Candid

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Candid SS23

Yup, We Did That.

Sumaawah Sylla

A brief History of the Influence of African-American Culture

I didn't always love African American culture as much as I do now. Growing up, I was pretty isolated from the media and other kids because my parents believed it wasn't "real" culture. They heard the rappers swearing, saw the dancers twerking, and swore they'd never let their children fall victim to it. I never fully understood what the problem was (I mean, it was just music and dance to me) but it was hard to unlearn those ideas. Luckily, I was a part of a college mentoring group, and we took a spring break trip to visit some HBCUs in Louisiana.

The earliest Historically Black Colleges and Universities were first founded to allow African Americans access to higher education between 1837 and 1856. Slavery still existed in America, and even free people were not permitted into previously segregated, predominantly white institutions (PWIs). HBCUs were not racially or ethnically segregated either, making for huge cultural hubs as students and faculty worked to keep the school accessible and engaging. I had never heard of these places before, let alone the creativity and passion they cultivated! When I got home from the tours, I began one of my new passions: researching African American cultural history, and how it persists today. I found that our culture has led to many trends and styles that are still beloved by people of all backgrounds today.

I grew up with music in every aspect of my life, even when I tried to avoid it. Gospel music on the weekends meant it was time to clean. Old school R&B made the family reunions come alive, and it was almost magical hearing some Rap at a school dance and watching everyone around me shout the words. Music has been an integral part of our culture since its inception, and its influence helped change what we call music today. Sacred music, such as spirituals and gospel, is the earliest type of African American melodic articulation in America and has Christian qualities while additionally characterizing the difficulties of subjugation. Folk music takes its roots from African cultural traditions, incorporating field hollers, work serenades, and game tunes. The blues are the groundwork of contemporary American music and have greatly influenced African American culture and social lives. Military music has its origins in the Revolutionary War and Civil War, with African Americans playing an important role in the armed services' musical bands. Jazz, with its roots in ragtime, has led to many variations in music and dance to accompany it.

Rhythm and Blues (R&B) is the predecessor to soul music, though the genre was first named "Race Music" and included all music from African American artists, regardless of the genre it actually was. It gained popularity as its own
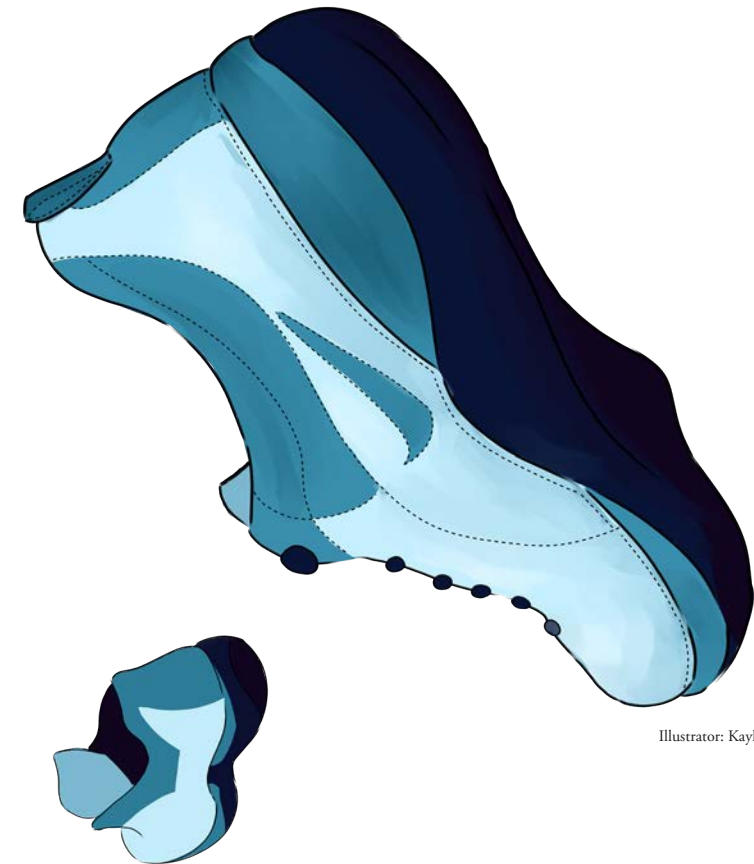
Illustrator: Kayla Allen

genre, finding a distinct sound and creating the possibility of racial incorporation. Rock and Roll combines elements from all African American music genres with American pop and country music, while Hip-Hop and Rap are immovably implanted in African American culture, spawning an entire cultural form. African Americans have additionally evolved old style music customs, national and western music, popular music, and dance music like disco, techno and house.

Where there was music, there was dance, and not just twerking and krumping (though they're pretty fun to try, too). Swing is a form of dance that has been popular since the 1930s. It is characterized by the use of large groups, intricate footwork, and a steady rhythmic beat. It requires dancers to move in time with one another and often includes large acrobatic moves. Swing was popularized by acts like Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra and was seen as a respectable form of jazz. Many subtypes of swing have formed since the original, mainly with different energy levels and styles of music. For example, in the late 1980s, a new style called "new jack swing" arose based on the traditional swing style.

Rock & Roll is a dance style that can be traced back to the 1940s. It is characterized by its upbeat tempos, energetic moves, and improvisation. It was initially created by artists such as Fats Domino and Big Mama Thornton, and was later popularized by white artists like Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash. To this day rock & roll is considered to be a white person's genre, largely because African American artists were isolated to the general "Race Music" category, renamed to "Rhythm & Blues"

in the 1940s. It requires dancers to move with the fast tempo, often engaging in jumps and spins. Rock & Roll is still popular today, despite the music and dance companies isolating its ethnic roots.

Tap joined components of African-affected mix moves, English obstruct moving, and Irish dances. Artists like Bill Robinson brought another type of decency and prevalence. Tap dancing grew further during the 1930s and 1940s when white artists remembered it for films.

Another aspect of my culture that I never recognized was the way I speak. It turns out that a lot of the words and phrases coined as internet and Gen Z slang were appropriated from African American Vernacular English. African American Vernacular English (AAVE) comes from West African dialects and various types of slang and provincial types of English. It has changed over the long haul to incorporate pieces of standard American English as well as various shoptalk, vernacular expressions, and syntax. AAVE has been formed by the African-American experience and culture, and has had a substantial impact on the formation of the standard American accent. In fact, many of the phrases and idioms used in normal American English today came from AAVE. Throughout the years, the dialect has acted as a vital aspect of African American expression and communication, enabling us to build a distinct language of our own. AAVE is often seen as unprofessional and its speakers uneducated, but it is no different than speaking any other dialect of English. It is a valid language with its own coherent grammar, and it should be recognized as much as any other.

Last but not least, the expanse of cultures combined and developed under the title of

African American have had a lot of influence in the fashion world. From Egyptians wearing ivory, gold, and bone nail extensions to Comme des Garcons sending white models down the runway wearing cornrow hairpieces, and the widespread popularization of monogram print, the African American community has undoubtedly been instrumental in driving the social wave. Acrylic nails and nail art, popularized by Hollywood stars in 1950 and 70s Disco stars such as Diana Ross and Donna Summers, have been subject to negative labels and stereotypes when worn by African American women. Hoop earrings, which date back to 3000 BC, have been a strong image for non-European societies, and have been embraced by singers and celebrities such as Diana Ross and Cher. The lettuce hem, invented by legendary African American designer Stephen Burrows in the 70s, has also become a favorite with various high street and fast fashion brands. Lastly, sneaker culture, which emerged in 1970s America, has revolutionized the last decade thanks to hip-hop culture, leading figures such as Michael Jordan, and high profile design collaborations. African American culture has been an integral part of the creative world, and should be respected and acknowledged as much as those who borrow from it.

Our influence does not end there, either. Art has changed alongside the world it's based on, and the people. As I grew older and learned how much of the creative sphere was inspired by my culture, I gained as much pride as I did respect. I still have a lot to learn, but I'm happy to share what I know. ❦
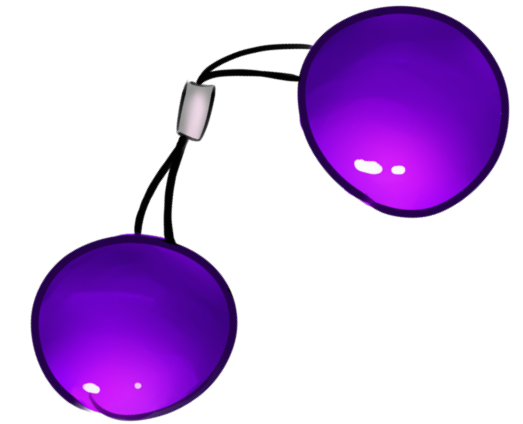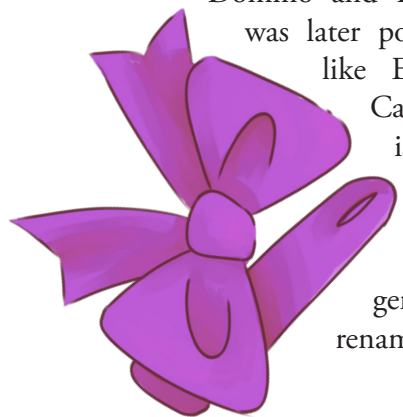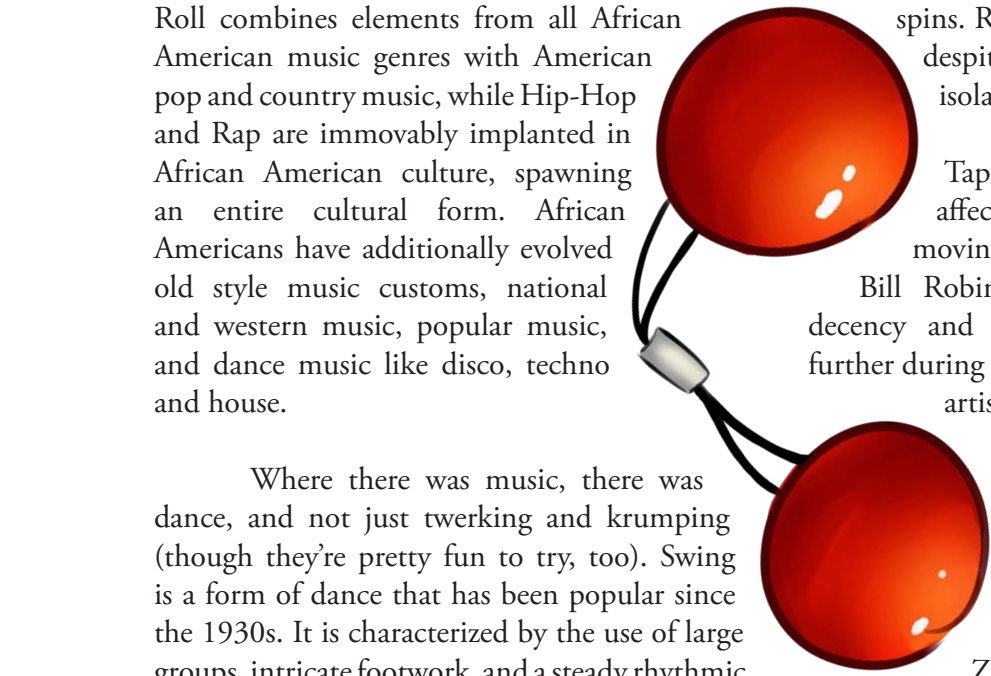
Community in Performance, Joy in Drag Mars Yates

When I attended my first drag show this year, I had no idea what to expect: skillful makeup, artistic performances, and gender expression that plays with the boundaries of the binary were all present, of course, but it was so much more than I anticipated. The music and the outfits and the unapologetic queerness of the space, audience, and performers were almost overwhelming. It was exciting, it was fun, and most of all it was a way to connect with others through performance. In that space for those two hours, nothing outside of the community and safety cultivated by drag mattered; it was the most profound sense of queer joy I've ever experienced.

Drag is an art form centering queer people and performance, establishing community, and cultivating joyous experiences even in the face of oppression and hostility. Using exaggerated masculinity, femininity, and other forms of gender expression, drag plays with gender stereotypes, performance, sensuality, and identity through makeup and fashion. Even in the current state of moral panic against drag performers, queer art is still thriving. Drag exists as it does now because of resilience and the desire for self-expression.

RuPaul is now a household name but drag is not a 20th-century invention. Drag has existed since the theaters of ancient Greece; since women weren't allowed on stage, men had to play women's roles, something that lasted through the Shakespearean era. These origins are far from what we know as drag today. Now, it exists as a form of performance art with a foundation of queer resilience and the human need to create art. Through its rich history of challenging social norms, drag has evolved into an intersectional form of personal and performance art.

The 1920s saw drag really come into queer spaces. "Drag" itself was redefined to reference social gatherings. Gender and performance were being experimented with at this time, with the Prohibition era seeing a rise in gay nightlife. The 20s also saw an introduction of the drag ball tradition – safe spaces for black queer people in response to racism that existed in the established drag circuit.

Drag continued to establish itself as an art form in the 1950s. Performances in bars meant specifically for gay people gave space for drag to grow, both as a form of art and expression. The 80s and 90s saw drag come into pop culture. The 1990s specifically gave much more visibility to the community. Drag had become widespread enough to differentiate itself from other identities in the public eye; the public was becoming more aware of the differences between being gay, transgender, and doing drag.

The 2000s saw the first season of RuPaul's Drag Race, which really brought drag to the mainstream. Millions of people have experienced drag since – on TV, in bars, at the library, and in their homes. Even as right-wing discourse grows in attempts to stir up moral panic and ban drag from public spaces, people are still making space for themselves and their art.

Evansville has a thriving drag scene. From campus to nightclubs, local drag performers have curated a community of artists and a safe space for audiences. Drag allows for these connections to be made, grow, and flourish, with queer art, performance, and identities at the epicenter.

Kitt St. Clair is an alumnus of the University of Southern Indiana and a local drag queen. I was inspired by her at a drag event on campus and later talked with her about her community and the joy it brings.

From her sequined outfits to her stage presence, it's obvious Kitt is a natural performer. Kitt was a theater major while attending USI and brings aspects of that into her identity as a drag performer. Amidst the pandemic during her senior year, when things closed, she began to get into drag. "Drag allows me to play a lot of the roles in the theater I always hoped I could play, but knew I wouldn't get a lot of chances to," she said when asked what got her interested in drag. We spoke about what drag means, both as a personal creative outlet for Kitt and as a community at large. "At the end of the day," St. Clair says, "drag will never be able to be defined by any one person, any one look, any one word. We're all participating in drag every day."

"Drag is also about community," Kitt continues. "[Drag performers] entertain the community, we uplift the community, and we are also a community of performers ourselves. If we don't find support amongst ourselves then we can't do our jobs to the best of our ability. Community is the foundation of drag."

Laws policing gender expression in both the public and private spheres have existed for over

> **It's a superpower we get to harness; it's a super suit we get to put on once a weekend.**
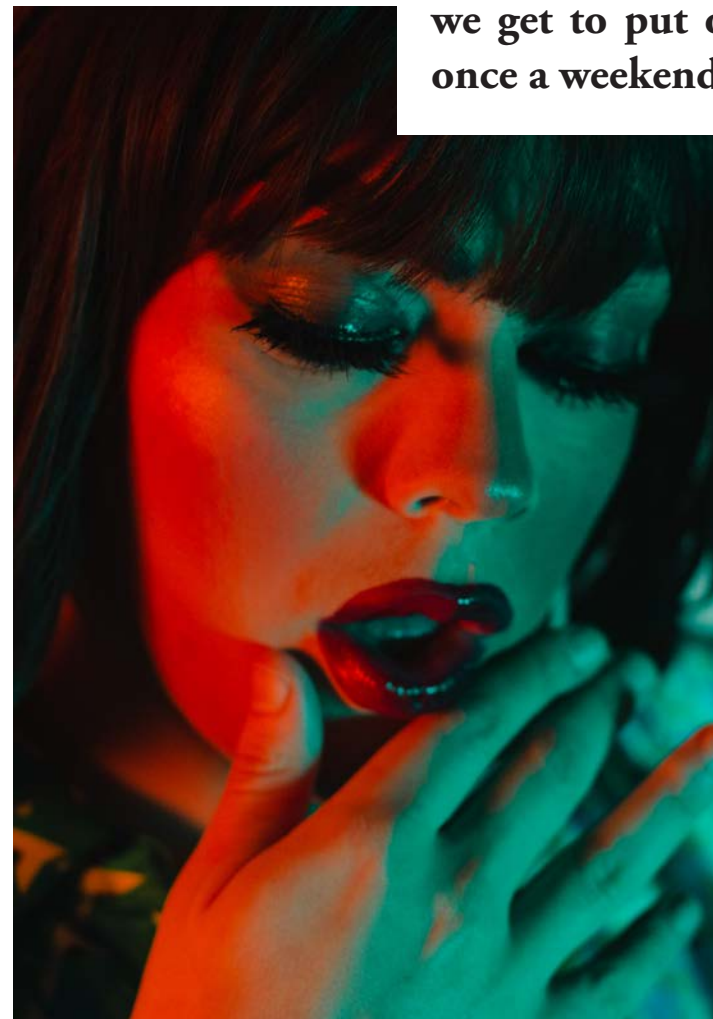
100 years, and current right-wing rhetoric has specifically been targeting drag, along with transgenderism and other LGBTQ identities. Anti-drag bills have been lobbied in 9 different states, coinciding with an increase of "don't say gay" bills that would limit education on human sexuality and forcibly out transgender youth. For decades, drag has been used in the face of oppression to form safe spaces that let queer voices be heard and queer art be seen.

"It's a superpower we get to harness; it's a super suit we get to put on once a weekend," Kitt says. The ability to connect to audiences through art isn't unique to drag, but the way you get to interact with art and artist simultaneously is, especially when you see aspects of your identity reflected in the performance. Kitt continues, "I love being able to share that with an audience each weekend, and seeing how they respond and start to fall in love with the art of drag. If I can make at least one person in the room feel safe, feel included, feel happy, then I am satisfied at the end of the night."

Even for those of us who don't participate in drag in the traditional sense, we all adopt a persona when we leave the house. The way we express ourselves through a personal sense of fashion, makeup, and dress are physical indications of our unique identities. Drag is a form of embracing this, taking it further, and pushing boundaries to explore aspects of ourselves we might not explore in any other contexts, as well as a way to connect with our community. Support your local drag scene, become involved in your community, and take Kitt's advice: Come with an open mind, and come with an open wallet. ✄

insecure

by Zach Winger
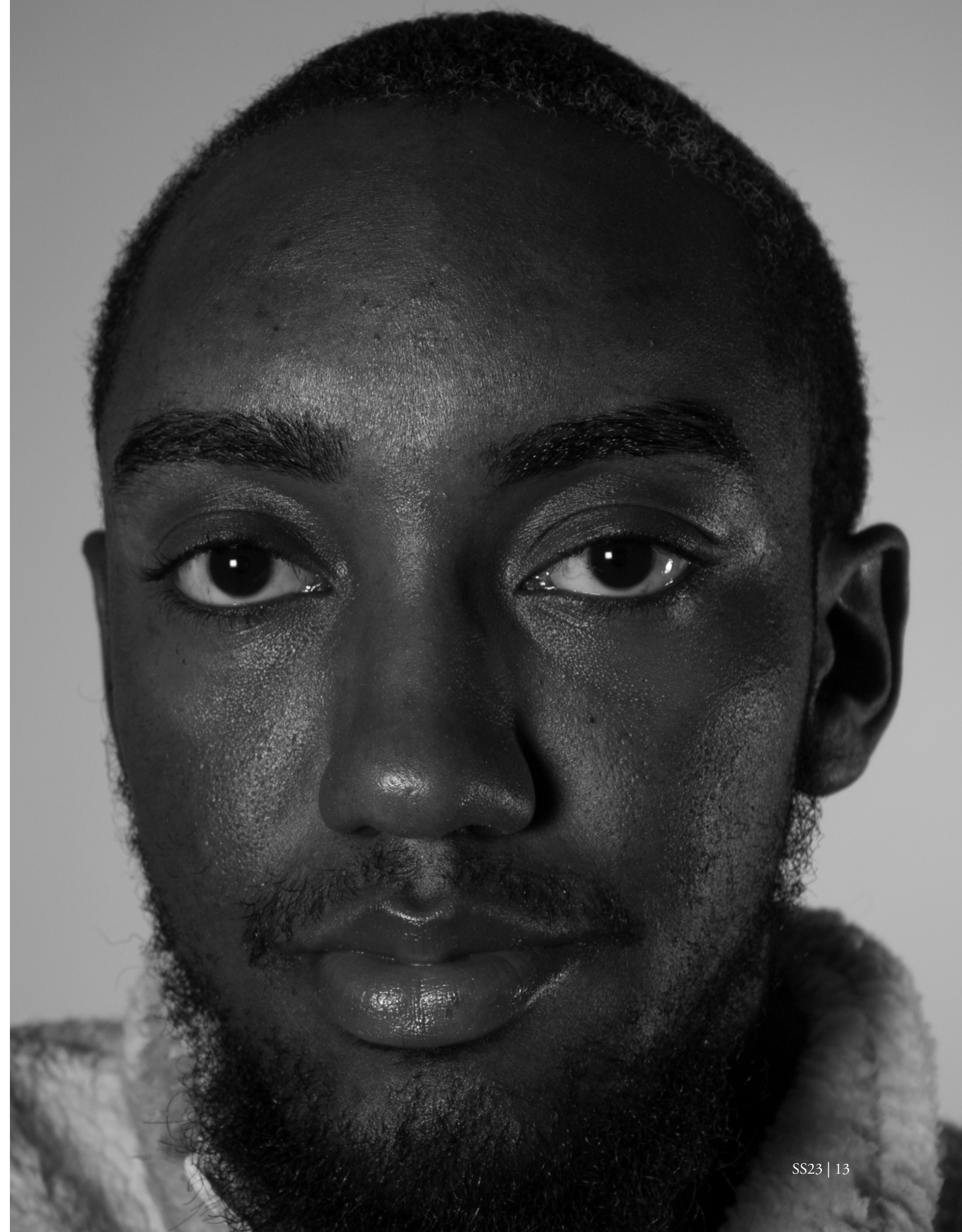
Self-Care and Wellness: Trending Now

Lexi Reed

White, blonde, skinny: the beauty trend of the 2020s (and an incredibly large portion of history). America is a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, orientations, sexualities, religions, practices, and body types— so why isn't this reflected in beauty standards and wellness practices? It's getting better, but there's still a problem.

Self-care and wellness are extremely important parts of our health, especially as busy college students. Trends can be amazing in the way that they provide ideas and inspiration for quick workouts or natural skincare. Regular physical activity is critical to maintaining both our physical and mental health and practicing good skin care routines can be a great way to implement mindfulness and calming rituals into your daily life. There's no doubt—there are benefits to trends and there's usually nothing wrong with hopping on a trend. I do it, too. It's hard not to! To me, the problem rests in the promotion of "hot and skinny" over what feels good in your body and the consistent cultural appropriation within a lot of trends.

To start, we will take a look at cultural appropriation versus appreciation. Cultural appropriation occurs when someone, often of a more dominant social status, adopts customs, practices, or ideas from a group without acknowledging their roots or meanings. Cultural appreciation occurs when someone is making an effort to learn about practices, cultures, or traditions to broaden their perspective and connect with others. Some tips to practice cultural appreciation include reflecting on your culture, listening to others talk about their culture, considering the context and importance of a symbol or practice to a culture, researching or asking if it is a closed practice (not open for use to those outside of the culture), and sharing your own culture and experiences.

When cultural practices make their way into trends, it is often appropriated by white people fitting the beauty standards. The problem lies here: appreciation versus appropriation. When the Gua Sha became popular, many TikTok users rushed to Target to grab their very own and follow along with (largely white) influencers' tutorials. Gua sha practices are one of the oldest known forms of Chinese medicine originating between 1300-1600 to treat illnesses, pain, and ailments by promoting blood circulation and lymphatic drainage. This was done by using the doctor's hands or smooth stones to massage or rub various parts of the body. It's true, this ancient technique is a great, natural method to keep your body healthy and promote glowing skin!

The question of ethics still plagues this trend— are we participating in cultural appreciation when we hop on a TikTok trend and buy a Gua Sha from Target? No, probably not. Appreciating a practice also involves supporting a community whose culture is deeply connected to the practice in addition to understanding the basics of its history. I understand, it's hard when you're a poor college student and Gua Shas at Ulta or from Amazon cost less than $10 when purchasing from a small business tied to the culture can be between $30 and $88. Appreciating a practice and recognizing its roots is still an incredibly important part of cultural appreciation! If you're looking to buy a Gua Sha and begin the practice, try checking out Mount Lai, an Asian, female-owned beauty brand with ethically sourced products that emphasizes Traditional Chinese Medicine!

Illustrator: Lucy Blair

Gua Sha practices are not the only appropriative trend that has emerged in recent years. A lot of people also pointed out that the Clean Girl Aesthetic is rooted in the histories of Black and Brown women. This aesthetic involves slicked-back hair, minimal, natural makeup, and clear lip gloss—beauty trends used for decades by Black and Latina communities that were previously labeled with slurs and insults. The problem is not always that people outside of the original communities think that the feathered eyebrows, minimal foundation, and clear gloss are pretty and desirable, it's often that influencers, mostly white, tend to make it seem as if this beauty trend is completely new and has
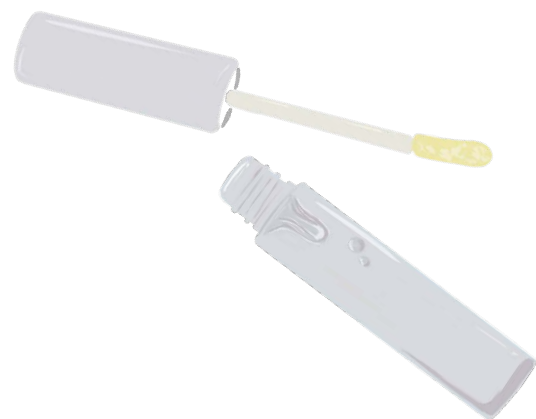
no history or discrimination tied with it. We see this happen so often with beauty trends where histories of discrimination are ignored and long-standing cultural practices or beauty trends are "discovered," "rebranded," or "white-washed." The trend itself is not always inherently bad, but as responsible social media users, we should all strive to be aware of the roots and histories associated with trends and give credit to the appropriate communities.

Beauty standards are not the only practices oftentimes problematic in trends. A lot of

wellness activities are also strongly tied to the idea of hot, blonde, and skinny. Of course, it's totally fine to be hot, blonde, and skinny! Here, the problem is when that demographic is made out to be the only desirable appearance when beauty and desirability come in all different kinds of shapes, sizes, and backgrounds. One example of this is the trend of Hot Girl Walks. Don't get me wrong, I LOVE a good Hot Girl Walk and this is a trend I personally enjoy implementing in my life. However, something I don't like about this trend is that it is often targeted at young people with a message that basically says "go on this walk because look how skinny I got after taking 30 minutes to walk every day!"

> ❝ **beauty and desirability come in all different kinds of shapes, sizes, and backgrounds.** ❞

To me, wellness should be holistic and I wish this trend shared a message that going on a short walk once a day is a great way to get your blood pumping and boost your mental health. Even short walks are proven to significantly improve overall physical health as well as boost mental and emotional health! A healthy weight looks so different for everyone and sometimes trends don't reflect this. Another trend like this was the 12-3-30 workouts where Tiktok users were encouraged to try a 30-minute walk at a 12% incline and level 3 speed at the gym a few times a week. Once again, this is a great activity for

physical and mental wellness for everyone, it was just largely promoted as a quick and easy weight-loss option.

Again, it's okay to fit the demographic of a beauty standard, but it's also okay to not! It's okay to want to lose weight or work on your physical health, but also recognize that healthy bodies can look completely different on unique individuals. Some ways to brighten your feed is to find users who are different from yourself—diversify who you follow! I love to follow body-positive users, therapists, and holistic wellness accounts. Another step you can take to be a responsible social media user is to do some outside research and look into trends. Ask a couple questions: is this a closed practice? Is it unfairly appropriating a culture? Or is this something I can take steps to appreciate? This can be as simple as googling or even checking out TikToks under the same sound or trend tag. Just remember: cultures and bodies are not trends. ✄

FEAR

Artists, in order: Kayla Allen, Al Sheets, Derek Helmer, Eli Fossett, Holly Karges, Ashley Staib
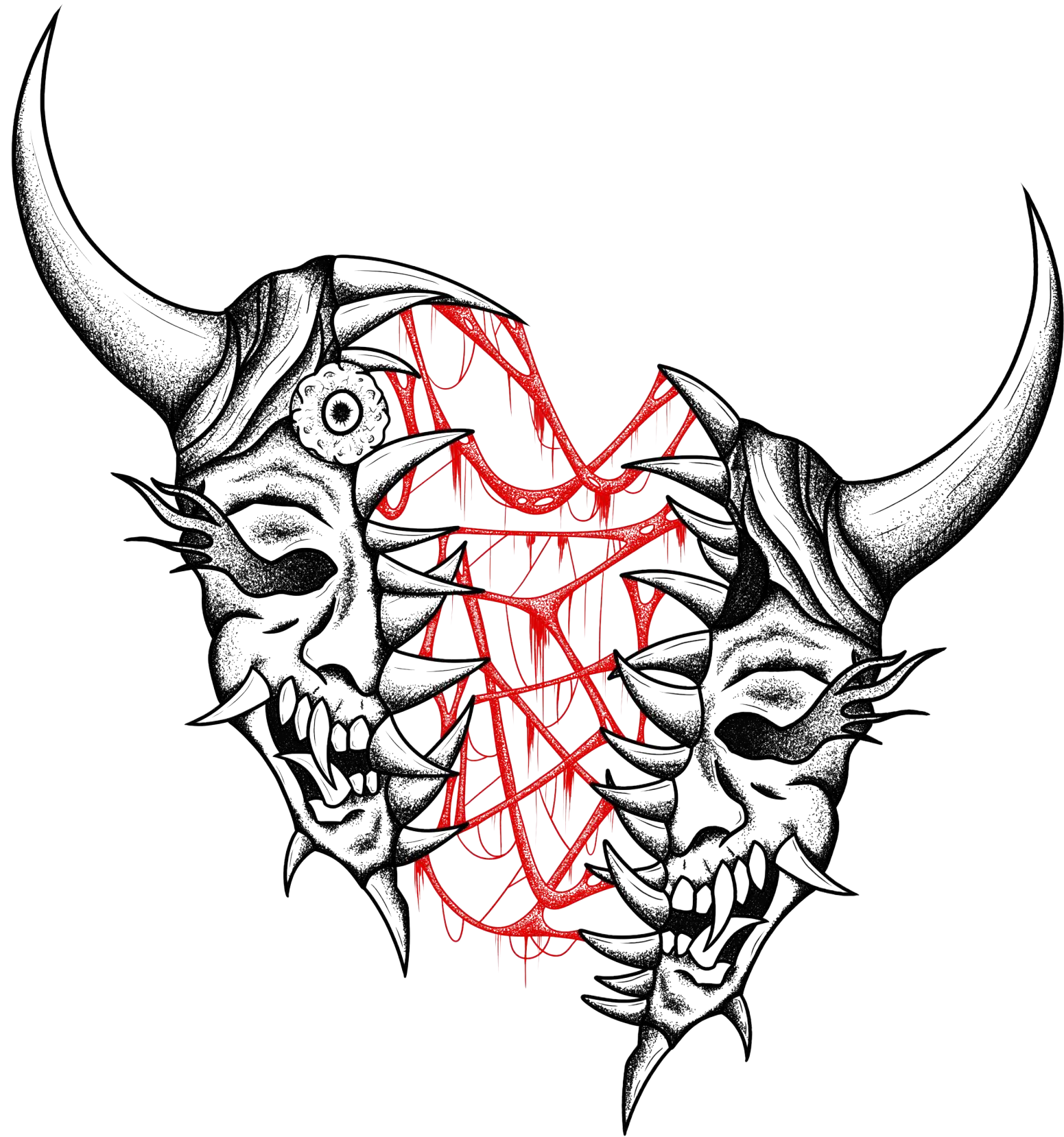
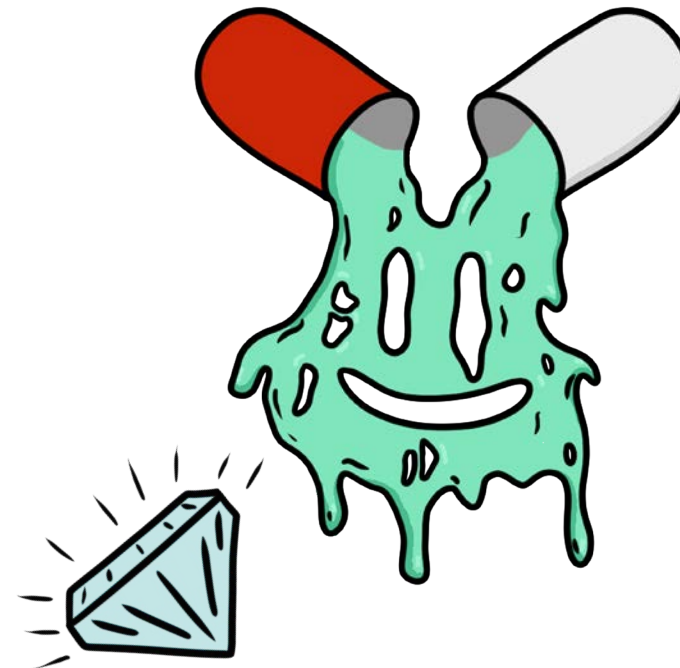# Music's Effect on Fashion

Christian Ruth

What's in your wardrobe? Chances are that most of what is in there was inspired by the music industry. We pick clothing out of personal preference. However, much of this preference can be attributed to the music and artists we listen to. Many designers even model clothing after specific artists. It is evident that music plays a significant role in the fashion industry.

One of the earliest examples of music shaping fashion can be shown in the birth of jazz around the 1920's. Americans were recovering from WW1 and speakeasies became a place for them to relax and listen to jazz; which was labeled as immoral and overly sexual at the time. Despite this many people rebelled and gathered to listen to this new genre. This inspired women to reject traditional clothing and opt for more loosely fit clothing with lower waistlines, Scandalous. They paired this with short bob cuts and pearl jewelry. Men also traded clothing from more formal attire to loosely fit "zoot suites." The genre and these speakeasies inspired rebellion and opened the door for people to express themselves more freely and defiantly through fashion.

After this the next jump in fashion could be attributed to the 1960's and 70's during and after the Vietnam war. During it, many musicians popularized drugs such as LSD for their positive affects in recovery of PTSD. To pair with this came hippie fashion and music. Singers such as Janis Joplin highlighted the newly popular bellbottoms, large blouses, and long skirts of hippie fashion on stage, adding to its success.

In the latter half of the war music and fashion started turning back towards rebellion and the birth of punk and glam rock styles. Punk rock fashion brands than most likely any other genre. Stars such as Beyonce, Rihanna, Janelle Monae, Pharrell, ASAP Rocky, Tyler the Creator, and Kanye West all have or had successful brands and deals. In the 80's and 90's the style started with popularizing track suits, several brands of shoes such as Adidas, and bulky jewelry. Many subcultures have developed since then and have brought us styles like skate, surf, and Hip-Hop. Without them brands such as supreme and Gucci may have never taken off the way that they did.

Another style often seen could be considered the world of rave fashion. Electronica music had a large impact on fashion inspiration. Raves were popular for ecstasy which became part of its movement. Many people from different backgrounds flocked to the mesmerizing beats of techno and the allure of once again, some kind of rebellion. Rave fashion defined itself as tight pants, leather, fitted T-shirts, waistcoats, silver jewelry, and bright pops of color.

Fashion is heavily inspired by the music industry through every change they make. This has been shown over and over throughout the years. Fashion will always be influenced by whatever is considered popular in the music business. Who knows what the next trend brought on by musicians will be?

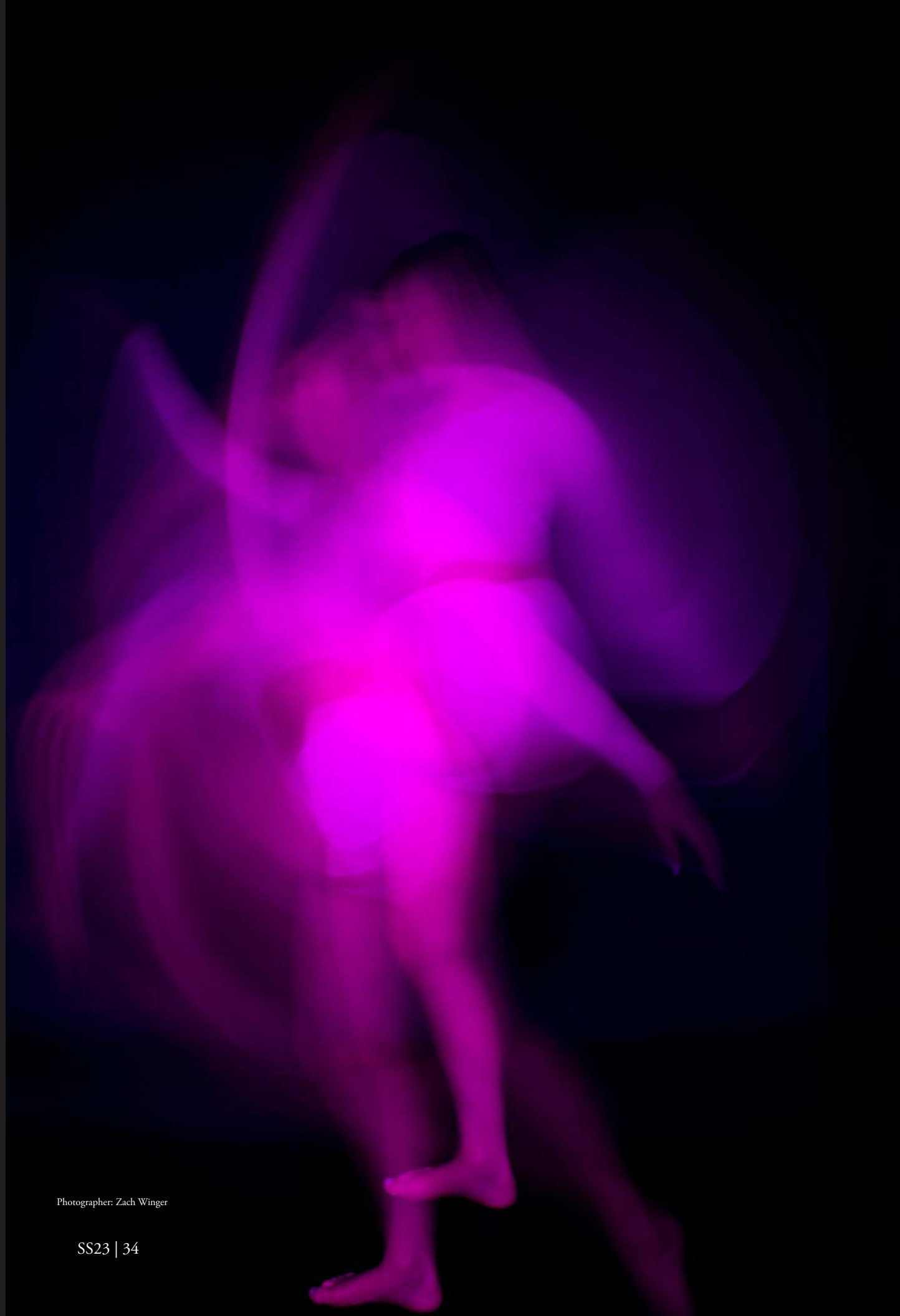Illustrator: Derek Helmer
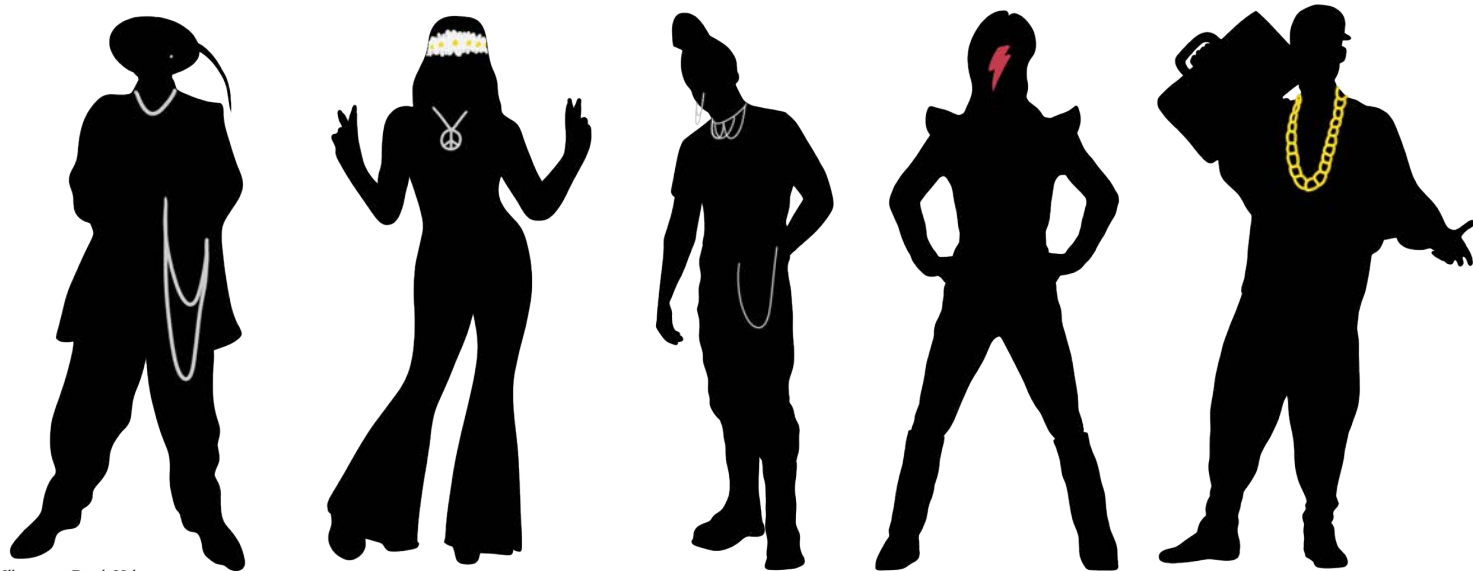
IN MOTION

An editorial by Amanda Meuth, Zach Winger, and Drew Head

Photographer: Amanda Meuth

Photographer: Amanda Meuth
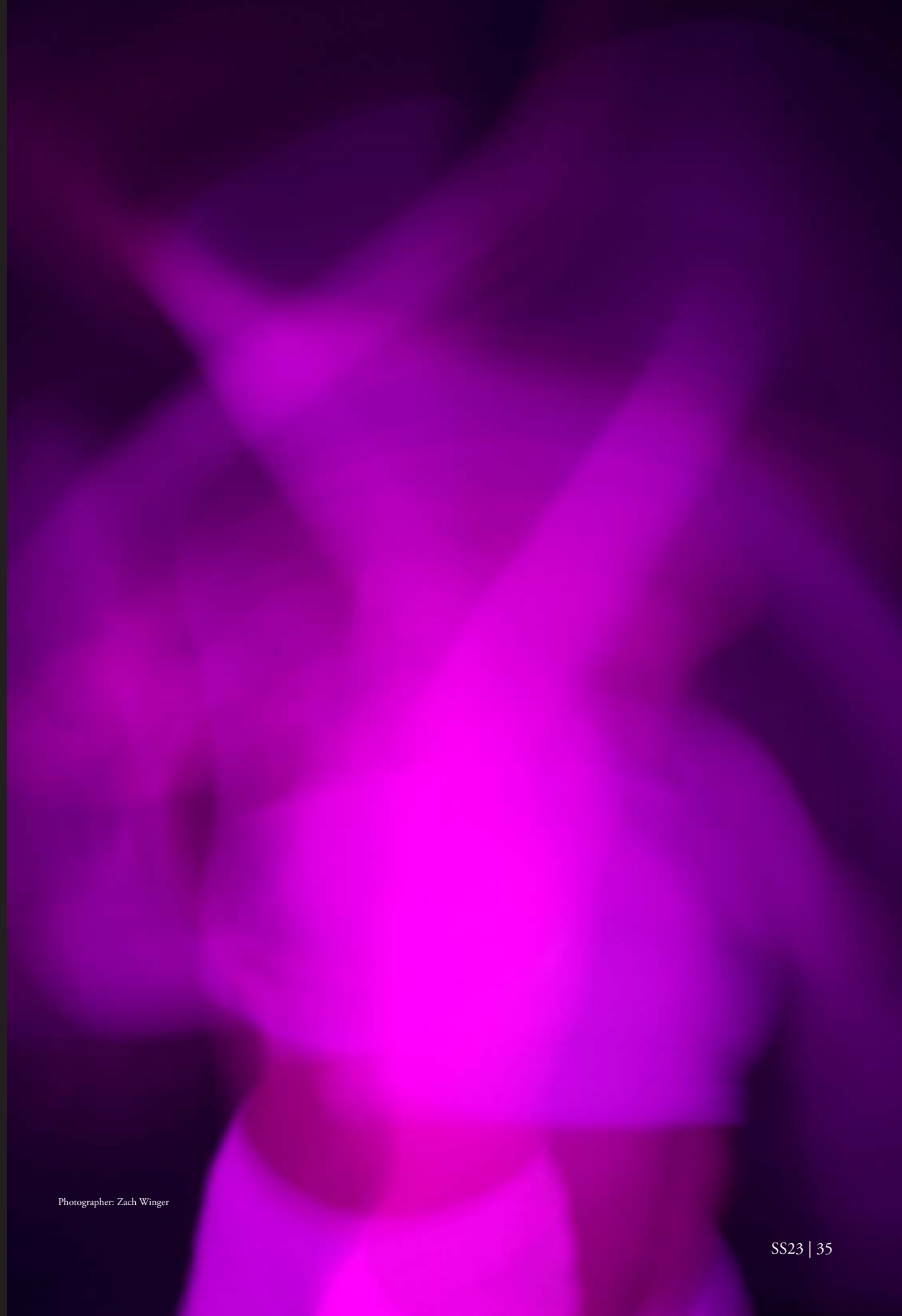
Photographer: Zach Winger

Photographer: Zach Winger

Social Media and Personal Aesthetic

MADALYN COTTRELL

For as long as I can remember, my parents have always had a cell phone in their hands, but it's never taken away from their devotion to their children. Nowadays, it seems that almost every anxious parent will sit their young children in front of a tablet for just an hour of peace in order to attempt to preserve their fragile composures. Education has also changed completely, placing kids in front of iPads instead of paper and textbooks. Technology is everywhere nowadays, but it hasn't always been so heavily ingrained into our everyday lives. However, over the past decade and a half, it seems as if the world has become dependent on digital communication. We can call, text, or facetime our loved ones at a moment's notice. We can access our bank accounts within minutes. Our phones provide us with digital calendars, calculators, and with an array of useful gadgets. We have access to limitless information within the palms of our hands. In ways, smartphones truly have done wonders for society, but I don't believe the problem lies with the technological advancements of the smartphone, I believe it has everything to do with social media.

In 2005, only 5% of adults reported usage of social media. Social media has consumed us, as that number has skyrocketed to 70%. There has been a growth in understanding that social media has damaged society. If you asked users to identify the problems with social media, most would focus on the content. They might list an array of misinformation and disinformation in the media that leads to societal problems. These complaints are valid, but the media specifically caters content to its users depending on the content that they interact with. By targeting users with what resonates with them, warps their perception and creates a false model of society. But for younger minds, it seems as if social media has heavily warped the perceptions that we have of ourselves.

Generation Z has had technology integrated into their lives in different ways than generations prior. Baby Boomers saw the rise of computers for personal usage, and millennials saw the rise of mobile technology in the early 2000s. For Generation Z, things have been much different as we are the first generation to have access to such refined forms of technology. We are a global generation redefining relationships with technology, and unfortunately, some of these results have been detrimental. According to a 2021 study conducted by Pew Research, Generation Z spends an average of 70 hours on their phones a week. Heavy usage begins at younger and younger ages. My parents didn't let me have a phone until I was 15. Nowadays, if I go to the mall, I'm seeing 9-10-year-old girls carrying the latest smartphones. I can't go to
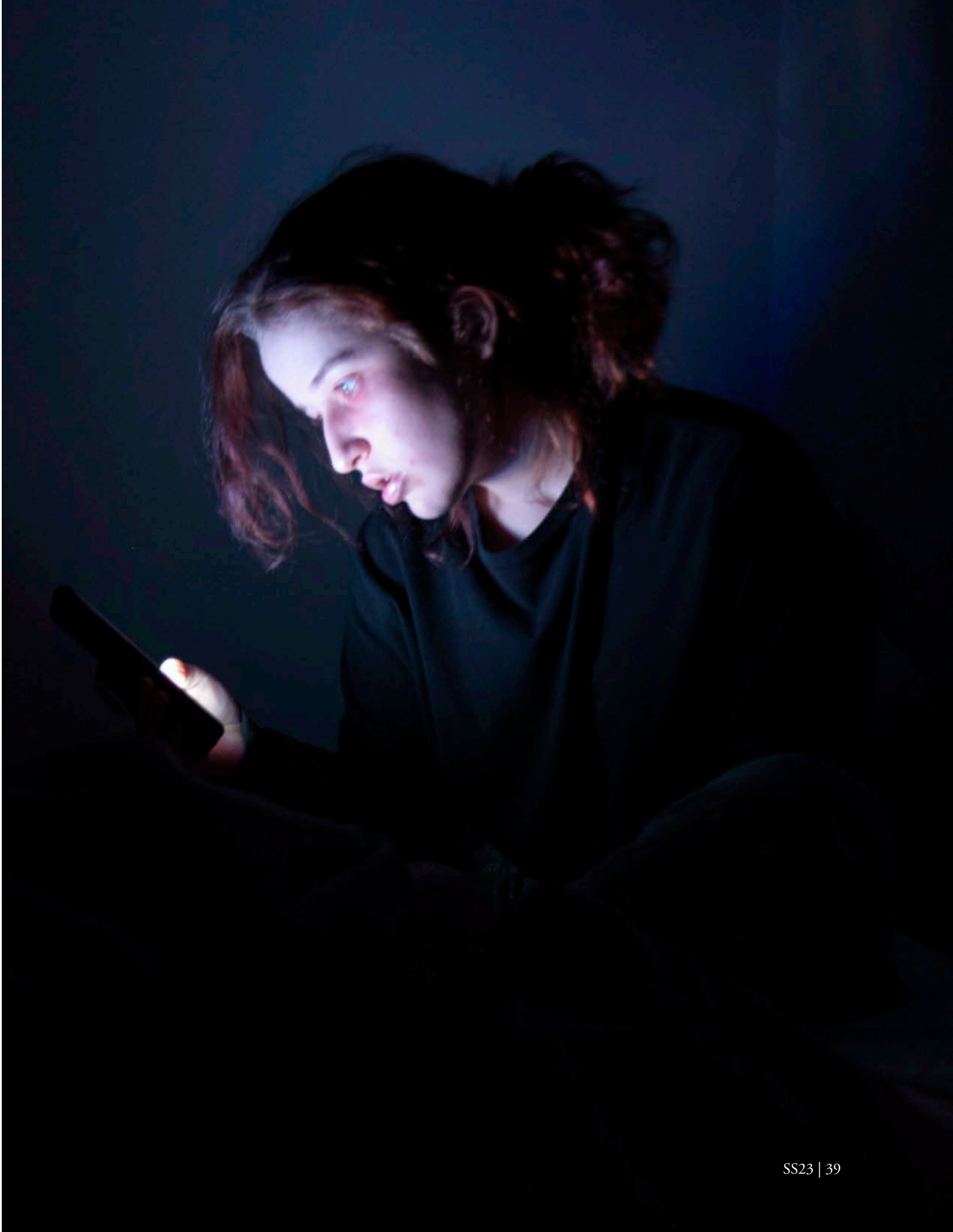
Target without seeing a group of young middle schoolers making a TikTok in the middle of a grocery aisle. Many members of Generation Z got their first smartphone when they were 12. 95% of teens surveyed by Pew Research reported that they had a phone, and nearly 45% of surveyors reported that they were online constantly. Phones have become such an essential part of our day-to-day lives, they are the last things we look at in the evening and the first things we look at in the morning, and it's safe to assume that most of us go to bed with our phones with us at night.

The near-intimate relationships we have with our devices have not only impacted our interactions with the world around us, but it has also affected our perception of the world we exist in. It's redefining virtual realities, but it is also redefining our actualities. Existing in a generation with such a reliance on technology and social media has also had devastating effects on the psychological health of our generation. Generation Z has some of the highest recorded levels of anxiety ever, and maybe this stems not only from pressures from our education system but also from social media and the digital era we are so acclimated to. Younger members of our society have a relationship with social media that the older generations don't seem to understand. I can name maybe one or two of my friends that don't have social media accounts. Social media is driven by young influencers, and it's difficult not to fall into the never-ending cycle of self-comparison. It can have a detrimental effect on

our identities, driving some of us to curate our personal aesthetics to keep in sync with what influencers are labeling as "trendy."

I claim to be someone who isn't overly attached to my phone, but I still find myself spending hours on end mindlessly browsing social media. It would be foolish of me to say I haven't been influenced by what I see in the media world, and I think that dozens if not hundreds of people my age would agree that they have been affected in the same ways I have.

In the media, there is such pressure on young people to conform to what is "trendy" and "aesthetic" – it's suffocating, especially for those who cannot keep up with the ever-changing trends presented to us by social media. What I think has been particularly harmful is the romanticization of the "clean girl" aesthetic. This aesthetic features perfect skin, perfectly groomed brows, plump lips, and perfectly slicked-back hair. Glorifying such an unachievable look for many can have extremely toxic effects on the way people may view themselves. I can't speak for everyone, but my failures to conform to the "clean girl" aesthetic have made me feel awful about myself at times. At the end of the day, real people don't always look as glamorous as they do on screen, and such a reality needs to be normalized.

Thanks to the never-ending cycle of fast fashion, standards of what's considered "cool" or not also can cause people to curate their identities. creating compartmentalized standards waters down people's identities and pressures them into conforming. There have been moments I have found myself disdaining every piece of clothing in my closet. In some situations, it's cool to be

trendy, and I can say with confidence that I dress like every other 20-year-old girl. But every time we change aspects of ourselves to fit into the mold that influencers have created, it washes away people's desires to be themselves.

The glamorization of the lives people lead on social media is also extremely toxic. It's created this awful habit of self-comparison for a lot of young people. They feel less than others because their lives aren't as "exciting" or "romantic" as

> **Every time we change aspects of ourselves to fit into the mold that influencers have created, it washes away people's desires to be themselves.**

the influencers they see on their social media timelines. In reality, the romanticization influencers seem to bathe in stems from a place of privilege. Having access to such luxuries doesn't make one's life any less exciting or valuable than those we see in the media. On the bright side, in attempts to combat toxicity and the pressures of social conformity, there has been a push for realism in the media amidst this toxic cycle of self-comparison. I've seen an array of creators on Instagram and Tik Tok who are advocating for mental health and authenticity. It's refreshing to see creators with such positive, inviting platforms. They're human and are normalizing the fact that it's okay not to be perfect. It's hard to ward yourself away from wanting to fit into

the mold, but there are ways to combat the toxic cycle of self-conformity. I love seeing huge celebrities be unapologetically themselves on all of their platforms. She advocates for people of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds, and has established herself as an extremely positive celebrity that celebrates self-love for all walks of life. A few of my personal favorite content creators on Tik Tok and Instagram are Chrissy Chapecka and Spencer Barbosa. Both have accumulated millions of followers and have truly used their platforms to uplift others. Chrissy Chapeka is a sex-positive, feminist, pro-queer, and self-proclaimed "bimbo." She advocates for queer rights and pushes for her fans and followers to have a positive relationship with sex and masturbation. Chrissy has also been extremely vulnerable about her own journey with self-love, and I admire being able to see someone open up on the internet. Spencer Barbosa is a body-positive influencer on Tik Tok who advocates

for filterless and real presentations of our actual selves online. She flaunts her stubbled leg hair on her legs, her stretch marks, and her belly online. Spencer is proud of who she is, feels beautiful in her own skin, and encourages her followers to feel the same. By opening herself up online, Spencer has created a beautiful platform and has had a significant impact on her followers by proving that not everyone you see online is perfect. And that's just it. At the end of the day, we have to remember that we are all just humans behind a screen trying to make it another day. It's not an easy pill to swallow, but a lot of what you see online is synthetic and crafted to cater to a particular following.

The push for realism in the media has laid the foundation for users to develop a better relationship with social media. As toxic as it is, social media can be a positive, powerful tool if used correctly and efficiently. ❧

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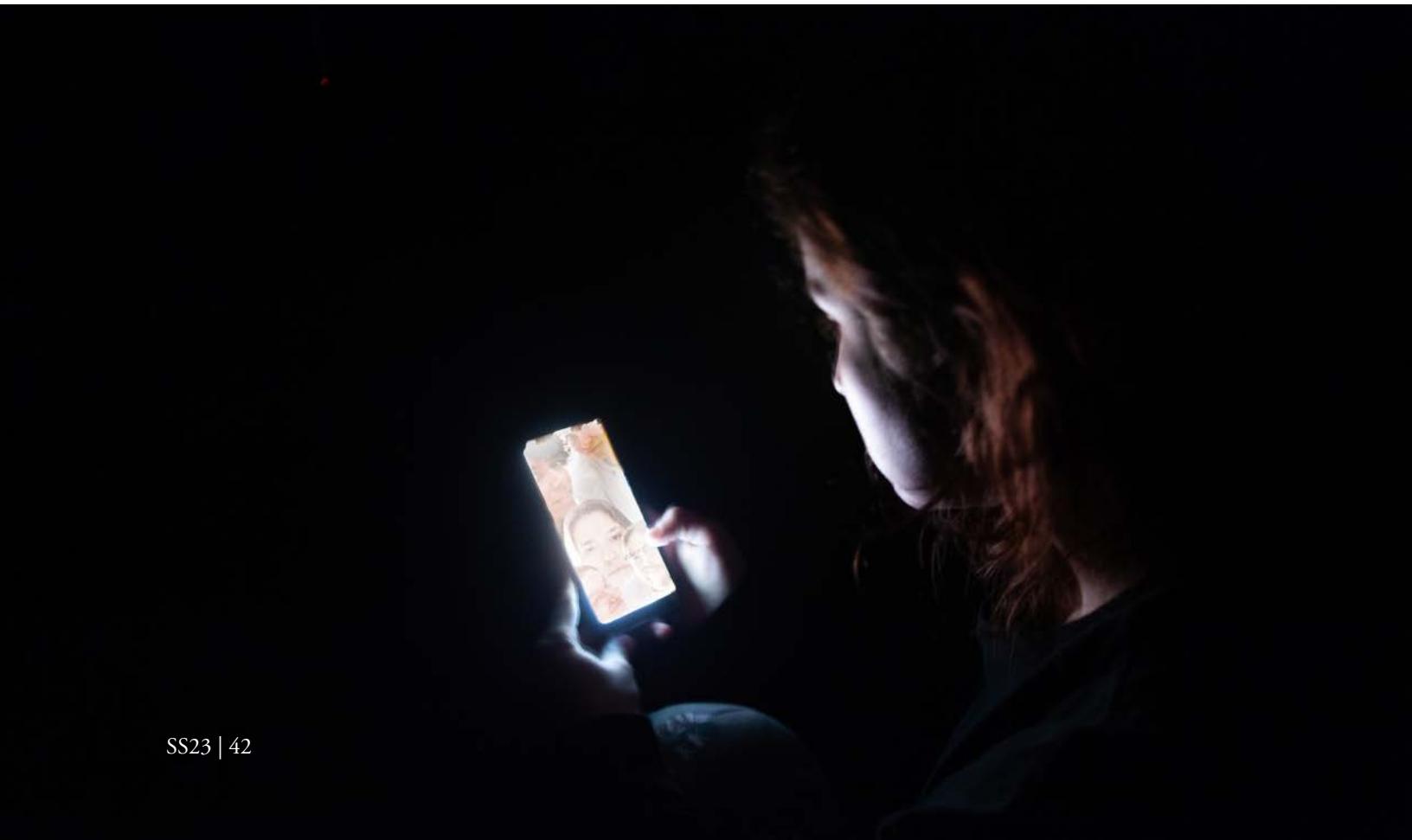
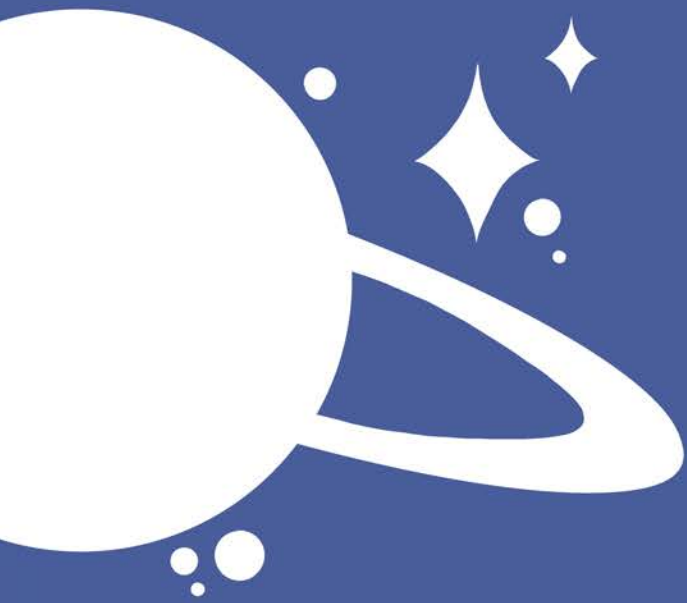**Photographers** Drew Head • Amanda Meuth • Zach Winger

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can·did

/ˈkandəd/ · adjective

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