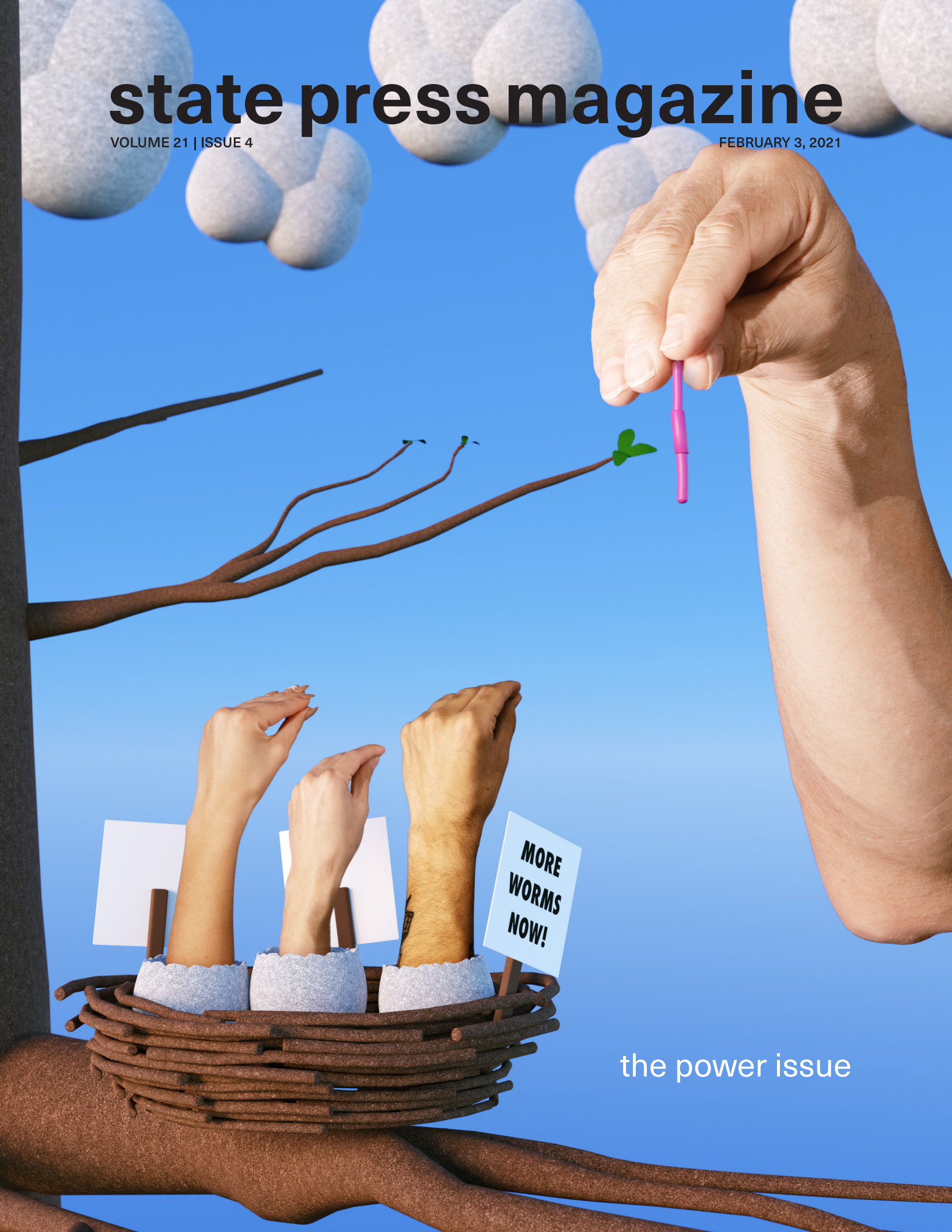


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the power issue



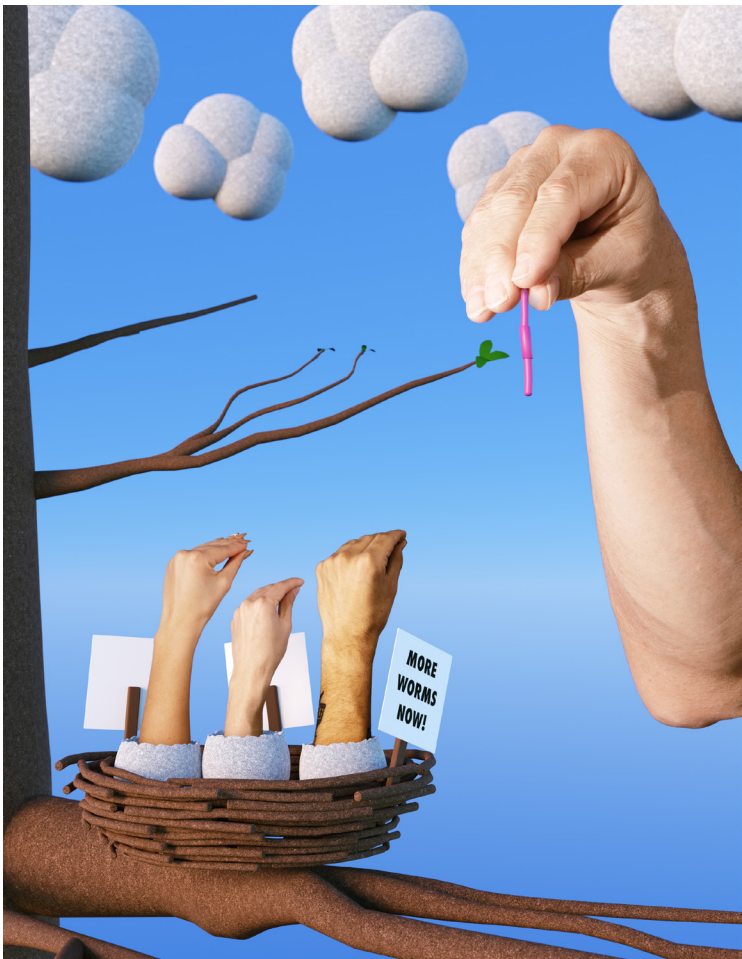
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Editor's letter

Power imbalance is a historical constant: In politics, in higher education and, well, in everything. The elite hoards wealth while the working class digs mass graves as this pandemic rages on, turning to any sense of stability presented, no matter how predatory. Public figures expropriate recognition and praise from mahogany podiums as organizers mobilize their communities. Students of color struggle through their degrees, staring institutional racism in the face while their white counterparts enjoy a disproportionate level of comfort. People with mental illnesses fight not only their internal battles, but also those waged on them by a negative public perception based in anything but fact.

It's time to demand autonomy from the hand that feeds.

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The best recruiter

Amid widespread uncertainty, the U.S. military offers enlistment as stability

by Chase Hunter B.

Elizabeth Baer wanted to become a musician in an orchestra, her family thought she might attend fashion school and for a long time, she wanted to be an anesthesiologist. But at 17, she joined the military and learned to build bombs.

“I never pictured myself joining,” Baer said. But financial hardships at home prevented her from pursuing college and the military appeared as the best detour to higher education.

Almost 10 years after Baer opted out of a traditional path to higher education, another economic crisis derailed more than 16 million Americans’ plans to go to college. Meanwhile, recruiters for some branches of the military are meeting recruitment goals after a pair of years where goals were missed or significantly lowered, according to Department of Defense statistics.

Beth Asch, a senior economist at the RAND Corporation, released multiple books outlining how military recruitment changed from the latter half of the 20th century to the modern day.

“A lot of people don’t have money for college,” Asch said. “So the military offers an opportunity to get money for college, which you earn by completing a service obligation.”

Recovering from the Great Recession was difficult for Baer’s father. He regularly found himself “on the chopping block” at new jobs. And the businesses continued downsizing, Baer said.

As her father sought new jobs to support his family, he brought the Baers on a nomadic search for employment over the

course of four years to Pennsylvania, Illinois, Florida and eventually Australia.

Baer’s mother worked for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, which provides dependents of their employees 100% free tuition at any state university. But her mother was forced to leave her Pennsylvania government job to be with her husband in Florida. Baer suddenly realized she didn’t “have free school anymore.”

The price of college has shot up exponentially in the past 40 years, rising more than 500% since 1982, according to College Choice, more than double the rate of inflation during the same time period. In 2020, U.S. student loan debt reached more than \$1.7 trillion.

The debt collectively owed by Americans to college is now the second largest form of debt behind housing, according to Experian, a consumer credit reporting company.

Volunteer forced

“When there’s a downturn in the economy, people are not just more likely to join the military, they’re also more likely to go to college,” Asch said. “There’s a certain element of that, where the military is competing with colleges for qualified people.”

Nearly 5 million more people are unemployed now than in February last year despite the stock market hitting record highs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And 30-40 million Americans are at risk of eviction according to an analysis by the Aspen Institute.

“Where the military comes in, is it’s offer-

ing me a job — although, of course that’s the case — but it’s also offering me a future when the future seems uncertain in the civilian world,” Asch said.

An April report from the Senate Joint Economic Committee — when there were 50,000 COVID-19 deaths — stated, “When the pandemic subsides to a degree that Americans can return to some version of their former lives, it likely will leave in its wake even greater inequality.”

A significant number of students are choosing to put off college until the storm passes. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found a 21.7% decline in high school students entering college during the fall 2020 semester.

Yet ASU defied that trend by maintaining its on-campus student population and growing its online student population by 19% since last January. Matt Lopez, the associate vice president of enrollment services cited a familiar reason for defying this trend.

“ASU’s innovation mindset allowed the University to leverage existing strengths, but also rapidly create new ones to ensure that students have learning options available so their education could continue with minimal disruption,” Lopez said.

But going to college was not an option for Baer — at least without a major deviance to her educational path.

As she contemplated entering the civilian workforce, Baer’s father gave what he describes as “tough love.” She had to figure out her own way to go to college.

“That was a turning point where I just kind



Illustration by Nghi Tran

“When there's a downturn in the economy, people are not just more likely to join the military, they're also more likely to go to college,” — Beth Asch

of thought to myself, ‘How am I going to do this?’” Baer said.

Got you by the bootstraps

In order to achieve her goal of going to college, Baer joined the military at 17 with parental consent. Through the military, she found “a pathway to college” and the job security she watched her father struggle to find when she was a teenager.

But like many young adults today, Baer was dismayed at the idea of going to college without the opportunity to experience the full scope of college life.

“I had this ... facade of what college would really be like. I imagined myself with my little Fjällräven Kånken bag with my books in my hand,” Baer said.

Baer only spent one day on campus due to the pandemic.

The lack of a social aspect in college caused some students to drop out and join the force, said Capt. Jose Narcia of the Arizona National Guard. Narcia leads the recruitment and retention battalion where he coordinates National Guard recruiting of young men and women in Arizona.

“There's some students that have left

college because they didn't really like to remotely go to college,” Narcia said. “The second piece is that you see a lot of people who realize how fragile the world can be, and unpredictable at this time.”

More than 208,000 Arizonans are unemployed, the most since July 2020, according to the Bureau of Labor. And according to a 2020 Feeding America study, close to 1 in 5 Arizonans are struggling with food insecurity.

Yet Narcia said his best National Guard recruiter had told him that of “every single person” he signed up, that “none of them were unemployed.”

“What the recruiters typically do is try and figure out whether the Guard are going to be able to help them in their careers, whether it's going to supplement it or complement their career,” Narcia said.

Desperation gripped millions amid the COVID-19 pandemic, giving new value to the military's promise of economic security.

“COVID-19 has given the military one of the largest bargaining chips of the decade,” Baer said. “They could definitely say, ‘Hey, you're experiencing economic hardship right now? We will feed you, clothe you and house you.’”

Attempting to sign a person up for the military by pressuring students with all of the benefits of joining the force is called “dumpster loading,” Narcia said.

“That's not how a recruiter is going to talk to you,” Narcia said. “Normally, when somebody talks about somebody being interested, it's more of, ‘Have you ever thought about serving in the military?’”

People are feeling a sense of duty in the past year to join the National Guard and aid in the distribution of COVID-19 tests, food and vaccinations, Narcia said.

But the serving in the military is not without its downsides. Pediatricians and other researchers found that military recruiter's tactics, including who they target, are “disturbingly similar to predatory grooming,” according to a 2011 study in the National Center for Biotechnology Information studying recruitment tactics compared to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The guidelines of the convention bar military recruiters from subjecting minors to military recruitment. But of all U.N. member countries, only the United States and Somalia have not ratified the conven-

tion, the study said.

“Although adults in the active military service are reported to experience increased mental health risk, including stress, substance abuse and suicide, the youngest soldiers consistently show the worst health effects,” the study said.

Rates of alcohol abuse, anxiety disorders, depression and self-harm were found to be higher in soldiers aged 17-24 than older soldiers, according to the study.

The difficulties young veterans face are partly why Baer decided to work at the Pat Tillman Veterans Center to help veterans transition back to civilian life.

And though the military has set up programs to aid in the civilian transition, Baer said, “no matter what they say, you'll never be prepared for that transition.”

“That's actually why I applied to help be a part of the veteran's center, because I wanted to help other students get a grasp on what it's like to transition fully to be a civilian,” Baer said.

The earring

Baer said her experience is emblematic of common military service pitches: Travel the

world, gain valuable work experience, serve your country.

She traveled throughout Europe, embarked on a tour in South Korea, and picked up languages along the way. She excelled as a young woman in the Air Force, ascending through the ranks to sergeant – which gave her the duty of commanding men sometimes a decade her senior.

Going overseas didn't just mean she had to leave her family behind, it also meant that she would have to leave her personal life in an ice chest to come back to.

“The guy that I broke up with in high school now has two kids,” Baer said. “And I have four cats.”

She reconciles her missed time building a life at home with the “surreal and almost unfathomable” opportunities she's had visiting Morocco in Northern Africa, Petra in Jordan and seeing the Eiffel Tower at night in Paris, France.

But the surreality of living abroad ended when she returned to the U.S., realizing she would be graduating college at 30 years old in May 2022.

“I put seven years aside so that I could serve,” Baer said. “At times I felt stagnant in

my education and that my life was on hold.”

But leaving the military and becoming a citizen again doesn't work like a switch. One person she met in a tax class spent a quarter-century in the military.

“He doesn't know anything else,” Baer said.

Baer realized the military mentality had ingrained itself in her when she was looking for houses. She began to panic when she realized she would be 5 minutes late to a realtor's appointment because “if you're not 15 minutes early, you're late” by military standards.

She had to get used to waking up later than 4:30 a.m. But it took a second ear piercing banned by military standards to get it through her head that she was a civilian again.

Her ears now adorned with a pair of teardrop earrings from her mother and sun-shaped moonstones, she said, “When I got out of the military I got a second piercing. And I thought I was such a rebel.”



ASIAN STANDS

Student stories and a tumultuous summer reveal a culture of exclusion and discrimination in journalism education and the profession itself

by Kiera Riley
photography by Noah Glynn



The data could not show the time her professor made light of Black Lives Matter in front of an entire class.

The data could not show the time her professor insinuated Indigenous communities were not worth covering.

The data could not show the many times they saw their white peers score higher on their writing assignments in their first reporting classes.

The data could not show the air of displacement students of color feel within a predominantly white institution.

In the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, some say reliance on outdated principles has created a hostile environment for students from marginalized communities.

So when Rosaura Wardsworth, a recent graduate of Cronkite, started her master's thesis, she knew it had to say what the numbers could not.

"None of these stories were making it into the data," Wardsworth said. "If you don't

hear why they're not enjoying (Cronkite), if you don't feel it like they're feeling it, it makes it harder to make change."

Wardsworth's project, entitled "I, Too Am Cronkite," gave a voice to often unheard BIPOC student journalists.

In a series of podcasts, Wardsworth sat down and discussed the experiences of four undergraduate students, Susan Wong, president of ASU's chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association, Kiarra Spotts-ville, president of ASU's National Association of Black Journalists, Noah Huerta, president of ASU's Native American Journalists Association and Marco Peralta, president of ASU's National Association for Hispanic Journalists.

And she did so while keeping specific context in mind.

Against the backdrop of last summer's revival of the national Black Lives Matter movement after the murder of George Floyd, students across and adjacent to the Cronkite School followed multiple controversies on

social media this summer.

Sonya Duhé

One tweet in particular peeled back another layer of conflict at Cronkite, and at other journalism institutions across the U.S.

Sonya Duhé, the then-incoming dean of the Cronkite School, tweeted from her personal account, "For the family of George Floyd, the good police officers who keep us safe, my students, faculty and staff. Praying for peace on this #BlackOutTuesday."

Duhé, previously the director of the School of Communication and Design at Loyola University New Orleans, saw near-immediate backlash from both her new and former student body.

Whitney Woods, a Loyola alumna and former student of Duhé's, replied to Duhé's tweet with a thread — and a damning one at that.

She wrote in her initial tweet, "There is no way in HELL that BLACK LIVES matter to you." She continued, "You are one of, if

not, THE most racist human that I have ever encountered in a professional setting."

In the next seven tweets, Woods listed multiple occasions where Duhé made racist comments both in and out of the classroom. She specifically recalled Duhé calling her natural hair "messy" and "inappropriate for on-air."

Woods filed six complaints with human resources against Duhé, but saw no change in her time at Loyola.

And beyond Woods's tweets, Loyola's student-run publication The Maroon and The State Press compiled stories from more than 23 students who complained about similar comments regarding appearances, each marked by racist or homophobic undertones.

A petition not to confirm Duhé's position circulated on Twitter garnering over 4,000 signatures. Faculty members at Cronkite also signed and sent a letter raising heavy questions about Duhé's ability to lead.

Duhé's job offer was rescinded by the Cronkite School shortly after, but the near-miss floated around the Cronkite sphere with some heavy sense of reckoning.

Kristin Gilger, former assistant and associate dean, was named interim dean shortly after.

Objectivity or identity

Last summer's string of events revealed more than a few missteps by administrators. What shone through was a commonplace culture in journalism schools, and journalism in general. One driven by a news ethic considered outdated by many.

"It did prompt us to take a look at the whole culture of the school," Gilger said.

The Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, considered a cornerstone of journalism itself nearly universally in the United States, previously placed a heavy emphasis on objectivity.

The emphasis seemed to stick even after SPJ revised the code in 1996. It is now widely taught in journalism schools that reporting,

and by proxy the reporter, must first and foremost be objective and unbiased.

Though this is still a driving factor in the reporting and writing process, it is now coming into conflict with another undeniable aspect of journalism: the identity and experiences of the reporter.

Sharon Bramlett-Solomon, an associate professor at the Cronkite school, veteran journalist and scholar of race, gender and society issues, believes there is plenty of room for both as long as there is balance.

"As journalists, we cut our teeth on understanding that we should be neutral, unattached to a story, not partisan, not biased," Bramlett-Solomon said. "However, we also know that it is impossible not to be subjec-

tive in reporting because you see through your own eyes."

The argument for a balance between identity and objectivity was widely borne through the experience of journalists of color in newsrooms across the country. And it only grew more intense amid the Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

Journalists covering protests found themselves a part of the news as they were pepper sprayed, shot at and physically assaulted by police.

"Black journalists and other journalists of color were immersed in the news story," Bramlett-Solomon said. "I'm going to report something different if I'm just writing down the facts compared to if I was beat down by



a police officer and taken to jail.”

Forbes reported the summer resulted in over 328 press freedom violations. There were 208 documented assaults on reporters with 47 journalists physically attacked by police and 83 hit by rubber bullets or projectiles.

“When you become part of the news, you most certainly can see that you have to relinquish the idea of trying to be neutral or unbiased because you’re hiding what you experience,” Bramlett-Solomon said.

Intersection with social media

This issue also crossed over into social media as it persisted as a home to many modes of activism and journalism.

During the height of the civil unrest, the Black Lives Matter hashtag was tweeted an average of 3.7 million times per day, according to Pew Research Center.

Journalists participated too, against an old head school of thought. For those doused in traditional journalism ethics, this advocacy on social media seemed to run counter to journalism itself.

Multiple journalism schools across the country implement social media policies warding students against sharing anything they deem partisan.

In the Cronkite School social media guidelines, the school implores students to avoid expressing anything political online, and to “recognize even hashtags can imply support,” and to “take care to avoid those instances.”

Student journalists took stances against injustices this summer anyway, even in the face of the very real and looming threat of disciplinary action from the school.

When Wardsworth chose the students for her project, she made sure to choose those who refused to sit idly by in both the Black Lives Matter movement and Duhé’s shocking, but somehow oh so predictable, exposé.

“To me, that’s what a real journalist is, standing up for those who can’t stand up for themselves,” Wardsworth said. “So I knew



I wanted to interview those four students.”

The Cronkite school launched the Cronkite Experience project in early July. Gilger announced the project, asking for “thoughts about how journalism is practiced both at the school and in the profession, and ideas for ways we can be a more inclusive community,” in an email to students.

According to Gilger and Vanessa Ruiz, the inaugural director for diversity initiatives and community engagement, the school heard from students, alumni and current and former faculty and staff immediately.

“It came to things such as harassment or discrimination and leadership quickly recognized that there are areas that needed to be immediately tackled,” Ruiz said.

The next steps

Some problems saw immediate action. The school created Ruiz’s diversity director position and changed the Must-See Mondays schedule to include a heavy focus on diversity and inclusion.

Another major focus was the hiring of a new dean for the school. In the search for a new candidate, leadership is requiring a diversity statement, and receiving training on how to best approach hiring.

Other issues would take more time.

The plan for the Cronkite Experience project was to hold listening sessions, form working groups and hopefully address problems like negative student experience, skewed curriculum, and low retention and recruitment rates among faculty and staff of color.

Wardsworth, took part in the working group looking to address retention rates among students of color, and a lack of diverse faculty and staff.

It was in the working groups where Wardsworth heard the stories of her peers. She recognized agents for change.

The main objective of Wardsworth’s thesis project was to give students a space to speak truth to their experiences. Within the work-

ASU is a comprehensive public research university, measured by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed in advancing research and discovery of public value; and assessing its fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.

ing group and with her thesis, she hopes to enact wider change at the school.

All of the proposals and ideas from the working groups just recently landed on Gilger’s desk, their topics ranging from faculty cohesion to curriculum.

Overall, the project is a work in progress, but Gilger sees that as a strength, not a weakness.

“There’s a temptation to rush this process and announce a whole bunch of stuff that you’re doing and then sort of lose momentum,” Gilger said. “It’s better to do this seriously, and deliberately and thoroughly. We may not be doing 22 things at once, but we’ll be doing things that we think will be most impactful.”

Until then, students are waiting.

Wardsworth said she expects transparency from administration throughout the process.

“We want dates. We want actionable items. We want transparency,” Wardsworth said. “I want to be able to say I’m proud of Cronkite. I want to be able to say this is what’s changing next year, this is what’s changing three years from now.”

In the meantime, Wardsworth hopes to continue to provide some type of liferaft to journalists of color, especially those in training.

“Even if things within universities are not going to change very quickly, there’s still students of color entering the journalism field,” Wardsworth said. “I want them to know, you’re not alone.”



Celebrity politics and convening power through blue light

Last year, as the world stayed connected through social media, the divide between community organizing and celebrity politicians grew

by Itzia Crespo

Vianey Di Anda was only 16 when she began her career in community organizing. But it wasn't a career at the time.

"I grew up within this community, and I was seeing that change happening right in front of me," she said of her life in the few years before enrolling in classes at ASU as a DACA recipient. "I saw the impact that our community had: So many people from so many backgrounds and allies coming together to help each other."

"I never left. I stayed here."

Now civic engagement communications director for One Arizona, Di Anda spends her days canvassing or helping people register to vote and participate in the U.S. Census.

One Arizona is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit made up of now 28 local organizations throughout the state of Arizona. The organization was founded in 2010 when SB1070 was ravaging the lives of undocumented communities by allowing law enforcement to check the immigration status of a person if they had "reasonable suspicion" that person was in the U.S. illegally.

Di Anda recalled these initial years as ones that brought her together with activists in her community and provided support during such paralyzing times.

"We were fighting against that kind of oppression. And throughout that time we gained allies, and we gained people that wanted to join our fight, and they supported us," Di Anda said. "And so now we're in a position to be able to work together."

Di Anda spoke about the importance of community organizing and gaining trust from those who have been harmed by the law. She said funding from One Arizona oftentimes created full-time staffer positions that paid for the efforts of their work within partnering organizations.

"It is so important to have this type of establishment because some of the orgs that we work with now are fairly new; they were not around five years ago, so they do not have the capacity, the funding, maybe the equipment, and maybe some of them were run on pure volunteers (initially)."

A shift in celebrity politics

Alexander Halavais, associate professor of critical data studies at ASU's School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, explained the shifting relationship in recent years between elected officials and those they serve.

"Traditionally, not just politicians but those in government have had this convening power, this ability to draw people

together and get their attention."

Convening power is described by Harvard Business Review as social networks and self-organizing using existing capabilities. In other words, one person provides the platform, but others do the work.

But the ways in which we can get that attention have changed, Halavais said.

The modern economy increasingly relies on the assumption of a person's attention span. Halavais cited this phenomenon as the attention economy, stating that technology and social media have shifted the way people tend to think, but also one that has constructed "authenticity" as a brand.

"A lot of politicians can find themselves in a position of having to be able to be on social media and respond directly," he said. "But it's not exactly authentic, it is a performance of authenticity. You have to be able to fake it."

And the ingenuous performances enacted by big names on social media in recent months left many with an aversion to usual idealization of household names.

Now, as the public braces itself for the daily headlines surrounding a pandemic that has killed over two million people, celebrity culture has taken a back seat.

Or could it be that it merely became embedded with a different powerful force?

According to a study by The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, "celebrity politics" can be divided into two main variants; one is an elected politician or candidate "who uses elements of 'celebrity-hood' to establish their claim to represent a group or cause," while the other is an established celebrity "who uses their popularity to speak for popular opinion."

And although celebrities used to provide a sense of comfort in their evasiveness toward reality, many could no longer see themselves reflected in vapid personas amid the bleak background of a deadly pandemic.

Di Anda believes an emphasis ought to be put on community members who are doing the groundwork of community organizing, rather than those who popularize it

or engage in party politics.

"It is us, the community who have brought us this (far)," Di Anda said. "It wasn't senator or representative 'X' or 'Y.'"

When asked who she has been inspired by, Di Anda's mind did not gravitate to household names or elected officials. Her voice softened over the phone as she spoke of co-workers and mentors who have impacted her life directly. She listed off names and chuckled at her own anecdotal memories.

"I'm very proud to be working where I am and with the people that are here," she said.

Pauline Cheong, professor and director of engagement and innovation at the Hugh Downs School Of Human Communication, said a recent increase in platforms that provide a home to similar remarks have formed a "widening ecosystem" of the digital world. The root to a seemingly infinite reach of messages pose the potential to shift the public view of issues, she said.

With this, elected officials who hold positions of power hold an additional responsibility with increased misinformation circulating on platforms like Facebook.

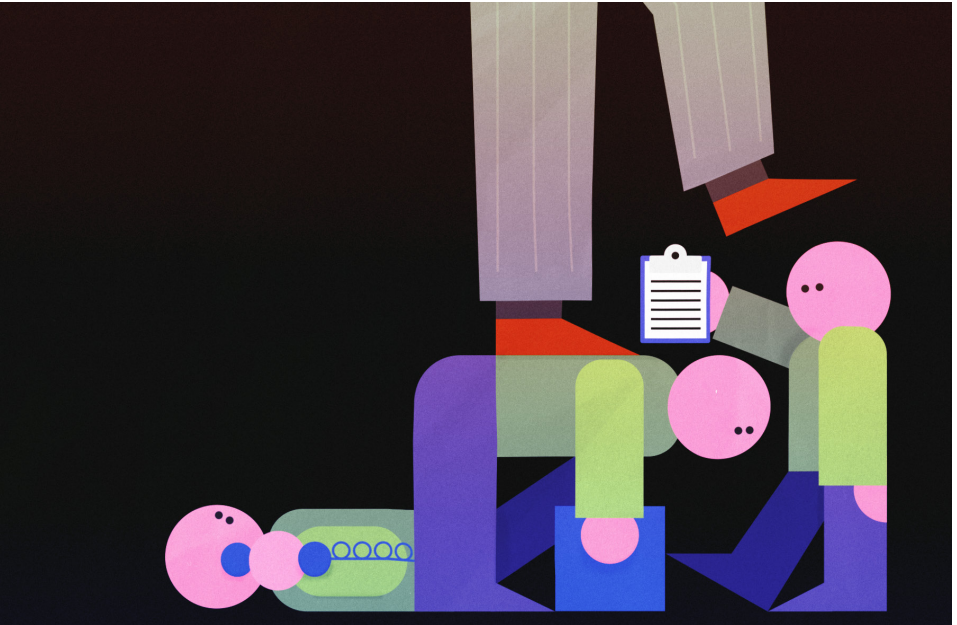


Illustration by Connor Wodynski

The power of reflection

Many look to the years of the Trump presidency as some that sparked a revival in blind political loyalty compared to years prior. Halavais referred to Trump as "President Twitter," for his ostentatious remarks on the social media platform, stating that the former president revived the site that had been previously notorious as a place for journalists to network.

"The point is that a lot of politicians can find themselves in a position of having to be able to be on social media and respond directly," Halavais said.

Halavais believes social media reflects this discourse, not the other way around.

"It's not social change in the sense of people having an aim in the public sphere, trying to shift that public sphere discourse towards that aim. It is instead this discussion around what's real and what's not, which is kind of disarming and difficult."

Cheong described the constant chatter among those in positions of power on digital platforms as "noise", and the cacophonous posts that circumnavigated issues ranging from racial injustice to the coronavirus pandemic in recent months, to in turn

center those unaffected, seemed rightfully described by such a word.

And that noise could only be exacerbated by an increasing inclination to remain guided by this mock sense of community.

"With the rise of a deep media type nation and society where you see that ingress and progress of technological innovations, reaching the corners of our everyday life, it enables people to use these various convergent media platforms to reach a community and to promote their messages," she said.

However, Cheong believes there's something to be said about the lack of recognition surrounding what many may be doing behind the scenes.

"It's hard to get the whole contextual picture of what they're doing for these communities on a day-to-day and ground level," she said. "So it's good to keep in mind that it is a condensed and crafted picture that can be easily misunderstood if you don't take time to investigate the stories that you see online."

For Di Anda, the motives that drove her to pursue community organizing were never so far removed.

"We are trying to work together as a state to support those issues that are important to our communities and to make sure that throughout the entire state voters have access to (fairness) and registering to vote and partake in the system."

You're not broken

It's time to end the stigma around psychiatric medication

by Brenna Toshner

I walked into the pharmacy with my mom. I told the worker my name and the prescription I came for. As the words left my mouth, heat crept up my face and my stomach tied itself in knots, a combination of excitement and anxiety washing over me. The pharmacy technician turned around to grab my order.

I shifted back and forth on my feet and looked at the ground.

My mental illnesses had become aggressive and blinding. My spark was gone, I was pale, malnourished and my personality had dwindled to almost nothing.

I was just a moving body.

The pharmacist handed me the paper bag of pill bottles. He looked me in the eye and told me to ignore the stigmas associated with what I held in my hand.

Everyone's brain is different, some of us just need extra help to get through life.

When I was 19, I began taking Zoloft and Abilify to manage my obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, depression and anorexia nervosa.

But I had been dealing with my mental illness since junior high. And the long road to medication and stability was littered with stigma and fear.

And I wasn't alone. In 2019, the National Institute of Mental Health reported 51.5 million adults living with a mental illness. And many more remain undiagnosed and untreated because of the same stigmas that haunted me.

These unfair stereotypes placed on those

living with mental illness leave many burdened with the decision to either get help and become categorized under that stigma, or worse, not seek out treatment in an effort to detach themselves from it.

Before being diagnosed

In 2018, as a sophomore in college, I hit a point that felt like rock bottom. The best part of my day was 3 p.m., when I was done with the pain of going through the motions and I could lay my head against my pillow. I wasn't enjoying life, I was simply obligated to it.

I removed myself from conversations. I wasn't eating. I was working out obsessively. I was irritable. But more than anything, I felt a sense of hopelessness that was so overwhelming it was like I was drowning in it.

And finding a therapist that I was comfortable with was a painstaking process.

After a months-long search, I found the therapist I am currently seeing. In my first session with her, I felt a flood of relief. I could finally express what I was feeling to someone who could help me untangle the mess I thought I was.

The diagnosis

After the first few sessions, my therapist diagnosed me with OCD, anxiety, depression and anorexia nervosa.

Hearing the first three disorders listed made sense to me, but when she told me I had anorexia nervosa, I was shocked. I didn't even notice it until she said the words out loud.

I was facing four very daunting diagnoses,

each one with the capability to take over my life even more than it already had.

In those first few weeks, my therapist realized I was completely overrun by my mental illnesses and in order for me to do the work to help myself in the long run, I needed the extra help psychiatric medications could provide.

Medication

My therapist referred me to a psychiatrist who I would meet with monthly to monitor any possible symptoms or issues from the prescribed medications.

I was prescribed low doses of Zoloft — a Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor that raises serotonin levels — and Abilify, which is labeled as an antipsychotic but was being used to help treat my eating disorder.

Even after I adjusted to the physical effects of the medications, I remember feeling the weight of societal stigmas surrounding psychiatric drugs and being worried about what side effects I may have from the medication or what my friends and family may think of it.

My concerns weren't unusual. Negative perceptions surrounding treatment for mental health disorders are common — whether that be in the form of therapy or just opening up about personal experiences.

A valuable lesson I learned in my experience was that I didn't have to feel trapped one way or another, I just needed to listen to my body and do what was best for my health, which can change. Maybe I'll have to be on medication for the rest of my life to manage my mental disorders. Maybe I won't. Either

way, I will continue to do what I need to so I can live a peaceful life. I want this for anyone taking psychiatric medication.

Stigmas & misconceptions

In a 2019 survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of the American Psychological Association, it was found that 87% of Americans "agreed that having a mental health disorder is nothing to be ashamed of." But the survey showed that some stigma still persists. 33% of survey respondents said they agreed with the statement, "people with mental health disorders scare me," and 39% said they would "view someone differently if they knew that person had a mental health disorder."

Marjorie Baldwin, a professor in the department of economics at ASU, studies workplace discrimination against people with disabilities — specifically those with a mental illness.

Baldwin said the stigma associated with mental illnesses is among the most severe, comparable to that expressed toward people with alcohol or drug abuse disorders.

"If someone is diagnosed with a mental illness, they are branded with the stereotypes that are associated with mental illness, and so you do everything you can to avoid that brand," she said. "And if you go to treat-

ment, suddenly you've got a diagnosis and you become a person with a mental illness."

Baldwin said these stigmas can infiltrate many parts of life. "In the workplace, discrimination can take the form of being ostracized socially, being harassed or bullied or, in the extreme, just losing your job completely."

But she said one of the worst consequences of the stereotypes surrounding mental illness is the self-stigma it creates.

"People who are diagnosed with a mental illness know the stereotypes that are pervasive in society, and many times they will adapt these stereotypes themselves, feeling that they're incompetent, incapable and a less valuable person," she said. "So to the extent that avoiding treatment can help you avoid the stigma — you can see why many people are hesitant."

When you take the step toward treatment, it requires self-admission that you may be dealing with a mental health disorder, and when these stigmas are so strong and negative, many people refusing treatment in order to avoid that self and social stigma.

Baldwin said the hesitation to seek out help is unfortunate because "in many cases, the sooner you get treatment, the more effective that treatment can be."

In addition, most people with a mental

illness have experienced invalidation or dismissiveness from those they have opened up to. For anxiety, it's, "Just stop worrying." For depression, it's, "Just be happy, look on the bright side." For OCD, it's, "That doesn't make any sense, you shouldn't think so hard." For anorexia, it's, "Well, why don't you just eat?" These statements and questions vary from person to person, disorder to disorder, but what remains is the complete misunderstanding and lack of consideration for those who deal with a mental illness.

Baldwin said there is a common misconception that mental illnesses aren't really a disease because of the lack of education surrounding mental illnesses.

"There's this idea that mental illness is not really an illness, that it's just somebody's weakness," she said. "So, education has tried to inform people that mental illnesses are real, that they are diseases of the brain, they are chemical imbalances of the brain."

Baldwin said even when this inaccurate belief is challenged, people then jump to another incorrect assumption that because mental illness is a disease of the brain, those who have a mental illness will never recover and will remain ill forever.

I may have felt hopeless when I first started treatment, but I wasn't. I am in a much better place now than I was two years

“I will continue to do what I need to so I can live a peaceful life. I want this for anyone taking psychiatric medication.”

ago. I may never “recover” in the way society feels I should, but I’m not broken. I needed help and I’m not ashamed of that.

Erasing the stigma

The stigmas surrounding mental illnesses and the treatments that go with them, must be erased.

Baldwin said stereotypes can be debunked when people with a mental illness directly challenge the stigmas placed upon them, by just leading their lives.

“When people discover that (someone has) a mental illness and this person is a lawyer, a teacher, a professor, a businessman or whatever...that’s what changes people’s minds.”

Even with a mental illness — or four — I can lead a life just as successful as anyone else. My mental illnesses aren’t shameful for me, not because they are easy to deal with — they certainly aren’t — but because they are a part of me, and they don’t make me any less capable.

Baldwin said when people open up about their personal experiences with mental health, it can be a powerful way to challenge the inaccurate notions the stigmas push, but noted how difficult that can be when the stigmas still persist.

We should all be able to talk openly about mental health. It’s crucial to pay attention to and care for your mental health — to make

it a priority. My hope is that people continue to be vulnerable and share their stories and continue to battle the stigmas.



Illustration by Nghi Tran

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Creighton University is seeking accreditation of a new physical therapist education program from CAPTE. The program is planning to submit an Application for Candidacy, which is the formal application required in the

pre-accreditation stage, on June 1, 2021. Submission of this document does not assure that the program will be granted Candidate for Accreditation status. Achievement of Candidate for Accreditation status is required prior to implementation of the professional phase of the program; therefore, no students may be enrolled in professional courses until Candidate for Accreditation status has been achieved. Further, though achievement of Candidate for Accreditation status signifies satisfactory progress toward accreditation, it does not assure that the program will be granted accreditation.