Issue #9

The Beauty of Androgyny

3/5/2021  0 Comments
I was very girly growing up. I loved the color pink, wore long skirts/bright tights and went to cotillion where I spent many years in itchy sequin and tulle skirt dresses, paired with satin gloves. I also grew up wearing jeans, not being afraid to get dirty with bruises all over my legs, loving sports and wanting to be exactly like my brother. I always considered myself to be a mix of girly and tomboy. Scout from “To Kill a Mockingbird” was an inspiration for me with her dirty, well-worn overalls and short shaggy hair.

Unlike many cis and trans girls (not all), I was completely detached from my hair. I would get it cut into different styles throughout my childhood switching back and forth from short bobs, shoulder length and chest length. I didn’t become aware of its social importance until I was a high school upperclassmen. Every girl in my grade had super long hair (not an exaggeration) and at some point, feeling always self conscious about my super pale skin, my face, my body, my actual core; etc., it all came to a head with my hair.

I had been growing out my hair since I was 13 or 14-years-old and then at 16, I randomly wanted it the shortest it had ever been, which was a middle parted bob that landed a few inches above my chin. I felt so good and then I didn’t. It was another way for me to be different and singled out. No one really made fun of me, except maybe one of two friends and one childhood friend who said I should only ever have long, middle part hair. It was more of me deflecting and willing myself to conform. I told myself, what do these people have that you don’t that makes them more liked, confident, popular and attractive? In my head, it was all in their long, unbelievably shiny locks. Till I was 18-years-old, I desperately did all I could to grow out my hair.

Obviously, that did nothing to change my social status or increase my confidence. I just felt worse and worse because nothing I did made me more noticeable in a positive light or made me see myself as more valuable. On October 27, 2015, I took a huge leap and donated 15 inches of my hair—which left me with a standard bob—and then chopped the rest into a long pixie. Five years later, I am still sporting it forever. One day once my hair dying adventure is over, I think I might even get a buzz cut. That idea still feels...
too insane to me currently, but it’s something I’ve never considered until now.

I have also been going through a long and continuous journey of self discovery with clothes. I still love dresses and skirts, but have not worn them for a year. I am worried about passing off as too girly. Although, I’m worried about passing off as too masc. as well. Pants have been my best friend and comfort. I also haven’t worn makeup since I left high school. This is what my path into gender noncomforming presentation has looked like and I’m still going down my winding path to learning what truly fits me. The world of androgyny is so wonderfully fluid that there is no one right way or age to do it.

Fashion is a way many baby andros start experimenting. Some androgynous clothing designers and labels I’ve found include Yohji Yamamotobutch (a 77 year old Japanese designer who focuses on asymmetric, black and flowy clothes), Grace Wales Bonner (a 29 year old British, mixed race designer who focuses on suitwear), Charles Jeffery Loverboy (a 26 year old Scottish, genderqueer designer who does bold patterns and colors and a mix of flowy and fitted silhouettes) and Official Rebrand (a genderqueer self expression clothing line). What’s amazing is that it is only the surface. There is so much more to explore if you are interested in doing your own google search. There are things far beyond the limited representation in New York and Paris Fashion week. The community is out there and is continuing to grow.

Something that might be helpful for anyone curious to try this out or find ways to be a better supporter for those who fit outside the conventional girly girl or cis girl and manly man or cis guy categories, let’s look at specific clothing pieces/options. For those who want to come off as more butch, there are suits (fitted or boxy),
ties/bowties, vests, pants (baggy or fitted), loose shirts/t-shirts and jackets, dresses/skirts (nothing is off limits), tennis shoes/oxfords (or heels if you like more fem. footwear), athleisure, darker colors like black, navy, and green (go for the brights and pastels if that’s more you) hoodies/sweaters, button up shirts/polos (loose or fitted), beanies and ball caps (or a sunhat if you want a touch of fem.), binders/sports bra (or go with traditional bra or no bra), boxers/boxer briefs (or bikini cut), makeup or no makeup, not shaving or shaving armpit/leg/pubic hair, piercings and long or short hair.

For the guys who want to present as fem/soft boys or an edgy blur—like the ones booming on TikTok at the minute—you also don’t have a shortage of options. There are skirts with t-shirts (untucked or tucked), blouses/off the shoulder shirt, a more fitted silhouette over all (baggy isn’t automatically only feminine, however), dresses/skirts (don’t be afraid to wear pants), tights, ankle boots/heels (tennis shoes are not wholly masc.), makeup or no makeup, softer colors like pastel (or go for those darks), florals (though any pattern can be androgynous), handbags, belts to cinch the waist, earrings that dangle or sparkle, nail polish, sunhats/berrets (ball caps, beanies and fedora types are also valid), shaving or not shaving arms/legs/chest/pubic hair, chest counter or silicone cups to simulate cleavage (or flat chest), bikini cut/thong underwear (or stick with briefs/boxer briefs) and softer fabrics (linen, taffetta, silks, 100% cotton; etc.).

There are so many crossovers because the possibilities are endless. Don’t feel boxed in to what you can and can’t wear due to standard gender roles. Trans/nonbinary/agender/genderqueer aren’t constrained either. If there can be cis female tomboys, there can most certainly be more fem. leaning enby folks. Trans men and women don’t have to strictly look like their desired gender all the time as well. It’s because clothes don’t always equal gender. It can be an important part of it for many, but it’s not seen as a necessary fuss for everyone.
People of all ages gripe about the good days when girls were girls and men were men. Throughout time, those rules have never been 100% set, no matter what we like to believe. I noticed it first when Kelso was given a David Bowie style makeover in “That 70s Show” episode “The Velvet Rope”. I had never seen a man wear, as well as enjoy wearing, a dress, pantyhoes and makeup. He’s worried of going “too far” each step of the way and he gets made fun of by his guy friends in the end, but I had never seen that kind of open experimentation. A more extreme, but no less badass example, is in “Rocky Horror Picture Show,” which is the quintessential LGBTQ+ and gender nonconforming play/film.

The list of androgyny in film and TV is also quite extensive, but I want to go back to Bowie and reveal the long list of past and present musical artists that brought androgyny global. The genres I will touch on are from classic, alternative, punk and emo rock and pop. With the men and AMAB enbys, we begin with the king David Bowie in the 70s (listen to “Rebel Rebel” for an androgyny anthem) and continue with Mic Jagger in the 60s, Kurt Cobain in the 90s and Harry Styles in the 2010s (both wearing dresses on huge magazine covers), Gerard way in the 2000s (identifies as gender queer), Sam smith in the late 2000s (also genderqueer), multiple K-pop and J-pop groups/members (Big Bang, Exo, Seventeen, Wayv, Shinee, BTS), Richard O’Brien in the mid 60s (identifies as agender), Prince, Steven Tyler (“Dude Looks Like A Lady” is another anthem) and Freddie Mercury (just go watch the “I Want to Break Free” music video).
Then with the girls and AFAB enbys, we got King Princess or Mikaela Straus from the mid 2010s (says she falls in the middle of the gender spectrum), Acrush (a Chinese pop band and the first androgynous Chinese band) from the late 2010s, Lady Gaga from the early 2000s, Annie Lennox from the mid 70s, K.D. Lang from the 80s, Grace Jones from the 70s, St. Vincent from the 2000s, Peaches from the 90s, Subrosa (a doom band) from the mid 2000s, Janis Joplin from the 60s, P!NK from the mid 90s, Hayley Kiyko from the late 90s, Tracy Chapman from the late 80s and Sinéad O'Connor from the mid 80s. For the androgoynous guys, girls and trans/enby musical artists, the list could go on for a lot longer. Drag Queens and Kings are also booming in the music sphere, especially in musicals like “Hedwig”, “Kinky Boots” and “Head Over Heels.”
Androgyny is nothing new. It goes back centuries in multiple cultures. We, as living beings, were never meant to be in two tiny boxes labeled “Girl: must always look and act girly” and “Man: must always look and act manly). There are too many people who fall out of those boxes gender, clothing or acting wise for only two directions to exist. I want this out in the ether for those who feel like me and want to be validated either because you believe in what you’re feeling, but no one else does or you want to experiment/express yourself and you are afraid of what people think or it won’t fit you. Just like gender and sexuality, expression is fluid and can change or stay similar for your whole life and they can intersect or not. Don’t be afraid to try everything—as long as you do it safely—and don’t be afraid to move on from things that you no longer identify with.

It’s just clothes, makeup and hair. That doesn’t mean it isn’t important or effective in feeling like your true self, but it is nothing permanent. You are always the one in control because it is your body. There is no such thing as too much or too little androgynous. If it’s something you personally identify with, so any combination works. This is also for those with angrogynous or gender noncomforing friends and family members. Please support them. You don’t have to get it and it doesn’t have to be “your type of thing” because this is all for them, not for you.

For some, this realization of uniqueness is discovered as early as childhood, but for many, it is long, painful, scary and confusing. The earlier and more strongly you support them, the easier and faster this journey may become. Not always of course because you must first love yourself on your own, but it surely does help. Encourage them to try new things and support them when they tell you something no longer or has never made them feel comfortable. In short, don’t shove them in one of the two boxes. Many suffocate in there because the boxes weren’t built to fit that many people. So many desperately want to get out, but never did. There are so many that still have a chance. Everyone deserves to find themselves and feel unapologetically confident. Being told there is no wrong way to be is the only way all of us can.
Regan Strauss, Staff Writer, Op-ed journalist

I am an English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis. I'm in LA, California this spring 2021 where I was born and grew up. I am interested in writing about a majority of social issues (Frankly too many to list), music, and movies through this publication. Might get a graduate degree in creative writing (undecided). I want to be a professional freelance writer who focuses on poetry, short stories, and opinion/research essays after I graduate.

Bugsnax is Not Just a Cute Game

3/5/2021  0 Comments

Written by Eliza Long, Staff Writer

“Bugsnax” is a gem.

Honestly, I feel like I could end this whole discussion here because that’s exactly what Bugsnax is. A mix of Pokémon nostalgia (“I’ve gotta catch them all”) and mostly-lovable characters with dumb names and bugs, the ones you can’t gobble up. It’s a mess, but that doesn’t detract from the story or the characters or the moments that hurt in that dull bruise sort of way.
“Bugsnax” was created by Young Horses (of “Octodad” fame) and starts off as a silly children’s game: you’re a journalist hoping to interview adventurer Elizabert “Lizbert” Megafig. You arrive (crash) at her current location, Snaktooth Island, and immediately run into a sweet boy and acting Mayor Filbo who commissions you into helping him get his town (Snaxburg) back together by feeding and supplying the other Grumpuses with Bugsnax (googly-eyes on food)—which mutate the Grumpuses who consume them. Which encourages you to befriend them: Snorpy and his future boyfriend Chandlo, a gruff farmer named Wambus, bugsnax activist Gramble and many more. All the while you learn that Lizbert and her girlfriend Eggabell (pillars of their community) are missing. You, with your investigative journalist skills, look into what has happened to them by interviewing the town.

It’s a cute premise, but there’s more to it than that.

There’s the whole body horror and cannibalism vibes that low-key terrify me—you are what you eat—and that’s fun. It definitely adds this t that strengthens as the plot
progresses, but what really sticks with me is the easy inclusion of queer characters.

You watch home movies of Lizbert and Eggabell's relationship, the sweet and bitter moments that fleshed both of them out as characters. You hear the other Grumpuses talk about their relationship like it's normal. No one questions the validity of their relationship or is uncomfortable with them. It's the same with Snorpy (a red string conspiracy theorist) and Chandlo (a sweet himbo), a couple that we see get together (kind of, it's a miscommunication thing, but they're definitely together).

Young Horses doesn't queerbait us. They aren't just friends with strong chemistry, they undeniably like-like each other. It's sweet. There's even a nonbinary character, Floofty, who is never misgendered by the other characters. Everyone uses their preferred pronouns (they/them). Even you, the player, is never referred to with gender specific words. The other characters refer to you as Buddy or Bestie or Stranger or something like that.

It's simple and good. As someone who recently came out as queer, "Bugsnax" means a lot to me. It is a children's game that has better queer representation than most mainstream media, and I love it for that reason.

There should be more games like this, more representation like this—easy and honey-sweet. The kind that sticks with you when the game is over.
Hello, I'm Eliza. I'm currently living in Tacoma, but I'm from Southern California. I'm interested in learning more about anything and everything (trying to be a well-rounded person). I'll probably be writing about pop culture things like comics or more literary things like poems and novels and authors. It'll just depend.

Thanks for reading!

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'Minari' Review

3/5/2021  0 Comments

Written by Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film analyst.

When was the last time you thought about your childhood? Was it as you were tasting some nostalgic food dish that you hadn't eaten since you were wearing size 4 shoes? Was it as you were staring into the reflection of your Zoom image and wondering “How did little baby me grow into this person?” Was it as you lamented the complex moral entanglements of 2021 and reminisced about the simplicity of playing in the backyard after a hard day of learning cursive? For as little time we spent in childhood then, we feel it everyday now. And as much as we would like to think it an indiscriminately positive experience, growing up is equally perilous as the other stages of existence. “Minari” meditates on the theme of childhood, as well as cultural identity, family and the human spirit.

“Minari” is directed and written by Lee Isaac Chung and stars Steve Yuen as Jacob, Han Ye-ri as Monica, Youn Yuh-jung as Soonja and Alan Kim as David. It is a semi-autobiographical drama that tells the story of a Korean family, disillusioned by their difficult life in California who moves to...
Arkansas with the goal of starting a Korean vegetable farm. While Jacob is adamant about his dream of the farm coming to fruition, his wife Monica is far more skeptical and longs to return to the security of their jobs in California. Grandma Soonja moves into the family's small mobile home to take care of Anne and David, Jacob and Monica's two young children.

Within minutes of the film beginning, Chung's reverence for nature is apparent. As if it were a child, the camera sweeps through tallgrass, rays of the sun piercing through blades. The score swells. Chung immerses us in the nature, under the trees and in the heat. There is a holiness in this place, emphasized by Jacob's saying that this will be the family's "garden of Eden." In scenes of nature, it's easy to spot the major influence of Terence Malick on Chung's approach. "The New World" (2005) in particular seems to be paid homage, but the techniques are still quite effective.

But it isn't just in the outdoors that the camera becomes an evocative storyteller unto itself. Towards the end of the film, I noticed a pattern of shots that happen in conversation. They were the standard conversation shot-reverse shot pattern, meaning that one subject occupies the first third of the screen and the second occupies that last third.
What was different was how one set of shots were often placed with only the shoulder in view, particularly in arguments between Monica and Jacob. Then it hit me. We are placed in the shoes of David, often through the camera being angled at eye-level or up against a wall as his parents argue. As if a child that peeks around the corner to hear why their parents are fighting, or looking over their father’s shoulder when they’re afraid, or seeing things from a much shorter stature, Chung mimics it in his camera positioning. David, the young son who C hung partly based on himself, is as much for the audience as he is for Chung.

My evaluation of the film’s story is much the same. The narrative that Chung creates is not exceptionally different, it’s the story of many immigrants in this story. In fact, my one major criticism of “Minari” is that the story has been told so many times to varying degrees of success; to this end, I was rarely surprised by what I saw. Despite that, this story finds its meaning in its rich characters and their interactions. Each family member has a masterfully crafted personality that a variety of audience members can tap into; for me, I identified with David. David has deep, relatable anxieties, metaphysical questions that many precocious children would often drop on our parents like we were asking for ice cream. His conversations with his Grandma Soonja are often the most humorous, at moments laugh-out-loud funny but equally poignant. The negotiation of space and ideas between Korean culture, Korean-American culture and American culture lends itself to natural situational comedy and moments of transcendence.
The impact of the film is also helped by the heartwarming performances from everyone in this cast. It is no surprise to me that the cast became friends on-set and off because the chemistry on-screen is undeniable. There is not a single person who I would rather have been played by another actor, nor did I ever question their believability as a family.

Composer Emile Mosseri, who also did the score for a personal favorite of mine, “The Last Black Man in San Francisco,” is proving himself within only a few films to be one of the best composers working today. The swooning cellos, tap-dancing piano and melancholic brass section dance together like well-worn partners after a long separation. It emanates
The magic of “Minari” is literalized through the minari (mee-nuh-ree) plant itself, a testament to the strength of Korean immigrants and the human spirit. When Soonja moves in, she brings with her a variety of nostalgic Korean foods, including the minari plant. On a walkabout a few days later, David and her come upon a perfect spot by a creek to plant the root. Jacob works on his weekends with a local friend to get the crops planted, but the plants do not always blossom as expected. Ironically, the minari that Soonja leaves by the creek cultivates a strong harvest without her work. The family literally plants their roots into the nature of Arkansas, they make their mark in the land. Interpreted another way: no matter where they plant themselves, how they are treated, the Korean people will always prosper.

8 out of 10.

Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst
Logan Canada-Johnson is a Communication Studies and Philosophy double-major from the East Bay, California. He primarily writes about film releases and film culture, but is also interested in philosophy. He performs a number of other roles on campus, including Campus Films Programmer, President of UPS Film Club, officer in Sigma Alpha Epsilon, and debater in Ethics Bowl. He plans on obtaining a Doctorate in Cinema Studies after his Bachelors.

Letterboxd: https://letterboxd.com/TheHalfNerd/
‘Framing Britney Spears’: Sensationalizing female pain

Written by Nicole Steinberg, Staff Writer

Coming of age in the mid to late 2010s, I remember Britney Spears being a household name as a pop icon. By the time I was old enough to be aware of her influence on pop culture, fashion, and music, her name was the butt of a national joke. I remember seeing photos of her shaved head on a magazine at the drug store and thinking that fame was too much for her and she was a lost cause. Now, over a decade later, and after shaving my head this summer, I see her “breakdown” not as a character flaw of her own, but the manifestation of eight plus years of having your whole life broadcasted, critiqued and ridiculed by the entire world.

‘Framing Britney’ is an episode on the New York Times docuseries titled documentary explores Spear’s rise into stardom and her downfall captured by national television. After years of being in a state sanctioned conservatorship having her money, actions and life controlled by her father, her fans and lawyers are speaking out.

The documentary starts off with Spears’ humble beginnings, born in a small town in Mississippi to Jamie and Lynne Spears. She started off singing in her local church choir where her talents were recognized. She went to Atlanta, Georgia to audition for the “Mickey Mouse Clubhouse” remake. She was rejected from the part for being too young, but the casting director recommended her to a talent agent in New York. She and her mom moved to a sublet in New York where she continued to audition and got casted in
Her career skyrocketed. She released singles including “... Baby One More Time” that sold 500,000 copies on the first day of release and topped the Billboards 100 for two consecutive weeks. Her tours amassed millions of dollars as she became the richest pop artist. Her songs expressed unapologetic sexual autonomy and demystified female desire in a way that forever altered the pop industry.

The music of the documentary turns eerie as clips are shown of Spears being swarmed by paparazzi as she tries to walk the short distance between the building and her car. A celebrity photographer revealed, “And it’s hard to get out of it once you start making the kind of wealth these guys were making.” At the peak of Spears’ fame, a photo of her could sell for up to $1 million. As the clips continued, the crowds grew and the tactics of photographers became more and more invasive.

Tabloids watched Spears’ every move like a hawk. She began to act more erratically in public. Daniel Ramos, the celebrity photographer given a cameo in the documentary, recalled a time Spears became so frustrated with his presence that she began beating his car with an umbrella. The media capitalized on Spears’ drastically declining mental health while pushing her closer and closer to insanity.

I just had to think, this would never happen to a male celebrity. Female pain and distress is sensationalized and normalized to the point where it is viewed as entertainment with no remorse or guilt from the viewer. The idea that successful women are not allowed to struggle with their mental health without being labeled as “crazy,” “irresponsible” or “broken” is the outcome of a misogynistic media culture.

I am glad the media is finally looking back on the mental and physical violence caused by voyeuristic reporting of women in the entertainment industry. Although, that sympathy has so far only been extended to famous white women. This is the tip of the iceberg in terms of any kind of justice or reconciliation for the violence and oppression inflicted on women and the silence we are forced into.
Nicole Steinberg, Staff Writer

Nicole Steinberg is a Political Science and International Political Economy double major at the University of Puget Sound. Among other things, Nicole enjoys writing about international current events and covering local news. She writes from Tacoma, WA but is originally from the San Francisco Bay Area. After graduation this spring, she hopes to travel and write for an international news publication.