

Volume 12 Issue 1 | Fall 2020

# ETHOS



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The Eugene drag scene adapts to the pandemic

## CLUBS TO CAMERAS

Sex workers move online during the coronavirus

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

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**Our Mission:** Ethos is a nationally recognized, award-winning independent student publication. Our mission is to elevate the voices of marginalized people who are underrepresented in the media landscape, and to write in-depth, human-focused stories about the issues affecting them. We also strive to support our diverse student staff and to help them find future success.

Ethos produces a quarterly free print magazine full of well-reported and powerful feature stories, innovative photography, creative illustrations and eye-catching design. On our website, we also produce compelling written and multimedia stories.

Ethos is part of Emerald Media Group, a non-profit organization that's fully independent of the University of Oregon. Students maintain complete editorial control over Ethos, and work tirelessly to produce the magazine.

Since our inception as Korean Ducks Magazine in 2005, we've worked hard to share a multicultural spirit with our readership. We embrace diversity in our stories, in our student staff and in our readers. We want every part of the magazine to reflect the diversity of our world

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This year has taught me, if nothing else, how much money, race and class determine success in the United States. As the new Editor-in-Chief of Ethos, I've shifted the mission of our multicultural magazine to reflect these lessons.

Now, Ethos' mission is to actively elevate the voices of people without power. Before, our mission was to simply reflect and celebrate the diversity of our communities.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started earlier this year, some said it would be the great equalizer, that everybody would be affected by it.

But all over the country, Black, Latino and Indigenous people have had higher case counts and hospitalization rates compared to white people. Service industry workers, who tend to make little money, were forced to stay at work and risk exposure to the virus. People of all income levels lost their jobs. But those without savings struggled the most as they waited for unemployment benefits, which some people still haven't received.

When the Black Lives Matter movement became the largest civil rights movement in 50 years following the police murder of George Floyd, we were reminded how the American criminal justice system regularly imprisons and kills people just because they are Black or brown.

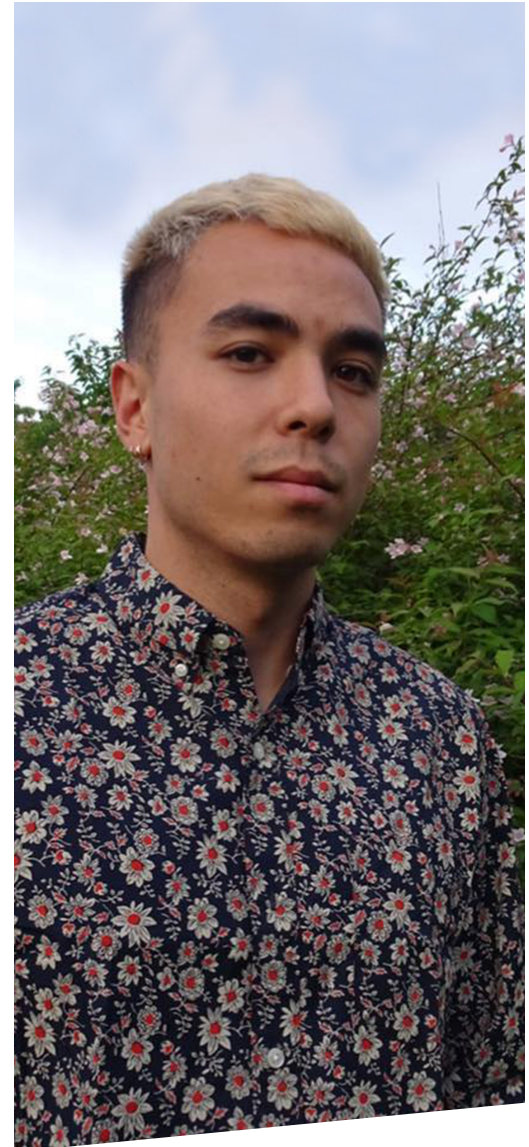
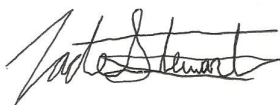
The upside of this year, for me, has been increased public awareness of inequality in America that I hope could lead to change for the better. Even for people with privilege, the human and economic cost of the coronavirus has been hard to ignore. And protesters have chanted "Black Lives Matter," in nearly every neighborhood of Eugene and most other U.S. cities.

Ethos' in-depth reporting can help people better understand the issues that lead to inequality. Our powerful storytelling can help people feel, and care about these issues.

I want this issue of Ethos, and our coming issues, to do a small part in creating an awareness that could lead to a more equal America.

I believe Ethos can, and will, contribute to change.

Jade Yamazaki Stewart



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# NEWSROOM IN YOUR POCKET

# QUARANTINE

Drag queens in Eugene are finding new ways to continue their passion during the pandemic.





Nicole Serenity Storm (left) and her partner, Chris Dean, usually work together to create the content for Storm's Instagram page. From putting on makeup to designing the outfits and taking photos, one Instagram photo shoot can take over two hours. "My favorite part is taking off my makeup," she says.



Written by **Molly Schwartz** Photography by **Jozie Donaghey**

Kares Anne Slaughter enters the stage to the song "I'm Good At Being Bad" by TLC. She struts to a slow-paced introduction, singing, "Sunny days, birds singin' sweet soundin' songs of love." The beat drops and the tempo picks up. The mood of the song switches with Slaughter performing to the words, "Now don't get me wrong cause I'm not a ho, but I know what I got you can't handle though."

She sways her sculpted hips, wearing a high waisted full body suit with a keyhole neckline. She flips around her long red hair and jangles the bangles on her wrists. The spotlight shines bright on Slaughter's black skin, and she sweats more than she usually does during a performance. Slaughter's outfit has one finishing touch, but it's not for looks. She wears a face shield to protect her from COVID-19.

This was Slaughter's first show in five months.

Drag shows provide a safe space for those in the queer community to celebrate one another. Not only is drag a form of self expression but it also provides a source of income. For some, drag is a full time job. COVID-19 has caused financial and emotional issues for drag queens as they've been robbed of this extra income and space for self expression. During the pandemic, drag queens have been finding new ways to pursue their passion while remaining socially distant.

## **KARESS ANNE SLAUGHTER**

Kares Anne Slaughter, or Cornel Hardiman, says drag is a release of his negative energy. He has been doing drag for 25 years.

After two decades, Hardiman has secured a name for himself in the Eugene drag scene. Before COVID-19, he would typically do shows at around six different venues in a month. This included a drag brunch with Nicole Serenity Storm, a fellow drag queen in Eugene, that took place in Cottage Grove every fourth Sunday. Hardiman is part of a group called the Glamazons that performs at venues such as Cowfish, a club, and Spectrum, a LGBTQ venue in Eugene. He has hosted Bingo and lip sync battles among other events.

However, once COVID-19 hit, Hardiman was no longer performing regularly. While other queens have taken to Facebook Live and YouTube to perform shows online or produce lip sync videos, Hardiman has not produced any online content. He says that with the pandemic and with his involvement in local Black Lives Matter protests, it is hard for him to muster the energy to perform online. He says he is also afraid to do online content because so much of his energy comes from the crowd when he performs. Hardiman fears he will not be authentically himself.

"It's really hard when you've been doing something for so long and the rug gets pulled up from underneath you," he says. "And you're just like, what do I do now?"

This has taken an emotional and financial toll on him.

Kares Anne Slaughter hosts a virtual drag concert organized by Bonnie Rose in Eugene, Oregon on August 23. While Slaughter hasn't been creating digital content, she has been supporting her community by performing at local protests, virtual drag shows and other socially distanced events.



Slaughter performs at the "March for Black Trans Lives" event in Eugene, Oregon on August 8. She says she performs at events like these as a way to give back and support her queer and Black communities.



Hardiman works at a grocery store, which he says helps him keep his head above water. But the loss of the extra income from drag has made things more difficult than usual.

"When I was doing drag, it was nice because I was very comfortable with being able to pay my bills and not worry about this and not worry about that," Hardiman says.

Although Hardiman was initially hesitant about performing, he says he is beginning to become a bit stir crazy. That is why, with a push from his boyfriend, he decided to perform at the Southside Speakeasy in Salem at the end of July. While Hardiman says doing the show was a nice stress reliever, he says it was also a very weird experience. He says the show was socially distanced and the crowd was all wearing masks. He says leaving the bar at 10 p.m. was a strange experience as he had never left that early before the pandemic.

Hardiman has no plans on ending his drag career anytime soon, pandemic or not. He is ready to get back to doing drag again whether it is online or in a socially distanced show.

"It's time for Karess to be able to show her face again." Hardiman says.

## NICOLE SERENITY STORM

In an Instagram post, Nicole Serenity Storm shows off her skills while performing a lip sync video to the song "Kings & Queens," by Ava Max. The video begins with her standing in front of a black curtain with a blue light shining on her face and wind blowing through her light blue wig. Storm's neck is decorated with a chunky gold necklace. She wears a glitter black tube top with matching arm warmers.

In the video, Storm goes through two outfit changes and

ends up in a dramatic white dress with one ruffle sleeve. When Ava Max sings, "Pop champagne and raise a toast," Storm pops a champagne bottle filled with confetti. She puts her arms up as the confetti falls all over her and she grins at the camera.

The video looks professional because of the colored lights and black background. But Storm filmed the video in her living room. Her hair was being blown by the air conditioning system in her home.

Nicole Serenity Storm, or Mark Harbaugh, has been doing drag for seven years. Before COVID-19 hit, Harbaugh was performing at bars every weekend. He is the youngest member of The Glamazons and was performing at Cowfish and Spectrum alongside Slaughter. He was co-hosting the drag brunch with Slaughter in Cottage Grove.

Due to COVID-19, he says everything stopped pretty quickly. Harbaugh says he was lucky that drag was not his primary source of income. He works as a veterinary technician and is currently a pre-nursing student at Lane Community College.

Harbaugh says there have been lots of online shows, but that everything took a while to pop up because everyone was unsure of how long the shutdown would last. Harbaugh made an appearance on a few virtual shows and took part in online interviews as well, but decided not to put on shows of his own.

Although stopping drag was hard, he says he used the time to learn new skills and let his "face breathe" by not wearing makeup.

"When everything had first hit, I decided to make a decision that I wasn't going to be sad about it. I mentally decided, this is sad and I'm going to miss everybody, and I'll pray really hard, but I'm going to use this time to take a break kind of rekindle my fire," Harbaugh says.

## BONNIE ROSE

The video opens with Bonnie Rose sitting in a bathtub covered in bubbles and a red light shining on their face. Rose, who uses they/them pronouns, has red voluminous hair. They have on large dramatic lashes and a white heart highlight on the tip of their nose. Before the music starts, they say, "Wash your hands for 20 seconds." Then Rose begins to lip sync to "Bathroom Bitch" by HOLYCHILD. The scenes switch back and forth as Rose passionately sings to the song. The video is titled "BATHROOM BITCH (digital drag)."

Bonnie Rose, who asked that their legal name not be used for privacy reasons, started doing drag two years ago. Prior to COVID-19, they spent every weekend at Spectrum, either performing or supporting their friends. They were doing a lip sync extravaganza at Spectrum and hosting their own show every other month. However, after COVID-19, they took their work online.

Rose did one show over Zoom with the Farce Family, Eugene's queer performance collective, which showed them hanging out and drinking near the beginning of the pandemic. They also hosted a Cats viewing party where they dressed up like one of the characters and asked different trivia questions. Aside from virtual shows, they have been producing lip sync videos. On top of working a full-time job during a pandemic, it has been tough for Rose to navigate online events, which are very different from usual shows.

Rose says that it's harder to make money with online shows. It can be hard to convince someone to pay five dollars

to stare at a screen, so they need to find ways to get audience members to pay for a Zoom call.

There are already a lot of layers and steps necessary for a performer regardless of a pandemic. Rose says this includes figuring out what their strongest skills are, what type of performer they are, creating an aesthetic, marketing and now there is a new challenge: creating online content.

While producing online content has been an obstacle, they say the hardest part has been the absence of a communal space for queer individuals.


"I just want everyone to have fun and I want everyone to have a good time and feel connected," Rose says. "It's so strange being disconnected because so much of what I love is just being in that room with everyone and having those moments together. And so, losing that, it just loses a lot of sparkle."

Without the community, Rose says performing feels like yelling into the void. They say that the community is the most important aspect of drag for them. They want to put out content and entertain people in any way they can, but posting a picture is not as gratifying as performing.

The queer community in Eugene is like family to Rose. They say it is hard going from seeing these people once a week to only texting every once in a while.

"Drag is my family. I did not know family or community or what this space meant until I found this community" Rose says. "It feels like there's just a little part of my heart that's missing and I know it's there and I know we'll get back to it."

A typical Instagram photoshoot takes two hours for Storm, with several outfit, hair and makeup changes. Rather than performing live during the quarantine, Storm has been exploring digital content by creating and directing lip sync videos.



"I FELT LIKE  
2020 WAS GOING  
TO BE MY YEAR.  
WELL WASN'T  
I FREAKING  
WRONG"

Rose says they want to help support and uplift the Eugene drag community, as it has lost in-person performances during the pandemic. "What I love so much about drag is the community connection," Rose says. "I just want everyone to have fun, and I want everyone to have a good time and feel connected and have a shared experience."

## MALIENA BITCHCOCK

Maliena Bitchcock begins getting ready at 11 am. She starts by shaving her face, creating a nice clean surface for her makeup. She takes her Elmer's purple glue stick and glues down her eyebrows with seven or eight layers, then dusts her eyebrows with face powder and lets it dry until she gets a smooth finish. Bitchcock draws thin eyebrows at the center of her forehead.

After applying her makeup, she puts on one of her 52 wigs. She blends the wig in with her makeup and by the time she is done it is almost 4 p.m. She slips on her outfit and sits in front of the sparkly blue fabric hanging behind her. The camera turns on and she smiles.

"Hello boys and girls! Welcome to Bitchtalk with Bitchcock," Bitchcock says.

Maliena Bitchcock has completed this process 50 times from April to July for her online talk show, "Bitchtalk with Bitchcock."

Maliena Bitchcock, or Jammie Roberts, has been doing drag for 15 years. Roberts, who uses they/them pronouns, started their career in Medford, Oregon and moved to Eugene two years ago. They got laid off from their job in October 2019 and decided to turn drag into their full time job. Roberts says they were looking forward to what 2020 had to offer. Things didn't go as planned.

"I felt like 2020 was going to be my year. Well wasn't I freaking wrong. I had a lot planned for 2020 honestly so much went down the drain. I had six months of shows planned," Roberts says. "Then in two days, they were cancelled."

When COVID-19 hit, Roberts decided to create "Bitchtalk with Bitchcock." Season one of the show, which ended in late July, broadcast two to three times a week. "Bitchtalk" focuses on performers in small towns who Roberts says are "kicking it at home and still kicking ass." Each episode features a new performer including drag queens, drag kings, transgender performers and assigned female at birth performers.

Roberts says that once they decided to put together the show, many people were asking to get involved. Roberts had older queens who did drag in the 60s and 70s on the show. They also included teenagers who were transitioning between genders and wanted to discuss their experience.

Roberts has put a lot of time into their talk show, but they say they do not make as much money with the show as they did doing drag shows. Usually during drag shows, they say they can count on tips for extra income. However, they say due to the economic effects COVID-19, audiences now do not have as much money to tip performers. But they do not do their show for the money.

"The thing that keeps me going is knowing what a beautiful platform it is and what it's doing for people," Roberts says. "I've had so many of the local girls tell me how much they love having a platform to finally speak their voices." ■



# RECLAIMING CANNABIS

Written by **Chelsea Pitarresi** Photography by **Jeremy Williams**



Seun Adedeji, owner of  
Black owned b



Seun Adedeji, the youngest Black man in America to own a dispensary and the only Black owner of a dispensary in Eugene, hopes to give back to people who have been persecuted for using the now-legal plant.

It was pitch-black and late, practically morning, as a teenaged Seun Adedeji stumbled into his aunt's home in Texas. He'd been out partying with his friends and was hoping to sneak back quietly without waking her, knowing she had to get up in a couple of hours for a long day at work. As he made his way into the house though, he found her waiting for him in the living room. His stomach dropped as he waited for the anger and scolding to begin. He shouldn't have gone out.

Another teen may not have worried so much about accidentally waking up a loved one after a night out. But for Adedeji, this was big. Moving to Texas had given him a fresh start. He was no longer a child selling candy bars or a middle-schooler selling pot to survive. Now he had someone looking after him; now he could really be a kid, a kid who partied with his friends instead of searching for his next meal.

His aunt had done so much for him since he moved in, all while working long hours as a nurse. He'd hate to disappoint her or cause her any more trouble.

But when he stepped into that room, she only asked him if he had fun.

"Yes?" He replied, still thinking it was some sort of trick and he was about to get told off.

"Okay. I wanted to make sure you get home safe. I love you, and I wanted to make sure you're okay," she said.

While he didn't know it at the time, moments like this, of understanding from the people who care for him, are what will inspire Adedeji to keep what he calls "the human element" at the forefront of his business and legal work.

"That moment meant the world to me," Adedeji says. "I am a product of great people that have just poured into me."

Now, at 26 years old, Adedeji is the youngest Black man in the U.S. to own a cannabis dispensary, and the only Black dispensary owner in Eugene. Adedeji's struggles opening the business left him wanting to make the industry more accessible for people of color. He is now working with legislators to legalize marijuana in other states and simplify the expensive process of opening a dispensary, all while he mentors his own employees in hopes they will one day open their own stores.

Adedeji says more people of color should be placed in ownership and management positions within the industry. According to data from Verilife, a division of one of the country's largest marijuana companies, Eugene ranks No. 4 in dispensaries per capita out of 600 cities with a population of over 50,000. About 55 dispensaries are open in Eugene, yet Adedeji's Elev8 is the singular Black-owned dispensary among them.

"We have no ownership," Adedeji says. "We need to have that conversation, about why. It's time for us to get what we deserve."

Seun Adedeji, owner of Elev8 Dispensary, speaks about the importance of supporting Black-owned businesses at a Black Lives Matter rally at Alton Baker Park in June.



Photo submitted by Seun Adedeji

Adedeji fought some major battles to get where he is today. When he was three years old, Adedeji and his family moved from Nigeria to Chicago, where he grew up on the South Side. From a young age, Adedeji faced financial instability. He was forced to look for ways to pay for himself. In second grade, he began reselling candy bars from the corner store at school, undercutting the prices of the ones sold in the cafeteria. But as he got older, Adedeji turned to selling marijuana to bring in more money. He was arrested when he was just 13 years old.

"I remember thinking my life was over," Adedeji says. "Since I was a DACA child, I didn't have any documentation. I could lose everything, even my ability to become a citizen could be taken away from me, and I could be forced back to a country I'd never really been to before. All of that hit me at once and I was honestly terrified."

Thankfully for Adedeji, the police saw him for what he really was — a scared kid, not a criminal. They told him that if he didn't get arrested for marijuana possession again by the time he turned 18, they would wipe the arrest from his record. Considering the financial and emotional burdens he was dealing with, Adedeji says he is proud he was able to hold up his end of the deal. If he had failed, his life would look very different today.

After his arrest, Adedeji joined the Future Business Leaders of America and Key Club in high school. He realized he wanted to start his own business one day and stay engaged in his community. By the time he was 20, Adedeji was managing nine Sprint stores in Washington to save up to open a dispensary in Eugene.

Adedeji wanted to get involved in the emerging industry as quickly as possible. He was familiar with some of the positive effects of cannabis, such as increased creativity and pain relief. He wanted to work his way up to a position where he could help other minority citizens get the necessary financial and legal resources to start their own businesses. Based on his early experiences of speaking with legal advisors and getting rejected for loans and license applications, he feared the industry was not as accessible for minority groups.

Adedeji says that he had to sacrifice regular life to see his goals come to reality. Opening a dispensary requires a large amount of capital, time, and knowledge about the legalities of this kind of business. Depending on the location, dispensary startup costs can range from \$325,000 to \$1.13 million, according to research done by Green Man Cannabis, a Colorado-based cannabis company.

"I read the law and did it all myself: installing the security cameras, the safe, finding a place 1,000 feet away from another dispensary or school, everything to be compliant with the state," Adejedi says. "I slept in my shop for a year while I worked from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and oh man, was it hard work."

In order to amplify minority voices in the industry, Adejedi says he prioritizes reinvestment in communities that have been most impacted by the war on drugs. He works with the Last Prisoner Project, a group dedicated to freeing people imprisoned for cannabis offenses. The organization is also writing bills intended to simplify the dispensary opening process and to allow those with previous cannabis offenses, a population that disproportionately consists of Black Americans, to apply for licenses and loans.

According to a 2020 analysis by the American Civil Liberties Union, Black Americans are 3.64 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than white Americans, despite similar usage rates. Adejedi says that if you come from a community that suffers higher rates of poverty and arrests, it can feel impossible to match the capital of white competitors. "If anyone is going to be making one dollar from this plant, justice needs to be served," says Kendra Freeman of the Oregon Cannabis Association.

Like Adejedi, Freeman is angered by the financial disparities between white and minority citizens and sees tax revenue reinvestment as a step toward reducing that gap.

As of June 2020, cannabis taxes have brought in almost \$57 million to Oregon. Currently, 40 percent of that total is given to the State School Fund, 20 percent to Alcoholism and Drug Services, 15 percent to the Oregon State Police and five percent to the Oregon Health Authority for Drug Treatment and Prevention. The final 20 percent goes toward general city and county budgets.

Previously, the association wrote a bill with Julie Fahey, the State Representative for Oregon's House District 14, which includes West Eugene, Bethel and Junction City, to allocate money to specific agencies that can disperse funds to communities in need. It didn't pass. Now the association holds meetings every week to rewrite it.

"It's hard because many times, this money does not actually end up in the Black and brown community," Freeman says. "It often goes into a general fund, then gets dispersed in a roundabout way, even making its way back to the police department."

Adejedi hopes for reform in cannabis tax reinvestment, but he is also looking for other ways to help newcomers in the industry. Now that Elev8 is well-established and expanding to other states like Massachusetts and Illinois, Adejedi is taking his employees and teaching them the legal, business and customer service sides of the industry. He says the goal is to get them their own shops one day and help them grow as leaders.

Cassie Michaud, who has been employed by Adejedi since June, says she can't imagine finding another brand that compares to Elev8's service to both customers and employees.

"We're working together to create space for those typically without it in the industry, and Seun really listens to all our input," Michaud says. "I'm so lucky for the trust and belief Seun has put in me."

Adejedi says that before his aunt gave him a chance, he was an angry kid, frustrated with his circumstances and concerned for his future. Now, he is proud of the supportive community he has found in his employees and customers and hopes they can share the same compassion that helped get him where he is today.

"They saw me beyond race, beyond everything," Adejedi says. "They just saw me for me. I remember thinking yes, I've found my purpose. It felt amazing." ■



Many strains of cannabis are available at Elev8 to cater to the desired effect or experience a customer is looking for, whether medicinal or recreational.





In the permanent studio set up in her bedroom, Young only spends a few minutes taking photos in an outfit, using the same set poses each time. "I used to be so shy and nervous talking to new people," Young says. "Stripping totally made me more confident."

# SEX WORK GOES VIRAL

*Since the national outbreak of COVID-19, local strippers have turned to alternate outlets to continue their livelihoods*

Written by **Emily Topping** Photography by **Jozie Donaghey**

**T**he iridescent tote bag that Naomi brought to work every night before the pandemic contained a few essential items: several bottles of perfume, seven-inch white leather high heels, a spray can of mace and more outfit changes than the average woman holds in her closet.

Eventually, when Naomi decides to return to the strip club again, she'll likely bring her baby pink mask to match her lingerie.

Naomi, a 22-year-old Lane Community College student, has worked as an exotic dancer in Eugene and Springfield for the last three years. But when the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 sent the Oregon economy screeching to a halt in mid-March, she was sent into survival mode.

"When COVID first happened, I kept refreshing my phone over and over," Naomi says. She was sitting on the couch with her roommates on the evening of March 23 when she received the notification that, due to an executive order issued by Governor Kate Brown, all non-essential businesses would close the next day. This meant no bars, no strip clubs and, for Naomi, no source of income.

"Even though I knew it was coming, I immediately burst into tears," Naomi says.

On the night of March 23, her last shift at the club before the shutdown, Naomi was in the middle of leading an older man to the back room, one of his hands gripping hers and the other holding a Coors Light, when the overhead lights clicked on. It was over.

"I didn't realize the club would be closing at midnight," Naomi says. She returned to the dressing room and organized the evening's cash tips into neat piles of 20s, 10s and singles, desperately trying to remain calm. She knew she needed a plan.

Naomi is one of the thousands of sex workers who were forced to act quickly when COVID-19 struck the U.S. In a business which requires physical intimacy, many exotic dancers needed to find a new and profitable outlet for their skills. Some women looked for work in a new industry, while others waited patiently to hear if, and when, their clubs would re-open. Others, like Naomi, turned to online sex work through sites like OnlyFans.

OnlyFans is a subscription-based website that hosts "models" and amateur content creators who sell photos and videos of themselves, which are mostly pornographic in nature. Although some pages are free, customers generally pay a fee from \$4.99 to \$49.99 to access a model's main page. They can then tip extra money to receive personalized videos and messages. The result is a more personal experience than can be found in the seemingly endless sea of free online porn. Most models on OnlyFans are "real," as in not professional porn stars, and will often respond and speak to customers on a more intimate level.

Naomi was not the only one to turn to online sex work in the wake of the pandemic.

The platform saw a 75 percent increase in users in March alone, citing 3.5 million new sign-ups, according to reporting by Complex. Although some of these users may have been new to the sex industry, Naomi believes her experience as a stripper is what has helped her grow her OnlyFans.



"What many people don't realize is that a lot of men don't come into the strip club purely for the sexual aspect," she says. "A lot of them are lonely. They want to tell me about their divorce, their kids and just have a girl listen to them for an hour."

When starting her OnlyFans account, Naomi tried to channel the same personality traits she uses at the strip club to make the interaction feel less "virtual" and awkward.

"I try to be as real as possible. Of course, there are naked photos, but I also show pictures of my plants, I talk about my meditations and crystals," she says. "It's like inviting someone into your life."

Her bedroom in Eugene now looks like part new-age meditation retreat and part porn studio.

A small jungle of plants cascade down Naomi's windowsill, interrupted by crystals jutting through the leaves and "charging their energy" in the sunlight. Her walls are covered in a large world map, dotted with pins on countries she's visited and others she plans to travel to, and a Black Lives Matter poster from a protest she recently attended. A shimmering pole is fixed to the ceiling, though the room looks hardly big enough to host any acrobatic moves, and Naomi says she hits her head on the door of the closet more often than she would like. In the corner of the room is a lighting kit and a phone stand to help her record OnlyFans content.

While Naomi seems to have embraced her new career path since the pandemic, the transition to creating online content has been more difficult for some sex workers.

Christina Waterman, age 25, moved to Eugene in the beginning of March hoping to escape sex work. Having danced at strip clubs in Orange County for nearly five years, Waterman says she had seen her fair share of the dark side of the industry.

Some of her co-workers became dependent on drugs and alcohol – Xanax to calm nerves before a shift or cocaine to keep going – while others developed an aggressive personality from years of having to compete for their income. The initial benefits of a flexible work schedule and quick cash began to seem less and less glamorous.

Oregon was supposed to represent a clean start. She looked forward to the slower pace of life, the cold weather and being closer to her aunt and cousins. She started accounting classes and planned on applying for jobs at firms in the Eugene area. Waterman realized quickly, however, that her previous career came with consequences she hadn't planned for. She had never claimed her cash tips on her taxes, so she found it difficult to prove her income. It was almost impossible to apply for a loan for a house or provide paperwork to make car payments.

Then COVID-19 hit. Suddenly jobless, Waterman learned about OnlyFans from a friend who had recently started an account.

After a few hours of research on Google, she decided to create a profile to sell nude photos and videos. It would be a temporary situation, she decided, just until the job market opened back up and she could find something more permanent.

But Waterman had concerns. While stripping comes with its own set of risks, the dangers of online sex work are unique. Photos and videos can be downloaded and saved indefinitely

For Young, creating content for OnlyFans is sometimes as simple as taking off her T-shirt and snapping some pictures. "Some of my followers actually like my lazy PJ pictures because they feel more authentic," she says.

*Kelly spins around the pole in her living room. She says she learns most of her moves from Youtube. "I'm the kind of person that has to be totally perfect at something before I show other people," Kelly says. "I watched hours and hours of YouTube videos before I ever auditioned."*



and strangers can sometimes discover personal information from thousands of miles away.

Even Naomi, who has no plans to quit the industry, has experienced negative consequences from online work. When she was 18, before starting as a dancer, she used to sell individual nude photos and videos to customers she found on Reddit. One time, when she forgot to answer a message request from an anonymous user, he sent another one. This time, it was a list: her full name, her parent's names and occupations and the city she lived in. Naomi says she was terrified.

"I immediately deleted all of my accounts," she says. "It was enough to scare me off doing anything on the internet for years."

There is also the risk of family and friends discovering online profiles in the future. Waterman worries about explicit pictures making their way back to her daughter one day, who is now only four years old.

"I think I might talk to her about my past one day, maybe when she's a teenager," Waterman says. "I'd want to warn her what I've gone through before she thinks about it."

Now, Waterman spends about an hour a day posting photos on OnlyFans. While Naomi seems to view her new business venture as exactly that, a business, by setting herself a schedule and coming up with new ideas for themed photoshoots and home videos, Waterman often recycles content that she already has on her phone.

"I think a lot of girls start an OnlyFans thinking it's easy money," Waterman says. "But it takes a lot of time to make that." She says her new income from the website is barely a fourth of what she used to make at the club.

The idea that online work is easy money is a stereotype that many OnlyFans creators say they have to fight against. Naomi says she's even read articles claiming that sites like OnlyFans take away the possibility of men finding love in "real life." Many online sex workers, however, don't see themselves fueling men's loneliness or dragging them away from the real world, but offering them a reprieve from it.

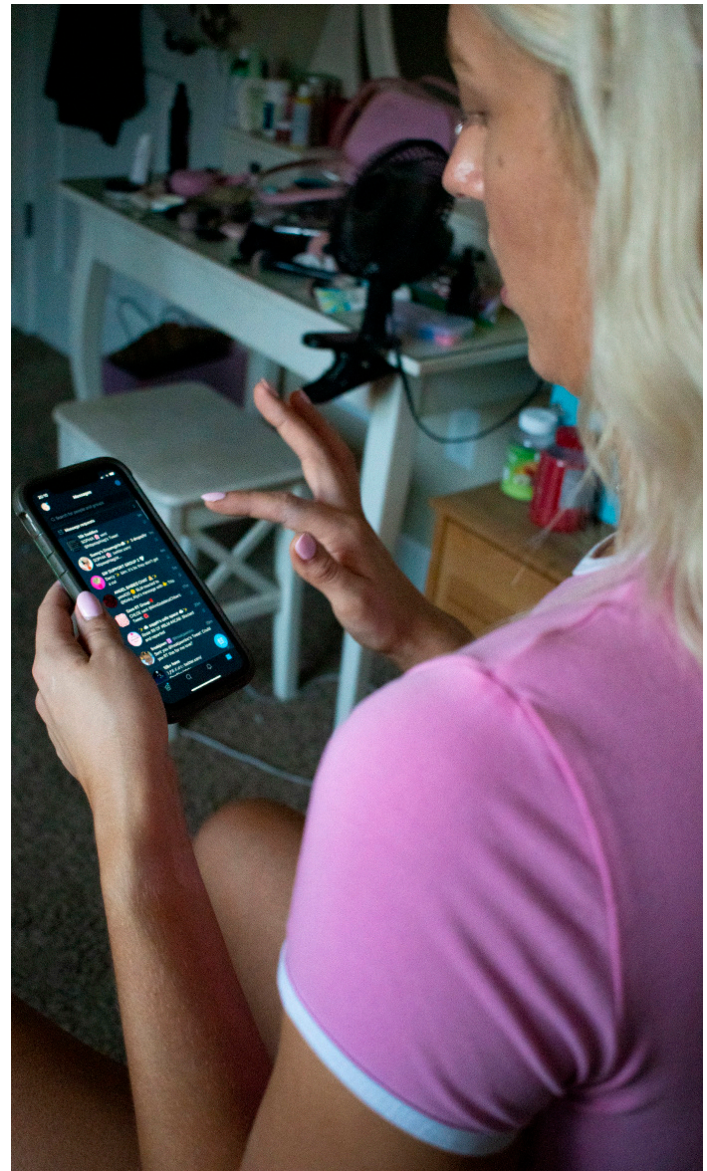
"A guy sent me a selfie the other day on OnlyFans and I told him he looked cute," Naomi says. The customer responded by saying it was the first photo he'd taken of himself in years because he was so self-conscious of his looks. He said he couldn't remember the last time he'd gotten a compliment.

Naomi says many of the men she interacts with struggle with insecurities and are afraid to pursue women in real life, particularly during nationwide shutdowns that make socializing difficult. Paying someone from the safety of a screen can allow for a healthy outlet.

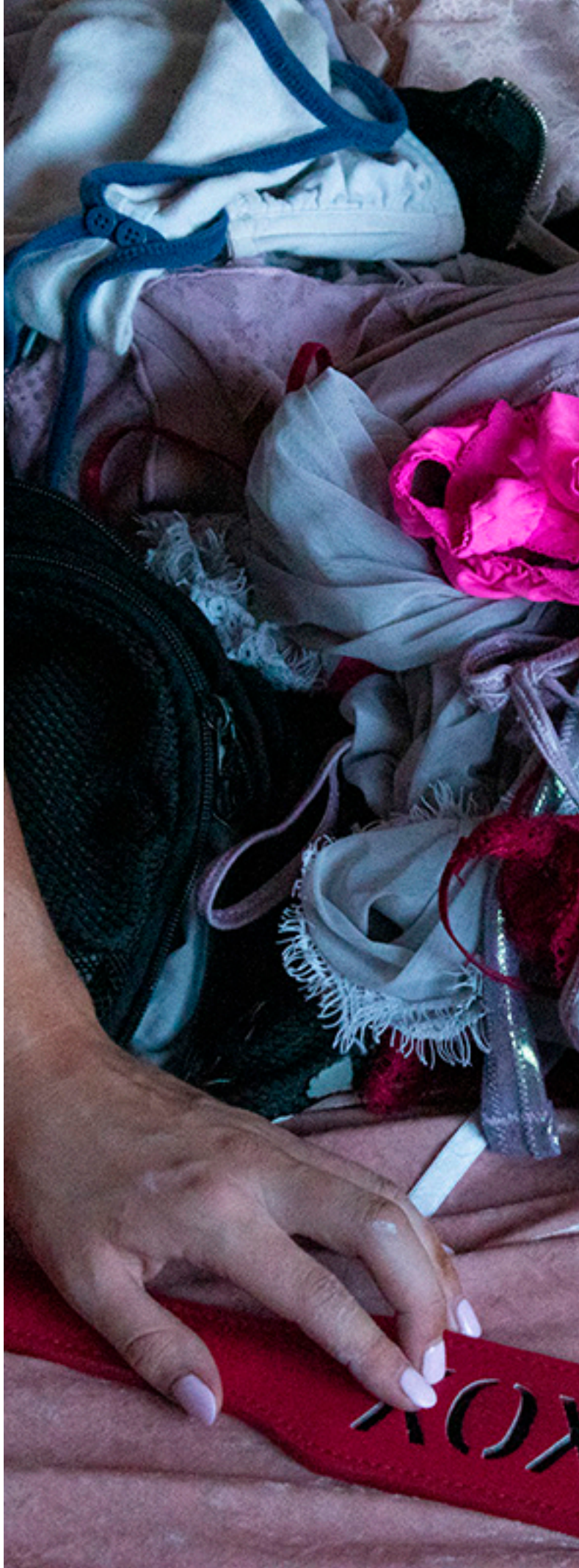
"Now he sends me a picture every few days, and I think he is starting to feel better about himself. That's nice for me," Naomi says.

For Waterman, the backlash against OnlyFans is amusing. Although she hopes to change paths soon, she believes the new era of online pornography is merely a different venue for the same thing humans have done for years. "[Sex work] isn't going away," she says.

It appears that despite rising numbers of COVID-19 cases across the country, strip clubs aren't going away anytime soon either. On June 5, Lane County entered Phase 2 of Oregon's COVID-19 response, which allows for the limited re-opening of bars and restaurants, including strip clubs, as long as patrons remain seated and wear masks. Within a few days of the announcement, nearly all of the strip clubs in Springfield and Eugene scrambled to adjust their protocol and open their doors again.



To keep her fan base interested, Young interacts with and messages her followers every day. "There's this one guy that's always sending me memes and cute messages," she says. "Sometimes, I think we could actually be friends in real life."



"The club looks very different now," says Brooke, a 21-year-old dancer and advertising student at the University of Oregon.

Brooke, who requested that her name be withheld from the article, first began stripping at Sweet Illusions more than a year ago. Now she works at a different club in Eugene. She was discouraged from revealing the location by her manager, who declined to comment for the article.

"When we re-opened we had to stay six feet away at all times, which can be really awkward," Brooke says.

Brooke has an ethereal aura about her and laughs nervously as she talks, brushing her shoulder length platinum-blonde hair from her eyes. When she demonstrates a dance on the pole in her living room, the straps on her flowery mask spin in time with her ruffled skirt, creating the dizzying illusion of a ballerina performing in air. It is clear that she has put effort into her craft.

"We have to work a lot harder to make money now," Brooke says. Her typical nightly income has dropped, from more than \$700 per shift before the pandemic to an average of \$300 a night now. Because so much of stripping is reliant on physical contact, even if it's just a flirty hand on the shoulder while making conversation with a customer, the new physical distance guidelines can be extremely hard to follow.

"A dancer [at Sweet Illusions] told me they actually pulled out a 6-foot yardstick the other day when a customer got too close," she says and laughs.

Some local clubs haven't followed safety guidelines after reopening. According to reporting by KEZI 9 News, local regulators with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission called for an investigation into Bohemian Tavern in Cottage Grove and Brick House Gentlemen's Club in Springfield, after investigators found too many people crowded together. According to the OLCC, dancers, staff and patrons were all not wearing masks at Brick House Gentlemen's club and dancers were too close to customers.

For Brooke, the risk of contracting COVID-19 is now simply another potential hazard of the job. "I'm already used to it," she says.

For other sex workers, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the idea of stripping in-person unthinkable. Naomi says she will probably not return to dancing until a vaccine is found and plans on continuing to focus on her OnlyFans.

As of Sept. 2, she has more than 50,000 followers on her Twitter account dedicated to OnlyFans content, and continues to grow her subscriber base day by day.

"Sex work is real work," she says as she glances around her makeshift studio in Eugene.

In Naomi's bedroom, the line that divides her from any other 21-year-old woman making a living is blurred. The photos of her friends lining her desk look like they could be found in any college student's dorm room – even as they are juxtaposed with her intimidatingly-tall white leather boots piled on the floor, the markers of a job which many people still find taboo.

The world map on the wall, dotted with pins of all the countries she hopes to visit, is obscured by the large studio light and metallic pole that make her plans possible.

"With all this craziness that has happened, I am really proud of how I adapted," she says. ■

Young dumps the contents of her "stripper bag" onto her bed and spreads out the lingerie she uses for her OnlyFans content. She uses a lot of the money she makes on the site to buy more outfits to keep viewers interested.





While Kelly currently studies journalism at the University of Oregon, she loves the art of pole dancing and considers it a passion. "I've considered entering pole dancing competitions," Kelly says. "That would be a really nice trophy for my shelf."

# DANCE AND DISABILITY

A Eugene-based method for people with disabilities is redefining what it means to be a dancer.

Written by **Ella Hutcherson** Photos Submitted by **Brittney Hietala**

**A**teenaged Kelcie Laube glanced uncertainly around the small ballet studio, her hand gripping the wooden barre at her side. All around her, dancers in pink tights and black leotards effortlessly mimicked the positions demonstrated by their teacher at the front of the room, their ballet slippers gliding gracefully across the black floor. The room was silent, but Laube waited for a voice of guidance, an indication of understanding or possibly a helping hand. After a moment, gentle notes of classical piano sounded from the stereo, and Laube's heart sank. Help was not coming. Once again, her needs had gone unnoticed, and she would be left alone to force her body into the correct positions.

"I was the only dancer, growing up, that had a disability in my dance class," says Laube, a dancer and certified teacher living with cerebral palsy. "So that in itself was a barrier. Most of my teachers were figuring it out as we went along."

Laube has been dancing since she was three years old, when she followed in her older sisters' footsteps and began attending dance lessons. But from the beginning, barriers in communication prevented her from enjoying her classes to the fullest.

Laube met Alito Alessi, the founder of DanceAbility International, when she was six years old. They kept in touch through her childhood, and when she was 16, Alessi invited her to perform with DanceAbility as a guest dancer. At 17, she joined the DanceAbility Performance Company. She was the youngest performer the company has ever had.

For Laube, now 22, the style of instruction and sense of community at DanceAbility has been transformative.

"It gives a person a place to fit in," Laube says. "When maybe they didn't before."

In an art form that elevates the able-bodied and engages in exclusionary hiring practices, DanceAbility International is proving that through understanding, communication and innovation, everyone is capable of pursuing their passions.

DanceAbility International is a dance methodology with its home base located in Eugene. Its curriculum is specifically designed to remove barriers and connect people, with and without disabilities, through movement. Since Alessi and Karen Nelson founded the method in 1987, more than 600 people across 45 countries have attended training certifications, bringing the method back to their studios and communities around the world. DanceAbility's mission is to create space for all kinds of dancers and to chip away at exclusionary dancer stereotypes.

According to Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, the current concert dance body standard can be traced back to classical ballets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which portrayed the female body as delicate and fragile. Male dancers needed to be strong enough to lift their female counterparts overhead, while also maintaining a trim and lithe figure.

While these gender roles are no longer the norm in modern choreography, many expectations for dance bodies remain rooted in the past. If dancers are not flexible, slim and able to fulfill the aesthetics defined centuries ago, they are not viable for a career in concert dance. Because of these requirements, disabled professional dancers are almost nonexistent.

DanceAbility is among a handful of dance companies that feature dancers with disabilities. The organization's concentration on outreach is changing the world of dance education, in which many teachers are not equipped to teach inclusive classes for disabled students.

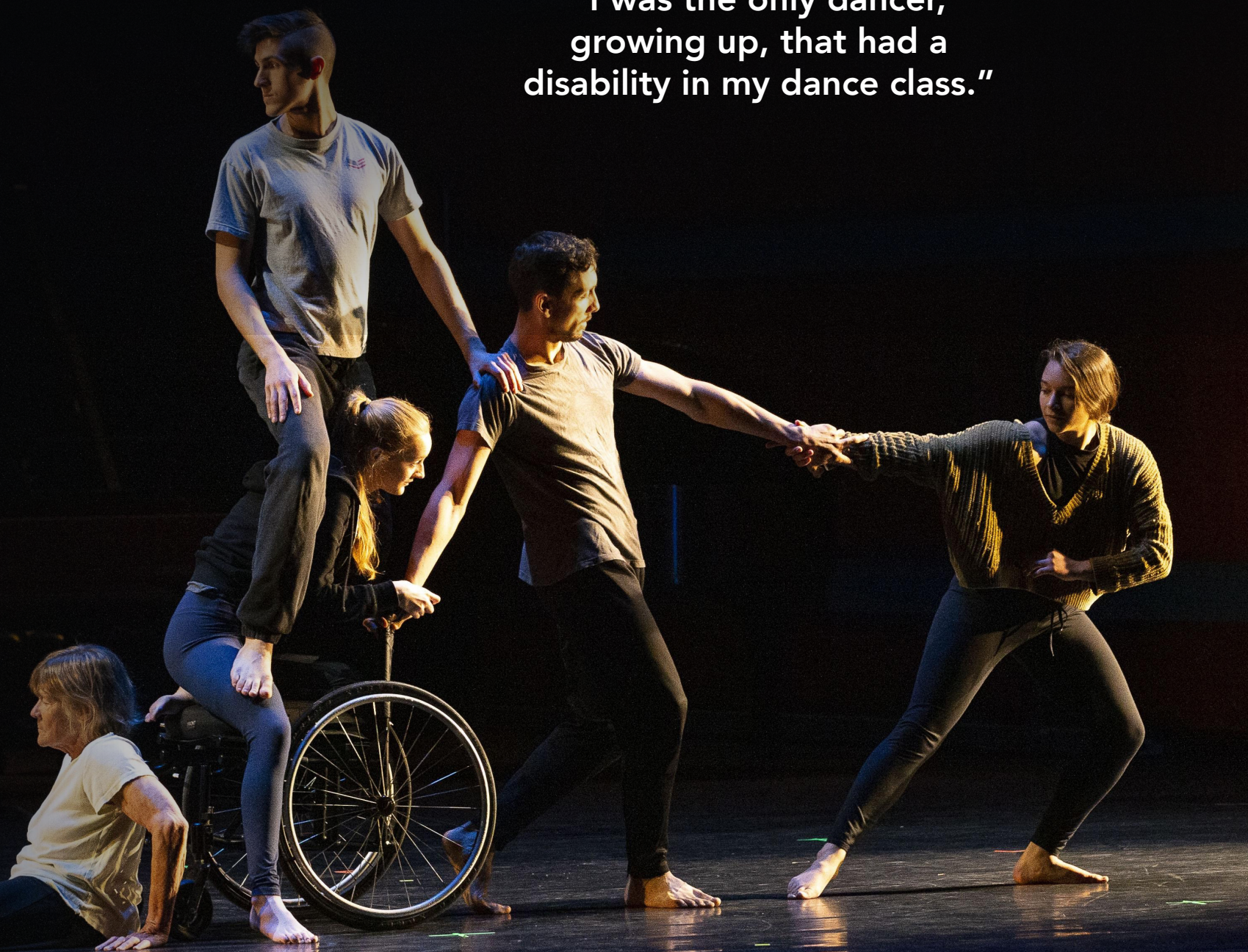
Brittney Hietala, a certified instructor in the DanceAbility method, says there are few students with disabilities in a typical dance classroom. Between the physical and educational barriers in these studios, many potential dancers never make it through the door. "I didn't have a lot of experience with people with disabilities until DanceAbility," she says.

The DanceAbility method was developed to include all types of bodies, regardless of ability. The methodology is laid out in a carefully curated





**"I was the only dancer,  
growing up, that had a  
disability in my dance class."**



Brittney Hietala (second from left) rehearses with other DanceAbility performers for the "Bach in Motion: A Celebration of Music and Movement" event during the 2019 Oregon Bach Festival.



Kelcie Laube (second from left,) Brittney Hietala (fourth from left) and Hajar Albattah (eighth from left) rehearse for the 2019 Oregon Bach Festival.

manual of exercises, approximately 400 pages in length. Each exercise is refined by Alessi to guarantee inclusion, so that no students are left behind in the duration of a class.

In Hietala's adult class, students begin with a simple warmup on the floor. As the class progresses, Hietala assigns a variety of movements and exercises for the students. Dancers explore movement concepts concerning time, repetition, transition and stillness. The class ends with everyone dancing together, using improvisation and contact to share the space.

Each class is adjusted based on who is in the room to ensure that everyone's needs are being accommodated. With a student like Hajar Albattah, a 25-year-old dancer living with a severe visual impairment, Hietala incorporates more touch-based movements into her classwork.

Albattah has always loved dancing. Growing up, she danced in her living room, alone or with her sisters and friends. She learned about DanceAbility International while pursuing a disability studies minor at the University of Oregon.

"I fell in love," Albattah says. "But I never thought I would be one of them."

Albattah was born with a severe visual impairment, and prior to DanceAbility, she never imagined herself performing for a live audience. Albattah's disability advisor told her that DanceAbility was looking for new dancers to take part in the Oregon Bach Festival in Eugene. She auditioned and was quickly invited to be a part of their performing company.

After a year performing with DanceAbility and studying the method, Albattah's understanding of what is possible for herself and others has shifted and transformed.

"It's not about you having a normal body or a moving body, it's just you being a person," she says.

When Albattah attends a DanceAbility class, the instructor uses physical proximity to keep Albattah from getting lost. She remains within Albattah's limited line of vision while she explains an exercise, and uses precise wording to ensure that Albattah can understand, even if she can't see the instructor do the exercise. When the instructor needs a volunteer, she calls on Albattah, encouraging her to experience the movements inside of her own body so that she can retain the choreography and receive any necessary corrections. Albattah says these simple communication adjustments make a world of difference for her experience in a dance class.

DanceAbility's method and mission have made it possible for dancers like Laube and Albattah to bring their dancing to a professional level. Since joining DanceAbility, Laube and Albattah have both been certified in the DanceAbility method. They perform alongside their fellow company members for an array of audiences in the Eugene area and beyond. And when theatres are open again, they will take the stage once more.

"DanceAbility is showing the world that anyone with consciousness can do anything they want, even dancing," Albattah says. "It's about breaking barriers. It's showing the world that anything can be possible if you want to do it." ■

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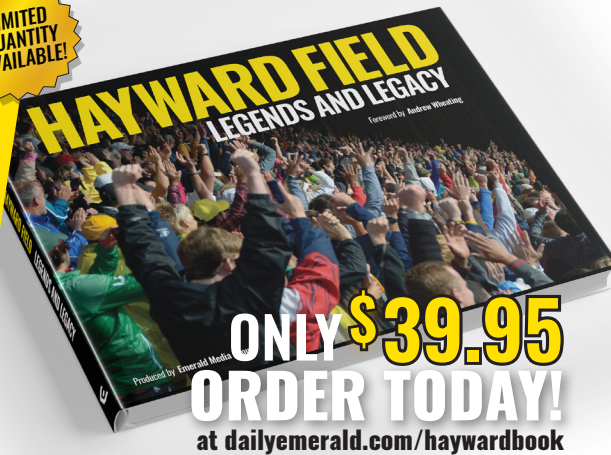


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Written by **Madeline Ryan** Graphics by **Emma Nolan**

# NO CHANCE TO SAY GOODBYE

Indigenous students were left without help in the early months of the pandemic.

**D**espite her efforts to stay calm, Charmayne James left the school auditorium in tears. While the rest of her classmates emptied into the hallway, James kept her head down as she hurried in the direction of her dorm, preventing anyone from noticing how the tears wouldn't stop. Her younger brother, a freshman at her high school, was somewhere in the mass of students. She avoided him too, hoping he wouldn't realize how distraught she was at the news they'd just received. When she reached the solitude of her dorm room, she broke down. The first person she called was her mom.

"I don't know how she already knew," James says. "But she already knew that they were sending us home."

This moment marked the beginning of an abrupt end to her senior year of high school at Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon. It was the second week of March, and Chemawa, one of 183 schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), was following orders to shut down. As a boarding school, Chemawa had to send their roughly 300 students home to cities and reservations across the nation during a pandemic.

Home for James is the town of Pinon in the Navajo Nation in Arizona. She had been enjoying her senior year and looking forward to her graduation for months, especially because her family planned a road trip from Pinon up to Salem so they could see her graduate in the spring. Her mom raised her to value education over all else. When her principal announced that the entire student body had to return home early, Charmayne knew that meant she and the rest of her senior class wouldn't get the graduation ceremony they'd been dreaming of for their whole lives. She was devastated.

"My heart stopped. It felt like it just dropped to my stomach," James says with a small laugh and then a sigh.

"I started thinking about it, and then finally that's when it hit me," James says. "And I was like, 'Wow. This last year of high school really went to shit.'"

In the coming months James and her family would not only be impacted by the canceling of her graduation; soon, several of them would test positive for COVID-19. They would

lose a family member to the virus without a chance to say goodbye. And they would begin preparations for James' younger brother, now a rising sophomore, to begin a school year at Chemawa unlike any other.

While the coronavirus pandemic has affected everybody in the country, it disproportionately harmed Native American communities and students. Struggles in education quality, technology access and health experienced by Native American students, including students at Chemawa Indian School and other Bureau of Indian Education schools, have become exacerbated during the pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, Chemawa had difficulties with the overall quality of the education and attention their students received. According to a 2015 report by the Department of the Interior, the school was not following the requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act by repeatedly failing to properly assess the academic needs of their students.

The same 2015 report detailed the gaps between standard public schools and the schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education. According to the report, test scores for Bureau of Indian Education funded schools are lower than public schools. "In general," the report reads, "BIE students lag behind the public school population."

Like most early boarding schools for Native American youth, Chemawa was founded in the late 19th century with the intention of forcing students to assimilate to Western culture. Chemawa's design as an off-reservation boarding school was intentional, immersing students in white culture away from their communities. Now Chemawa encourages students to celebrate their culture with regular festivities like pow wows and drum circles. Even so, structural barriers to equality have been in place for Chemawa students since its founding.

The devastation of not having a graduation ceremony was particularly intense for James because only half of Native students attending Bureau of Indian Education schools get the experience of graduating. According to statistics on the Bureau of Indian Education website, American Indian and Alaskan Native students have a graduation rate of 69 percent nationally, but the average graduation rate for Native students attending

*The average graduation rate for Native students attending Bureau of Indian Education schools is only 53 percent.*

*For context, the national graduation rate is 81 percent.*

Bureau of Indian Education schools is only 53 percent. For context, the national graduation rate is 81 percent.

By the time Chemawa announced that everyone was going home, James had technically already graduated. After finishing up her remaining credits by the end of her first term, James spent her second term at school entirely focused on extracurriculars. This meant that once she went home in the spring, she didn't have to worry about online schoolwork or the fact that she didn't have access to a laptop at her house.

Other students at Chemawa still had work to do before they could graduate. But receiving an online education is often more difficult for Native American students because they have less access to technology and internet than other racial groups.

Kalorie Dillinger, a 17-year-old Chemawa sophomore from the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona returned to her reservation in March, panicked about how she was going to access her online courses. Dillinger says Chemawa told her she would be required to pass online core subject courses in order to complete the year. But she didn't have the necessary internet access or technology at her parent's home to participate in the courses.

With libraries already closed by the time she returned to her reservation, Dillinger decided to finish her last few months of school staying with a cousin who lived nearby and had a laptop with an Internet connection she could use.

Dillinger's challenges in finding internet access are common among Indigenous youth. Almost 30 percent of Americans on tribal lands lack broadband access, according to the Federal Communications Commission 2020 report on broadband deployment. By comparison, the same report concluded that only 5.6 percent of Americans lack access. This digital divide makes receiving an online education significantly more difficult for Native American students.

Chemawa Indian School didn't receive a lot of resources or guidance during the transition to online learning. The Bureau of Indian Education offered only vague guidance to their schools and did not share explicit plans for the \$153 million they received under the coronavirus relief bill quickly enough for it to be distributed when it was desperately needed during the spring. According to legal experts, their response was slow and sparse in comparison to the responses of other school districts.

"What we've seen is that they're behind," Heather Hoechst, a staff attorney at the Native American Disability Law Center, says of the Bureau. She says state educational agencies in Arizona and New Mexico were fairly quick to put out guidance for their schools, while the Bureau of Indian Education put out limited guidance.

The Academic Guidance Memorandum provided by the Bureau on March 30 was two pages long and contained only vague advice. A bullet point in the guidance titled "Plan for Student Learning" instructed administrators to "build on a student's current location, family, strengths, interests, goals, and needs, and use this knowledge to positively impact student learning."

In comparison, the New Mexico Public Education Department provided a 31-page guidance document that was more thorough, including a structured 5-day training plan for teachers to adjust to online instruction and grade-specific time commitment maximums with content options for 'learning time.'

Hoechst learned from clients that many Bureau of Indian Education schools reacted in vastly different ways from each other during school closures as a result of incomplete guidance from the Bureau.

"It seemed apparent that schools didn't know what to do. If the Bureau had been a little more proactive about issuing guidance to the schools, then there would have been a more uniform response and parents and families would know what to expect," Hoechst says.

The Executive Director of the Bureau of Indian Education, when reached for comment, redirected questions to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Bureau of Indian Affairs did not respond by the time of this writing.

When Chemawa Indian School announced that they were closing the school, some students celebrated the long summer and the chance to return home early. This reaction angered Myka Tahoe, James' roommate. Tahoe was upset about the abrupt end to her senior year, but also felt that students didn't understand the dangers that waited for them at home.

"It was that worry of, 'are we going to be safe? Are we going to be okay?'" Tahoe says. "And are we getting sent home to where things are not going to be okay?"

Both Taho and James' families live in the Navajo Nation. While Taho was able to move out of her grandparent's house and live on her own in Flagstaff at the beginning of the summer, James stayed at home, helping her mom and siblings.

Cases began to rise in her town of Pinon. The Navajo Nation quickly became a COVID-19 hot spot.

"Since this is a small community," James says, "we knew who had COVID. We knew who passed away from it."

In May, her family tested positive for COVID-19. A few days later, her stepfather Lewis was hospitalized, and shortly after being flown to a bigger hospital in Scottsdale, he died. He was 41.

"I didn't expect him to..." James trails off in thought. "I had seen him that morning when my mom took him to the hospital, and that was my last time seeing him."

By June, the Navajo Nation had a higher infection rate than any state. This disparity ties back to disparities in health that were present before the pandemic. According to the Indian Health Service, American Indian and Alaska Native individuals experience and die from diabetes, chronic liver disease and respiratory disease at higher rates than other Americans, all immunocompromising conditions that increase the dangers of COVID-19.

The pandemic continues on, and since spring, schools have adapted. James' younger brother is now a sophomore at Chemawa, and according to James, Chemawa is sending him a laptop through the mail. She says the school may also purchase a Wi-Fi router for the laptop. Online classes began in September, and the earliest students can return to campus will be at least after Christmas break. James sees the school's decisions as a step in the right direction.

"I was like 'Oh, okay, they pulled themselves together and found a solution,'" James says with a laugh.

James hasn't applied to any colleges yet, but she's considering going to school in various states. She knows moving away will make her worry about her family, but she thinks maybe she'll outgrow it.

A few weeks before her stepfather's death, James was sent by her mom to pick up the mail. She drove to the mailbox and when she opened it, something caught her eye.

"I went to check the mail and I see the package from Chemawa. I opened it, and I was like, oh my gosh. This was what I was supposed to wear," James says. Neatly folded inside the package alongside her yearbook and diploma lay her graduation regalia.

"And I just started crying in the car. I was looking at it and I was crying. But after it was over, I was like, I'm really glad I went through that so none of my other siblings would've gone through it. I just really, really hope that none of my siblings have to endure that."

"And I was just thinking. When I graduate college, I will wear that cap," James says clearly and slowly. "I will wear that tassel."

**"I didn't expect him to..."**  
*James trails off in thought, "I had seen him that morning when my mom took him to the hospital, and that was my last time seeing him."*

GUEST VIEWPOINTS:

# BLACK LIVES MATTER

Black Oregonians share their views on the BLM movement, and their experiences being Black in a predominantly white state.

Written by Julia Page

Protesters gather to hear speeches at the Wayne Morse Federal Courthouse in Eugene on May 31 before marching. The protest was organized by Black Led Action Coalition, a Black Lives Matter activist group in Eugene, and ended in Alton Baker park.

Photo by Jozie Donaghey







BLACK LIVES MATTER

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THE SLAVES CONTINUES TO

Photo by Maddie Cooke



**“As a Black person living in America, it's important to speak up about the injustices in this nation. Our words have the power to create change and inspire others to do so.”**

Written by

# Maxwell Ntege

UO Student

*The BLM movement is the light at the end of the tunnel which gives us hope for equality. From its inception in 2013, after the murder of Trayvon Martin, the objective of the movement has been to put an end to the racial injustices in the U.S.*

*The statement, “all men are created equal” is paradoxical when white supremacy, systematic racism, racial discrimination and police brutality are still heavily embedded into this nation. The BLM movement is an integral piece to solving the puzzle when it comes to fixing this deprecating false narrative.*

*In light of the recent murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Rashad Brooks, BLM is saying “enough is enough.”*

*As a young Black man I constantly live in a state of fear of that happening to me – being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, inevitably leading to my death. The death of George Floyd really hit home for me because I grew up in Minnesota. People think that Minnesota is progressive. That racial inequalities don't occur and everyone lives by our “Minnesota nice” motto. As a POC that grew up there, I can see through those lies.*

*To this day, Minnesota still struggles to combat the repercussions of racial discrimination. It's everywhere. I've been pulled over so many times because the cop mistook me for someone else, I've been called racial slurs by white people and treated differently compared to my white peers.*

*All over the media, I constantly see innocent black men, women and children murdered. The disheartening reality of this is that there are many Black people who've been wrongfully murdered*

*and their voices aren't being heard. BLM wants to change that by giving them a voice and igniting change. We want the voices of our fellow Black brothers and sisters to be heard. We are tired of being killed, we are tired of being oppressed and we are tired of being treated like second-class citizens. Most importantly, we are tired of fighting for basic human rights such as equality.*

*With protests occurring globally, the world has also had enough of the cruel treatment of Black people in the U.S. Although the protests are to combat racial injustices, it brings me joy to see people from all races and walks of life joining together in our fight for liberation. It also gives me hope that someday we'll reach the end of that tunnel.*

Photo by Jay Eads.

Written by

# Ayisha Elliott

*Eugene resident and creator of the "Black Girl From Eugene" podcast*

*He came from behind, and I hit the ground. His hand gripping the back of my head and his knee jammed into my lower back. Both of my arms bent underneath me. He slams my head to the ground. I yell out to answer my son, "I'm okay, I'm okay." He slams my head on the ground again. I yell out, "baby stop moving, I'm okay". He slams my head on the ground at least one more time. I'm dizzy, and everything is echoing. He is trying to get my hands from underneath me to constrain my wrist in chains, handcuffs. I hold my hands tight. He's stronger than me. He grabs my right arm and then my left, his knee grinding a, what would become a permanent indentation into my back. I'm shackled, both of my arms behind my back. He yanks me from one arm, not assisting me to my knees. I scramble with no upper body control to find my balance on my knees. I'm yanked to my feet.*

*I don't recall much. I was riding in the back of the police car. The lights of the streets seemed bright, blaring, extreme auras around each one. I was numb. I was more still than I should have been. There were no tears. My awareness was altered, shifted, adrenaline centered. I was quiet, speechless. My mugshot public, humiliated for protecting my son.*

*I recall two years later, in court. My "peers", 12 of them: 11 white, one Asian. Their verdict and their assessment. They hadn't heard of Black Lives Matter. Their words: not guilty. Their conclusion: "We feel for her, and as a mother she did what any of us would do, but we just couldn't see the officers doing that."*

*This is Eugene, September 2017.*

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The incident discussed by Ayisha Elliott took place in July 2015 and began as a simple call to a non-emergency number regarding a personal issue with her son. The trial for Elliott's claim of excessive force and racial profiling against her son and herself took place in September 2017.

After Elliott's first request for a jury trial was denied, Elliott was able to get her case appealed. However, the federal jury ruled that she "failed to prove that Eugene police used excessive force against them."

According to the court filings of Elliott's U.S. Court of Appeals case, "even if probable cause did not exist, the officers would still be entitled to qualified immunity."



**"I was quiet, speechless.  
My mugshot public,  
humiliated for protecting  
my son."**

The murder of George Floyd and other cases involving police brutality have brought attention to the problems with qualified immunity. As defined by the Legal Information Institute, qualified immunity "protects a government official from lawsuits alleging that the official violated a 'clearly established' statutory or constitutional right."

Qualified immunity has made it difficult to hold police officers accountable for their actions and wrongdoings because courts generally require plaintiffs to back up their claims of misconduct with previous judicial decisions. This means that if the exact circumstance in question hasn't been clearly established as an illegal action in a prior court case, the probability of government officials being convicted for their actions is very low.

Photo by Maddie Cooke



From an interview with

## Ibrahim Coulibaly

*Eugene resident and current President of the Eugene/Springfield NAACP*

"I was first called the n-word here in Eugene," says Ibrahim Coulibaly, President of the NAACP and a single father of one.

After permanently moving to Eugene in 2011, Coulibaly came to discover the lack of diversity in a state known for its "whites-only" past. In contrast to his birthplace of Burkina Faso, in West Africa, and his previous residences of Paris and New York, Eugene did not have a large Black community.

"Coming from Africa, France and New York where you have a big African and Black community," Coulibaly says. "It was kind of a shock for me to see that we have a small community here."

Following his move to Eugene, Coulibaly searched for organizations to connect him to the local Black community. In 2013 he discovered and joined the Eugene/Springfield chapter of the NAACP.

Coulibaly is now the president of the organization. Along with the NAACP, Coulibaly is also the Human Rights Commissioner for the City of Eugene.

The common theme among Coulibaly's organizations coincides with that of the Black Lives Matter movement: justice and equality for all.

Along with supporting racial equality through his daily work and volunteering, Coulibaly has continued to express his support through the messages of the movement.

"We have people protesting, we have people joining the movement, but, as John Lewis said, we have to 'keep our eyes on the prize' because we cannot be distracted," says Coulibaly. "We have to know that, first and foremost, what we are asking for is equality, is justice. We aren't asking for protests, we aren't asking for riots, we are asking for justice and equality."

To earn the support of protestors and supporters of the BLM movement, addressing the movement and its purpose has become essential for politicians throughout the United States. Despite many U.S. politicians claiming to support the movement and their fight for equality, their motivations may not be what BLM protestors are hoping for, says Coulibaly.

"Everybody wants to find solutions, but sometimes the solutions that people are looking for are the solutions about how to bring people back home, how to stop the protests. It is not how to listen, understand and make those 'asks' happen, it's just 'how can we control the movement?'" says Coulibaly.

"That's my concern. It is that at some point people take their eyesight off the prize and focus on something different, and at that point, we may be asking ourselves if we are better off before or after George Floyd."

Since George Floyd's death, activists and supporters of the BLM movement have called for police reform through policy changes and a reduction of their funding. The arrests and convictions of the officers involved with Floyd's death will not be enough for their fight for equality.

"We have to be better off," says Coulibaly, "We have to have better communicative partisans, we have to be better about political accountability, we have to have criminal justice reform, we have to have more opportunity for people of color, we have to have systemic racism addressed. If we don't focus on those things, if we see the protests as a defensive thing to do, at the end of the day we may not achieve a lot."

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The 1860 census for Oregon reported that out of the 52,465 people that lived in the state, only 128 were African American – a total of 0.24 percent. Oregon's Black exclusion laws ended with the ratification of the 14th Amendment in 1973, but Oregon has remained predominantly white.

In July of 2019, 86.7 percent of Oregonians were white and 2.2 percent were Black. In Eugene, the population was 83.3 percent white and 1.6 percent Black.

Although the number of Black students and residents in Eugene is low, there's been strong support for the BLM movement.

Since May 29, Eugene and Springfield have seen regular BLM protests. Black Unity, one of the most prevalent BLM protest groups in the area, has been organizing largely peaceful protests and events in the Eugene/Springfield area for the last several months.

Photo by Jade Yamazaki Stewart



Written by

## Sophia Kinaya Haug

*Eugene resident and leader of Black Unity*

*My name is Sophia Haug and I am a Black woman in Oregon. I had my first racist experience when I was 5 years old in Thurston. My best friend at the time was a little blonde white girl. We were inseparable and wanted to be just like each other. Her grandparents did not approve of this friendship. They would always make sure to make me feel unwelcome, exclude me from adventures and would not let their family take pictures with me. Later on in life my friend disowned them because she found out they were racist and homophobic.*

*In my teenage years racism became a normal thing. In high school all of the Black kids hung out by the planters together and they referred to us as "the monkeys in the jungle." They loved the Black boys there because they were athletes but the Black girls were sexualized. Boys dated white girls but hit the black girls up on the low and would never date them. They would speak about the black girls saying, "she's pretty but she's too dark to date."*

*As an adult things began to change inside of me. I've always been vocal about racism and injustice but I finally realized enough is enough! I started using my platform to voice my experiences and enlighten people on what it's like to be a Black woman in racist America.*

Black Unity leader Sophia Kinaya Haug attends a Black Lives Matter protest she helped organize at Westmoreland Park in Eugene on July 3. The march was called "The truth behind the flag," and featured speeches by Haug and other Black Unity leaders about how the American flag and the Fourth of July symbolize freedom for white people, and oppression for Black, Indigenous and people of color.

*I've been rejected jobs for "being too vocal". I've been rejected advancements in a job for being a woman, and a Black one at that. I've been fetishized by men because "they've never been with a black woman before." Rejected. I've been called violent, aggressive, intense, over the top, crazy, etc., all for being passionate about seeing change.*

*When George Floyd was killed by the police there was a shift in energy in the world. Finally people were mad with me. Finally people wanted to see change too. Finally people were speaking up... but this came with major backlash. I joined a group named Black Unity and we are determined to make change. We peacefully protested because society told us that was the best way to make change.*

*We peacefully protested everywhere until one day we woke up a neighborhood that was more racist and vicious than anyone and was not ready for change.*

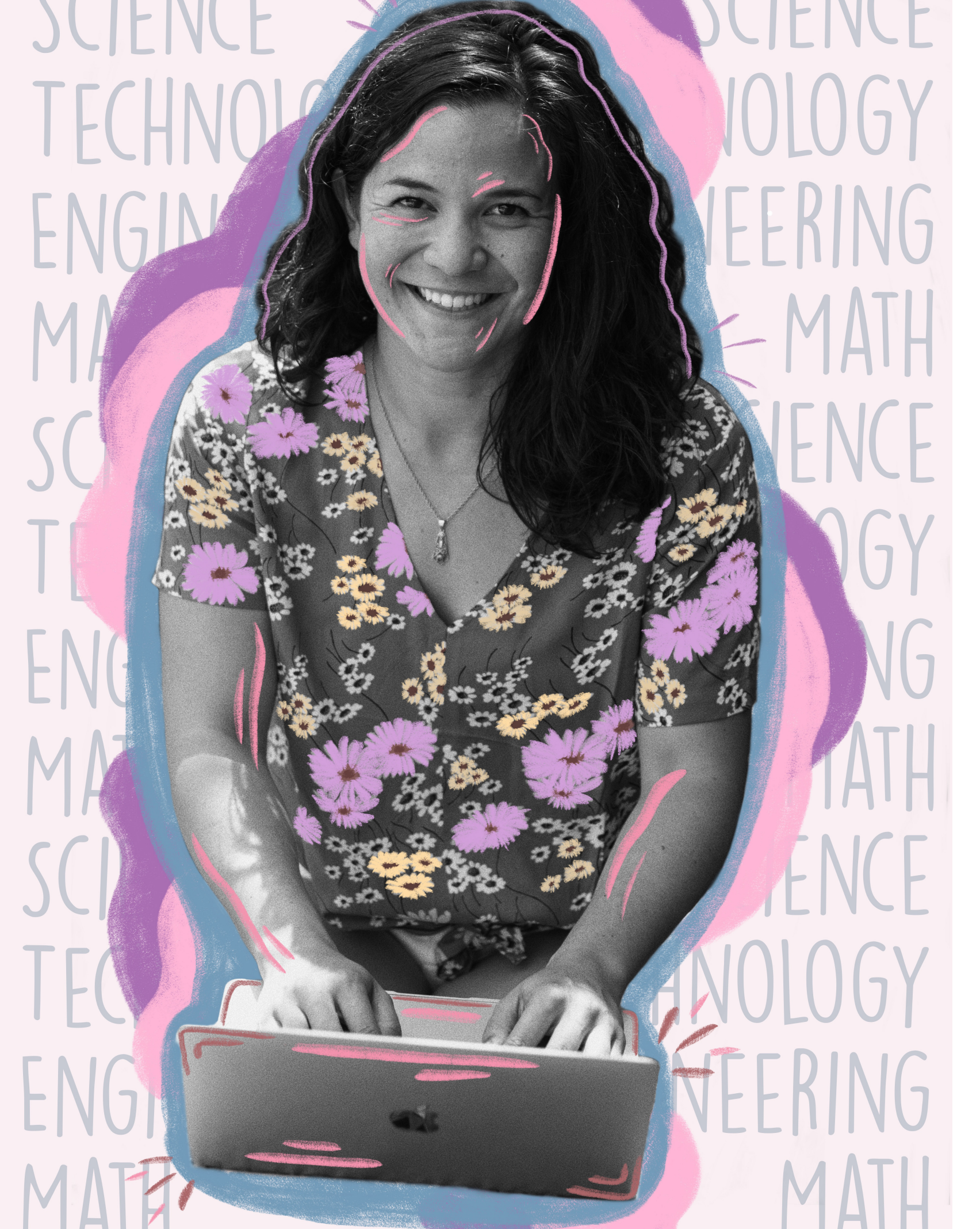
*Thurston... Springfield/Thurston is by far one of the most racist cities in Oregon. We started gathering at a park by a man's house. This man prior to the protest called a 13 year old Black kid a "nigg\*r" and told him to go "back to where he came from." Black neighbors have been harassed and even had to move.*

*That night, although we peacefully protested, saged the community, drew loving quotes in chalk and sang "Black Lives Matter," the racist Springfield police department decided to beat us down, nearly kill a leader, break a leaders nose, break ribs, assault a woman, drag a woman by her hair, beat someone up in handcuffs and so much more.*

*They trapped us in this neighborhood, did not speak to us, put a barrier up just to push it back and beat us up. They coordinated with the counter-protesters and rounded us up to face them in the dark. The counter protesters had automatic guns, wasp spray, knives, paintball guns full of frozen paintballs, mace, flagpoles to stab us with and some were extremely intoxicated including a woman who assaulted a BLM protester and gave her a concussion.*

*They were screaming things like "get out of our city" and "go back to where you came from." They informed us that next time we come back "necks will be broken," "there will be bloodshed" and "you will get hurt or killed." They told me they knew everything about me and are coming for heads.*

*After this protest happened we realized the severity of the problem at hand. We saw and heard unbelievable things. We realized that we were going to have to come back harder than ever and fight until change is made. ■*



# FORGING THE PATH

*Women of color pose solutions to the lack of representation in STEM.*

Written by **Anna Mattson** Photos by **Grace Hefley** Graphics by **Makena Hervey**

**M**ichelle Muth walked into her high school guidance counselor's office. The room was cluttered with college brochures, bookshelves and different posters highlighting all the ivy league schools alumni had attended.

Muth went to her counselor to talk about her top college choices, and she was excited for her future at the time. The conversation started with the both of them staring at her transcript, where her achievements and work were printed in little black letters.

But when Muth told her counselor that she wanted to go to Rice University, a competitive private school, her counselor wasn't supportive. She recommended several other colleges that were less competitive instead. The conversation left Muth deflated and confused.

Muth is a biracial Black woman and comes from an affluent town where many people go to prestigious colleges. Her high school takes pride in that. So it didn't occur to her until years later that her counselor was making assumptions based on her race.

She overheard the guidance counselor complaining about a student who was admitted to nearly every ivy league school, and went on to say that affirmative action was unfair and immoral. In that moment, Muth understood why the guidance counselor wasn't supportive of her.

This wasn't the only time Muth felt discrimination in school. She experienced racism, both subtle and overt, throughout her time in the education system. For years, Muth was convinced that she wasn't smart enough to pursue her dream career in earth science.

Women of all races and ethnicities make up no more than 30-45 percent of those pursuing STEM in postsecondary education, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2019. This phenomenon, according to research done by the American Association of American Women, is due to a long history of implicit bias and stereotypes. Women, especially of color, who work in STEM face discrimination as minorities in the field. Muth believes that this issue can be solved by taking a deeper look into the biases of academia.

In second grade, Muth experienced an instance of racism that pushed her away from her interests in STEM. Her teacher moved her to a lower math class because she believed that Muth wasn't good enough at the math they were working on. After having another teacher the next year, she landed her seat back in the advanced math track.

"When I was younger I just really talked myself into this idea that I wasn't good at science and that it wasn't for me, so I decided to go into English instead," Muth says. "I loved science. And even though I convinced myself that I was bad at math, in retrospect, I was actually fine at it."

Muth says she was lucky to have parents who were able to advocate for her once they recognized the racism that was happening. She worries that other students won't always have that kind of support.

"I know that there's a ton of other students who don't have those resources or don't realize what's happening. All they get is the message that they can't do it, and then they're stuck in a classroom that might not be a good fit for them."

It wasn't until her sophomore year in college that Muth even considered going into the sciences as a career after her experiences in grade school. But once she did, she fell in love. Now she's working towards her Ph.D. in Earth Sciences after shifting gears from pursuing an English undergraduate.

Today, women struggle to find representation, particularly in computer science. According to the National Girls Collaborative Project, a program that works to inform and encourage young women to enter STEM, only 28 percent of college educated women pursue science and engineering as a career.

Dewi Yokelson, an Indonesian and white student pursuing a Ph.D. in Computer and Information Science, has seen these statistics in action. She noticed that she was only one of three women in a course of about 17 students.

"I feel like for computer science, it's very heavily white male and also Asian male. That's generally the makeup," she says. "And I remember commenting that to somebody because one day the two other women in the class weren't there; they were out sick or whatever. And I was like, 'oh my god, I'm the only girl here. Why is this so obvious and apparent?'"

Dewi Yokelson says there are only a few other women in her Computer and Information Science Ph.D. program at the University of Oregon. "I think of myself as paving a path for other minority women like me," she says. "It's not just for me, it's for every young, mixed-race girl out there who needs to see what people like her can accomplish."

# "RACIAL BIASES TODAY ARE FOUNDED OFF OF YEARS OF FALSE SCIENTIFIC STUDIES."

Her Ph.D. cohort is an accurate representation of the demographics in computer science across the country. According to Pew Research Center, 84 percent of the computer science workforce is made up of Asian and white people, most of which are men.

"It's not something I'm not used to," she says. "but it's definitely something you still always notice."

Yokelson remembers hearing that the sciences would become more inclusive and it has been upsetting to her to see the reality. She says that people often can't tell what gender she is from the sound of her name, and the power of ambiguity gives her a sense of protection at work. With a career in computer science, she says people often just assume she is a man.

"When there is something that makes you different from the majority, whether it's your gender or the color of your skin, then you are always identified that way from then on out," she says. "It gets exhausting."

Yokelson was sexually harassed by a man in the workplace, which caused a hostile environment that was difficult to work in. It wasn't until he quit that she was able to really identify the situation for what it was.

"I realized how much it had been negatively affecting my productivity," she says. "When he was finally gone it was as if this huge weight was lifted and I felt free to just do my job - which is how people should feel all the time when at work."

The New York Times published an article that looked into the reasons why there are so few women in STEM. It mentions the pressure society puts on women to shy away from "nerdiness." According to author Eileen Pollack, there's a pressure for women to separate intelligence and attractiveness. That kind of cultural stigma around women in the field dissuade young girls from pursuing it, according to Pollack.

Having Indonesian descent has also left Yokelson subject to many stereotypes about Asians, especially regarding her career in computer science.

"People always identify me and say 'You're Asian so you're good at math,'" she says. "But I've literally never met another person that's Indonesian doing computer science."

These stereotypes of who should or shouldn't be involved in STEM pose a dangerous threat to inclusivity in the field, according to Dr. Jo Weaver, a medical anthropologist with the University of Oregon. For the past three years, she has co-hosted a public education podcast project called "Speaking of Race," which aims to debunk assumptions that there are biological differences between races, also known as "scientific racism."

Scientific racism is when pseudoscience is used to justify racial differences, according to the Smithsonian. "It's a dangerous idea because it does lead very quickly from Black people are more athletic than white people, to white people are smarter than Black people," Weaver says.

Weaver says racial biases today are founded off of years of false scientific studies. Those studies have transcended from physical differences to accusing minorities of being less intelligent or more aggressive, according to Weaver.

Some of these false ideas are still being projected to the public today. Author and former New York Times reporter Nicholas Wade released a book in 2014 titled "A Troublesome Inheritance." The book reinforces the idea that genetic selection gives varying populations distinct character traits. Weaver says that race is not any kind of trait ingrained in our biology, and to remove biases that we see today, people need to be informed on the faulty science that drives those assumptions.

"The more people believe that race is biological, the more they believe it's real, and the more ready they are to sort of buy into the idea that racial groups are distinct and shouldn't be considered equal to each other," says Weaver. "I think in that, in many ways, scientific racism underpins a lot of the racial conflicts and racial inequality we see in the world."

Muth, Yokelson and Weaver have all said that to reach gender and racial inclusivity in STEM, our current education system needs reevaluation. Part of the issue today is that a lot of outreach is put on the shoulders of the minorities who are experiencing the brunt of the problem.

Weaver says that people from underrepresented groups often want to do a lot of the work for representation, but they're also asked to do so more than their white or male counterparts. She thinks that those expectations on people of color should be reduced by normalizing a conversation about race in education, and by expecting all educators to address that subject.

"Help students understand from a younger age than college on this idea that race isn't really real," she says. "And do so in classrooms that aren't just humanities classrooms or social studies classrooms, but also in biology classrooms."

Yokelson says that it can be challenging to balance both studies, work and outreach as a minority in STEM. She believes that if high school districts and universities adopted programs dedicated to inclusivity in the field full time, that would lift the burden off of women and people of color.

"People who are the minorities in the field are required to do all the work to involve other minorities. It's really tough. You're expected to do your full time job and extra," Yokelson says. "People really want to help, and they want to make changes, but they all also have full time jobs."

Muth hopes that more women of color will join in on the path to inclusivity in STEM, and she is optimistic that there will be more role models for young people in the future. She hopes that less students will have to endure the hindering discrimination that she faced. For those who are trying to become that beacon of inspiration for others, Muth offers some advice:

"Focus on what you love doing and follow your passion and your curiosity. Wherever you are, try to seek out a good support network and people are going to help you do that and be there with you on your science journey," she says. "Pay attention to the people who support you, and just focus on doing what you love." ■



"I think it's very important to find people and communities that are healthy and supportive, both within your program and outside of it," Muth says. "If this means looking or acting differently than the status quo, then you have every right to do that."





Yokelson says she is three years away from receiving her PhD in Computer and Information Science "I have completed two years, and I passed the first milestone with the highest rating your committee can award," she says.

# LESSONS LEARNED

Students of color share their experiences of racism in private schools, prompting the schools to take action.

Written by **Sam Nguyen** Illustrated by **Makena Hervey**

In her comparative religions class last year, Naviya Venkitesh, a senior at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, was assigned to watch the movie "Little Buddha" to learn about the life of the Buddha.

When Keanu Reeves appeared on her laptop screen, tanned and dressed in South Asian jewelry, Venkitesh squirmed out of discomfort. She was upset that instead of casting a South Asian actor, they chose to use yellowface on a white actor. She could only watch a few more minutes of the movie before turning it off out of discomfort.

Venkitesh brought up the issue to her teacher, so he opened up an optional class discussion about the use of yellowface in the movie. But only a handful of students participated. Seeing the lack of engagement from her peers on issues of racism made her feel even more isolated as a student of color.

"It made me feel extremely uncomfortable with my own skin," Venkitesh says. "I'm always conscious that I'm different because of the color of my skin."

When Venkitesh walks into a classroom, she looks to see if there are any other students of color, but it's not surprising when she's one of only a handful in the room. Venkitesh says that she feels more comfortable when there are other people who may also understand what it's like to be a person of color in a predominantly white institution. When there are only a few other students of color, Venkitesh says that it's more isolating and harder to speak up when racist incidents occur.

On May 18, 2020, Venkitesh detailed her experiences of racism in an Instagram post using the hashtag #demandwhatyoudeserve. She says she's been asked ignorant questions, been subject to stereotypes, and made fun of because she was a person of color at Jesuit High School. Venkitesh was one of many students who used the hashtag to bring attention to the racism that students of color endured at her high school.

In recent months, students of color across the U.S. have been sharing their experiences of racism in private schools on social media. Instagram accounts with @blackat and @pocat in their usernames offer platforms for students of color who

attend private schools to anonymously share their experiences. The stories range from microaggressions from teachers to the use of derogatory slurs among students, revealing the persistent racism in American private schools.

## HISTORY

Despite efforts to desegregate schools in the 1950s and 60s, the American education system still remains segregated. Private schools in particular have remained racially segregated because they historically served affluent white families and remained out of reach for many families of color.

Today, they remain predominantly white in both their student population and faculty. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, private school enrollments in 2017 were 66.7 percent white while private school teachers were 85.1 percent white. In comparison, public school enrollments in 2017 were 47.6 percent white while teachers were 79.3 percent white.

After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, many white Americans sent their children to private schools instead of the public schools that were required to integrate under the *Brown* decision. In 1976, Duke University professor Charles Clotfelter published a paper analyzing that concluded that desegregation increased private school enrollments through white flight, especially in areas with a higher proportion of minorities. In the South, white Americans founded private schools to resist desegregation orders. These private schools are also known as segregation academies and many of these institutions remain in operation today.

While segregation in public schools was ruled unconstitutional in 1954, it was only in 1976 that the Supreme Court ruled racial discrimination in private schools to be unconstitutional in the case *Runyon v. McCrary*. Despite the ruling, however, many private schools remained overwhelmingly white due to high tuition costs that many people of color could not afford.

"The segregation of private schools at one level was driven by racism, but it is enforced by class," says Jerry Roseik, a professor of education studies at the University of Oregon. "Private schools have always functioned as a form of class segregation, which is, of course, determined by race in the United States."

## IT'S NEE-VA

Niva Baniya is one of the many students of color who shared their experiences on social media in the past few months. Although she graduated from Jesuit High School in 2019, she felt the need to speak out. Baniya says she had grown frustrated with the microaggressions she faced at Jesuit and felt like she never stood up for herself when she was in high school.

"I was letting people step all over me. I was angry at myself for not doing anything about it," Baniya says.

For three years in high school, Baniya had classes with the same math teacher. Every year, she corrected him on how to pronounce her name. Even her classmates began correcting him, but he still didn't get it right. Some teachers called her by the names of other students of color.

Baniya noticed the names of white students were rarely mispronounced, even if they were complicated or uncommon.

At her senior year awards ceremony, Baniya's name, as well as her friends' names, were mispronounced. Disappointed at the mispronunciations that had persisted for her four years in high school, she brought up the issue to the school administration so that everyone's names would be pronounced properly on graduation day.

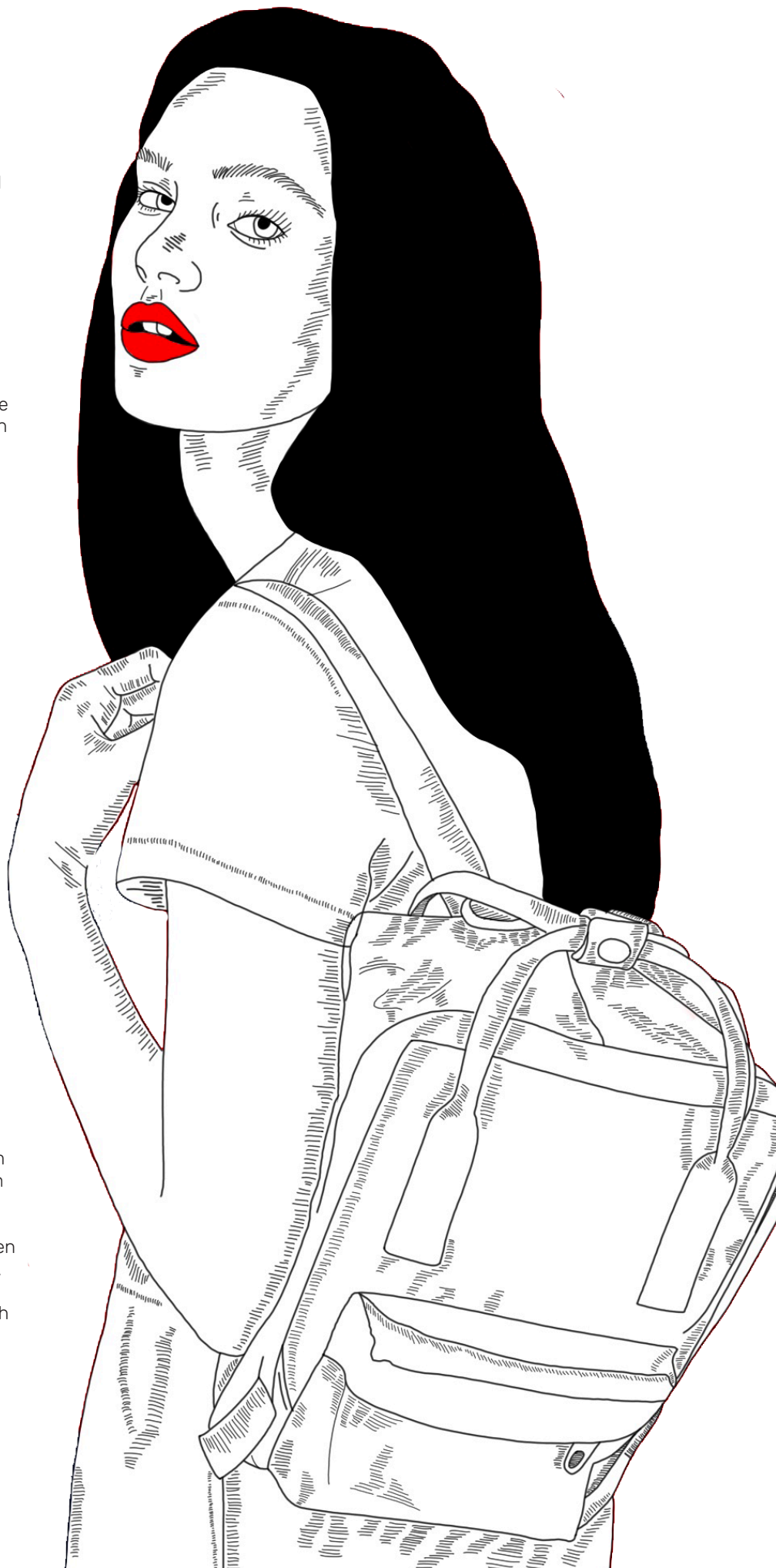
"That's such a basic thing," Baniya says. "It shouldn't have been something that I brought up to them. They should've already been doing that."

When graduation day came, Baniya's name was pronounced correctly but her friends' names were still mispronounced. Even after standing up for herself and her peers, it wasn't enough to fix the issue.

"After a certain point, I just didn't care," Baniya says. "Caring meant letting yourself be hurt every single day."

Baniya says that part of the reason why racism still occurs in schools is because the most common acts of racism aren't obviously identifiable as racist. Microaggressions, such as projecting stereotypes and mispronouncing a student of color's name, often go unnoticed to those who are not subject to them.

While there were opportunities throughout high school to embrace diversity, such as the school's annual multicultural assembly, Baniya says the school often only did basic education on race. She also says that the lack of critical discussion on race and diversity made these learning opportunities performative rather than truly educational.



# "IT'S VERY EMPOWERING TO KNOW YOUR OWN HISTORY"

Baniya sometimes struggled with deciding whether or not she was responsible for educating others about racism. While Baniya understands that it's important to open a dialogue about race with her white peers, she feels more comfortable talking to other students of color about race because they share her experiences.

"It's not a case of trying to convince them that it's an issue. It's just something that we are dealing with," Baniya says.

## THE LESSON LEARNED

Like Baniya, Belise Nishimwe, a senior at St. Mary's Academy in Portland, says that part of the issue with racism in schools is that curriculums rarely include the perspectives of people of color. With her fellow Black Student Union members, Nishimwe has been pushing for more diversity in the school curriculum.

"It's very empowering to know your own history," Nishimwe says. In this past year, she says the Jewish Student Union at St. Mary's successfully pushed to have "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker removed from the school curriculum because the author has been accused of anti-Semitism. Nishimwe says that while she was disappointed that she wouldn't be able to read a classic novel in African American literature, she was more upset that the school wasn't giving equal treatment to the Black Student Union's concerns.

St. Mary's Black Student Union has been pushing for the removal of "Cry, the Beloved Country," a book about the South African apartheid, from the curriculum. Nishimwe says the Black Student Union thinks including a novel written by Black African writer would provide a valuable perspective that "Cry, the Beloved Country" cannot, which was written by Alan Paton, a white South African. When the Black Student Union brought up these concerns to the school, Nishimwe says that the school didn't want to remove the book due to its value as a classic novel.

Rosiek says that a school's response to the concerns of their students is part of a hidden curriculum. A hidden curriculum is the implicit values and lessons that students learn from being in the school environment. Hidden curriculum differs from explicit curriculum, which is an intentional plan for teaching a certain subject such as math or biology. Unlike explicit curriculum, hidden curriculum is not intentionally decided like an explicit curriculum is.

"The situation in which one group got their concerns addressed and another didn't conveys the message that the voices of this group and their concerns are valid in this space and another group's isn't," Rosiek says.

Despite being unintentional, a hidden curriculum can work in tandem with an explicit curriculum to reinforce social inequalities. Nishimwe says that she feels like the school administration is not as responsive to the Black Student Union's concerns compared to other groups. Because of the lack of meaningful response to the Black Student Union's concerns, Nishimwe says that she began to lose trust in the school administration.

"If they're going to apply this rule to these books, they need to figure out one rule," Nishimwe says.

## THE WAY YOU WALK AND TALK

Students of color not only have to deal with microaggressions and unresponsive school administrations, but they are often tokenized in promotional material for their private schools as well. Tokenism is the practice of including members of a minority group in a certain setting in order to make it appear inclusive and diverse.

Jesuit High School graduate Jayla Lowery says that she was often one of the few students of color that her high school would use in events such as panels and orientation. Lowery says the way the school invited students of color to these

**"Lowery says that it took her at least a year until she befriended other students of color."**



events made it feel like the school was trying to fill a quota. Whenever Lowery saw promotional materials for the school, she felt that the racial makeup of students in photos wasn't truly representative of the student body. The photos made the school seem more diverse than it actually was.

At the same time that the school used Lowery to represent students of color, she says that she never felt comfortable enough to speak out about racism she experienced.

As one of the few Black students in her grade, Lowery faced microaggressions throughout her time in high school. On the first day of freshman year, Lowery says that a white student pulled on her box braids, asking if they were real. Throughout high school, other students told her that she spoke too 'gangster' and that she was 'too into her Black power.' These remarks came from people who she called her friends at the time.

"People literally get ridiculed for acting too much like their culture, their ethnicity," Lowery says. "It's so emotionally draining to constantly be belittled or pointed out. Just constantly having things thrown at us for being a person of color."

Psychologist and educator Beverly Tatum wrote in her 2003 book "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" that as adolescents of color become more aware of race and experience racism, they tend to turn to other peers of color for support that they can't find elsewhere.

Lowery says that it took her at least a year until she befriended other students of color. For her first year at Jesuit, Lowery spent her time with mostly white friends. Not wanting to get made fun of, Lowery tried to downplay her ethnicity when at school and especially around white people. Some of the habits she developed to avoid standing out are still with her now that she's left high school.

"It's mostly my voice," Lowery says. "I feel like I need to sound smarter or more informed. I changed the way I walked and the things that I did because I just was definitely trying very hard to fit in somewhat, which is just impossible."

Adjusting one's tone, vocabulary, and grammar are all code-switching tactics that students of color may use to try to accommodate the environment they are in. Code-switching is the act of switching between two or more languages or dialects to accommodate one's environment and audience. When someone uses a certain language or dialect, it may appeal to their audience's implicit biases.

A study published in the Online Journal of Education Research in 2012 found that pre-service teachers had generally negative perceptions of African American Vernacular English, supporting decades of research showing that people who use

African American Vernacular English are often perceived as less intelligent compared to people who use Standard English.

Code-switching is used by people of color to avoid negative perceptions that come with using certain dialects. A 2019 Pew Research study found that four out of ten Hispanic and Black Americans feel the need to change how they express themselves around people of different races or ethnicities.

"I have perfected my 'white' voice. I know what I have to say and act like." Lowery says. "I wish I didn't have to condition myself like that."

## A-GAME

For Serapiya Niyokwizigira, a St. Mary's Academy graduate, code-switching wasn't enough to avoid implicit biases. Microaggressions from teachers affected her relationship with academics.

Niyokwizigira was always a good student, receiving A's and B's throughout middle and high school. She tended to keep to herself and do her work quietly, only becoming more lively around her friends.

One day in math class, Niyokwizigira began goofing off with her friends while waiting for the rest of the class to finish the assignment. Although the math teacher had said that the students could do whatever they liked after completing the assignment, she yelled at Niyokwizigira to go into the hall for being disruptive. Other students were also dancing and making noise, but the teacher only asked Niyokwizigira to leave.

"The fact that I couldn't do anything, I felt so powerless in that instance," Niyokwizigira says.

This wasn't the first time this teacher singled her out. She was one of two Black students and the only dark-skinned student in her math class. She felt like the teacher always treated her more harshly than the other students, but at the time, she didn't fully understand why she was being treated differently.

According to a 2013 report from the Education Department, students of color disproportionately receive more suspensions than white students. The disproportionate disciplining of students of color can be partially attributed to teachers' implicit biases. An analysis of North Carolina school data published in 2017 found that when Black students were exposed to teachers of the same race, they were less likely to receive exclusionary discipline.

Rosiek says that having teachers of color in a school that serves students of color can make a positive difference. Teachers of color are more likely to have lived experiences of navigating predominantly white institutions, offering a sense of

solidarity to students of color. Most importantly, representation in teaching staff humanizes the educational space.

Niyokwizigira says she felt like she had to work harder to receive positive attention from teachers. Her white peers were called on more often to share their thoughts and given more praise for making the same points that students of color did. It became even harder as Niyokwizigira took advanced courses where she was often the only Black student in the classroom.

"I had to always be on my A-game," Niyokwizigira says. "Being on your A-game every day is tiring."

## PROMPTING CHANGE

After months of discussion and sharing, Venkitesh's and other Jesuit students' social media posts and letters detailing their experiences prompted a response from their school.

On May 26, Jesuit High School's principal Paul Hogan published a response to the #demandwhatyoudeserve posts, expressing his sympathy and appreciation for the students who posted and stating the school's commitment to do better in terms of improving racial literacy.

On July 28, Jesuit's Board of Trustees announced that they will implement five diversity, equity and inclusion strategic initiatives starting in the 2020-2021 school year. Among these initiatives are plans to continue implicit bias training, to hire more diverse faculty and to make a more culturally-responsive curriculum. A culturally-responsive curriculum aims to make meaningful connections between students' experiences and the learning materials so that it can better serve a diverse student population.

"Our goal is to create a holistic community that is anti-racist, inclusive, culturally-relevant, and open to growth. It is clear we have a lot of work to do. As difficult as this work is, we have the resources and determination to see it through," says Melissa Lowery, Jesuit High School's Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion. "The Jesuit community is resilient and we know we can be better."

Like Jesuit High School, St. Mary's Academy is implementing similar anti-racism initiatives to support their students of color. The school's initiatives include installing a Board of Directors Task Force for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Among other initiatives, the task force will work to recruit faculty and staff of color and increase cultural inclusivity in their curriculum.

"This change happened because us, as a student body, as an alumni body, came to the administration and said 'Here are our issues,' and the administration was willing to listen," Venkitesh says. ■



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