *BROs* is probably the closest thing to the sugary romcoms of the past decades but through a queer lens. Netflix's *Young Royals*, a Swedish TV series about a teenage gay couple sheds light on the restrictions class and race place on young people. The representation

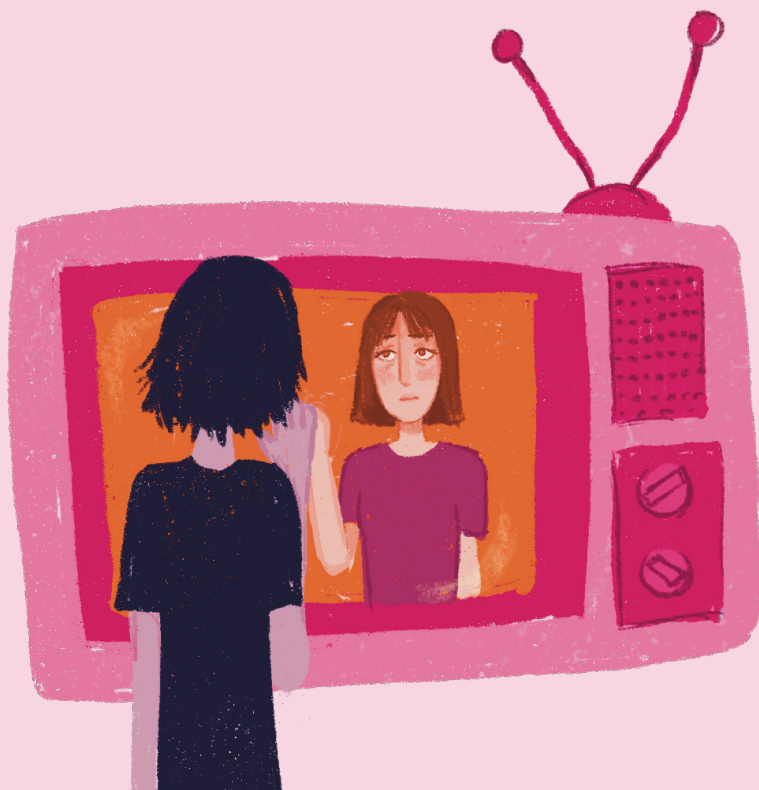
of these pieces of media is incredibly important, but this does not mean that queer depictions are anywhere near perfect.

Sarah Beck, a sophomore at Syracuse, says she also saw very little representation growing up and the representation offered was rooted in stereotypes. "In shows, if there are two gay men they're always very flamboyant and the butt of every joke. It's not their personalities that matter, just that they're queer," she said.

This pattern of queer media made for straight people's enjoyment is very harmful to the LGBTQ+ community. "On Netflix, you see a lot of queer white men shows being preferred over women-led POC shows. You have to understand that not all representation in the queer community is equal," said Wintermute.

Organizations like GLAAD work to promote media that "accelerate[s] acceptance" and affirms that everyone can see themselves in a character on screen. There is immense importance in being able to learn from people who have not seen themselves represented for their entire lives and supporting those who want diverse media representation.

There are an infinite number of stories that have been told and are yet to be told in the media. And for most of history where media has been consumed, LGBTQ people have not been included. It is crucial for queer people to see themselves on screen as a form of validation and normalization that will make queer people less uncomfortable around those who are straight and cis. While there's no doubt that cliché Hallmark romcoms will continue to teach us the spirit of Christmas, the future looks bright for more queer stories to be told.



# MONUMENTAL MOMENTS IN QUEER HISTORY

Your Crash Course on Queer Criminalization.

Words by Isa Naro  
Graphic by Lilly Chidlaw-Mayen

This is a timeline of monumental moments in queer history, but by no means reflects every single significant milestone to date. It merely highlights several major events that are important to recognize and understand as you read different articles throughout this issue of Jerk.

In the last decade, countries like Gabon, Angola, Jamaica, Botswana, India, Belize, etc. are rewriting their policies and abolishing laws targeting and criminalizing same-sex relationships.

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

Starting in 1962, Illinois repealed its laws on sodomy, becoming the first state in the country to decriminalize homosexuality.

The 1978 Briggs Initiative in California was an attempt to ban queer individuals from working in educational settings. Luckily, the attempt failed thanks to San Francisco's openly gay politician Harvey Milk, whose persuasive letter to President Jimmy Carter and "Hope Speech" ultimately defeated this legislation.

In 1981, the first official report of an AIDS diagnosis in LA was made after dozens of healthy gay men reported symptoms of pneumonia. This epidemic took over the 1980s and 90s, killing almost 40 million people to date, and infecting double that. Millions of lives could have been saved if the government responded urgently to the AIDS epidemic and created a public health policy to support the American people, rather than treat the crisis as a "gay" issue.

Finally, in 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay marriage.

In the 1969 Stonewall Riots, queer bar patrons fought back after constant police raids on gay bars. These riots were a huge launch in LGBTQ movements against harassment from law enforcement and a major turning point in the fight for equal rights. Protesters challenged the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness in the DSM, which was finally declassified in 1974.

The 1979 March on Washington was the first national march for LGBTQ+ rights. It took place in Washington, D.C. was attended by almost 80,000 protestors. This march marks a very important point in the evolution of LGBTQ+ advocacy as it nationalized the gay movement, which had been previously minimized to local struggles.

After years of discriminatory laws against queer people, decriminalization expanded in Europe throughout the 1990s. The European Convention on Human Rights prohibited the criminalization of same-sex activity, which was a successful effort to spread democracy throughout Europe and highlight the prevalence of same-sex relationships.

The Ashes Action Protest of 1992 was a protest on the White House lawn in response to the government's very minimal response to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 90s. Over 400,000 people died from the lack of governmental urgency. Protesters scattered the ashes of lost loved ones right outside the White House.

In 2015, landmark case Obergefell v. Hodges argues the stance on same-sex marriage licenses. Obergefell ended up overturning Baker (the opposing voice), requiring all states to issue licenses to same-sex couples, recognizing the validity in same-sex relationships.



# AFFIRMING IDENTITY

Coming to terms with our authentic selves, in past and present.

Words by Joelle de Poto

Art by Lang Delapa

**'I'm not gay, but...'**

This phrase. This fucking phrase. It is the bane of my existence, and yet I've probably said something similar to myself at least a couple hundred times. For a good portion of my life, I experienced internalized homophobia, which manifests itself differently from person to person but generally results in repressed sexuality. Here's the thing about internalized homophobia: it does not give a shit about how accepting your culture or environment is, how accepting your friends and family are, or even how accepting YOU are. It may seem like internalized homophobia cannot affect those who are tolerant of others' sexual orientation, but the fear of straying from the norm can have a chokehold on almost anyone.

If you have suppressed who you are, in order to start the process of reconciling with and accepting your identity, you must unearth the reason behind your shame and fear. As a queer woman, I find that the most pervasive issue in my coming-out journey has been the influence of patriarchal beliefs and institutions. Since I was raised to be Catholic, I

had always seen the heteronormative standard for romantic and sexual relationships, whether it was through the Biblical Creation story or through Catholic marriages and teachings. I had a very binary idea of sex and gender, and I had believed that all women NEEDED men to be happy, even when I began to identify as a feminist.

It was weird. I was trying to understand my queerness while also having this indestructible desire to attain male attention and validation. At the time, I was questioning whether I was bisexual, and I was pretty confident that I was, but I never felt like it was acceptable for me to voice this feeling about my identity. If I'm gay, I can't be married in the Church; I can't kiss my partner in public without feeling paranoid; I can't have the white picket fence. Hell, I didn't even want the fucking white picket fence, but to think that it could be taken away from me was frightening.

Instead of thinking about what I would gain from coming out, I focused on everything I would lose. Of course, coming out does have its trade-offs. There may be disappointed family members, friendship fallouts, weird stares, and so on. In extreme cases, staying in the closet may be a matter of survival. However, there is a lot you can stand to benefit from coming out. Even though it forced me into feelings of vulnerability and discomfort, coming out allowed me to better understand my identity. I am now able to explore my sexuality freely and without an all-consuming sense of fear. At the end of the day, there are certain things about yourself that you can't change. You will not go through a metamorphosis that modifies who you love. What you do have control over is how you explore and express your identity. Even though you may be challenged by others because of who you are and who you love, absolutely no one can take your identity away from you. End of sentence.



# BUT I'M NOT A CHEERLEADER

In which Santana Lopez influences my relationship with sex.

Words by Zoe Glasser | Art by Lang Delapa

About a year after I came out, a French film called *Blue Is the Warmest Color* exploded into the indie-kid zeitgeist. The hype online was paralleled only by My Chemical Romance and jeggings. On a chilly day after school, I leaned back on my twin-sized bed, and let Netflix roll the tape. I watched the protagonist, Adèle, and her blue-haired love interest Emma develop their romance, culminating in the first lesbian sex scene I ever saw. I remember peeking through my fingers and squinting, an invisible force pressing on my ribcage. Sure, it's not abnormal for a 13-year-old to be squeamish about sex; after all, they only learned about it yesterday. The thing is, I sometimes feel that invisible force squeezing my chest at age 21.

When I came out, I immediately dove into the world of my identity, scouring the internet for queer politics, history, literature, and anything else I could get my chipped-black-nail-polished hands on. To this day, my friends sometimes call me "queer elder" because I know so much about the LGBTQ+ community. But there's one topic that still catches in my throat, even after almost 10 years: sex.

In the front of my mind, I have no problem with sex. Would I be on *Jerk* if I did? And yet, when it comes time to chat about crazy hookup stories or write at length about it, I fall uncharacteristically silent.

The first lesbian I ever saw was Santana Lopez. I'm serious— whenever anyone asks who my gay awakening was, I tell them that it was Naya Rivera's bitchy cheerleader character from Ryan Murphy's acclaimed TV show *Glee*. Her performance in the *Rocky Horror* episode completely (ok, maybe not completely) aside, Santana was the first person I ever saw on television who referred to themselves as a lesbian. Though she struggled with her identity at first, Santana ultimately developed a

comfort with her sexuality. But she and her best friend-turned-girlfriend Brittany S. Pierce were similar to Adèle and Emma in ways that I didn't yet understand. They exclusively wore short cheer uniforms. They sang sexual songs on a regular basis— far more so than our darling Rachel Berry. They were referred to as "best friends with benefits" prior to them even dating. They embody what I call the "queer cheerleader" archetype— the girl who seems super straight must wrestle with herself to embrace her identity as a hypersexualized queer woman.

Without realizing it, Santana and Brittany and Adèle and Emma held equal weight in shaping my view of sex with women into one of shame and awkwardness. Naturally, so did other factors; my complex relationship with my own body and health, my neurotic Virgo tendencies, and my general fear of others' judgment, to name a few. Still, when we talk about representation— buzzword alert!— we often discuss how crucial it is for young people to see themselves on screen. As one of my professors once said, "You can't be what you can't see." Although I saw lesbians in entertainment, I never saw lesbians who were awkward, insecure about their bodies, and, let's face it, not conventionally attractive. I only ever saw the queer cheerleader. Now, at age 21, I'm trying to fight that chest-crushing force, and attempt to be what I never saw as a teenager.



AMPLIFIED:

# SAINT LUKE

Saint Luke discusses bedroom pop, his influences, and how to be the shit.

Words by Jackson Barnes  
Photos by JJ Tanaka

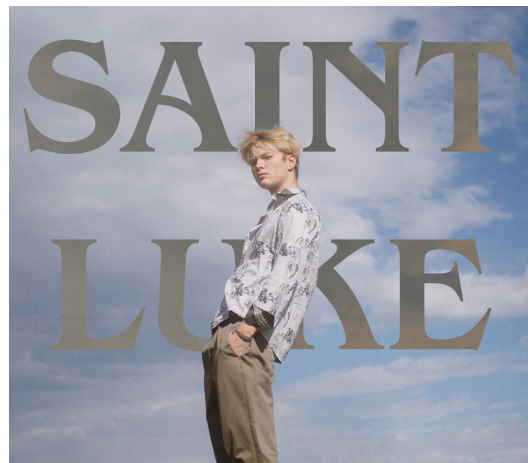
**Saint Luke** is a true internet age artist. When he was 14, he saw Steve Lacy's TedTalk about using iPhone GarageBand. As someone who felt "held back by [his] gear, Luke was inspired after seeing a major influence of his use of the same entry-level tech that he did.

"Now Steve Lacy is on the radio, something I thought only really big people got to do, and it's inspiring because he started at the same place I did," says Luke. But he doesn't want that homemade, bedroom pop style to contain him. "We need to rebrand bedroom pop, because it automatically diminishes what you expect when you're listening to something that bears that label," he says. A range of artists and genres influences his work; from Mumford and Sons to Drake to the fluidity of jazz or the intricacy of classical orchestra, Luke is multigenre to his core. As a young artist, he speaks to quarantine's influence on him, which gave him a lot of new freedoms to explore his medium. Luke considers himself an introvert, and notes that "quarantine gave [him] a chance to

fully display everything he can do by himself, with nothing to focus on but what [he] loves."

According to the singer, he "gets anxious before a show...but when it's time to shine he "puts on this persona" and all his "charisma can come to the forefront." Luke, generally a very humble person, will freely admit that he is "The Shit." It's important to him that he acknowledge his accomplishments. Before shows, he likes to take time for himself to remember that he is, in fact, worth the hype. And after a show, Luke expresses that he always tries to appreciate the "really cool" moments of his set.

For all those seeking a little indie, a little hip hop, maybe a touch of jazz, and true creative spirit, go listen to Saint Luke. He'll be performing at Westcott Theater on October 29th. You can find him @SaintLukeMusic.



REWIND:

# MAN EATER

How Jennifer's Body subverts and reinforces archetypal queer women.

Words by Sydney Gold | Art by Katie Cefalo

**Everyone knows Jennifer Check.** An indomitable mean-girl force, Jennifer floats down a cleared runway. She gets into local bars without so much as a second glance despite being firmly in her teens. She cheerleads/dance-teams for at least one scene. Everyone wants her and wants her attention.

Jennifer is the perfect monster because no one would ever assume her to be one. Even as her skin dulls and her nails chip, her hair grows greasy and flat, the viewer never once worries she'll be caught by the town. How could there be something bad inside Jennifer's body?

Writer Diablo Cody, at the time fresh off enduring cult favorite Juno, plays Jennifer on a couple of levels. As a man-eating demon, she's an undeniable femme fatale. In line with the classic literary trope that sex equals death – except for Jennifer, who only survived her attackers because she wasn't a virgin – her victims are punished for their lust. Jennifer is also arguably in love with Needy, her long-time best friend with whom she shares iconic wisdom such as "they're just boys, mortals, we have all the power." The film also includes a queer makeout scene and an admission by Jennifer that she "goes both ways" during her final confrontation with Needy. Reading Jennifer as queer is not only pretty well substantiated in the work itself, but offers an entirely refreshed interpretation of a film largely misunderstood upon release.

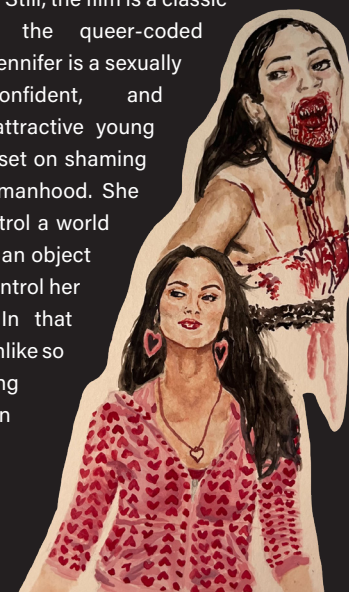
"Monsters threaten social norms and are by their very nature transgressive. There is a long history of marginalized communities finding a sympathetic connection to monsters and I think Jennifer is another example," said Communication and Rhetorical Studies Professor and horror film scholar Kendall Phillips. "Of course, most monsters are not explicit representations... they tend to be

more subtly coded, and I think that coding is key."

While Jennifer's queerness is alluded to in the film, it's also easy to cast off, particularly for viewers predisposed to projecting a heteronormative lens on media. By leaving an element of ambiguity, Cody allows different viewers to draw different meanings. For straight women, the interpretation may focus on power dynamics in heterosexual relationships. For queer women, it may represent what it feels like to navigate a world that oftentimes forces you to comply with certain cisnet norms. This subtler approach isn't new:

"A queer-coded monster can be identified and decoded by those in the community while not necessarily being noticed by those outside that community," said Phillips.

While Jennifer spends most of the film luring and eating her prey, including Needy's boyfriend and ultimate final boy Chip Dove (perfect name), the central relationship is always between the two leading ladies. That intensity has helped usher Jennifer's Body into the pantheon of queer cult classics since its release, despite horrible reviews early on. Still, the film is a classic incarnation of the queer-coded monster trope. Jennifer is a sexually embodied, confident, and conventionally attractive young girl in a society set on shaming that kind of womanhood. She is unable to control a world that sees her as an object and unable to control her own sexuality. In that way, she is not unlike so many other young women, and in that way, she is a monster.



Do you listen to Girl in Red? No, I read *Jerk*.



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