

# the throwback issue



issue 26  
january 2022

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## Letter from the Editors

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Hey guys,

We are so excited to share our second issue of the year with you so shortly after we shared our Past v. Future Issue. Because this issue is our 25th, and therefore a milestone issue, we thought it would be interesting to go as far back as issue #1 and examine the ways in which GirlTalk has changed and grown, but also the ways in which it has stayed the same. Looking over issues that have been written these past five years, it's evident that GirlTalk has stayed true to its principles, and that we've continued to amplify the voices of young people. However, GirlTalk doesn't look the exact same. We attribute this partially to the fact that our styles of writing, formatting, drawing, etc. have moved with the times, but it's also clear that from issue to issue, the tones of each of our writers have changed. GirlTalk has seen two presidents, a global pandemic, countless movements, protests, pieces of legislation, and each article that our incredible writers produce reflects the state of our world. Looking back, some pieces of writing address great strides the world has made, others address terrifying situations we've all had to live through. It's fascinating to see which articles have held true today, and which ones have stayed more relevant to the past. All of this aside though, it's just been a great experience reminiscing on the articles that served as the foundation for the community we've built and we hope that by republishing issues by some of our original members, we're able to pay homage to the incredible people who helped build this space for us. Without further ado, please enjoy our first-ever throwback

Best,  
Alex Wexler and Eve Kaplan

## Former Editors Notes

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In March 2020, female labor force participation dropped to 1989 levels.

Women are slowly re-entering the labor force, but doing so is harder for those who are less privileged: 91,000 Black women left the workforce in November.

At the moment of my writing, there is a reconciliation bill in the works that would provide aid to millions of women, giving them more (but still not enough) time off and making it easier to return to work. It would set the seeds for an adequate child care infrastructure that exists in every wealthy country but the U.S., making a vital good enjoyed only by those who can afford it available to all. Mothers would spend time with their newborns and recuperate from pregnancy, and return to work without fretting about their children. What's more, domestic workers, who are primarily women of color, have been excluded from government benefits since the New Deal. While they gained some assistance during the Obama era, they would gain even more through Build Back Better.

There is one person who is blocking this bill.

He is a man. He is white. He is wealthy. And he receives inflows of money from people like him, who take women's work for granted—especially women with darker skin than their own.

When I created GirlTalk five years ago, I was hesitant to express partisanship. I was certainly less of a partisan (weren't we all), but I really wanted it to be an inclusive space where anyone could talk about gender. Gender is a relevant topic in everyone's life, regardless of their political affiliation. I still believe that, but I also believe that GirlTalk is a place for expression, and for me, I express myself through politics. Traditionally, journalists aren't supposed to be political. That is changing, but this piece can be a little secret between GirlTalk readers and me. I'm not sure if I want to go into journalism or politics. Every writer will do something different with what they learn through GirlTalk. However, I know that everyone who leaves GirlTalk will challenge the world's power structures and change it for the better, regardless of what career they pursue or political party they join.

I am a Public Policy major at Duke University, and I'm getting a certificate (similar to a minor) in Policy Journalism and Media Studies. As a Public Policy student, I can't help but hope that someday, whether they are writing bills or organizing social movements, GirlTalk writers will be at the forefront of concrete advancements in intersectional equity. I hope that together, our writers will yield enough power to overcome the efforts of the privileged individuals who care more about their personal finances or traditional family structures than helping those who need it—and there are people of all genders, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds who need help right now.

Through GirlTalk, I learned how to express my passions for justice and equity. When I created it, I wanted young women to learn to share their ideas, develop their opinions, and openly engage with each other through GirlTalk. While I no longer have control over the magazine, I see its editors and writers continuing to do just that. I enjoy watching it change and grow, and its leaders and writers are doing a fantastic job. Young people must learn how to express themselves, and hopefully GirlTalk inspires them to challenge the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which power weaves its way into society.

Charlotte Kramon, January 2022, Duke 2024

GirlTalk has been such a fulfilling and impactful experience, and it makes me so happy to hear about its continued progress. The memories I shared with the staff, the personal stories that GirlTalk had the privilege to feature, and the pop up events we were able to host were some special moments of GirlTalk I continue to look back on. GirlTalk has expanded my perspective and made me a better listener, and I am incredibly grateful for everyone involved with the project.

Eunice Park, January 2022, Yale 2023



Artwork by Sabine Fuchs, Cate School 2025

## *The Rise of LGBTQ Representation*

Article and Commentary Eve Kaplan, Cate School 2025

Taken from April 2020 Issue

### **Eve's commentary on her old piece:**

The first issue I was featured in was published April of 2020, both articles I wrote in this issue I wrote at the age of 12. My writing feels almost innocent, like I wrote it before I had grown up. Although I don't disagree with my statement, which is based on fact but rather,

I see myself writing in an optimistic and hopeful tone for the future which my current writing lacks. Two years ago I would've stopped being friends with someone if they had said "I stopped being friends with her because her sexuality is her entire personality". One of my best

friends said this to me speaking of another person a year after I wrote this piece. I in part understood the intent, how she struggled to be friends with someone who only spoke of their sexuality and didn't have other conversation topics. As my small bubble of friends and

world has grown, homophobia and prejudice have become increasingly more normalized to me. The politically correct person I once was, has seemingly grown less and less so. But, my political correctness in regards to comments directed towards the LGBTQ community also came from the same innocence this article did. An innocence in which I felt the queer community might.

be finally free in the next few years, and yet here I am, almost writing to say that the movement has stopped. That as I've grown up I feel more disconnected from my sexuality and I feel the fight to end homophobia and transphobia has been shadowed by a pandemic and onslaught of political brawls. That the queer community is no closer to ending prejudice,

within and outside of itself. With this statement and more negative note declared, I present the writing of my twelve year old self, an article depicting the rise in LGBTQ between generations.

## The April 2020 article:

We're at the dawn of a new decade, and with a new decade comes a rising generation; Generation Z. In the past decade, LGBTQIA+ rights have come a long way. It was only in 2015 that gay marriage was legalized in the United States of America. Now that there is so much acceptance, visibility and open-mindedness in our world, people are figuring out their sexuality younger and younger. Only 66% of Generation Z identifies as straight, compared to the 88% of Baby Boomers who identify as straight. 10% of Generation Z believes LGBTQIA+ equality is the most important issue that needs to be addressed. 70% of Generation Z are comfortable with homosexual relationships compared to 43% of Baby Boomers. These statistics say a lot, but they don't explain why Baby Boomers and Generation Z have such different political views. The main reason is the media and the Internet. When Baby Boomers were growing up, there were no phones, no access to the Internet.

Now that there is so much online access, kids are learning that it's normal to not just like the opposite gender or identify as the gender you were assigned at birth. Children are getting iPads before the age of five, and are able to have different opinions on LGBT+ rights

**kids are learning that it's normal to not just like the opposite gender or identify as the gender you were assigned at birth.**

because there are so many resources online for them to form their own opinions and not just repeat what their parents say. YouTubers like Jessie Paege, James Charles, Shane Dawson, Nikkie de Jager, and Tyler Oakley are making it

so kids from small towns know that there are people from all over the world who don't identify as straight. Shows like Will and Grace, The L Word, Modern Family, Glee, and RuPaul's Drag Race give kids the exposure to the LGBTQIA+ movement that they need. Celebrities like Caitlyn Jenner, Ellen DeGeneres, and Laverne Cox inspire kids to be themselves and to understand everyone's sexuality and gender identity is valid. Singers like Lil Nas X, Miley Cyrus, Halsey, Hayley Kiyoko, and Demi Lovato, who show that sexuality is fluid and on a spectrum. The Internet can give exposure to a lot of horrible things, but one of the amazing things it creates is awareness. Generation Z is the most opinionated generation yet because they've been given so many ways to formulate their own beliefs. This new decade has begun, and so has the beginning of a generation I'm sure will change the world.\*

# Inspiring Young Girls in Afghanistan

By Lily Kramon, October 2018

Oakwood High School 2023

## Lily's commentary on her piece:

I wrote this article before the recent Taliban take over in Afghanistan. The conditions in Afghanistan at the time were unsafe for women, and with the recent Taliban takeover, these conditions have not improved. SOLA (the school I wrote about in this article) was deeply affected by this takeover, as the Taliban doesn't support its mission to educate young girls. According to an update given on their website, they were able to relocate outside of Afghanistan to a place where they can provide a safe space and an enriching education for their students. As I was before, I am still in awe of how these young girls continue to persevere through this unimaginable challenge, and I am inspired by their courage and determination.

## Lily's Original 2018 article:

Afghanistan has been named one of the most dangerous countries to be a woman. The country is in a constant state of conflict and war, and women have less access to resources or protection. Oftentimes, when women try to speak out about gender inequality or take positions in politics or journalism, they are intimidated or killed. Young women growing up in Afghanistan right now aren't offered the same opportunities as young boys. Education is not easily accessible and the idea of girls going to school while living in Afghanistan isn't widely accepted. However, a determined woman named Shabana opened a boarding school for girls in Afghanistan,

so that they can receive the education they deserve and have their eyes opened to opportunities and life-changing potential. This school is in Kabul, and it is called SOLA (School Of Leadership Afghanistan). Along with receiving proper education, the girls who attend this school learn about global issues outside of Afghanistan, and they create strong bonds with their peers and classmates. This school keeps a low profile, because many in Afghanistan still don't accept the idea of girls receiving equal opportunity to education as boys.

**While it is extremely tough for these girls to grow up in a country like Afghanistan, they stay strong, optimistic, and motivated.**

Before getting a proper education, many of these girls didn't have many ideas for their future careers, but after learning about the wide range of jobs in the world, they now strive to work for their ideal job when they are older. War, conflict, and injustice affect these girls every day, but they continue to fight for, and invest their time in, the education they deserve. Many people aren't aware of what is happening currently in Afghanistan or how women are treated there. While this issue doesn't have a direct impact on people in America, it is still very important that we stay aware of these global issues, and educate each other on what is going on in places like Afghanistan.\*



# The Need for Intersectionality in the #MeToo Movement

Eunice Park, December 2018

Yale 2023

Despite the #MeToo movement's undeniable success in exposing a wide range of sexual predators and launching a nationwide sexual assault conversation, the range of faces we see and voices we hear representing the movement is very limited. Although Tarana Burke, an African American woman, founded the movement, #MeToo has fallen prey to being co-opted as a convenient social justice hashtag by white, upper class women who spotlight stories of Hollywood actresses while ignoring experiences of people who are most likely to be victims of gender violence, who are minorities, queer, and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged. The #MeToo movement's purpose should not be to maximize the number of high powered businessmen society can shame but should be to rather radically restructure the heavy imbalance of power that gave these businessmen the ability to abuse their power in the first place. Doing so requires us to examine privilege in the #MeToo movement, which allows certain stories to be uplifted and other experiences to be ignored.

In fact, the #MeToo movement presents a troubling situation where despite the common hashtag meant to connect all victims of sexual violence in solidarity, this focus on highlighting victimhood and shaming perpetrators stops short of dismantling the system that allows such crimes to happen, and only further consolidates the division of power.

Within the #MeToo survivor community, the voices and needs of people who are minorities, queer, and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged are repeatedly shut down through the lenses of white America - of white newscasters, white celebrities, and white culture - which capitalizes off white tears and destroys survivor narratives of marginalized people with doubt and vengeance.

There is an inextricable power relationship that ties white society with these stories, whether it be through white media hypersexualizing women of color or overwhelmingly white college administration boards setting inadequate policies for responding to sexual assault cases that make the legal process of reporting a rape especially daunting for financially disadvantaged people who do



-not have access to private legal services. #MeToo is not limited to a conversation based on reproductive organs and gender violence, but rather, is as relevant to broader conversations about race, privilege, socioeconomic status, and more - that supports the power structures that are perpetrating their oppression.

No matter how uncomfortable this is, #MeToo needs to engage in these conversations, led by those who are most likely to face suppression. By uplifting stories of people who are minorities, queer, and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged, #MeToo can lead an intersectional movement to restructure the power imbalance. However, it is necessary to recognize that the #MeToo movement cannot neatly be split into the priorities of white, privileged women and marginalized people.

In fact, neatly defining the #MeToo movement into easily discernible, marketable sections is dangerous, as it ignores the vast gray area that separatist labels do not protect, whether it be legal protections for sex workers who have been sexually assaulted or murky experiences like the Aziz Ansari story, in which Ansari, a Hollywood actor, was accused of ignoring a woman's uncomfortable body language during a sexual encounter.

In order for the movement to be truly revolutionary, the #MeToo movement, which is multidimensional, must embrace the multicolored diversity of experiences of its people. In order for the movement to be truly revolutionary, the #MeToo movement must listen and be flexible in responding to unique concerns of marginalized voices.

My hope for #MeToo is that people will shift away from viewing the movement's success in terms of the number of people the movement exposes, but rather value its success in the diversity of people it uplifts. If we begin to shift away from the mindset of #MeToo being a transactional movement, we can begin to expose more powerful narratives and spotlight more diverse people to be the leaders of the movement.

Once we stop seeing #MeToo as a political transaction of power, flexibility is created to engage in deeper discussions about broader issues of privilege to tackle other intersectional social justice issues. The future is intersectional, and I hope to see the #MeToo movement leading the way.\*

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## The Body Mass Index

Sophie Dorf-Kamienny, January 2018,

Tufts 2025

Almost anyone who has had an annual check-up, taken a high school health class, or applied for life insurance has come across those three little letters: BMI. The nightmare of any woman (or man) who struggles with their body image, which is, unfortunately, a large portion of the population.

Body Mass Index is a method used to judge the body fat and ultimately the health of a person in terms of their weight. The value is based on a specific calculation which involves dividing one's weight (in

kilograms) by their height squared (in meters).

The concept of BMI was developed in the early 1800s by Belgian mathematician Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet. However, many are unaware that it was designed only to judge the obesity of an entire population "to assist the government in allocating resources," according to NPR. Quetelet had clearly conveyed that the formula was simply incapable of designating whether an individual person was healthy or not.

So, you may be asking yourself, how is a 200 year old formula still being used for something that it wasn't even meant to be used for in the first place? The Center for Disease Control claims that using BMI for its modern purpose is prevalent because "it is inexpensive and easy to use for clinicians and for the general public."



Art by Sabine Fuchs, Cate School 2025

Yes, accessibility for health-related resources is tremendously important, and many people lack such resources. Yet, however important it may be that solutions are found to this ubiquitous problem, there are instances where knowing nothing is better than knowing incorrect information.

For instance, biological science has provided evidence that if someone is lost at sea with no

water, it is better to drink nothing than to drink the sea water which they possess an abundance of. This is because seawater contains such a large amount of salt that the body will more quickly feel the need to expel it along with more water, and so one is left in a worse state than when they started.

The seawater in this example is comparable to the knowledge of one's BMI. The method of measurement is widespread and highly accepted in modern society because of its accessibility, and therefore many people do not hesitate to type their measurements into a calculator and wait for it to spit out a number.

However, they may not understand that doing so could leave them with a useless assessment that shatters their self esteem or gives them a false impression of the effects of their lifestyle, which can, in the long run, do more harm than good.

A prominent disadvantage to using BMI as an indicator of one's status is that ultimately, all that BMI will do is offer a number on a scale, rather than an understanding of the full complexity and ambiguity of each individual's body. In addition, doctors' offices will often dispense BMI measurements on charts that show one's percentile in terms of other people in the same age and gender group. Imagine, for example, a class of students whose tests have been graded on a curve, and this letter grade is the only information they receive regarding their test results.

Rather than simply having feedback as to what they need to improve on and what their proficiency is in regards to the material, the students are simply left with a number which neither answers their questions, nor precisely indicates how much of the material they had mastered.

Instead, each student has a score that gives them no other choice than to compare themselves to their classmates, without a full understanding of what their score consisted of. In the end, one feels pressured to make comparisons between apples and oranges, and you have no sense of what the issue is, or if there even is one. And even worse, one feels unnecessarily ashamed of his or herself, which is a feeling that society has made sure that women in particular are much too accustomed to.\*

## Gender Based Violence Around The World

Philine van Karnebeek, Fall 2017

One in three women are sexually abused in their lifetime. In times of conflict, nine in every ten women will be sexually abused or violated. So what is the relationship between gender-based violence (GBV) and conflict?

Gender based violence is defined as “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” by the UN.

Gender based violence is perpetuated by many societal factors. The main factor is the long historical inequality between the genders.

Men have dominated women since the beginning of time and the idea that men should own women is rooted deeply in our society. Because of this, men sometimes feel a sense of ownership and protectiveness over their female counterparts, and this feeling easily translates into physical violence or sexual abuse.

Gender based violence is often embedded into a society as a part of the culture and/or religion. When this violence is not stopped, it usually results in murder of the women.

Most of the gender-based violence is inflicted by an intimate partner or a family member of the victim. 47% of all female homicide victims were killed by violence inflicted by a intimate partner or a family member compared to the 6% of males who were murdered in the same way. Gender based violence perpetrated by a man onto a woman is leading to activists calling on men to change this culture.

One of these activists in Ban Ki-Moon, former United Nations Secretary-General: “I call on men and boys everywhere to join us. Violence against women and girls will not be eradicated until

all of us- men and boys- refuse to tolerate it.” Eradicating gender-based violence is a key part of accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals, most significantly SDG 3 and SDG 5; “good health and well-being” and “gender equality”.

The already high rate of gender based violence spikes even higher in a time of conflict. In modern insurgency warfare, civilians are killed at a higher rate than soldiers. The civilians most susceptible to this are women and children.

This is because sexual violence has become integrated in modern warfare. Armies use violence against the most vulnerable parts of a society. There are different goals that this kind of violence targets, including humiliation, terrorization, information gathering, power enforcement and ethnic cleansing.

Often, this tactic is used against minorities to enforce their control over them. Gita Sahgal of Amnesty International said to BBC in an interview, “If one group wants to control another, they often do it by impregnating women of the other community because they see it as a way of

### **This is because sexual violence has become integrated in modern warfare.**

destroying the opposing community.”

This is because of the identity issue that is created if a woman of minority carries a child whose father is part of the oppressing majority. These mothers and their children are often exiled from the communities as they are culturally seen as tarnished.

These social prejudices are also a form of gender-based violence as they are only enforced because these women have to uphold an image of being the untouched. Rape is now being called a weapon of war. Rape is used to break down the fundamental strengths of the opposing communities and to spread fear to lower the moral of the opponents.

However, sexual violence is not only inflicted by the hostile forces but often also by the

host forces. This form of sexual violence has very different targets.

A report published by the UN about sexual violence in peacekeeping missions inflicted by the blue hats showed that there were 480 reports of sexual abuse between 2008 and 2013, the majority of which happened in the DRC, Congo, Liberia, Haiti and South Sudan. Jane Holl-Lute.

The special envoy of the Secretary General expressed there are four things the SG is trying to tackle.

Firstly, the restoration of the respect, needs and dignities of the victims. Secondly, the impunity of the soldiers who committed these crimes.

Thirdly, to engage civil society more in the issue and the peacekeeping missions, and lastly, to strengthen the communication between all parties of the peacekeeping initiatives to ensure that all concerns are heard.

Sexual violence in the peacekeeping missions has been extremely controversial because the UN claims to be the enforcer of human rights, gender equality and peace. By inflicting gender-based violence they are undermining all three of those goals.

In conclusion, the violence used against specifically women is heavily influenced by the political situation of the country.

Aside from the obvious damage caused by gender-based violence, and the physical and psychological effects, such as loss of reproductive abilities and increase of suicide attempts, there are other lesser known community based effects of gender-based violence.

This violence often is linked to restricting education and results in detachment of the women from society and from the political atmosphere.

This causes the economy to suffer because on a large scale these women cannot participate in the economy, as without education they could not reach their full job potential. Gender-based violence is not only an infringement on the ability of the women to prosper but also the ability for the community to prosper.

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## Being Biracial In the Face of a Black Revolution

Sierra Stern, Summer  
2020,  
Princeton 2024

**T**here is a way to think about things without knowing them. Someday I will die. George Floyd is dead. George Floyd is dead because he is twice or two-and-a-half or three times more black than me. Part of me wants to keep these secrets from myself forever. I do not feel like the sum of my parts. I feel like an entirely new part, one that requires instructions on what to do in a time like this. Right now the instructions are:

White: Silence is complacency. Be anti-racist. Black: Mourn. Take that pain and put it somewhere useful. Make sure you're hurting for a reason.

Where are mine?

In my experience, to be multiracial is to embody an identity crisis, to feel a simultaneous sense of nonbelonging and universality wherever I go. To be multiracial is to feel

ashamed of the privilege I am afforded for being light while potentially benefiting from intended racial equalizers like affirmative action. Most of the time, this is not too difficult a cross to bear. Sometimes I even forget, and this too is a privilege.

Right now I am acutely aware of my identity. I hate this country for making blackness synonymous with hurt and hardship. I find myself justifying my black half with the (limited thus far) discrimination I have encountered and have yet to face. I hate that the strength of our community is born of tragedy. I hate that I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say "our community". If white protestors are meant to protect their black counterparts, where do I stand? Am I an ally or am I the affected? I don't think I have to know yet. I'm hurt, so I'm writing. I'm hurt, so I'm donating. I'm hurt, so I'm angry.

Here are the instructions I made for myself (which, by no means, is any other mixed black and white person obligated to abide by):

Use your whiteness for good. Be sensitive to well-meaning (and potentially misguided) allies. You have stakes in this—to feel black should not be to struggle. In the reality we are rallying for, this is not the status quo.

I do not claim to have processed what happened to George Floyd or Breonna Taylor or the thousands of other black citizens with families and pasts and futures whose lives were taken unlawfully and despicably. If I did, I'm not sure how I'd scrape together the optimism to get up each day. Belonging to a racially disoriented demographic, the easy thing to do would be to lean into my whiteness and be blissfully ignorant of the horrors faced by my more oppressed half, but confusion does not excuse silence. In this instance my voice will lead, and my identity will have to follow.

## LGBTQ+ Hookup Culture Anonymous, July 2018

The experience of being a queer high schooler can be lonely and alienating, especially if you are either not out or don't know many other students that are queer.

Living in Los Angeles, I am afforded the privilege of being out at my high school and it has been not only a



Melissa Koby, Summer 2020

tolerant experience, but an accepting experience. Seeing the rainbow flags and "Everyone is Welcome Here" posters hung around cafés, bookstores, clothing departments, etc has shown me the importance of representation. Yet, despite this acceptance, it has been difficult meeting many queer students.

Going to a small private high school doesn't leave many options from casual hook ups to romantic relationships. Despite acceptance within city or even schools, other factors such as religious backgrounds, familial values, etc can keep many students from being openly out outside of school. The heteronormative curriculum of sex ed makes understanding safe sex and consent culture even more difficult and adds fuel to the already alienating experience. The LGBTQ+ community still faces much hatred and shame when coming out, creating much fear and anxiety surrounding a part of their identity that should be empowering. This in addition to the lack of sex ed representation leads to shame-based perceptions surrounding relationships. The lack of conversation on mental health in conjunction with grappling with

identity, especially with dedicated professionals such as counselors due to fear only subverts even confusion and mental health issues. However, social media and burst in the app culture has dramatically changed much of the experience of queer high schoolers around the world.

On an individual level, many students look towards dating apps such as Grindr or OkCupid (many high school students post they are looking for other high school students despite the age limit of the apps). Despite the negative connotations of “screening” people online, for queer people, it is especially important to be able to find others like them. Although dating apps stated purpose is usually for casual hook-ups, users

from those who are out. The anonymity of the online world is the last place that anyone would think to find a supportive safe have started to find friends and long-time partners. Each dating app has distinctive characteristics/ purposes that allow people to find others with the same intentions.

**In addition, social media is an ever-growing resource to learn, connect, and feel included within the LGBTQ+ community.**

From queer instagram models to YouTube channels dedicated to sharing coming out stories and teaching inclusive sex ed, the online world can create friendships from around the world. Even if you aren't in a place to come out to your family or friends, the online world gives

However, the mutual understanding of being closeted allows for thriving safe LGBTQ+ safe spaces online. This is not to make it seem like these spaces are a positive utopia, but the positivity and amount of changed lives due to these spaces outweighs the occasional hateful comments. Whether it be figuring out their sexuality, finding courage to come out, or simply feeling a little less alone, social media has made an enormous impact on me and the LGBTQ+ community. This is not to say that social media can ever replace having a real life community supporting you, but rather it provides access and openness to all that are in uncontrollable living situations.

## Fetishization of Asian Women

Monie Choi, June 2021, Yale 2025

Six Asian women were murdered in a targeted attack of three Atlanta spas. This brutality shocked the country, but for many women in my Asian-American community, the killings only served as reminders of the deep rooted misogyny and hypersexualization

of our bodies that we've learned to accept as a fact of life.

I've specifically noticed that the intersection of Asian-American women's race with their gender makes them uniquely susceptible to a type of violence that feeds power-hungry people's urge to dominate the “docile and submissive.” The perception of Asian-American women carrying these charac-

teristics can be traced back centuries to the Page Act of 1875, which blocked Chinese women from immigrating to the U.S. in a way that seemingly was for the purpose of regulating prostitution, but really, the law was a tool to exclude Chinese women from the country under the pretense that they were all prostitutes. This pretense is further rooted in U.S. imperialism during the Philippine-American War, World War II, and the Vietnam War where American service

members solicited sex workers while abroad, creating the perception of Asian women as sexual objects.

This dangerous perception and expectation of Asian-American being the exotic sex objects that they've been stereotyped as has not gone away, but instead, it has taken more covert form as a result of the model minority myth, where people now have an unfounded assumption that Asian

Americans are all doctors or lawyers, which seems to minimize the oppression and silencing that Asian-American women have endured. In reality, however, many Asian-American women who immigrated to the U.S. work in the service industry in beauty salons, massage parlors, and hospitality. These low-wage service jobs continue to perpetuate the stereotype of Asian-Americans as cheap and disposable laborers, as workers face stigma, fetishization, and misogyny. These women are uniquely vul-

nerable, too, however, as many of their statuses as migrants box them into silence, as they fear the risk of deportation if they turn to the authorities to report acts of violence or crimes against them. This fear, coupled with the model minority myth, effectively papers over the ongoing structural violence that Asian-American women face, creating the perfect condition for horrific crimes like the Atlanta shootings to occur again. \*

## HAIR

Anonymous,  
December 2019

in fact, I thought it was beautiful. It made me feel unique and the thought of it being like the rest of those around me (straight) was not appealing. I loved my pigtails, braids, buns and the occasional fro. I loved it when my mom would take me to my best friend's house so her mom could braid my hair into cornrows. I would ecstatically choose a color from a big bag of beads to decorate the ends of my hair.

Hair has always been something that seemed to have more weight in my life than in the lives of others around me. It's something that I have always been more conscious of. Others used to mistake preoccupation with my hair as vanity or an obsession with appearance. My hair used to be a center for constant deep-set self-consciousness.

When I was younger I had no issue with my hair and, I'd walk into school proud of my hair and I thought it looked wonderful.

As I grew older, I inevitably became much more conscious of popular media. I became rather infatuated with magazines and the models that appeared in them.

To my dismay, no matter what page I turned to, I looked nothing like them. Movies, TV, and magazines were all perpetuating the same



Unknown

standards but none of these standards looked like me or anything I could achieve. Over the years, I progressively internalized this predicament and, soon enough, my hair was not pretty to me anymore. The only qualities of my hair



Of course, nothing about my hair had changed, but my own beliefs had. My greatest wish became to have long perfectly straight hair. I began to straighten my hair two or three times a year and slowly but surely it became my primary way of wearing my hair. Cornrows, to me, became an embarrassing phase of the past.

As high school carried on I realized that I needed to make a change.

### **My hair is not something to be ashamed of.**

It is unique and versatile and something that I should have taken pride in.

The time and care that

it requires to be maintained are worth it. I invest more time into managing my hair and wear it in new natural styles that I've never tried before. I've learned that often, it's best to look inward to retain a positive self-image. \*

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## **What Intersectionality Means to me and What it Doesn't**

**Charlotte Kramon, December 2019,**  
Duke 2024

I heard the term “intersectional feminism” for the first time at a Gender Equality Club meeting at school. It was a week after the first Women’s March in 2017, and women of color at the meeting particularly Latinx women couldn’t bring themselves to stand alongside people mostly there for reasons that didn’t apply to them or their culture. The way men verbally objectify women in her culture, said a Latina female, is problematic but different from the way Donald Trump bragged about how easy it is for him to get white women’s “pussies.”

If you’ve heard me talk about feminism, you’ve probably heard me talk about Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She was the first feminist I followed, and I read and watched her lectures before the word “intersectional” began to disperse throughout the feminist movement. Adichie is a woman of color who and she was the first person to enlighten me about casual sexism through her experiences in both

Nigeria and the United States. Some of Adichie’s encounters with sexism were unique to women to women of color, but I found myself able to relate to most of what she was describing, even as a white woman. Nevertheless, I didn’t categorize prejudice specifically against women of color outside the realm of feminism. She mobilized my search for long-term solutions to oppressive perceptions of marginalized people that have been around since the beginning of humankind, not just white women like myself.

I had yet to learn about the history and modern day prevalence of white feminism. I had yet to learn about instances such as black women at tending feminist meetings but being forced to leave due to their supposedly abnormal scent. But, most importantly, I had yet to hear directly from women of color that they felt excluded by feminists because they weren’t white. Middle-class white women call

I am in no way trying to downplay feminist's historical accomplishments. Women would not have the freedom we do now without first and second feminist movements. But as socially active demographics change, the feminist movement won't succeed without inclusion.

Along with inclusion, though, we need balance. Otherwise, inclusion will lead to exclusion. It already has. Look at Women's March, an organization that has progressively lost participants (including myself) because the woman who started it was kicked out due to anti-semitism. A much-needed effort to include women of color lead to the exclusion of a white woman on the basis of her religion.

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We also need to be cautious of grouping other social issues and forcing them under the umbrella of intersectional feminism. If you tell someone that in order to be a feminist, they have to agree with every single liberal or left-wing issue feminism will immediately disintegrate. Intersectionality is about diversity-and that includes diversity of opinion.

I'm excited to see our generation and the next wave feminists. Having grown up watching endless political turmoil, I think we will do intersectional feminism the right way: inclusively, not exclusively.

## Feminist Facade

Alex Wexler, August 2020,  
Haverford 2021

**F**ebruary 9, 2020: Natalie Portman strides down the runway wearing a Dior gown covered with names of female directors.

Photographers are quick to flash their cameras as reporters call out question after question.

Paparazzi are in awe of her dress and cape and in a matter of hours; news and media outlets are covering the story of "Natalie Portman paying tribute to female directors" and "Natalie Portman making a statement with an honorable dress," quick to call her dress both fashionable and brave.

With any statement-making piece, just as many people are quick to criticize Natalie Portman and call her a hypocrite and a fraud, including "Charmed" actress Rose McGowan. In response to the admiration for Natalie Portman from the public, McGowan tweeted that she found Portman's form of feminism "deeply offensive," eventually



Unknown, 2020

calling her “the problem.”

There seemed to be somewhat of an immediate turn around within the same tabloids that were calling Natalie Portman brave—they were all of a sudden reporting on the fact that Natalie Portman has only ever worked with one female director other than herself and began “sid- ing” with Rose McGowan.

Natalie Portman tweeted back stating that she agrees that she isn’t brave and says that she associates bravery with women who take action.

It seemed as though the media was quick to call out actions of “surface-level” feminism, which got me thinking about a larger issue of media coverage of feminism and the feminist facade we so often see.

Celebrities are given a huge platform to discuss issues, but following the culture of mass media and instant news, these issues they bring up are discussed for a second by the media, but then the issue is dropped and new articles are written the next day about something else.

Then, when the spotlight of attention shines on any given celebrity for a split second, they act motivated and charitable, but as soon as that spotlight fades, these issues aren’t given any more attention.

Natalie Portman is a great example because what the public often sees is what she presents. On the red carpet for instance, she is given a platform for change and to bring up issues, but once she steps off the carpet, as Rose McGowan mentions, she doesn’t stick to these charities or movements. It’s somewhat easy for Portman to brandish the names of these directors on her cape, but it seems as though she isn’t willing to go much further than that.

Had Portman really been passionate about the issue of representation for female directors,

we would have seen her work with more female directors.

This issue doesn’t apply to just celebrities. We too are given a platform to publish a brand for ourselves, this platform being social media.

An estimated one billion people use Instagram monthly and through Instagram, we create our own facade.

Instagram is convenient in the sense that we can selectively choose which parts of ourselves we want to share, so we are given the ability to cherry pick and present ourselves in the way we see best.

Often, the brand people try to create for themselves is one that makes them seem charitable and giving. Instagram stories are a handy tool for people to post pictures of themselves, places they’re visiting, as well as issues they care about.

Best of all, unlike regular posts, they disappear after 24 hours. Clicking through Instagram story posts, you’re likely to find a plethora of reposts with the basic message of “help feed kids in Sudan” or “reduce the amount of palm oil you use” by simply sharing this post.

This is ideal for anyone trying to create an image for themselves, but for conducting meaningful participation in social-justice issues, these tools are actually really harmful.

While they’ve had their benefits in raising awareness, these stories often provide a feeling of satisfaction for the person posting them, but they do virtually nothing.

It’s important that in our everyday lives, whether it be on social media or in the news, we differentiate between meaningful involvement in social issues and people “raising awareness” simply so that they can improve their own reputation or image. All this being said, there are so many incredible women who back their words with actions and are incredible role models to any one who wants

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to make a difference in the world. Amandla Stenberg, for example has tastefully worked on projects such as acting in the movie, *The Hate U Give*, which addresses police brutality, and participating in a project called “Don’t Cash Crop my Cornrows,” which focuses on the pandemic of cultural appropriation specifically in relation to hair braiding.

America Ferrera is another inspirational example of someone who uses their platform to make an impact. She and her husband have co-founded the organization *Harness* which gives artists a platform to have political impacts.

Ferrera also actively fights to keep families together and has recently published her book, *American Like Me*, which discusses the struggle she faced as a first-generation American.

These are both examples of incredible women who deeply involve themselves for the purpose of making a difference rather than just boosting their image. These amazing women prove that actions will always speak louder than words and while discussion will always be important, we should empower each other to go even further and put ourselves on the frontlines of issues we care about.

Let’s make something that lasts longer than a 24 hour story post and speaks louder than names sewn onto a dress.\*

