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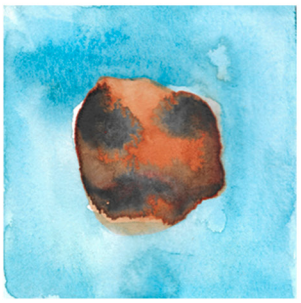
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The Human Condition Issue










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Letter from the Editor

Originally, this issue was going to be called the "Voter Issue," with the goal of investigating voting tendencies, new legislation and politics at ASU. As we produced story ideas, we decided that calling it this would be an oversimplification of what matters to students — it doesn't cut deep enough. The issue quickly evolved to be "The Human Condition." We wanted to make a theme that explores topics of injustice, civil duty, humanity, labor, work and mental health.

One reporter decided to look at the voting habits of ASU students, as well as her recollection of harassment on campus. Others wrote about the changing reputation of the University and its portrayal of women. Another reporter took a look at how mental illness is stigmatized, and one reporter told the story of the work that often goes unnoticed on campus.


HERE LIES



Report

After everyone goes home

The everyday life of ASU's service and custodial workers

By Harshali Patel
Photos by Liam Gigsy Gajotan
Illustration by Natalia Jarrett

At 4 a.m., most ASU students are asleep. The campus is silent at this hour, classrooms sit empty, walkways are sprinkled with early bird runners and the sun is hours from rising. But for those responsible for keeping the University running, the workday is already underway.

By the time students arrive on the Lemon Street walkway, groundskeepers, custodial workers and maintenance crews have already spent hours preparing the spaces that students will soon use. Despite this, their work is often most successful when students do not notice it at all. Students walk through freshly maintained lawns, enter clean classrooms and study in buildings that are kept functional behind the scenes.

Phoenix recorded 143 days with temperatures of at least 100 degrees and 70 days with temperatures of at least 110 degrees in 2024, according to the National Weather Service. For workers whose jobs are outside, starting early can also mean working before the hottest part of the day.

According to the University, Facilities Management supports campus infrastructure and building components, while grounds services maintains outdoor areas and responds to landscaping and safety needs. The work ranges from emergencies requiring rapid attention, to routine repairs and preventative maintenance.

Arizona State University Facilities Management handles services ranging from plumbing and electrical work to HVAC and building maintenance. According to an announcement earlier this year, the custodial services contracted by ASU have changed hands. This change has facilitated an opportunity for questions regarding who performs the work that keeps campus running and how those workers experience the community they help sustain.

Hidden in Plain Sight

Kevin Kasper, a groundskeeper specialist with ASU Facilities Management and graduate student studying applied biological sciences, starts his day around 5 a.m. His work includes pest management, weed removal, tree and shrub care, trash removal, and responding to issues in student housing, classrooms and other buildings.

"We're usually in and out of these buildings extremely fast before anyone really knows," Kasper said.

Kasper handles much of ASU's pest management, including about 95% of the University's bee problems. He removes and relocates bees and honeycombs while also responding to smaller issues that students may never see.

"I don't mind being in the background," Kasper said. "Because I don't want people to think, 'Oh, I'm constantly seeing bugs in my office,' or 'I'm constantly seeing bugs in a restroom or classroom building.'"

This kind of invisibility is not unique to ASU. Research on cleaning and maintenance work has found that workers can experience both "invisibility at work," when customers or building users do not acknowledge them, and "invisibility when the work itself is overlooked or unappreciated.

A 2019 study published in the Journal of Vocational Behavior examined university building cleaners and found that the structure of their work, including where and when it was performed, contributed to that sense of invisibility. A 2026 Frontiers in Sociology study similarly examined how cleaning work performed at the margins of the day can make workers less visible to other people using a building. At ASU, that separation can be intentional.

Jennifer Gorney, Senior Director of Facilities Management, said facilities workers often complete their work at night, on weekends or during the summer so students can use campus spaces without being interrupted.

"We want the spaces to be pristine and clean and be unobtrusive," Gorney said. "We try to get that stuff done at nights, on the weekends, over the summer, so that way we're not interacting with students."

Summer is especially busy for Facilities because they have such a short amount of time to prepare the campus before students return. This work can include power washing, cleaning tables, resetting chairs, maintaining landscaping, responding to work orders and preparing buildings for the next day.

"People don't think about that kind of stuff," Gorney said. "It just looks nice when they come in the next morning."

Samuel Robertson, an assistant vice president with Facilities Management, said that the first indication students have that facilities workers are there is when something goes wrong.

"Something has to be wrong to be noticed," Robertson said. "That can make successful work almost invisible. Students may not think about who cleaned a classroom, repaired a building component, removed a fallen tree or treated a pest problem because those things simply appear to be part of the campus."

Robertson said facilities workers are dedicated to their jobs and bring expertise to the work they do.

"They're extremely dedicated," Robertson said. "They're really well educated in their skill, and they're here to do a good job."

A campus community

This dedication is reflected in the lives of those performing the work. Kasper earned a degree in greenhouse management and integrated pest management, gaining experience in the subjects while working in landscaping in New Jersey. Eventually, he moved to ASU and began applying his skills here. Today, he is a graduate student at ASU's College of Integrative Science and Arts, completing a graduate degree in applied biological sciences.

For Kasper, being both a worker and a student can feel like existing between two worlds that often intersect.

His perspective on campus work has also changed since becoming part of the facilities team. As an undergraduate student taking classes online, he did not spend much time thinking about the people maintaining campus. When he was younger and attending community college, however, he remembers noticing the upkeep of the campus around him.

"I think a lot of it is the campus looks nice, but that's the one and only thought," Kasper said.

Today, he recognizes the work behind that thought.

Kasper describes interactions with students as generally positive. Students sometimes ask him for directions, make small talk or ask questions about his work. He also tries to avoid the busiest pedestrian times when possible.

"They're studying. They're busy. We're an R1 institution. I can't fault them," Kasper said.

Even brief interactions can make the work feel more connected to the larger university community. Kasper has helped coordinate ASU's annual date harvest and volunteer planting days, which gave him opportunities to work alongside people from other departments.

"I love the ability, though, to have multiple groups get to intermingle with one another and get to ultimately truly meet someone else from another department," Kasper said.

He would like to see students become more involved in the work that keeps campus maintained.

"I want to see it extended out to students who want to take part in that," Kasper said. "Just to see what it's like, or who wants to join in with keeping the campus looking beautiful."

When noticing someone working, it's easy to forget about the personhood that exists behind a job title. Students may recognize the same person maintaining their classroom or trimming the lawn on their daily walk to class without ever stopping to know anything about their life outside of a simple wave or smile.

A worker can spend years inside the same space and watch the faces of thousands of students walk by while remaining largely anonymous to them.

Those interactions can influence whether workers truly feel like members of the Sun Devil community or simply people who work inside it.

For Gorney, being part of that community is connected to the pride workers take in their jobs. She said facilities employees have expertise across fields including plumbing, HVAC, carpentry, ground and landscaping, and that many take pride in being able to the result of their work.

“I like being able to see something that’s broken and fix it,” Gorney said. “There’s something nice to see—something tangible at the end of the day.”

That pride can show up in small moments that students may never witness. Gorney recalled workers creating temporary fixes to prevent potentially serious damage such as using a piece of wood to plug a leaking hot water tank or creating a temporary system to redirect condensate water during move-in weekend. ‘

Beyond the work

For students, this connection is often realized only after something goes wrong. When storms knock down trees or other damages occur on campus, crews work to clear the areas and restore the spaces. Kasper said students have thanked workers after those efforts.

“We’ve had students say, you know, ‘Thanks for clearing it,’ or like, ‘Great job,’” Kasper said. “For me, that’s a very fulfilling aspect of it.”

Robertson said the same principle extends beyond grounds work. Without facilities employees, the buildings that students rely on would quickly become difficult to use.

“I think we just expect that the carpet is clean and so forth,” Robertson said. “ I think the challenge is just recognizing that they’re there and they’re providing the service. Without them, the ‘building would fail pretty quickly.”

The work is therefore caught in a strange position: the better it is done, the easier it is to overlook. A clean classroom does not announce who cleaned it. A functioning building does not explain who repaired it. A lawn that looks untouched does not show hours spent maintaining it.

Often, however, that is exactly what happens. Students walk into a classroom that is clean, cross a lawn that has been maintained and sit at a table that was ready for them before they arrived. For the person who prepared that space, the workday may have already been going for hours.

Gorney said that students do not have to do much to acknowledge the workers around them.

“Just say thank you.”

Kapser said that recognition can mean more than students may realize.

“Our satisfaction comes from them thinking the campus looks beautiful, even if it is just a fleeting thought,” Kasper said. “To us, like to a lot of us, that means a lot.”



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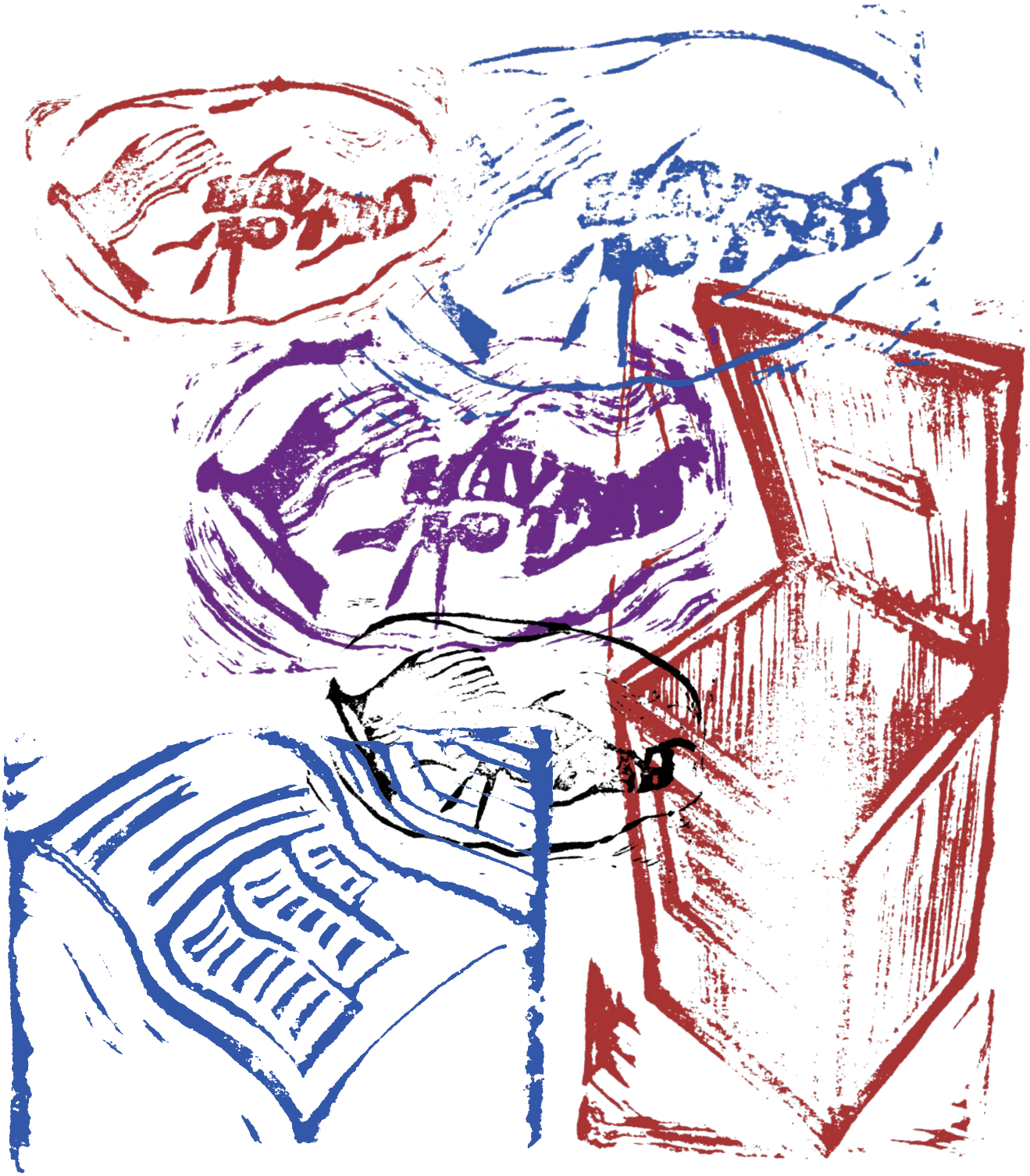
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Report

Red, blue or ew?

Exploring ASU student's voting patterns

By Jocelyn James
Illustrations by Kormac Moore

From holding hand-painted signs at protests to reposting content online, Gen Z has a reputation for being politically active and outspoken. Despite this public engagement, many don't have an interest in voting in elections.

Of the over 4.1 million registered voters for Arizona's 2024 primary election, only 31% cast ballots, compared to a 78% turnout for the general election, according to Arizona's Secretary of State website.

Thom Reilly, a professor at ASU's School of Public Affairs, believes many factors, including party affiliation and out-of-state status, contribute to this disproportionate statistic.

Reilly studies the voting patterns of independent and Gen Z voters.

"What has been encouraging, in the last couple of elections, is that we've seen an increase in young people voting after decades of decline since young people were given the right to vote," Reilly said.

According to Tufts University's Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, nearly half of people aged 18-29 were estimated to have voted in the 2024 election. Despite this, midterm voter turnout continues to be disproportionately low among the student population.

Reilly believes that the high percentage of independent Gen Z voters is partially to blame. Identifying as independent comes along with challenges that can influence how people choose to vote.

"I think we make it confusing for independents to vote in the primary," Reilly said. "If we had an open primary and everybody could vote, it'd be different." According to Reilly, when he polled independents, many were unaware they were able to vote in the primary.

"If you're an independent or you're unaffiliated, you can still vote in the primary, but you have to pull a ticket either as Republican or Democrat. So that means if you're getting your vote by mail, you have to actually contact the Secretary of State's office and inform them you want to pull a Republican or Democratic ballot," Reilly said.

Opting out

According to Reilly, a lack of accessible information regarding out-of-state voting can cause confusion, and because of this, they tend to disengage.

Others are unsure of how to vote at all.

"It's not as straightforward, particularly for those who live out-of-state," Reilly said. "It's not that the information is not out there. It's just not as simple."

ASU is a school with a high percentage of out-of-state students. As of the 2024-2025 school year, 48% of students at ASU were from out-of-state, according to data from ASU's enrollment report from that year.

Voting while out-of-state requires additional steps, which can impact voter turnout. According to the U.S. Vote Foundation, there are two options to vote as an out-of-state student. Absentee voting is a solution for many, and requires confirming initial voter registration, then checking your state's protocols. Many states, including Arizona, require individuals to fill out an absentee ballot form.

Voting in person requires students to first consider their school as their primary address. But for some, voting isn't seen as a priority.

Reilly believes that students are habitual, and the hardest step to take is to vote for the first time.

"If they go the first time, they're more likely to vote in the future."

Additionally, Reilly mentioned differences between how Gen Z engages with politics in comparison to other generations, including through outreach on social media.

"Gen Z is also influenced by social media, influencers, and online communities, which can amplify shifting political ideas or create rapid shifts in political sentiment," Reilly and Dan Hunting wrote in their 2025 study, Understanding the Gen Z Independent Voter: An Exploratory Study.

Polls conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute support this notion, stating that Gen Z uses social media to politically engage through petitions and reposting content more at a more frequent rate than previous generations.

Reilly found that social interaction is another factor influencing voting behaviors among youth.

"Voting patterns resemble how your friends behave, right? So, if your friends are voting, you're voting," Reilly said.



On campus, political involvement can look different for every student. For many, clubs and organizations serve as a primary avenue for political engagement.

Avery Hansen, a junior studying journalism, is registered to vote and says her voting plans are "set in stone."

Hansen is a member of Turning Point USA at ASU, a group she described as primarily conservative, and she herself identifies as a constitutional conservative.

Hansen encouraged students and members of Gen Z to engage with politics.

"As citizens, I think it's our duty to remain informed and know what's going on," Hansen said. "If we aren't, then it's very easy for people in power to end up getting too much power, and that's when things get messy."

For Hansen, a deep regard for our constitution and the values intended by it push her to stay politically active. Upholding these values means staying continuously informed and engaging with current events.

"The most important thing is knowing that what we do does matter."

Various organizations on campus are encouraging voter registration, including Arizona Students' Association and the Democratic National Committee's When We Count initiative.

Armando Olmos, a sophomore studying mechanical engineering, is a student volunteer with Save Our Schools Arizona Network, an organization dedicated to encouraging voter registration among college students.

"As students, we have the power to speak up," Olmos said.

Although there are support systems in place to encourage voter registration, some students don't take the opportunities provided, Olmos continued.

Olmos believes that student voting is progressing, facilitated by an increase in ways to get involved. Although many partisan clubs contribute to this movement, non-partisan clubs have proven to be a useful alternative for those who do not have a strong party affiliation.

The fight for change

Lindsey Chavez, a junior studying sustainable food systems and the president of ASU's chapter of Climate Action Campaign, says climate change is an issue that goes beyond political parties. Because of this, the Climate Action Campaign is non-partisan and advocates for federal climate action on all sides of politics.

According to Chavez, students should get involved in whatever way is possible for them, no matter how small their involvement may be.

"We all need our voices heard, so just in whatever small way you want to do it, and if you want to do it with us or another climate or sustainability group on campus, please do," Chavez said.

Nina Suberville is a junior studying economics and a political organizing intern at ASU's Reproductive Freedom For All chapter. She said that despite Mini Timmaraju, the organization's CEO, stating that the group is non-partisan, primarily Democrats and independents visit Suberville's tabling events.

"It should be a non-partisan issue. That's kind of what we spread and what we stand for," Suberville said.

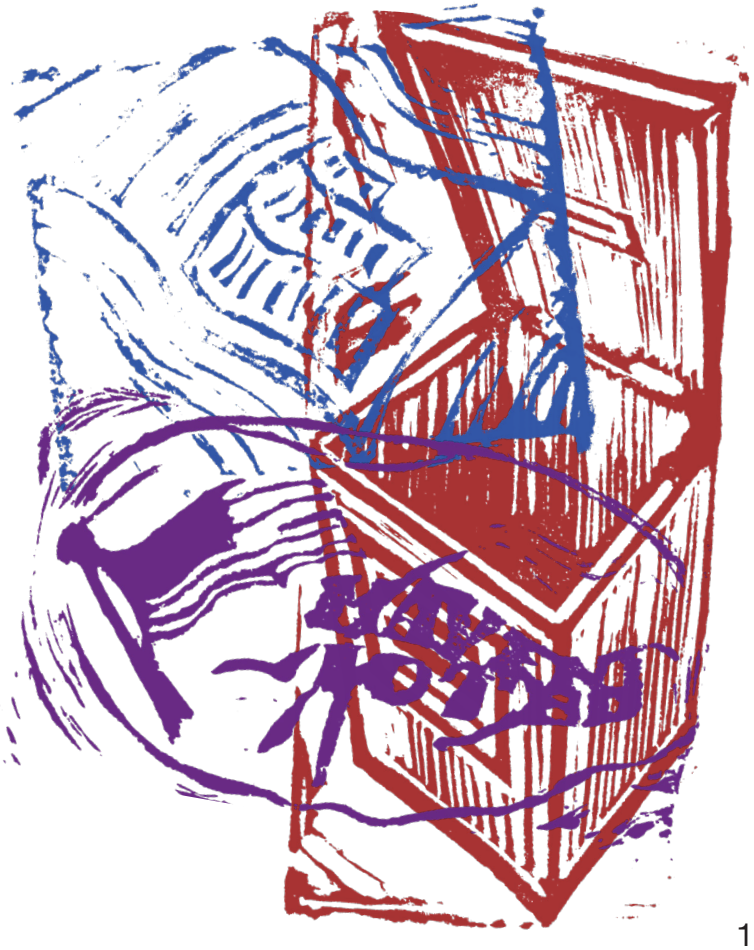
For Suberville, reproductive rights concern everyone, regardless of their political affiliation.

"We're not trying to polarize people," Suberville said. "We just want to spread our message and improve women's healthcare."

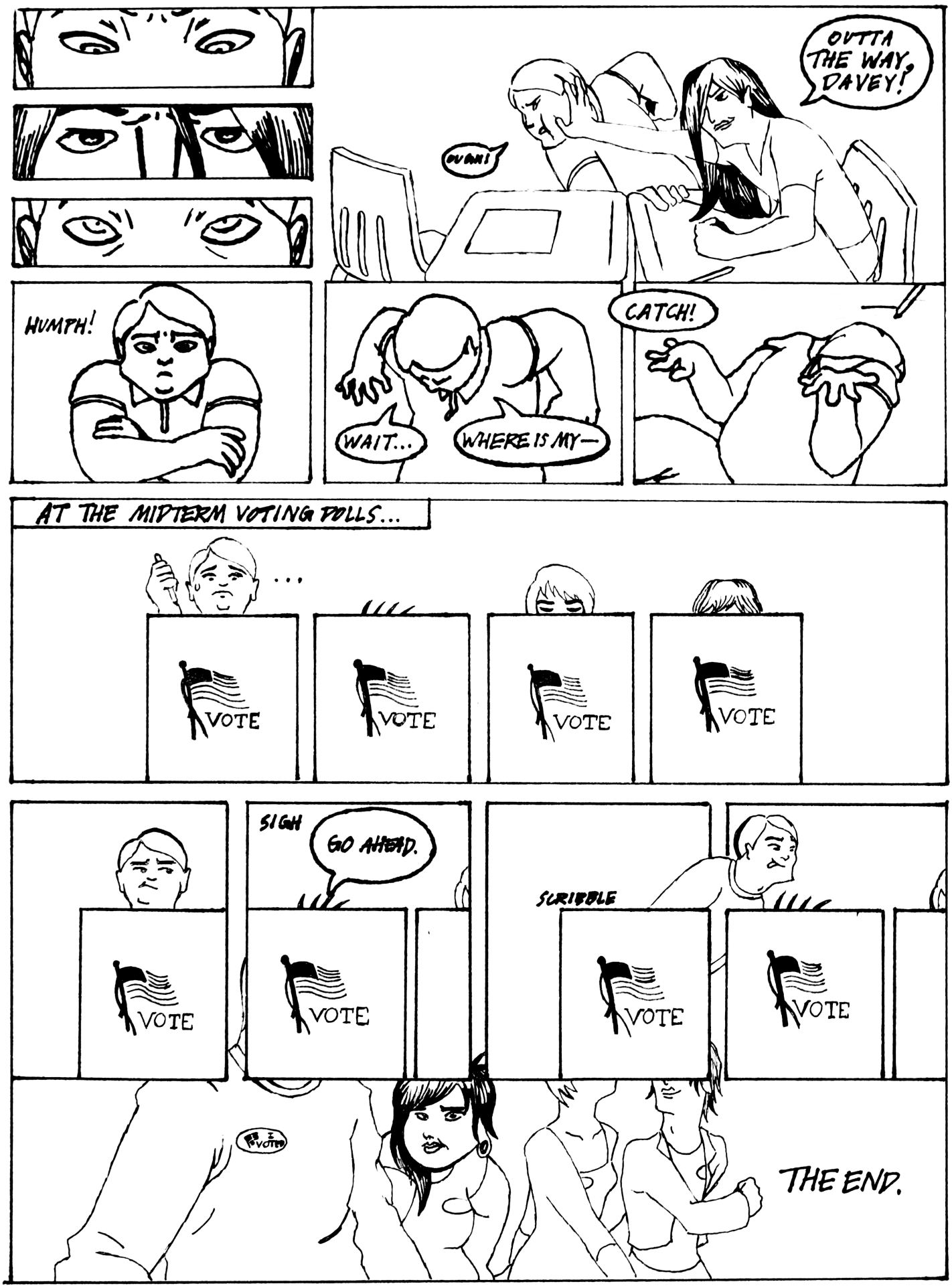
For some, clubs can set a strong foundation for future political participation.

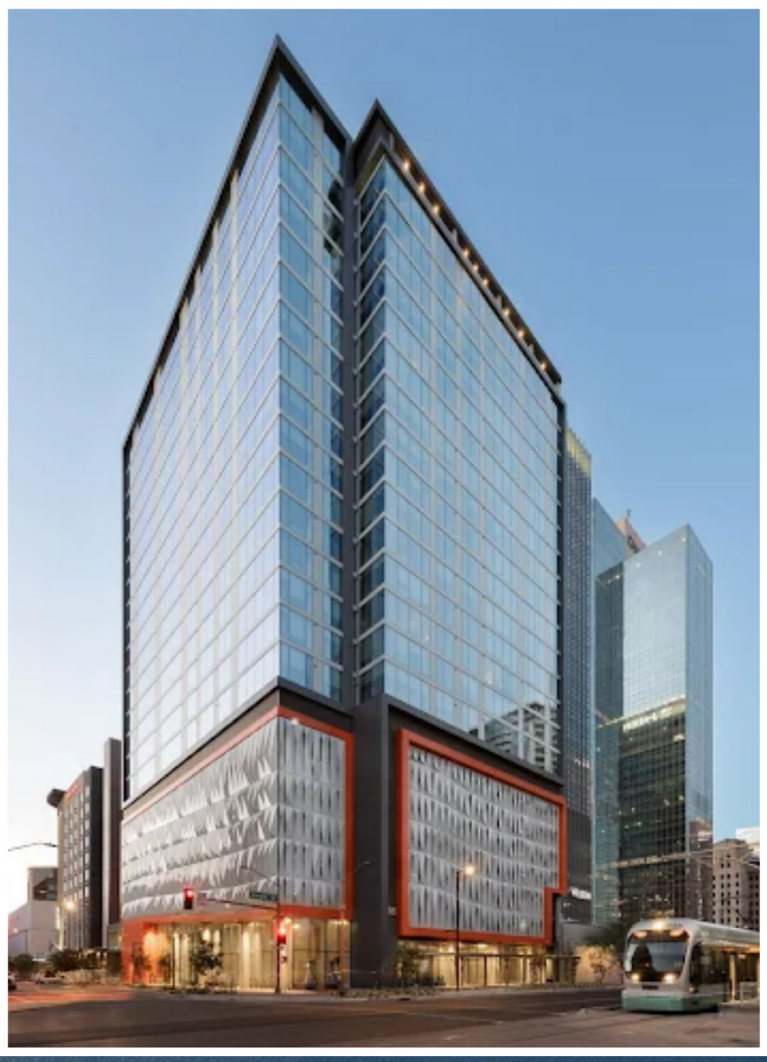
Reilly shares this sentiment and is hopeful that Gen Z will continue to get involved.

"I tell young people if they vote at the same percentage of [their] older counterparts, they could rule the world. It's just getting them there," Reilly said.




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ELECTING NEXT YEAR'S
STUDENT COUNCIL.
I EXPECT EVERYONE TO
I DON'T KNOW!
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DAVID!
YES SORRY I'M SORRY SIR
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HUMPH!
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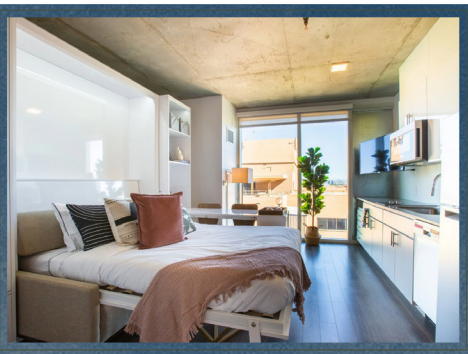


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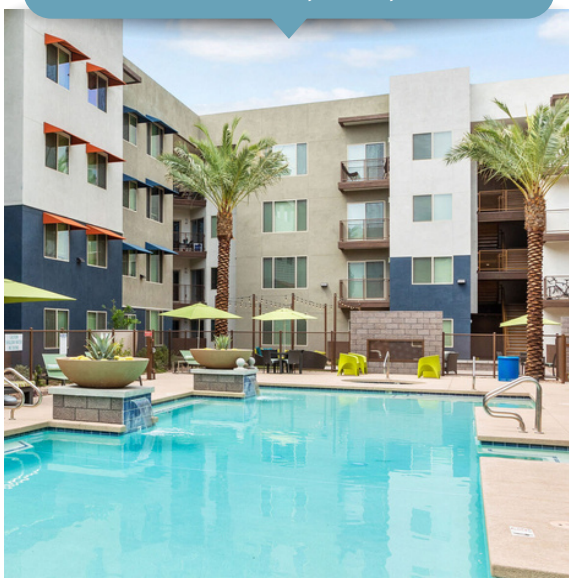
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“You just exist, and your existence is offensive… and that’s a pretty hard burden.”



Feature

No. 1 in promiscuity

Is ASU's constantly evolving reputation based in misogyny?

By Lucia Zettler, Keyanee Walls and Sydney Voorhees
Photos by Paul Pascual

Arizona State University's licentious reputation far precedes much of the online discourse we're familiar with today.

In 2002 Playboy Magazine named the University the No. 1 party school in the nation, an achievement determined by reader submitted stories and write-in votes from over 1,500 students around the country.

Thriving (and mostly unchecked) Greek life, an enduring party scene and a flourishing hookup culture promoted ASU's promiscuous image on a national stage. In their inaugural 2006 sexual health report, Trojan Condoms placed ASU 70th in a cumulative ranking of sexual health resources and education among 100 colleges and universities around the country.

This standing has drastically evolved over the ensuing years, as ASU President Michael Crow stepped into office in 2002, with a clear objective; legitimize the University's reputation.

Crow's New American University model came to fruition following the removal of the University's 'Alpha Drive,' the ASU equivalent of a fraternity row and a major crackdown on parties around the city.

These efforts were in many ways successful. By 2016 the University moved up to 30th place in Trojan's last collected report, and had completely dropped off of most nationwide party school rankings by the early 2010s. Despite this, pieces of this reputation carried on through to the digital age, and social media gave it a bit of a cultural revival – with a whole new kind of controversy.

'Alcohol Sex University'

Search 'ASU' on tiktok and many of the first suggestions to come up will likely read along the lines of "ASU storytime," "top 10 worst things," or "effect," which all pertain to recent viral moments and movements centering the University.

In 2021 the "ASU Effect," trend swept across the social media platform TikTok, as users participated by sharing the results of their "glow-ups" after attending the school. The overwhelming demographic of these posts, being from female students.

Beyond the pressures and exclusivity that this trend perpetuated, there was also a vivid shift in assumptions surrounding the perception of an "ASU girl." And because this trend largely garnered participation from female students in ASU's (already famous) Greek life, a certain convergence surfaced between a preexisting university reputation and deeply sexist stereotypes about the women who attended – and the scale was tenfold.

"My girl is going to ASU," soon emerged as a trending phrase among social media users, suggesting that if your girlfriend is going to ASU, your relationship is doomed. And soon the idea of an "ASU girl," became in many ways mythologized through traded stories and tales.

A sorority girl. A nursing major, in a long distance relationship with a boy back home. She's hot (as all ASU women are), and is definitely cheating on her poor boyfriend too.

Hundreds of videos have been uploaded, captioned with variations of this gag; "She just told me she's going to ASU. Am I cooked?" one video said.

"She's so my type too. Can't wait bro," the top comment with over 7,000 likes read.

One creator made a lot of noise this summer for his unique coverage of ASU party and hookup culture, through personal anecdotes. And his account has become a central facilitator in the perpetuation of these jokes.

Tyler Stevenson, or TZSkits on TikTok, released a 10-part series leading up to the commencement of ASU's fall semester, ranking the top 10 "craziest things," he'd ever experienced at the University. The final installment (and No. 1 craziest experience) of this series garnered almost 20 million views.

"Yeah my daughter's not going to college bruh…" one commenter said.

Though Stevenson's account biography claims that his content is satire, viewers generally seem to take his stories at face value, harmful stereotypes and all.

Stevenson didn't respond to requests for a comment but went to TikTok to address many of the jokes about ASU women in a video released on Sept. 2, stating that the men of the University are undoubtedly worse in their behavior.

Many other users took to the platform in recent months, to raise concern about how damaging these jokes truly are, critiquing an immense double standard in how men and women participating in the same campus culture are treated and calling attention to the much deeper roots in misogyny that this trend has stemmed from.

According to Breanne Fahs, a woman and gender studies professor at ASU, "Women have long been stereotyped and caricatured in all sorts of media, and these stereotypes can be harmful in a number of ways. Most dangerously, women see themselves through these stereotypes and the stereotypes come to define femininity or womanhood."

The Female Condition

Sally Kitch, founding director of the Humanities Lab at ASU, explores the structures that support sexism and society's view on women in her book, Art, Activism, and Sexual Violence.

Kitch echoes this sentiment, describing stereotypes like these as a symptom of a culture that consistently reduces women to their sexual characteristics.

"Its not unique to any group of women or any particular woman. There is a culture that sexualizes young women and sexually degrades older women because women's sexuality and reproductive function are the primary identifying characteristics, and it doesn't matter who you are," Kitch said.

Although social media portrays this stereotype as applying to only ASU, Kitch argues that it reflects an older, much broader stereotype – one that reduce women to their sexual utility and ignores their accomplishments.

"Whether they're in public life, private life, your next door neighbor or a woman on campus, your sexual identity, appeal and reproductive function, in this society and many others, are your primary values and characteristics."

This can happen to anyone, and Kitch points to past presidential elections as an example.

"It happened when Hillary Clinton ran for president and when Kamala Harris ran for president, it happened to them. There was vulgar and hateful commentary by men about them as women, as sex objects."

Kitch argues how these beliefs are supported by centuries old religious, legal and cultural institutions that tie women's value to her reproductive role. Historically, institutions like these have viewed education as a threat to that role. Kitch points to an example in the 19th century, where men claimed if a woman pursued an education, her reproductive organs would shrink.

"Because God forbid their reproductive organs would shrink…because a woman would be worthless if she didn't have her reproductive organs. Because that's what she's there for."

Today, Kitch says these beliefs are supported by social media, which provides a platform for people to say anything without impunity.

"It's just a brute expression, and in many cases, to be as offensive as possible."

According to Kitch, the vulgar nature of these posts reflect a broader issue: the constant need for men to prove their masculinity, often by rejecting femininity.

"Men have to prove their masculinity in a way that women don't have to prove their femininity.

It's historically the case; it's cross-culturally the case…For cisgender men, the worst thing you can call him is a girl."

Kitch describes these dynamics not as just stereotypes, but as a machine that is humming in the background, manifesting itself in every aspect of women's lives.

"It's a constant engine that is purring in the background. It's not just a fixed idea like a stereotype can often be…You can assume it is present in all mixed society."

What does this mean for women at ASU?

Many students are familiar with the "My girl's been asleep for 22 hours," and "My girl got into ASU, she's going to be a nurse," jokes. They all have the same message: ASU women are promiscuous and cheaters.

Leyna Nelson, a freshman studying sports business, felt the effects of the ridicule online before coming to ASU. She said her peers always made similar jokes about her college decision, which she felt undermined her accomplishments.

"I'm a first gen, so it's a big deal, and it's annoying that the majority of people who see that I'm at ASU or know that I'm going to ASU from high school, the one thing they can take away from it is, 'Oh, good luck to your boyfriend,'" Nelson said.

The discourse has far transcended generations and online spaces as well. Nelson said her father received odd comments about her attending ASU as well.

"My dad told me like he had people in his life tell him, 'Oh, are you okay? Are you sure you're gonna be okay with your daughter going to ASU?'" Nelson said. "Which is like so weird to tell someone's dad, but my dad was just like, 'I trust her to make smart decisions.'"

The jokes often specifically target nursing students. Ashlyn Cathey, a sophomore studying community health on the nursing track and a member of Pi Beta Phi, said the comments online are dehumanizing.

"We go to these classes about how to treat other humans and how we all respect one another, and then for these people to go online and… they laugh at us and they joke about us, and it's just like it's very off-putting," Cathey said. "It makes you feel like you have a big target on your back wherever you go."

Similarly, jokes about cheating at parties and promiscuity often target sorority women. Cathey said her sorority experience has been about finding her community and serving their philanthropy, children's literacy, not what is described online.

"We go up to the elementary schools, and we read books to kids. It's really sweet," Cathey said.

That begs the question: what is 'promiscuous' about saving lives, seeking sisterhood and volunteering for a charity?

Nelson said the comments have made her hesitant to join a sorority or predominantly female clubs on campus.

"It feels like you can never get away from not being taken seriously as a woman at ASU with all the jokes that go around," Nelson said.

Cathey said the men who joke about sorority women are intimidated by the large network and leadership opportunities sororities and the National Panhellenic Conference offer women.

Coming from a marketing background, Nelson said she wonders why ASU has not done any damage control to filter the online perception of female students, especially under the University's social media posts.

"You can have certain words not be said in comments. I don't know why they don't do that because as a university, I feel like they would want to be taken seriously and want to create a safe environment for all the women who are coming here to study," Nelson said.

To Kitch, attacks like these are more than just humor, but a tool to intimidate– putting women on trial before they even step foot on campus.

“I think that anybody who’s bringing that up to you is sending you a message, and that message is, you need to prove yourself in a different way, or else people are going to include you in this stereotypical view,” Kitch said.

She argues that, over time, these comments can grow deeply personal.

“You’re not guilty of anything,” Kitch said. “You just exist, and your existence is offensive… and that’s a pretty hard burden.”



Not your fantasy: The problem with romanticizing mental illness

Why being a manic pixie dream girl isn't a dream

By Lexi Janusee
Illustrations by Natalia Jarrett



Content warning: This story contains subject matter that may be disturbing or upsetting to some readers, including eating disorders and suicide.

The first time a boy called me a "manic pixie dream girl," I was in high school.

I had just dyed my hair pink for the first time, and I felt unstoppable. I felt interesting. I felt cool.

It didn't matter that I couldn't actually comprehend what "manic," meant at that age — That would come later. At the time, I wore that title like a badge of honor and embraced the traits about myself that boys liked.

But as years went by, and these comparisons began to pile up, I noticed a hint of malice placed undetectably beneath the compliment. It took me a long time to unravel what they really meant.

It clicked into place when a man finally said it one day, the thing that made me realize it had never been a compliment after all.

"You're crazy," spit out at me while I was experiencing a full-blown panic attack.

The animosity and disgust in his tone rang in my ears long after my tears had dried. That was the first time I was cognizant that my quirks had an expiration date, and I had long passed the threshold from appealing to annoying.

All my life, I haven't been quite right.

I was either too loud, too emotional, too angry, too much — Or then, I wasn't enough, because I was overshadowed by those people who are too much but know how to do it right. I've learned that people can get away with being "a lot" as long as they have a certain grace about it that I've always lacked.

My bluntness always fell flat, misplaced and coming across as bitter instead of witty. But on others, their sarcasm soared, securing them as cool and unbothered. My temperamental moods scared others away, but I watched from the corner as gentler criers earned sympathy.

I never understood what I was doing wrong until one day, sunk into a therapist's comfy couch cushion, I was faced with a diagnosis that altered my view of myself.

The exact traits that once made me desirable were also the worst parts of myself. I watched it plague every aspect of my life, poisoning my relationships with those around me. And then I watched people on social media trying to make an aesthetic out of it.

There's nothing glamorous about my "manic pixie dream girl," accusations — In reality, it was always just a misogynistic trope slapped onto mental illness in hopes of appealing to weird men.

Behind the romanticization

Almost any woman with mental illness can recall similar comparisons to Clementine, Ramona Flowers, or Lady Bird — the poster children for "manic pixie dream girls."

The trope, commonly seen in film, TV and even literature, is a label for women who are slightly alternative, different from other girls, and always experience some sort of deep-rooted sadness underneath their cool persona.

Per Urban Dictionary: "She's everything you want but slightly broken and unattainable. Her wild hair and magnetic personality pull you in but you'll never be able to keep her or fix her."

The interesting thing about this dream girl is that they are only seen through the lens of the protagonist, who is always an awkward and horny teenage boy. The manic pixie dream girl is an unattainable fantasy devised to romanticize women's suffering and package it neatly for a male audience.

Other similar tropes have taken shape online, such as "girl failure," defined as a girl who is mentally unstable and pathetic in a way that is endearing and gives one the urge to comfort her.

Personally, I would like to live in a world where the women we look up to are strong and independent, not purposefully fetishized caricatures of mental illness.

"Men like to view women in a weaker position so that they are able to take care of them," Evey Aspaas, a sophomore studying fashion design, said. "But also there's a control element there that I think isn't always intentional."

Aspaas said her mental health journey began at age eleven, when she began therapy for anxiety and depression. She added that the reality of mental health is often less romantic than it is viewed in popular culture — The reality being something that most people don't discuss.

"(Men) say they want someone who's insane and crazy and obsessive, and then they actually find someone who is those things, but it's not beautiful," she said. "It's grosser. It's dirtier. It's more upsetting than it is pretty."

Aspaas said depression can create a spiral of "disgusting" habits that only worsen the condition, such as not cleaning, leading to mold, bugs, and a decreased quality of life.

According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, depression is a biologically-based illness that can affect all factors of life such as energy level and motivation. It's a real disability that doesn't need glamorization, despite what "girl failure" TikTok might have to say.

There's nothing appealing about being bedridden for days, stuck without the physical capacity to perform basic tasks.

On the other end, mania is a common symptom of bipolar disorder, categorized by a week or more of abnormal behavior, including impulsivity, grandiosity and irritability.

Ava Sauve, a local musician, has performed at venues across Phoenix such as Central Records and The Rebel Lounge. She said being an alternative woman in the music scene led to
stereotypes towards her as a "crazy big titty goth girlfriend."

Sauve said she received misogynistic comments and messages online that stereotyped her based on appearances.

"There are days where I couldn't get out of bed, and I'm watching people be like, 'I want a crazy depressed girlfriend who I have to take care of,'" Sauve said. "It's really damaging to people, especially recovering individuals who are actively trying to get better."

Sauve said it is damaging to women in recovery to have people "water down" their mental illness and turn it into a joke on the internet.

"Manic is not a good thing," she said.

#sadgirl

Growing up, I read books that filled my mind with delusions of being a "sad girl." "Looking for Alaska" altered my brain chemistry at the ripe age of 12, and I began to believe that suffering is cool because John Green told me so.

"It's very romanticized in media, a very sad girl," Aspaas said. "They're always beautiful and tragic. And I think that kind of limits how women in mental health are perceived."

When young people are exposed to this ideal of how troubled women should behave, it becomes something to idolize without regard for the consequences.

"Younger girls mainly look at media portrayals of 'sad girls,' and that's kind of their inspiration," Aspaas said. "It can be bad and dangerous if they are trying to aspire to be that."

Sauve said she has seen firsthand her younger siblings fall into dangerous spaces online that romanticize unhealthy habits, urging them to behave more "edgy" to fit a cliche.

She also said online communities such as "ED Twitter" are becoming an increasingly likely result if a young person searches for mental health, making them more susceptible to detrimental rabbit holes.

These pro-eating disorder threads become spaces for people to share restrictive diets, extreme exercise plans, and motivational imagery in a place that is easily accessible to those of any age.

According to a Journal of Pediatrics study from 2023, eating disorders have more than doubled in children and adolescents over the past 20 years. The same study suggests increased screen time exposes young minds to damaging messaging, contributing to the escalation of the issue.

"(Eating disorders) are nasty," Aspaas said. "So many complications happen to your body when you're not giving it what it needs, and you're depriving it of its basic necessity."

There are also online communities dedicated to spreading generalized hate towards people with mental illnesses, such as a sub-Reddit titled r/BPDlovedones.

"Showing patience, empathy and kindness to someone with unregulated BPD is like trying to fill an empty bucket with holes in it with water," wrote one post. "Don't waste your time. They won't appreciate your efforts at all."

Another post detailed an over-generalized relationship with a person with BPD, encouraging readers to stay away from people with the disorder because "they will always be sick" — Which is untrue.

A diagnosis is not a life sentence. These comments only further perpetuate harmful misconceptions that affect women at a disproportionate amount.

According to the DSM-5, 75% of borderline diagnoses are women. Borderline Personality Disorder is also the mental illness with the highest suicide rate. Similarly, it is also the most stigmatized and misunderstood mental illness according to the BPD Alliance.

"I don't think people realize how truly rooted in trauma disorders like that are," Sauve said. "People don't really think about what others have gone through to turn them into the person that they ended up being, and they just jump to conclusions too quickly."

Recovery

Annamarie Walters, a junior studying healthy lifestyle and fitness science, uses social media to find more positive representation for mental health.

Walters said she used to feel immense anxiety within her relationship, to a point it affected both her and her partner's mental health. She added social media was a catalyst to finding out she was experiencing anxious attachment.



"Seeing community in the comment section made me feel not alone because other people were expressing their experience," Walters said.

The term 'anxious attachment' dates back to the 1950s, with psychiatrist John Bowlby's theory that a child's early relationship with their parents forms the way they interact with others throughout their life.

If a child is brought up in an environment where their emotional needs are met, a secure attachment will form. However, if the child's needs are not met, they are unable to form a stable bond — resulting in one of three insecure attachment styles in adults.

Walters utilized resources online to educate herself on her attachment style, and learned to manage her symptoms over time. She said simple coping mechanisms such as going for a walk, listening to music and spending time with friends make a huge impact to brighten her mental health.

"A lot of people can get so caught up in life and everything that they forget to take a moment to breathe and just collect themselves and process emotions," Walters said.

When she was unsure about her anxious attachment, Walters said she found podcasts, articles and psychologists online that helped her understand her experiences.

"I took it one day at a time, slowly regulating and just doing things that made me feel good," Walters said. "It's okay to have a relationship, but still focus on myself."

Walters added it is important to positively represent mental health because people come from different families, cultures and perspectives that impact their behavior into adulthood.

Despite all the negativity surrounding mental health on social media, Sauve said it can be used as a tool to bring together people who experience similar struggles. She added it can feel isolating to experience mental illness, and creating community online is useful to combat those feelings.

Women's mental health has existed at the convenience of men for too long — entertaining them, attracting them, and conforming for them. But mental illness doesn't fit into a box, and it cannot be categorized into simple terms for the sake of comfortability.

The truth about mental health makes people uncomfortable. And it should.

Being a "manic pixie dream girl" comes with life-altering strings attached, the kind that repulse people who look beneath the surface. The only way to break these stereotypes is to continue surviving unapologetically, refusing to perform a role that never had our best interest in mind.

The ongoing, sometimes excruciating story of my mental health is worth so much more than some man's fantasy.

"It's never the end. It always gets better, and then it gets worse, and then it gets better again," Asapaas said. "Now that I'm a little bit better, I live for those moments, and I'm so glad that I'm alive to experience those things."

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, visit 988lifeline.org or text 988 for help.

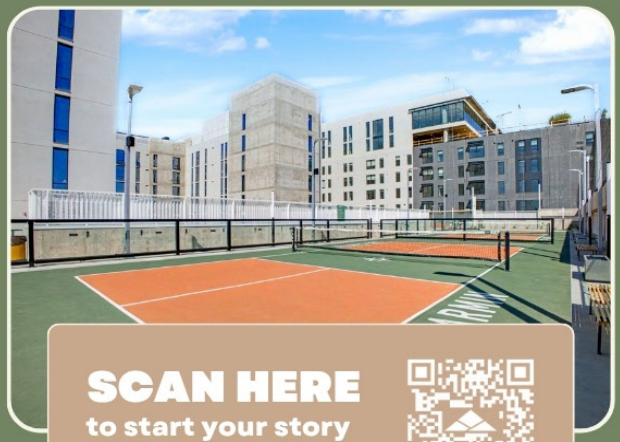
For campus resources available 24/7, visit https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling. ASU's EMPACT line is 480-921-1006 and is available 24/7.

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INSIGHT

Don’t be polite

Learning to speak up against harassment on campus

By Jocelyn James
Cover photo by Matthew Marengo

"You look really beautiful," he said.

To the untrained ear, that would sound like a compliment. I, however, heard it for what it was: A dog whistle shrouded by the facade of praise. Sure, it could have been sincere, but I knew the intention. To demean and objectify. Not every person has bad intentions, but the more times it happens to you, the mask peels back and you see the person for who they truly are– someone who is looking for a sliver of opportunity to get you to lower your guard. Talking to you while staring at your body, restless and looking for any way to close physical distance — You learn the signs.

I used to take the compliments. I'd stop to acknowledge the man and thank him. But years of learned experience hardened my perspective. It's best not to respond. Don't get close to them, don't let them take the opportunity. They will.

This time, I held my head high and continued on my way without so much as a look, heading to Gordon Commons. He clearly didn't like that, another sign my initial instinct was correct. The man reached out and asked for a high five, attempting to initiate physical contact.

That simple motion transported me back to the New York City subway station my junior year of high school.

It was a school field trip and my first time in the city. I was warned about the dangers of pickpockets and other common occurrences, but I didn't think I had to be afraid of friendly people. I was in the middle of my school group, feeling like a duckling in a line, and a man in his 20s came up to me. My first mistake was assuming he couldn't isolate me with a hundred people I knew around me. He knew he could, and he took the opportunity and asked for a handshake. I thought it was strange, but assumed it was also his first time in the city, and he was really excited, as I was. I accepted.

That's when he locked onto my arm like a vise and tilted my chin to the side. He grabbed my face and chin with both hands, despite my struggle and attempts at calling out to others. He attempted to forcibly kiss me. My cries for help went unheard and unanswered. I knew I had to save myself. I finally pushed him off of me, and he laughed in my face. He smiled and looked to the side, where I noticed a group, presumably his friends, filming and laughing at the altercation. Girls applauded and cheered for the man who tried to assault me. I didn't understand how fellow women could take pleasure in witnessing the worst moment of my life, and, worse, cheer for it. Did no one have humanity or decency?

At that moment, all I wanted was for one of the hundreds of people in the subway to realize what he did was wrong. Someone from my school who I knew, or a stranger who gave a damn. No one noticed I was upset. Not one of his friends, fellow women or bystanders spoke up either.

Back on campus

I carry that memory with me to this day, and remembering it as this man asked for a high five guided me on how to proceed.

I walked past the high five and attempted to sidestep away from him. He fumed, standing in front of me to block my path. He claimed I couldn't take a compliment. I knew it was best not to engage, but I desperately wanted to give him a piece of my mind. I didn't, and tried again to move past him. The man called me ungrateful.

"That's what I get for trying to be polite," he said.

Eventually, I managed to evade him and inform campus security, who called the police.

At first, I described the situation with a false facade of calm, before being told to wait until the police arrived. When I was left to stew in my thoughts, I began to realize the severity of what had happened. Unfortunately, accounts of harassment are far too common, and in my restless pacing awaiting the police, this was confirmed. While talking to campus security, I heard several other students murmuring

about having endured the same thing. The elevator rang, and they made their way upstairs, taking their experiences regarding the man with them.

People react differently after experiencing events like this. Some get angry, some go numb completely. Others are so used to objectification that they don't think twice. Why should they report it if it's happened so many times to them and to people they know? Stay silent, don't rock the boat. If you speak up about the situation, you're labeled as dramatic or a pick-me.

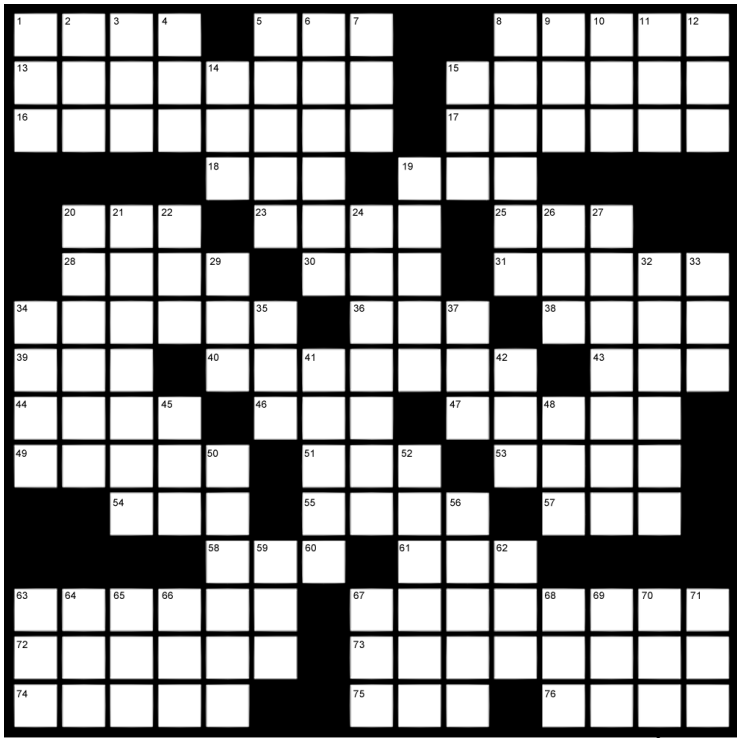
Or, worse, you fall into the "It wasn't that bad" mindset, which is what I did after my experience in New York.

While waiting for the police, I saw the man make contact with several other people. When they arrived, I gave a witness statement with clammy hands. The sergeant asked me if the man made contact, and I froze. Had he, or was I making it up? Heightened emotions distorted my memory, and I realized I wasn't quite sure. He spoke some more, and took my information for his report, saying to expect a future call. When he left, the stress and emotional weight of the past half hour took its toll.

The man was ultimately arrested, not for his comments or intimidation, but for something else entirely. The police said they reviewed the security footage and deemed that since he didn't physically touch me, I couldn't press charges and wasn't needed anymore. I understand they couldn't do anything about my altercation, but what about all of the people he did the same to while I was waiting for the police? I didn't report it on behalf of myself, I did it to try and prevent it from happening to others. Seeing it happen and hearing he didn't get in trouble for those incidents either saddens me. He was arrested, but for other circumstances.

I wasn't able to say something during high school. I was too upset and didn't think it would make a difference. I did report it this time, and I'm proud I found the strength to stand up for myself.





ACROSS:
1. Heart or spade
5. Nickname for a "Star Wars" protagonist
8. See 11-down
13. Like clay before molding
15. "____ Can Wait" (2001 Michael Jackson hit)
16. *Mythical king sentenced to eternal boulder-pushing*
17. Things to grasp, maybe
18. Home of Bel. and Nor.
19. Georgia airport code
20. ____ Dhabi
23. Vast desert under Mongolia
25. Obsolete behavioral diagnosis (abbr.)
28. Acronym for a privileged group
30. "Apocalypse Now" setting, colloquially
31. *User without login credentials*
34. Apple TV's "____ Got Money Troubles" (2026)
36. File type alternative to .zip
38. "Donde ____ la biblioteca?"
39. N.Y. winter setting
40. Redundant Starbucks order
43. What 40-across might be served in
44. List ending abbr.
46. Like Jrs. and Srs.
47. Government mind-game, for short
49. *Causeless film protagonist*
51. "____ a plane…!"
53. See 63-across
54. Commercial unit abbr.
55. "To ____ their own"
57. Spanish 101 verb
58. Suffer
61. Spray alternative, maybe
63. With 53-across, central archetype of many an Albert Camus novel… or what the answers to the italicized clues represent
67. *Adolescent source of danger*
72. Declines an invite
73. Precarious punctuation, say
74. South American range with an eponymous candy
75. Watercraft abbr., patriotically
76. Gunn of television's "Breaking Bad" (2008)

DOWN:
1. Untrustworthy, in modern slang
2. ASU categorization, to a Brit
3. American HQ that's out-of-this-world?
4. Shakespearean possessive
5. GCU 102, for a high-schooler
6. What two idiots might share, formally
7. Vets at a bar, for short?
8. What you might get after arriving at19-across, perhaps
9. Musician's asset
10. Principal of "Abbott Elementary" (2023)
11. With 8-across, hit K-Pop group
12. Like IG or SC
14. Mimic
15. FDR follower?
19. Point to, with a scope
20. "What ____ of food!" (teacher's exclamation after a lunchroom battle)
21. Lines at a pub, say
22. Funding source for many an ASU event
24. Community coffee-maker?
26. Date dreaded by students and given by doctors
27. Nullify an exam grade, perhaps
29. Suffix to BI-
32. In a drunken ____
33. Alternative to swipe, sometimes
34. Kat starter?
35. Super ____, like a member of 11-down
37. Dem. rival
41. Only Disney princess not born a human
42. Ketchum of anime fame
45. Allow
48. Word spoken before and after "a thousand times"
50. Puts one's major to use, hopefully
52. Workplace of Js. Alito and Roberts
56. Brings on board
59. Words at an altar
62. Spanish article in the title of an Elvis film
63. "Happy ____ clam"
64. Squash, as 52-down might
65. Nickname for a "Euphoria" (2019) star
66. Employ
67. Eight for two, abbr.?
68. Often hoped-for Reddit verdict, for short
69. Partner of tonic
70. What a lecture might feel like
71. Genetic messenger, abbr.

Answers on the next page

Answer Key

1 S	2 U	3 I	4 T		5 A	6 N	7 I		8 J	9 E	10 A	11 N	12 S
13 U	N	S	H	14 A	P	E	D		15 H	E	A	V	E	N
16 S	I	S	Y	P	H	U	S		17 S	T	R	A	W	S
				18 E	U	R		19 A	T	L			
		20 A	21 B	U		23 G	O	24 B	I		25 A	D	27 D	
		28 W	A	S	29 P		30 N	A	M		31 G	U	E	32 S	33 T
34 M	A	R	G	O	35 S		36 R	A	37 R		38 E	S	T	A
39 E	S	T		40 C	H	41 A	I	T	E	42 A		43 C	U	P
44 E	T	A	45 L		46 Y	R	S		47 P	S	Y	O	P	
49 R	E	B	E	L		51 I	T	52 S		53 H	E	R	O	
		54 S	T	E		55 E	A	C	56 H		57 S	E	R	
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63 A	64 B	65 S	66 U	R	D		67 S	T	R	A	N	68 G	69 E	70 R	71
72 S	A	Y	S	N	O		73 Q	U	E	S	T	I	O	N	
74 A	N	D	E	S			75 U	S	S		76 A	N	N	A	

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