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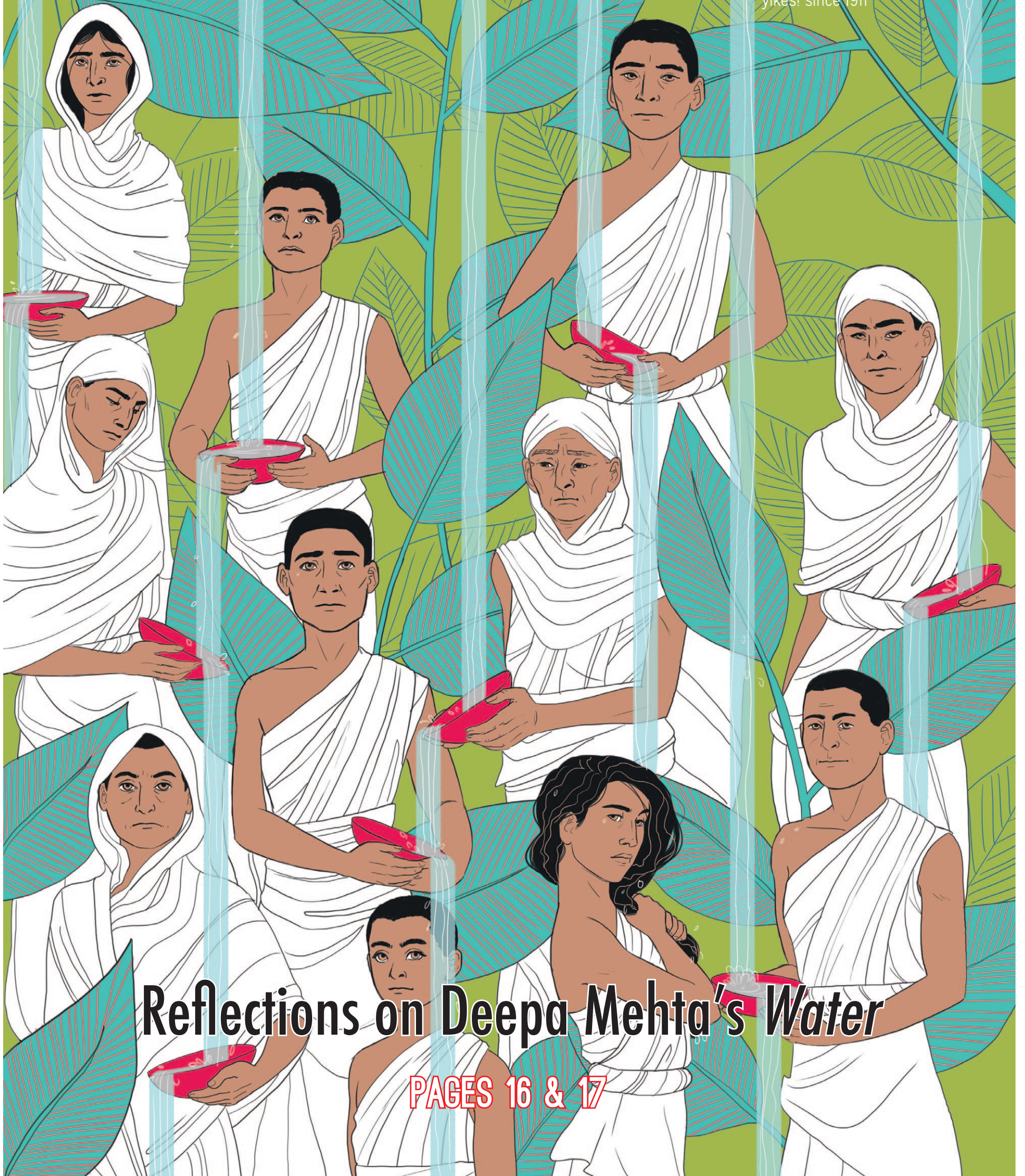
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Reflections on Deepa Mehta's *Water*

PAGES 16 & 17



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Destigmatizing mental illness

Students discuss lived experiences at panel discussion

NORA MCCREADY
The McGill Daily

Students gathered last Thursday for a panel discussion centred around lived experiences with mental illness, as part of the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) Mental Health Awareness Week. Panelists included Alyssa Rooster, a third year psychology student, Alison Gu, a third year student and floor fellow at Douglas Hall, and Clark Bray, in his last year at McGill.

The focus of the panel was broad: it aimed to break down stigmas around mental illness, open discussion about how mental health has impacted students' daily lives and identities, as well as how students have coped with their mental health at McGill.

According to the organizers, the event was intentionally open-ended in order to make it accessible to a broader range of attendees. It began with each panelist telling their personal stories of mental illness.

Rooster talked about the way that the university environment exacerbated her depression.

"I thought that everything would get better when I went to university because a lot of my dissatisfaction with my life was due to my home living conditions," she said. "McGill's gonna be the best four years of my life, I'm so excited, this is going to be amazing," and then I think I hit the lowest mental place in my life."

"At the end of first year is when I realized there was a real problem," Rooster continued. "And I was not speaking to any of my friends. I would climb up the back stairs of my [residence] just so I could avoid seeing anyone. I left at least one exam in tears. [...] It kind of just got to a point where I was like, [...] you need to be honest with yourself [...] I think that it's time that you go and you seek help."

Gu talked about her experience recognizing mental illness in the context of physical injury.

"I had a great week of Frosh, learned how to kayak, it was great, it was fine. And then on the second

day of school I got hit by a car and I got a concussion," she said.

"I thought that everything would get better when I went to university because a lot of my dissatisfaction with my life was due to my home living conditions. 'McGill's gonna be the best four years of my life, I'm so excited, this is going to be amazing,' and then I think I hit the lowest mental place in my life."

—Alyssa Rooster
Panelist

"Ninety per cent of concussions recover within two weeks, but ten per cent of them go longer than that, and when that happens it's called post-concussion syndrome," Gu explained. "And with that came a lot of horrible moments [...] always just wondering if life is worth it."

However, she had difficulty recognizing her mental illness because she thought it conflicted with her identity.

"I had become known as this fun jokester: super ambitious but also super goofy," she elaborated. "My last name is Gu, people call me Gu, [friends] don't call me by my first name just because [Gu] is more indicative of who I am as a person. [...] If I told anyone that I was going through this then suddenly I wouldn't be Gu anymore. I would have to become Alison, and I really didn't want to become Alison."

Gu also touched on the challenges that being a Floor Fellow poses to her mental health.

"Working as a Floor Fellow was more tumultuous that I realized because of how you can actually never have a consistent lifestyle," she said. "You're not eating well because [cafeteria] food sucks. You're not sleeping well because first years are loud. The things that you deal with are pretty heavy. I never really understood the term emotional labor until I became a Floor Fellow."

Bray told his story of developing mental illness in tandem with a life-threatening case of Ulcerative Colitis. "It's a gastrointestinal disease, an autoimmune disorder," he explained.

"Your large intestine thinks there's something in your body that's not there, and then starts to self destruct," he said. "So I got my colon removed, I had to miss the end of my junior year of high school to get a bunch of surgeries."

In his time off after high school, he developed severe depression, which cropped up again in his second year at McGill.

"I didn't have any motivation to do anything, and I was in counselling and that wasn't working. Somehow I made it through the year," he recalled.

When he returned home, he had to have another series of operations. During treatment, his doctors came to him with shocking new developments.

"I learned that that they had hypothesized that one of the reasons I was so depressed was because your colon is responsible for secreting 85 to 90 per cent of your body's serotonin, and that's a really crucial hormone for mental health," he explained. "When I had my surgeries there wasn't enough of this research out for it to be something the surgeons would tell you about. I'm not even sure if they do to this day."

His physical health continued to suffer and he developed a hernia.

"When I was recovering from my hernia surgery, I was diagnosed with PTSD. [...] I was really dumbfounded because I just thought [...]

I haven't fought in Iraq or anything. [...] But then I started to look into the symptoms of it, how it develops, and realized I had everything that people with PTSD have."

"You can develop PTSD from any traumatic experience, it's a disease that's often stigmatized," he continued.

Rooster related a similar experience in which severe physical illness had effects on her mental health: "My mental health hit its lowest over the summer when, spoiler alert, I was diagnosed with cancer. I ended up having to drop out of McGill and move back home for four months."

"I think it's important to remember that while all three of us were kind of triggered by very serious health conditions, you can also have mental illness for a reason that doesn't seem like a reason. You don't need a reason to feel depressed."

—Alison Gu
Panelist

"When you're a cancer patient or when you're physically ill no one asks about your mental health," she recalled. "Over these past few months I really learned how closely interrelated they are, and also things that are just like coping mechanisms, like if I wanted to go out for a run, I couldn't."

Gu noted that mental illness is still a struggle for people who have perfect physical health.

"I think it's important to remember that while all three of us were kind of triggered by very serious health conditions, you can also have mental illness for a reason that doesn't seem like a reason," she clarified. "You don't need a reason to feel depressed. Part of the frustration for me in the beginning, part of my depression, was that I felt like I had no reason. That was something I really gave myself crap for."

Gu continued by discussing the benefits and shortcomings of therapy as a treatment for mental illness: "Talking about easy stuff [...] can be really important and can kind of get the ball rolling to start that conversation, so you don't jump into it by saying 'I am dealing with horrible depression.'"

"Therapy doesn't work for everyone," she said, "but it also doesn't work if you really don't go into it with an open mind. And also sometimes it just doesn't work because of who you're matched with."

"As counter-intuitive as it sounds," she continued, "I think that sometimes it's easier to talk to a stranger about it because they don't have all these preconceived notions about who you are. And that's why a therapist can be very cathartic."

Rooster explained how sharing her experience had been a way of healing: "[I wrote] a blog post talking about all my personal issues with mental health and everything. [...] My mother who had been a big support was like, 'Do you really want to put that on Facebook? Think about employers.' What if your aunts and uncles see this? That was really a step back. I was like, 'Mom this is really something I need to do for myself.'"

"I was brought to tears by the positive response it had," she explained. "I had people messaging me who I hadn't talked to in years, just being like 'thank you so much. I resonate with a lot of things you say.'"

"For every shitty response you get from someone there's a million great responses," she reminded attendees.

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SSMU Council on internal reform

Councilors and committees give reports, potential AVEQ affiliation

ELLEN COOLS
The McGill Daily

On Thursday January 26 the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) Legislative Council met to hear a notice of motion regarding the amendment of the internal regulations of governance, as well as reports from various committees and from councilors and the SSMU executive team.

Motion regarding the amendment of internal regulations

The notice of motion regarding the amendment of the internal regulations of governance was read by Igor Sadikov, Arts Representative and a former Daily editor.

The motion, according to Sadikov, "primarily consists of [...] a set of suggested internal regulations for [SSMU's] Board of Directors."

The proposed internal regulations focus on procedures and clarifying the relationship between the Council and the Board.

"Currently, the process is that the Board ratifies all Council decisions," Sadikov continued, "so this would retain that process, however, Council decisions would basically come into effect immediately, and then the Board would have a choice of ratifying or overturning them, and if it's overturned, it would come back to the Legislative Council, and basically the internal regulations would recommend that the Board only exercise this power very sparingly."

The motion provides further clarification on the Board's power, including its ability to recommend a referendum question to the Council. This power, Sadikov explained, is outlined in SSMU's Constitution, but the process for recommending a referendum question is unclear, and thus this motion aims to clarify it.

"Some of the more substantive things are in terms of dealing with [Judicial Board] decisions," he

added. "The two main changes are that the Board has the option to refer an opinion of the [Judicial Board] to Legislative Council, and the other change is that overturning the opinion of the [Judicial Board] no longer requires a four-fifths majority, and this is because ratifying a [Judicial Board] opinion requires a simple majority, so if you don't have a majority to ratify [...] it doesn't have effect, so I guess this is just a way to make that explicit and not have this limbo state where it is neither ratified nor overturned."

Engineering Representative Richard (Tre) Mansdoerfer voiced some concerns regarding the removal of the supermajority in regards to overturning a Judicial Board opinion.

"I feel like [Judicial Board] decisions should be held to a higher standard and that they shouldn't be that easily overturnable," he said. "[The Judicial Board] makes decisions on things such as [...] SSMU elections, and for the Board of Directors to be able to overturn a [Judicial Board] decision on that, such as when candidates maybe do violate protocol, I don't feel comfortable."

Mansdoerfer added that he would like to see a supermajority added to the Legislative Council portion in terms of its ability to overturn Judicial Board opinions.

Clubs Representative Adam Templer questioned Appendix A, article 1.3.1, of the motion, which states: "The Board of Directors should only exercise its power to overturn resolutions of the Legislative Council to protect the legal, financial, or operational well-being of the Society."

"I think that there are a number of different situations in which the Board of Directors might [...] consider itself in a position where it needs to exercise power to overturn resolutions of Council beyond just the legal, financial, or operational well-being of the Society," he said.

He added that "given that the Board of Directors is supposed to be



SSMU Council.

ELLEN COOLS | The McGill Daily

sort of the ultimate governing body," he felt that this article also had weak wording, and suggested the word 'should' be changed.

"[Judicial Board] decisions should be held to a higher standard and that they shouldn't be that easily overturnable."

—Richard (Tre) Mansdoerfer
Engineering Representative

Sadikov responded that the word should is used for the possibility that the Board might find other reasons to overturn a Council decision.

"The reason I think it's still worth it to include it is to give guidance to the Board of Directors as to what it should be thinking about when considering overturning the resolutions of the Council," he said.

AVEQ affiliation?

Following the notice of motion, committee reports, and a few councilor reports, the SSMU executives (apart from VP Operations Sacha Magder who was unable to attend) presented their reports.

As part of his report, VP External David Aird explained that he, and VP University Affairs Erin Sobat recently attended the Association for

the Voice of Education in Quebec's (AVEQ) members assembly, but said that he would provide a full report at the next Council meeting.

However, Sadikov asked if Aird could provide a few more details about what was discussed at the assembly, for those councilors who were interested.

Aird agreed and continued on: "We talked about some internal policies of the federation and also in terms of social political affairs, there's a consultation coming up by the provincial government on sexual violence policies in universities."

"The idea behind that is to mobilize support and get student input on [...] what, if anything, a law [...] that would mandate universities to have their own policies [would look like]," he explained.

He also shared that he attended the mobilization and association development commission at the assembly, where they discussed ongoing association campaigns.

At the Winter 2016 General Assembly, a question went to referendum asking students whether they would like to affiliate with AVEQ. While students voted against affiliation, Aird expressed that "it does look like we would like to re-ask the question this year during the referendum to McGill students."

"The feeling is that seeing as there were so many abstentions last year that people just aren't really aware of what a federation is," he explained. He plans to try to increase students' understanding of student federations by tabling.

Board of Governors reform

At its December 1, 2016 meeting, the Board of Governors [BoG] passed a motion whereby members of the

McGill community will be allowed to submit written questions and attend a twenty minute question-and-answer period twice a year at BoG meetings. This aimed to facilitate greater interaction between the McGill community and BoG, and was sparked by SSMU executives' efforts to increase the BoG's accountability to students.

In his report, Sobat noted that at the Senate meeting on January 18, "the President [Ben Ger] and I asked a question about university governance best practices, kind of to determine the best way forward in pushing for reform to the McGill Board of Governors."

"We've [...] settled on an ad hoc committee at the Board as an option," he continued, "assuming we could get some sort of parity of both governors and non-governors. As it stands, the Board effectively regulates itself when it comes to everything, including succession planning, outreach to and nomination of external members at large, best practices and evaluation of their success. So [we are] trying to see some more accountability and oversight of that body," he said.

Sobat also shared that the University Affairs office is planning to submit a case to the Advisory Council on the Charter of Student Rights regarding academic accommodations, "identifying issues with [...] McGill accommodation policies across the Universities and with some recommendations for improvement."

"Fun fact, the new Senior Director of Student Services told us that she's surprised there haven't been more human rights complaints because our office for students with disabilities is so understaffed," he added.

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On mental health after graduation

Panelists discuss “pressure cooker” environment of university

RAYLEIGH LEE
The McGill Daily

On the evening of Wednesday January 25, a panel called “Life AYD: Mental Health Post-Graduation Panel” was held in the Shatner Building, as part of the Students’ Society of McGill University (SSMU)’s Mental Health Awareness Week. This event was hosted by Life After Your Degree (Life AYD) in partnership with SSMU, Campus Life and Engagement (CL&E), Career Planning Service (CaPS), and McGill alumni. The panel aimed to combat the stigma around mental health, and connect undergraduate students with alumni.

Panelists included Ryan Golt, an alumnus who spoke out about his experience with mental illness in 2016; Ishani Ghosh, an alumnus who graduated at 2016; and Vickey Habel, an alumnus who, while at McGill, “discovered a new horizon in mental health and aims to help others find their path too,” according to the event’s Facebook page.

Aleks Djurdjevic, CL&E Project Development Specialist (Student Life) and Life AYD co-organizer, told The Daily that the event came about because “we recognized a need to connect students with McGill alumni to hear more about and normalize the mental health issues that can come up during university, and [...] the value of hearing other people’s stories and hearing how they got to where they are.”

“Mental health issues are important because to some extent, everybody will experience some in their lifetime. Hosting events like this is important because one of the most empowering things that you can do is talk about what’s going on,” Djurdjevic continued.

“At McGill, we’re trying to do more around graduation. We have

a pretty strong program around entering orientation, we put a lot into orientation week, frosh events, but we don’t focus as much on when students are actually leaving,” she added.

“This is a great opportunity to actually hear what student concerns are. [...] We’re trying to gauge info and hear what some of their anxieties are about graduation so that we can create more programming to help have their questions answered,” Djurdjevic concluded.

Panelists discussed their own personal experiences with mental health issues, as well as support networks available to undergraduate students struggling with stress and anxiety.

“We’re trying to gauge info and hear what some of their anxieties are about graduation so that we can create more programming to help have their questions answered.”

—Aleks Djurdjevic
CLE&E Project
Development Specialist

Ghosh addressed the University’s lack of capacity to help students experiencing mental health issues.

“I’ve had a lot of experiences with McGill Mental Health Services and [...] I’ve had relatively positive experiences,” Ghosh said.



Mental health panel.

RAYLEIGH LEE | The McGill Daily

“But it is [...] clear that [compared to the] capacity [...], the demand far exceeds the capacity of McGill Mental Health,” she continued. “Maybe there are ways for us to try to increase that capacity because I think that we’ve been relying on peer services, and student driven services, as well as awareness campaigns, to try to bridge that gap. But maybe that isn’t sufficient.”

In an interview with The Daily, Golt, who is also currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Educational Psychology, noted that graduation can be a particularly stressful time for students.

In his final year, Golt helped found Stronger than Stigma, a student-led initiative aimed to reduce stigma associated with mental illness on campus.

“The reason why I felt compelled to be a part of this program was due to my own personal experience with mental health, and ever since then I felt a passion and a duty to be as involved in this important

cause as much as possible. So by sharing my story, by becoming a resource for students, it’s both healing to me to share my story and I find that it helps others,” Golt said.

When asked why she decided to be a panelist, Ghosh told The Daily: “I thought it would be a helpful thing [...] to come talk about my experience, the resources students have access to, [...] unexpected things that can come up before and after graduation especially, because I found that to be a very stressful time. I think these are really important things that we need to talk about and keep viewing from different lenses, from different people’s experiences and getting as many perspectives as possible.”

One attendee, Marine Luciani, a U3 student who studies psychology at McGill, echoed Golt’s sentiment on graduation.

“I think [mental health] important because a lot of people don’t know about it, or don’t talk [...]

openly about it [...]. I think it’s important to talk about it to get more awareness,” she told The Daily.

“Since I’m graduating, I think it’s important for me to know and see how other people have done,” Luciani added. “Any change can be stressful [...], work [...], school.”

During the discussion, Habel referred to McGill as a “pressure cooker” environment for students, as she stressed the importance of mental health awareness: “It doesn’t only affect the student level, but it can carry over to the workplace, and for the rest of your life.”

“It’s like having a good, healthy body, your healthy mind goes with it” she continued. “If you’re not healthy in the mind, the body falls through [...]. The more you take care of your mental health and body as well, everything sort of improves around you. But once you’re afflicted with something like mental health, it’s like a broken bone; you can fix it, but you’ve got to know that you can fix it.”

AUS creates oversight committee for SNAX

The Legislative Council of the Arts Undergraduate Society (AUS) met on Wednesday January 25. Councilors created an oversight committee for SNAX, the student-run cafe in the Leacock Building, and dealt with various administrative matters.

The motion to create an ad-hoc SNAX Oversight and Advisory Committee passed unanimously, as a result of the cafe’s “significant financial impact on the budget of the AUS” and its lack of direct accountability to Council. The

Committee will be co-chaired by the AUS President and the VP Finance, and include four councilors and one SNAX cashier.

It is mandated to “improve [the] financial state” of the cafe, which ran a deficit last semester, the exact amount of which was not revealed at Council, and to present a report at every meeting of AUS Council.

Council also voted unanimously to reinstate the Italian Studies Student Association, which was temporarily inactive. They also

unanimously agreed to appoint AUS VP Academic Erik Partridge and Arts Senator William Cleveland to the Arts Student Employment Fund Committee (ASEFC).

As stated in a motion that was then proposed from the floor, the ASEFC “meets annually to allocate funding for research and other academically advancing positions across campus.”

This motion aimed to reinstate Arts Senator Charles Keita as a member of AUS Council. Apparently, Keita had been auto-

matically suspended from Council because, due to a scheduling conflict, he had missed more than four meetings over the Fall semester. Despite this, however, he had continued to serve on Senate. The motion in question, which passed unanimously at Wednesday’s meeting, simply made him an official AUS councilor once again.

Finally, Council heard reports from various departmental associations, from the Arts Representatives and Senators, and from the AUS Executives.

In her report, AUS VP Communications Chanèle Couture De-Graft explained that Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) Ollivier Dyens had instigated the creation of a taskforce “to envision the pathway to a McGill degree.” This taskforce, which Couture De-Graft said is intended to boost student engagement in the classroom and reduce stress, will include student members. As such, Couture De-Graft has invited any interested students to get in touch with her.

—By Marina Cupido

Thousands protest Trump in Montreal Women's March

Diverse group of speakers call for solidarity and an end to intolerance

MARINA CUPIDO
The McGill Daily

On Saturday January 21, nearly ten thousand people gathered at Place des Arts in protest against Donald Trump's inauguration as President of the United States, standing in solidarity with the "Women's March on Washington" movement. The inauguration ceremony, which took place in Washington D.C. on Friday January 20, has sparked a wave of resistance around the world, with millions decrying Trump's overt bigotry and destructive policy proposals.

Many of the signs and slogans on display explicitly attacked misogyny and gendered violence. Several attempted to put a subversive spin on Trump's own rhetoric with slogans such as "pussy bites back" and "pussy power."

While such messages are likely well-intentioned, critics have noted their cisnormative undertones; by conflating female sexual organs with womanhood and feminism, this kind of discourse effectively erases the identity and the struggles of trans women who were assigned male at birth.

To their credit, however, the organizers of the Montreal rally made a point of featuring a diverse series of speakers, many of whom stressed the importance of intersectionality.

Dalia Tourki, a local activist for trans migrants' rights, reminded those present that for racialized trans women struggling for status, virulent discrimination and misogyny are nothing new.

"What the media don't mention," said Tourki, speaking in French, "is that since 2009, one trans person has been killed every three days. What the media don't mention is that in 2016, 98 trans people were killed, the majority of whom were Black and Latina. I know that under Donald Trump, the number of trans women killed by the end of 2017 will be even greater. I know that under Trump, the conditions of trans migrant women will be worse. But I also know that we're already there. We experience discrimination, we experience suffering, whether it's under Trump, or Obama, or Trudeau, or [Quebec Premier Philippe] Couillard. [...] But we survive. We know how to stay strong."

In a subsequent email to The Daily, Tourki clarified that, in fact, the number of trans and gender-diverse people who were killed in 2016 was actually much higher: the total number of murders around the world was 237.

Rachel Zellars, a PhD candidate at McGill in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education and Executive Director of The Girls Action Foundation, spoke to the

crowd with her daughter by her side, urging solidarity and self-criticism.

"The new election has also sent a strong reminder of the work to be done between women," Zellars said. "A clear majority of the white female voters [...] in the United States voted for Trump, despite his racism and misogyny."

At this, the crowd booed enthusiastically.

"This statistic does not come of thin air, everyone," Zellars went on. "It is rooted in the troubled histories of our first and second waves of feminism throughout North America. [...] Although it is tempting here today to dismiss all of these things and Trump as a condition of U.S. history, we must risk promoting very dangerous ignorance in this moment if we fail to now look inwards to ourselves, and fail to make the connections between xenophobia and imperialism here at home, and also abroad."

Gabriella Kinté, of *Tout le Hood en Parle* ("The whole hood's talking about it"), a platform for the lived experiences of racialized people, echoed Zellars' emphasis on examining local manifestations of oppression.

"We must risk promoting very dangerous ignorance in this moment if we fail to now look inwards, and fail to make the connections between xenophobia and imperialism here at home, and also abroad."

—Rachel Zellars
Executive Director of the
Girls Actions Foundation

"We have a tendency to look at our neighbors, and forget what's happening at home. Let us not close our eyes to inequality in the United States, nor to inequality in Quebec," said Kinté, in French, to the crowd.

Kinté went on to say, "Yes, we must struggle together, but first we must unite, and to unite we must recognize that not all women are oppressed in the same way. For some,



Protesters at the Women's March.

MARINA CUPIDO | The McGill Daily

Trump's words have been shocking, but for others, these words have simply openly revealed the nastiness they experience on a daily basis."

As the crowd cheered, Kinté listed marginalized communities of women whose voices are often forgotten at high-profile rallies like this one: Indigenous women on reserves in Northern Quebec, women without status who are imprisoned in detention centers, women in working-class neighborhoods such as Parc Extension and Montreal-Nord.

"Let us be more inclusive," Kinté urged her audience. "[These women] have much to teach us, [...] we must listen to them."

Later in the rally, two masked representatives of the Montreal Collective of Women Without Status gave a bilingual address in Spanish and English.

"We, the undocumented women and mothers who live in the shadows, invisible, [...] are coming forward to ask for support. [...] The precarity in which we live because of our immigration status threatens our security, our freedom, our families, our children who are born here, live here, and who are terrorized by the threat of deportation," they said.

"We are some of the most vulnerable and exploited people in society," they continued. "We reject the [oppressive practices] of Canada's immigration system, and demand to be accepted as human beings [...] with equal dignity like everyone else."

Meanwhile, in protest against Trump's apparent history of harassment and assault of women, other speakers focused on the issue of gendered and sexual violence. Journalist

Sue Montgomery, one of the creators of the hashtag #beenrapedneverreported, asked those who had experienced sexual assault – if they felt comfortable doing so – to raise their hands.

For a moment, those assembled looked around as hundreds of hands were raised. A few wiped away tears.

"It makes me so sad to see this," said Montgomery. "One day, I would love to stand before you and ask the same question – raise your hands if you've been sexually assaulted. And I'd like to see not one hand raised."

The rally at Place des Arts began and ended with words and music from Indigenous people, to honour the fact that the event – and the city of Montreal – was located on unceded Mohawk land, and in recognition of the disproportionate violence and discrimination faced by Canada's Indigenous population.

The final speaker, a member of the collective Quebec Native Women, told the crowd that she had been sexually assaulted three times.

"I have a hard time finding the words," she said, speaking in French, visibly emotional. "If I healed, [...] I owe it to the women standing behind me, and in fact if I hadn't had access to services culturally adapted for Indigenous people, I think I would not have survived. I've had enough. I've had enough of violence against Indigenous women."

As the rally concluded with live music, and the crowd slowly dispersed, The Daily spoke with some of those who had attended. One couple, accompanied by their one-year-old son, explained why they came to the event.

"I think it's important to teach him respect for rights and for equality [starting at] a very young age," the child's mother explained, "and I think we're [witnessing] something that's really not okay, and we should stand up against it. Particularly, I want to teach him to respect women. We already started teaching him about consent and stuff like that, and about the President of the United States being someone who doesn't respect [women's rights]."

"If I hadn't had access to services culturally adapted for Indigenous people, I think I would not have survived. I've had enough. I've had enough of violence against Indigenous women."

—Member of Quebec
Native Women

"He doesn't understand, but [...] he'll catch up someday," added his father. "It'll be deep-rooted within him."

Health centre petition suspended

Montreal mayor calls for consultations on Indigenous health centre

XAVIER RICHER VIS
The McGill Daily

Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre has told the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Health Centre (MUAHC) Board of Directors to stop circulating a petition drive seeking public consultation to secure a building for an Indigenous Health Centre in Montreal.

He apparently told members of the group last Wednesday that he has agreed to their request, and will “hold consultations on opening a specialized centre for the needs of Indigenous people in Montreal,” according to CTV News Montreal.

Needed: 15,000 signatories

Unlike many other prominent Canadian cities, including Toronto and Ottawa, Montreal does not have an Indigenous Health Centre.

Volunteers under the MUAHC Board of Directors (itself associated with the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy, or NETWORK) were attempting to rectify this, petitioning across Montreal to gather the 15,000 signatures necessary to secure official public consultation on an Indigenous Health Centre.

Efforts included visiting local university and CEGEP campuses, and a petition drive on the McGill campus last Friday, January 20.

The mayor’s decision could potentially be seen as a victory for petitioners, primarily because of the sheer difficulty of obtaining 15,000 signatures before the previously established deadline of February 25, 2017.

“We’re not allowed to get electronic signatures,” said Pascale Annual, a member of NETWORK who was present on the McGill campus to obtain signatures, in an interview with The Daily. “The city doesn’t trust [those] signatures.”

Annual explained that the city is working on making petitioning more accessible in a more technology-driven world, but as of now, petitions like this one are “bound by the old laws.”

In addition to that restriction, only residents of certain municipalities could sign, with residents of other municipalities unable to because they fall under the category of “independent cities,” or separate municipal jurisdictions. For example, residents of Montreal Nord-Centre could not sign the petition.

The disproportionality of Indigenous health concerns

Currently, many Inuit and First Nations people seek support at the Native Friendship Centre and Projet Autochtone du Quebec, but go to the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) for medical help.

Those who were petitioning campaigned for a new Indigenous Health Centre in Montreal on the basis that Indigenous communities in Canada face higher barriers to health care and are disproportionately affected by certain medical concerns.

In 2013, the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health released a report detailing specific health issues faced by Indigenous communities in Canada.

“Even if the health of Indigenous communities has improved over the last few years, the state of health of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people continues to be considerably inferior to those of other Canadians,” reads the report in French. “According to multiple indicators of health, the burden of illness or health disparities affecting First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples are still disproportionate.”

Volunteers who petitioned for signatures handed out press releases which in part detailed those disparities, explaining how “while Aboriginal peoples comprise 3.8 per cent of Canada’s population, they account for 8 per cent of people living with HIV and 12.5 per cent of new infections.” They also detailed how Indigenous people are at higher risk of developing tuberculosis, diabetes, and related complications.

“Greater effort is needed to provide Aboriginal people with culturally sensitive, inclusive health policies, and targeted health programs,” reads the press release.

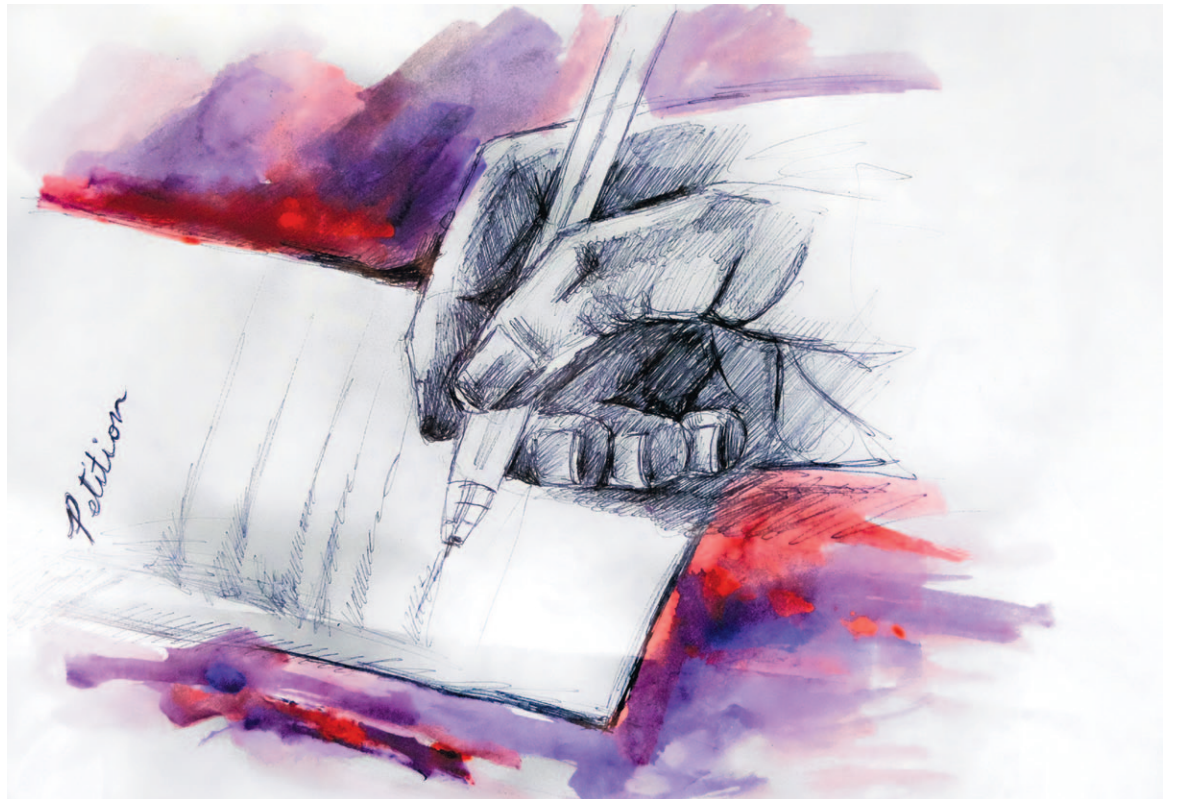
Annual detailed the challenges faced by Indigenous communities in Montreal, which comprise an estimated total of 20,000 people.

“You have a lot of provincial health services that are mostly in French, and they’re not holistic enough,” she explained, “so you [see] services for part of the population, but not all the population. [...] Montreal, being more of a cosmopolitan city, could and would have to go beyond the provincial model, which is mostly francophone.”

Annual also explained how provincial health services don’t cater to Indigenous needs.

“[In Quebec, there] is only one model: the pharmaco-medical model,” she said. “Basically, it’s highly specialized. If you have an earache, you go to your GP [General Practitioner] and they give you a reference to see your ENT [Ear Nose and Throat doctor]. If you hurt your right foot, you go back to your system, you see your GP, get a referral, and you go see another specialist.”

“If you have a different belief as to why you’re having those ailments, and how to get better for those ailments, let’s say that includes a spiritual belief, then you’re [...] on your own,” she elaborated. “An Aboriginal Health



RAHMA WIRYOMARTONO | The McGill Daily

Center model answers to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual perspectives on health – a holistic and integrated model, all under one roof. That doesn’t exist in Canada.”

“Even if the health of Indigenous communities has improved over the last few years, the state of health of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people continues to be considerably inferior to those of other Canadians.”

—National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health report

Past Indigenous community centers

The proposed health center wouldn’t be the first center in Montreal dedicated to addressing Indigenous-specific issues.

In 2010, the Ivirtvik Center (South) opened in the Montreal neighborhood of Verdun. Its goal was to aid Inuit participants in integrating

into the workforce or to assist them in going back to school, offering activities, services, classes, and counseling in French, English, and Inuktitut.

However, while the center’s aims were admirable, this didn’t prevent some from campaigning against it during its initial construction. Certain locals in Verdun passed out flyers with “Not in my backyard,” written on them, objecting to the center’s construction for transparently racist reasons.

“Basically, it’s the same barriers as health services,” explained Annual. “There’s a huge amount of stereotypes and misconceptions, and misinformation about [Indigenous peoples].”

Annual feels it’s important to remind Montrealers of the medical barriers Indigenous peoples face and the racial politics that might accompany those initiatives to solve them.

Moving forward

In an email to The Daily, Jasmine Ramze Rezaee, a project administrator at the McGill Centre for the Convergence of Health and Economics (MCCHE), as well as a member of NETWORK, emphasized that while recent developments with Coderre indicate a positive shift in the status quo, it is still just one component in the fight to aid Indigenous health issues in Montreal.

“Despite the Mayor’s promise to hold consultations on the issue,” she wrote, “we must not forget why culturally sensitive medical care is important. Aboriginal peoples face barriers to accessing health services that non-Aboriginals often do not, such as racism and discrimination, jurisdiction and eligibility issues, and lack of clarity and advocacy.”

“Only by addressing these issues in a collaborative, inclusive, and participatory manner can they be resolved,” she continued. “In this way, I hope that the public consultations headed by the Mayor will include strong Aboriginal representatives and produce concrete results.”

In her email, Ramze Rezaee highlighted the role of non-Indigenous allies in the struggle for better health.

“An Aboriginal Health Center model answers to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual perspectives on health – a holistic and integrated model, all under one roof. That doesn’t exist in Canada.”

—Pascale Annual
NETWORK member

“To clarify, I am an ally,” she wrote. “For me, it’s important to remember that I am a settler on this land, that I’ve benefitted from the history of colonialism – whether directly or indirectly – and that it is in my power to honour Aboriginal resilience through my support.”

Self-defence workshops aren't the problem

It's time for us to look at the bigger picture of consent on campus

PANIZ KHOSROSHAHY
The McGill Daily

Content warning: rape, violence

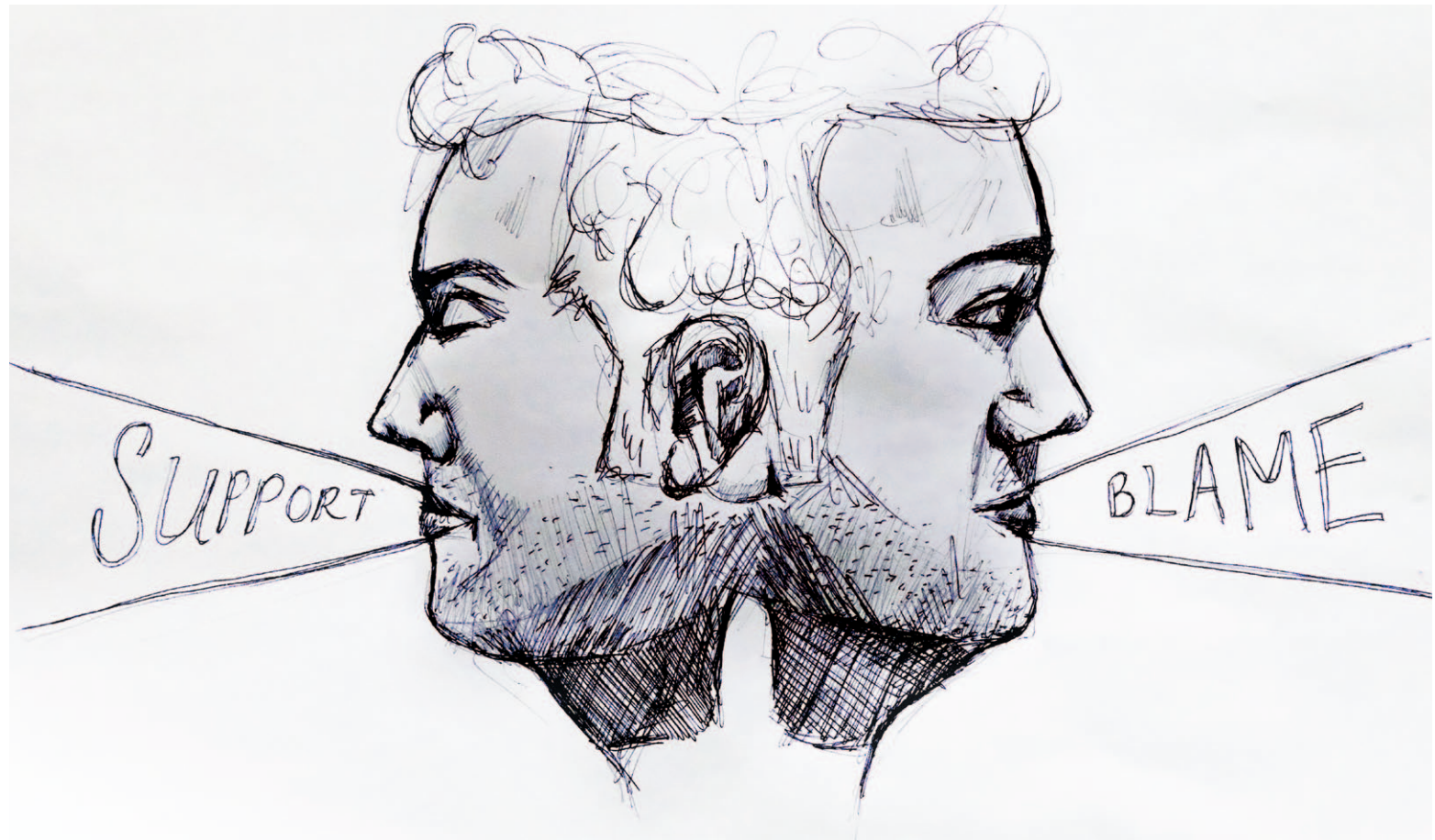
On January 23, the Daily published a news story on Rape Aggression Defence (RAD), a self-defence workshop offered by McGill Security Services, which I was quoted in. This piece reflected the typical attitude in the feminist mainstream about self-defence: that self-defence is inherently bad, and it places the blame on victims. Overall, criticisms of self-defence are valid - don't teach women not to get raped, teach men not to rape; sexual assault is often perpetrated by someone known to the survivor, etc. This being said, this characterization lacks specificity and context in its understanding of self-defence in general, and RAD in particular.

I attended RAD in winter 2014. Reflecting on it, I can say that the RAD curriculum is, unfortunately, terribly outdated. The facilitators have evidently never attended a sexual assault 101 workshop, and offer false information about the effectiveness or sensitivity of McGill administration or law enforcement in responding to disclosures. And, no, the workshop did not prevent me from getting raped a few months later.

Not all self-defence is bad, and not all self-defence curricula are the same.

However, not all self-defence is bad, and not all self-defence curricula are the same. The existing literature links self-defence training with a host of positive attitudes in participants: researchers have observed increased self-esteem, assertiveness, and ability to fight back in women - particularly in intimate partner violence situations. At a more holistic, feminist, evidence-based and survivor-centered level, feminist self defence or 'empowerment self-defence' has been shown by Jocelyn Hollander of the University of Oregon to reduce incidents of campus sexual assault.

But let's go back to run-of-the-mill self-defence, because I am especially worried that the prob-



RAHMA WIRYOMARTONO | The McGill Daily

lematic vocabulary used by RAD facilitators, which was largely comprised of buzzwords. Further, if I am to personally report assault, I would much rather be shamed for what I was wearing and how much I was drinking than have the administrators lie to my face and neglect to take concrete actions and provide me with accommodations post-assault - which is what happened when I reported.

Another critique of RAD focuses on the fact that it's a closed workshop for women. Given that sexual assault is experienced by women 98 per cent of the time, I do not see an issue with having closed workshops to address scenarios experienced by women. I agree, however, that the sole focus on women leaves perpetrators - almost always men - off the hook. Self-defence offered in an institutional setting has to go hand-in-hand with holding rapists and abusers accountable. RAD doesn't do this, but neither does any other measure at the university. Perhaps the newest and best proof of this lack of accountability is McGill's lauded sexual assault policy, that places zero sanction on perpetrators. While indeed providing a structure for dealing with sexual assault, it is quite remarkable how the policy's choice of feminist buzzwords and the latest social justice lingo effectively masks the lack of any sexual-assault centered disciplinary procedures.

I am further troubled about the double standard often present in discussions of consent education vs. self defence. I agree that self-defence is not by a long shot an end-all solution nor is it necessarily helpful in real sexual assault contexts. However, if we know the typical context of sexual assault, how is it that we still praise the attempts to drill the vague ideas of "Ask, Listen, Respect" into people's head by plastering cute posters all over campus, or producing yet another consent video with an irrelevant analogy?

If we want to interrogate RAD, we also need to critically assess the 'good' initiatives on campus.

Take another example: while McGill's Becoming an Active Bystander workshop is considered to 'not [be] perfect but a step in the right direction,' RAD is seen as inherently bad. However, while researchers have observed a change in attitude in bystander prevention workshop partici-

pants, no study has, to my knowledge, found links between these workshops and long time behavioural change. What I'm trying to say is that, RAD has problems, but so does virtually every other anti-sexual assault strategy on campus. And we can't address one without the other.

I'd like to suggest that critics of RAD cut it some slack: if we want to interrogate RAD, we also need to critically assess the 'good' initiatives on campus - Rez Project, Becoming an Active Bystander Workshop, Policy Against Sexual Violence, Consent Week - that are almost always ignored by administration and educators. At the end of the day, the university strategically uses these methods to avoid liability and transparency. For example, McGill Athletics has consistently demonstrated its utter disregard of sexual violence in its community over the years. When I asked Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) Ollivier Dyens recently if there are any new concrete measures to respond to these issues at Athletics, he dodged my question by reminding me of McGill's supposed "firm commitment" to responding to sexual assault through its "widely supported Policy Against Sexual Violence."

An empirical investigation of the impact of all anti-sexual assault initiatives on behaviour

at McGill is long overdue. But I'm sure the university's senior administrators - most of whom are seasoned academics - know that very well. Moreover, I sincerely doubt that if the university believed RAD to be detrimental to its 'survivor-center' facade, it would hesitate, for even a second, to continue offering these workshops. We all know that the university only responds to money and PR crises. That's why it's on us, as activists - often with personal experience of trauma - to have the humility to listen to a variety of voices on anti-sexual assault initiatives and take constructive criticisms seriously.

This is especially important for student activists who are, thanks to their whiteness and respectability, in positions of power in the university due to their inclusion on various committees, panels, and advocacy groups. In the meantime, I'd rather know basic self-defence techniques while confronting assholes cutting line, being groped at a club, or being followed by men on the street, rather than putting #iloveconsent buttons on my backpack.

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Being an ally in the Trump era

Our allyship is flawed if we are not conscious of our privilege

ANONYMOUS
Commentary Writer

The U.S. Presidential Inauguration, the entire election process, and the discourses surrounding it, have proven that the vision of allyship understood and practiced by the supposed “friends” of the movement needs to change. Many marginalized people have pointed out that while they had hoped for the best before the election, they were not surprised by the outcome. I, an able-bodied, cisgender, upper middle class, mixed-race woman, along with many allies, was shocked at the election results. Upon further reflection, I realized that what I deemed surprising has actually been a historic reality for the United States.

After the Civil War, there was the Jim Crow era in which Black people were systematically and brutally murdered and abused by both the government and white citizens. The sixties and seventies brought an increased demand for freedom and equal treatment; this apparent progress was followed by the rise of New Conservatism and the “return to traditional values” under Reagan, which saw the government roll back its funding of social services, increasing social and economic vulnerability among impoverished and marginalized groups.

The U.S. has an established pattern of progress and regression and yet I, among many other Americans, was foolish enough to believe that having a Black president signalled the end of this back-and-forth. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and classism are alive and well in the United States and the consequence of Donald Trump’s election is this: we can no longer ignore this. When I say we, I speak about those who call ourselves allies. Those of us who could never imagine that anything we do might be perceived as racist, homophobic, sexist, transphobic, ableist, or otherwise discriminatory. We are supposedly the good guys – and we failed.

Post-election, both the left and the right asked for unity. Donald Trump and his supporters demanded unity because they had won, they had vanquished us, and we needed to fall in line. The left asked all of us who disagree with the administration to join them to fight: “Love Trumps Hate.” We promise. We can all unite. We can all agree that positivity and love are better than the hatred expressed by the Donald Trump campaign and his supporters. And yet, there is no discussion of concrete, real action to fight against

the inevitable furthering of inequalities and discrimination that will come out of the Trump administration. This discourse did not ask for us to reflect inwards to think about how allies perpetuate the systems of oppression against which we claim to fight. Some on the left asked that we wait to see what Trump would do as President before passing judgment or taking action. “Give him a chance,” they asked, ignoring the fact that undocumented immigrants are threatened with almost certain deportation, and that disabled folks who rely on the Affordable Care Act cannot afford to wait.

Allies want to relieve affected communities from the control of oppressive power dynamics, but our intentions are obscured by our lack of understanding on how we enact these power dynamics ourselves: how our own internalized sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and classism influence our activism. Our abstract understanding of privilege can be seen concretely in the way allies perform solidarity, be it the occupation of a space meant for marginalized groups or through offhand comments that are meant jokingly. We keep telling ourselves that our intentions are good, but we use this as an excuse not to recognise that we often engage in the systems of oppression that we seek to destroy.

There is no discussion of concrete, real action to fight against the inevitable furthering of inequalities and discrimination that will come out of the Trump administration.

The Women’s March on Washington, and many of its sister marches, is a prime example of how allyship has deviated from its purpose. On the one hand, it was fulfilling, cathartic even, to be surrounded by angry women demanding equality. But even the name reveals that this march was truly created for one group. Although in its dictionary definition, the term “woman” exclusive-



SOPHIA KOPYNA | Illustrator

ly denotes gender, it has been appropriated by the first and second wave feminist movements to primarily refer to white cisgender women. For example, suffragettes are applauded, and Susan B. Anthony’s tombstone covered in “I voted” stickers, although her justification for women’s right to vote centred on the superiority of white women over Black men: the right to vote was granted to Black, Asian, Indigenous, and Latinx women only later. Even today, the debate of women choosing whether to “lean in” or “opt out” of full time jobs often excludes lower-class women, often Black, Indigenous, and women of colour, who cannot afford such choices, as well as expressing heteronormative ideas about family structure.

The signs that many people made for the marches emphasized anatomy – “pussy grabs back” – which is exclusionary to trans and nonbinary folks by reducing the complexities of gender to a body part. The fact that the march’s manifesto was re-written to exclude language that supports sex workers is another example of how “woman” is used to mean something very specific, an implicit recognition of what the ‘respectable’ ‘norm’ is. While society has created and perpetuated the concept of the right ‘woman,’ these standards are upheld by powerful voices, even from within the feminist movement – allies at places like the Women’s March should be among the first dismantling these norms.

What is perhaps most significant about Donald Trump’s election is not that it proves that even the

most unqualified person can become president as long as they are a rich, heterosexual white male. Now is the time for us, again referring to allies, to look inwards and ask ourselves how we missed the signs. How we are able to spout our progressive ideals while simultaneously ignoring their erosion. Why we only seem to march when it is in our interest to do so? After the Women’s March on Washington, writer and activist Ijeoma Oluo posted on Facebook: “I cannot put into words how heartbreaking it is to see grown adults that I know and love decide only now to take to the streets. I’m glad you’re doing something. But...weren’t we worth it before? Why weren’t we reason enough? Where have you been? And where will you be once this doesn’t impact you directly anymore?”

A photo went viral of a Black woman holding a sign that said “Don’t Forget: White Women Voted For Trump” with three white women wearing “pussy hats” in the background. White women took this opportunity to say “not me,” as though this excuses the disproportionate damage that this administration will have on marginalized folks. What the photo and the above quote point to are not that the blame for Donald Trump’s election rest on white women’s shoulders but that he is symptomatic of larger problems that exist even within the left. Just because we believe that people deserve basic rights does not mean that we don’t perpetuate systems of oppression.

Now, we must act. Now is the time to unravel our privilege and

recognize that this is a never-ending process. Now is the time to listen, to ask questions, to read and consume media made by those who are marginalized. Palestinian Muslim-American activist Linda Sarsour said in her speech during the Women’s March on Washington that “if you want to know if you are going the right way, follow women of color.” Under the Trump administration, allyship must change from simply a way of affirming that you are not racist, sexist, classist, ableist, homophobic, or transphobic into a support system of all these different movements where everyone shows up. When the next Black Lives Matter protest happens, we show up. When the construction at Standing Rock continues, we show up. And if we are unable to be there, we draw attention to it. We call our representatives, the president even, to express our concern, disbelief, and disgust. We ask the press why they aren’t providing proportionate coverage. If we are unable to attend, we make sure the police know we are watching. If we do attend, and the police become violent, we will be in their way, using our privileged bodies to make them hesitate. We cannot wallow in disbelief at what has happened, but we can acknowledge our accomplishments while also consciously improving on the ways we understand and perform solidarity.

To contact the author, email commentary@mcgilldaily.com

Realities of prescription medication

A look into students' experiences with prescription medication



ALAINAH AAMIR
The Looking Glass

Content warning: mental illness, medication

Last Saturday afternoon, I posted a request on Facebook asking for volunteers to share their experiences with psychiatric medication. I was hesitant going into the process. This was research for my first column, and I was terrified that a lack of responses would lead to my article being generalized based on my own personal experiences. This was, frankly, the opposite of what happened.

After posting the request, I began tackling a bowl of fruit yogurt. By the time I was barely halfway through, a small pile of responses had already accumulated. People were chiming in with their own experiences with different kinds of medication, and their thoughts on the subject brought me one step closer to understanding the different ways in which the consumption of psychiatric medication impacts students' lives here at McGill.

My interest in this particular topic piqued toward the end of my first semester at university. A friend of mine was taking five milligrams of CipraleX (escitalopram), an antidepressant and anti-anxiety medicine, which is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. Her psychiatrist doubled her dosage because of the frequency of her panic attacks, but she reacted poorly to the change in her dose. She did not attend a single lecture or conference in her last week of the semester. She slept through each class because of the medication's sedative side effects, and her body's inability to adjust to the change led to panic attacks every morning and evening. Once, while showing me the panicked e-mails she had sent to various professors and TAs, she turned to me and said, "I keep thinking to myself, 'Nothing I'm feeling right now is real, it's all just a side effect.' How strange is that?"

I was terrified that a lack of responses would lead to my article being generalized based on my own personal experiences.

As I researched for and wrote this article, I continuously reminded myself that experiences of mental health and medication vary from individual to individual depending on a myriad of different factors, including an individual's socioeconomic background, or their cultures or families. I grit my teeth as memories of being a fifteen-year old girl in Lahore, Pakistan rush back to me — I would pretend my anxiety medication as something I took for migraines. There was a world inside me that nobody knew about. I'm going to attempt to explain some of these personal experiences as they were told to me. But even these barely scratch the surface of the millions of different interactions people across the world have with mental health and medication. The reality of prescription medication is that every reality is different, and these are only a small snapshot.

Her psychiatrist doubled her dosage because of the frequency of her panic attacks but she reacted poorly to the change in her dose. She did not attend a single lecture or conference in her last week of the semester.

An individual I talked to has been taking forty milligrams of Celexa, an SSRI closely related to CipraleX, for six years to treat her anxiety and depression. She initially experienced worsening depression as she increased her dosage to its current amount and described the way the symptoms of her depression were initially augmented with feelings of irritability, lethargy, and a loss of interest. However, as her body began to adjust to the medication, she began to show more interest in social activities. She also found that she was able to manage her anxiety better. The initial "numbing" effect of the medication led to a decrease in social activities, but in her words, it helped her come to the realization that

her disorders did not define her, and they could be managed with a little help.

Someone who takes CipraleX and Xanax as treatment for borderline personality disorder and depression explained that after she stopped feeling sleepy all the time, she was able to concentrate more on her studies and felt that she had become less dependent in her interpersonal relationships. "It didn't make me happy, but it made me less sad."

An individual who takes Zoloft (Sertraline), which is also an SSRI that helps her manage her generalized anxiety disorder, explained that she was unable to sleep before taking this medication. The fact that she was now getting enough sleep meant she was in a better position to commit herself to schoolwork. Something she said particularly stayed with me: "It really sucks having to work so much harder just to feel normal, so I certainly don't deserve to be told that taking medication for mental health is dangerous or weak. I'm happy that I want to live and I'm happy that I can enjoy life more. Medication isn't right for everyone, but it's certainly an option that everyone should have access to, without fear of judgment."

An individual who takes Prozac for social anxiety, panic attacks and trichotillomania said that when she first began taking this medication, she experienced diminished appetite and had trouble sleeping. It entirely stopped her trichotillomania, although it had no effect on her social anxiety. Still Prozac immensely improved some aspects of her life, and she said that if she had the chance to go back to when she first began taking the medication, she would have started with a sixty milligram dosage instead of ten milligrams, which had proven ineffective for her.

She turned to me and said "I keep telling myself, 'nothing I'm feeling right now is real, it's all just a side effect.' How strange is that?"

A close friend of mine also takes Celexa (escitalopram), a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor, for generalized anxiety disorder. He explained that when

he initially began taking the medication, he didn't feel any different, but his family felt the change almost as soon as he began taking it. He explained, "I found that every day just got a little bit easier to a point maybe two months in, when I sat back and thought, 'Wow, I wouldn't have had a day like this two months ago.' He also explained that both his academic and social life improved. He said, "You wouldn't ask a diabetic to stop taking their insulin." He mentioned to me that after the medication began to help him, he decreased his dosage and in less than a year, he may not be taking it at all. He left me with something that I've been thinking about ever since: "Medication can also be a transition, not an absolute thing for the rest of your life."

"It really sucks having to work so much harder just to feel normal, so I certainly don't deserve to be told that taking medication is dangerous or weak."

One of the individuals I interviewed takes Zoloft, Clonidine, Strattera (Atomoxetine) and Concerta (Methylphenidate) every day to treat his depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder, as well as his learning disability. He takes Ativan, a benzodiazepine, and Sublinox (Zolpidem ODT) as well, on a need basis, because they have addictive qualities. He explained that Concerta decreases his desire to eat and he often has to set reminders on his phone to eat and stay healthy. He found that he had developed a Vitamin D deficiency, which was a likely consequence of this medication. He also explained that Concerta and Strattera helped him focus in school, while Zoloft treated his social anxiety. He explained that since Ativan cannot be mixed with alcohol, there were instances where he could not go out drinking with his friends because of the possible repercussions. Despite this, he argued, medication had definitely enabled him to lead a happier and healthier lifestyle. This meant he was able to become more socially and academically involved.

When I was fifteen, I began

taking half a tablet of CipraleX everyday to treat my anxiety. When my palpitations became particularly difficult to tolerate, I would take Inderal, a kind of beta blocker that controls my palpitations, or sometimes Lexotanil. The winter I first began taking this medication, I was constantly hungry and sleepy, and I spoke to almost nobody but my immediate family. But I did not mind. If anything, it was a rejuvenating experience. I would nap constantly, which is something I had not been able to do without waking up with a panic attack since I was a little girl. I would indulge my increased appetite without a trace of guilt. As the weather began to change, I noticed that I was also becoming more sociable. I could study for tests and exams without continuously feeling dread, like a ton of bricks sitting on my chest, my heart hammering away. It would be an absolute lie if I were to say that taking this medication has 'cured' me. How can I be cured of something that is essentially a part of me?

It would be an absolute lie if I were to say that taking this medication has 'cured' me. How can I be cured of something that is essentially a part of me?

Personally, I do not think of my anxiety as a defining factor in my life; there are steps I can take to prevent it and lessen its effects. Of course, it is an inconvenience that I sure could live without, but it is not my defining characteristic. I'm lucky that I have access to mental health facilities, medication, a loving family, a caring set of friends, a Netflix account, and of course, so many wonderful people who have the strength to come forward and share their experiences with me, and a column where I can come back and reflect on the journey, enabling me to understand that each experience of mental illness and the medication one takes is entirely unique.

The Looking Glass is a column based on the author's reflections on mental health and first-year life on campus. To contact the author, email thelookingglass@mcgilldaily.com.

QUILTING AND CROSS STITCH

By **Lucie Lastiger**

CHRISTMAS SQUARE

Crafting has always been a family affair for me: my interest was sparked as a young teenager, and it was my mother who taught me how to crochet, quilt and embroider, while one of her close friends who taught me to knit. Browsing the local quilt store in my hometown with my mother, I spotted a pack of Christmas-themed squares. Although I had never made my own quilt before, my mother immediately offered to buy the squares for me. This was the first complete quilt I made – a Christmas lap quilt pieced painstakingly as I would sew, rip apart, and sew again the various squares and borders. My memories of quilting are embedded in the living room carpet, where I would lay out my pieces to see how they looked as an aesthetic whole. I'm sure you can still find bits of thread that have yet to be vacuumed out of that carpet, four or five years later. With my mother's guidance and advice, I completed this quilt, the first of many.



Photos by Kevin Tam



GEORGIA PEACHES

Pattern "In Praise of Peaches," published in "Celebrations" vol. 2, #4 in the summer of 1991

When I first saw this pattern amongst the dozens of embroidery books my mother keeps in storage, I was reminded of my childhood and driving cross country in a car packed with children and parents. We used to visit my grandparents in Georgia twice a year, and perhaps the strongest memories I associate with those trips (beyond the carsickness) was the fresh Georgia peaches we would eat in the summer. So ripe they'd fall apart in our mouths, we'd eat them raw all season, cook them into jam for the winter, and bake them into pies for dessert. For me, this is a small memory brought to life by the hours of work I put into this embroidery. That's one of the joys of cross stitch for me; you take the time to stitch every square, with love, passion, and patience, and the end result is more important, more beautiful, than any print you could get at the store. It has meaning, not only because of the design you chose yourself, but because of the time you dedicated to its making.

SUMMER SUMMER

One of the things I enjoy about crafting is that I can mark time by the projects I'm working on. When I worked on this piece – my first attempt at a large scale cross-stitch – it was summer, and I had just gotten a bike as a birthday gift in May. I found a photo of this piece online, and I immediately wanted to recreate it, so I scoured the Internet for a pattern of it. Finally, I found it (a rarity!), and started to stitch away. That summer, I was travelling eight hours a week to southern West Virginia for an internship. I would spend three days there in McDowell County, and four days in my hometown of Morgantown. The hot summer evenings in McDowell County were spent sweating over my work, watching Bravo, and swatting at mosquitoes and fleas (my hosts' dogs had fleas). And each weekend, when I stayed at my mother's house, I'd show her my progress. When it was done, over four months later, I couldn't have been prouder of my work. A brilliant blue bicycle with flowers bursting from the basket – there was nothing that could better commemorate my summer in West Virginia.



The body remembers

Women talk about healing from trauma through sports



NADIA BOACHIE | The McGill Daily

Content warning: mentions of sexual assault, eating disorders, and self-harm

When everything goes wrong in our life, the body may be the only domain left that we can still control, shape, and care for. Being grounded in our bodies can be the only reliable and consistent link to the world outside of our heads. The body will always be there to remind us that, someday, we can - or may, or will be - whole again. For the inaugural piece of the section, we have dedicated this space to people's understanding of the relationship between sports, their body, and trauma.

My primary motivation when I began running about six years ago was to lose weight. I did not realize that what I had considered a punishment had become a coping mechanism. For as long as I could remember I had participated in team sports, but my relationship with running was completely different. At first, the lack of rules, structure, and dependence had left me beyond frustrated. I blamed myself when it was difficult to run my target. Whenever I pushed a previous record, I was convinced that I wouldn't be able to reach it again. Though I had been running regularly since I took up the sport, I never talked about it much to others. I was embarrassed that the amount of effort I was putting in did not produce results that were impressive, and considered myself a failure. Running didn't help me with weight loss, but I continued running because it gave me the time I needed to calm down when I had kept too much in. Running became meditative. Whenever something happened that felt like change, the only response I knew was to run it out.

The abusive relationship I was in when I began running lasted a year and took the following year for me to process. Healing was, both literally and not, sprinting uphill, then jogging back down and sprinting up the same hill time and time again until I felt exhausted. It wasn't until recently that I began to feel consistency and control in my relationships with people, as well as in exercise. I had made a conscious effort not to compare myself to other runners. I avoided running in any events, assuming that I would feel insufficient at something I loved. Though I was intimidated to compete in races, it had become such a large part of my life that I seemingly had little to show for. Last summer I began training for my first race, a full marathon. My original worry of insufficiency proved unfounded: when the race came in September, I cut my goal by fourteen minutes, finishing about an hour faster than the average for women.

—Victoria*

*Last name has been omitted.

From gymnastics to rugby, I have been involved with sports and athletics my whole life. Weight training, on the other hand, has been a new endeavour in a very foreign space. The gym does not have an especially inviting atmosphere: you are either being ogled or judged, and if not, then you are ignored, which leads to people impeding on your space. When I step into the gym, I have to confront all of my self-hatred issues, my social anxiety, and men's tendency to make me feel even smaller than I already am. So it's weird that this is the space where I found myself.

When I was depressed and no longer reading books, making silly art collages, or discovering new music, the gym was there to make me feel happier. When someone asked me what I like to do in my free time, I was able to answer that question again. The gym gave me back a sense of purpose and accomplishment in my life when I was at my lowest. I had been drinking too much, my grades were suffering, I was alienating myself to fewer and fewer people. Being able to squat heavier, run farther, and do more pushups reminded me that I could achieve my goals. Lifting gave me the confidence that I needed when I couldn't even be bothered to shower.

I've learned that not all bodies have to look one way to be fit, and that going to the gym is not a punishment when you've eaten too much. Often physical exercise is recommended to people who have experienced trauma without considering their personal history or ability. While the gym has been a large part of my recovery process, it certainly isn't the answer for everyone, and that's okay.

For me, working out brings me peace in knowing that I am creating a body that cannot be pushed over. I now love eating more than ever, because I am fueling my body to be the best it can be. I won't lie and say that I'm completely in love with myself, or that there aren't days when I regret a meal, or that I didn't cower to some bro demanding my machine when the next one is clearly empty. I'm also not saying that it's solely thanks to the gym that I have recovered from my mental illnesses, because it isn't, and I have not. But it has definitely helped. The gym gave me back a sense of control after hitting setbacks and feeling useless. I'm still working on things, like my social anxiety and anger, but I know that improvement will come. I have my outlet; the gym is my anchor.

—Rhiana Warawa

As a child, I was playful and competitive. Sports were a way for me to have fun, see my friends and feel good about myself through my athletic achievements. Over time, however, the meaning of sports had completely changed for me.

My teenage years were difficult: I dealt with a lot of anxiety, panic attacks and, at some points, self-harm. The one activity that helped me cope with these issues was mostly running: it was a mental and physical escape from my problems, but a temporary one. It also triggered an eating disorder: I became obsessed with losing weight and making myself as small as possible, often starving myself in this process.

I started lifting after being sexually assaulted. I was angry at myself for not having resisted more, for not having been mentally and physically strong to protect myself. I felt like my body had betrayed me, and that it wasn't mine anymore. At this point, running wasn't enough because I didn't want to run away anymore: I wanted to fight, to break things and be violent.

Growing muscles has become my way of coping with what has happened to me. It is therapeutic to lift, to throw some weights around the gym and to work out so hard that I can hardly breathe. Lifting helps me cope permanently by allowing me to make my body mine again, to deal with my strong emotions.

I had been told not to lift too heavily in case I become 'manly,' 'too big,' or even 'bulky.' Deciding to gain strength is my way of controlling my body: no one will ever have a say in what I do with my body anymore. Lifting also led me to eat more, increase my confidence, control my anxiety and stop self-harming. When I lift, I feel unstoppable, powerful and extremely confident. I became a personal trainer in order to help other women discover the amazing empowerment you can get from lifting weights as a woman. It truly changed my life.

—Audrey Laurence



COURTESY OF AUDREY LAURENCE @strongwomanfitness



COURTESY OF JENNIFER LOCKERBY

Developing a noxious connection to my own body was years in the making, but the apex of this negative self-dialogue happened after a long, destructive relationship. It began with my partner of several years fetishizing and sexually assaulting me. I often had involuntary repulsion in intimate settings, relived past abusive experiences in successive nightmares and my self-worth hinged on being an 'exotic' half-Asian girl. As a result of a slew of mental after-effects, I became distant from my body.

Strength training played a decisive role in reestablishing control over myself after what ended up being a four-year ordeal. Unsurprisingly, my motivations for going to the gym in my first year began as an attempt to 'shape' myself into something I could like when looking in the mirror, something enviable in the distant future. However, I found early-on that I quite enjoyed teaching myself exercises, and effecting changes in my physique encouraged me to continue my routine. The gym eventually offered an emancipatory element: during the workout, I often concentrated on achieving a mind-to-muscle connection, which was a welcome break from other thoughts or responsibilities. Significantly, my perception of my body as 'damaged goods' shifted to one where I recognized my strengths as a woman and athlete instead.

Still, I can't tell you that I overcame physical and emotional trauma, nor can I prescribe strength-training as a miraculous, one-size-fits-all cure. Even though lifting weights opened up a transformative healing opportunity for me, the changes were slow, subtle, and largely indirect. My workout regimen did, however, help alter the direction of my self-dialogue toward being responsive to my physical and mental health.

—Jennifer Lockerby

Boxing is a fundamental way of existing in my body in a healthy way as I continue to recover from the trauma I've experienced. Sometimes, I relive traumatic memories as if they were happening in the moment. Other times, I feel completely disassociated from my body. I used to spend a significant amount of time feeling as if my body was not my own, that it reacted to things completely independent of me, and that I couldn't trust it. Sometimes I would completely shut down and feel weak and out of control. When I started boxing a year ago, I began to manage these symptoms and regain a sense of confidence and strength that had been lost to me.

The very act of punching something/someone is intensely cathartic for obvious reasons, but that's not the only reason I fell in love with the sport. Boxing is a sport that requires you to push yourself. You have to be in the moment, attentive to both yourself and the person you're fighting. Just about every muscle of your body is used, even if you don't realize it at the time. You have to believe that you are strong and capable, yet always be aware of the ways you need to improve. That feeling of strength that had been taken away from me when I was assaulted finally started to come back. That strength has been a fundamental part of my continued recovery. I am starting to feel that my body is no longer the enemy, that we're on the same side, and that finally my body is mine again.

—Nina Hermes

Can young blood rejuvenate?

A bloody good time for mice

BINGZHANG WU
Sci+Tech Writer

An intense fascination with blood has been ingrained in human culture since the dawn of civilization. Whether it be the Hungarian Countess Elizabeth Bathory, the prolific murderer of the late sixteenth century who bathed in her victims' blood, or the fictional Romanian Count Dracula, a notorious vampire who instills fear in people's hearts even to this day, diverse peoples and cultures share the belief in one unique property of blood: the ability for it to rejuvenate and heal. The belief in such powers of blood was originally founded on little more than superstition and pseudoscience, but in recent years, an increasing amount of research has been dedicated to the study of blood, especially that of younger individuals, and its potential to reverse age-related impairments and health risks.

In 2005, Irina Conboy and colleagues at University California Berkeley were some of the first researchers to study the antiaging effects of young blood in old mice. Through the use of heterochronic parabiotic pairing, the surgical joining of young and old mice so that blood is exchanged between the subjects, Conboy observed a notable degree of tissue regeneration and increased proliferation of progenitor cells in old mice. However, they also observed a decline in those same processes in young mice. These results do not conclude that young blood is therapeutic, but they do have implications that are far more important. "What we showed in 2005 was evidence that aging is reversible and is not set in stone," as reported by Berkeley News. "Under no circumstances were we saying that infusions of young blood into elderly is medicine."

However, the opinions of Conboy were not echoed by the greater populace. Media outlets fueled a young-blood-as-medicine narrative, which was reawakened in response to an abstract published by Alkahest, a global healthcare company aiming to produce plasma therapies, at the November 2016 Society for Neuroscience conference. The abstract stated that injecting blood plasma from 18-year-old humans into old, immunodeficient mice resulted in increased neurogenesis (growth and development of nervous tissue) and cognition in the mice.

Although the specifications of the research conducted by Alkahest have not yet been revealed, that the results they have found are similar to many other experiments which looked at old mice with young blood. These observations suggest that some aspects of aging may be reversible, based on a trial in Stanford University which aims to test on a very limited group of Alzheimer patients – but the results might be impossible to replicate in humans. "The therapeutic implications are profound if this mechanism holds true in people," said Matt Kaeberlein, a biologist at the University of Washington who studies anti-aging, commenting on similar papers about the de-aging mechanisms of blood in 2014. "[But that] is the million-dollar question here, and that may take some time to figure out."

What we showed in 2005 was evidence that aging is reversible and is not set in stone.

—Irina Conboy
Researcher at University California Berkeley

Despite these previous studies, the lack of evidence of young blood possessing therapeutic value did not dissuade companies from proceeding with exploring the therapeutic potential of this therapy while the public's interest is at its peak. Ambrosia, a relatively new start-up, aims to test the anti-aging effects of young blood on humans. In their clinical trial, 600 individuals over the age of 35 received a 1.5 L transfusion of blood from an individual under the age of 25, and the effects of the transfusion will be periodically monitored. The cost for participation in this trial is a hefty sum of \$8000, intended to cover a long list of fees including lab tests and administration fees.

These controversial and costly trials have dismayed many ethicists and researchers, who believe that the trials only exploit public interest and bring illegitimacy to the basic science. "There's just no clinical evidence [that the treatment will be beneficial], and you're basically abusing people's trust and the public excitement



JENNIFER GUAN | The McGill Daily

These controversial and costly trials have dismayed many ethicists and researchers, who believe that the trials only exploit public interest and bring illegitimacy to the basic science.

cess which exchanges the blood without the need to conjoin the mice, they were able to study only the effects of blood without the side-effects of organ sharing. Their results showed that

by comparing the young and old mice, "the inhibitory effects of old blood are more pronounced than the benefits of young."

In contrast with the observations of Alkahest, "under no circumstances did young blood improve brain neurogenesis in our experiments," said Conboy. "Old blood appears to have inhibitors of brain cell health and growth, which we need to identify and remove if we want to improve memory," as reported by Berkeley News. While Alkahest is currently working on isolating and synthetically manufacturing the proteins they believe are responsible for the rejuvenating abilities of young plasma, Conboy and her colleagues are counting to study how inhibition processes work in old blood and how to ultimately alter its potentially harmful effects.

There are still many questions to be asked and unknowns to be clarified, but eventually facts will separate from fiction and science will outshine superstition.

The Goddess

Deepa Mehta's *Water* through

INORI ROY
The McGill Daily

Content warning: sexual violence, misogyny
This review contains spoilers for Deepa Mehta's *Water*.

Since her entrance into Indian cinema in the nineties, Deepa Mehta's films have danced on the sharp edges of intersecting transnational feminist discourses. Mehta's reputation precedes her: she is known both in India and in the American film world for pushing the envelope, and for telling the stories no one else is willing to. Born in Amritsar, India, Mehta now lives and works in Toronto, where much of her work is produced. The move was likely in part due to the difficulties she has faced in India as a filmmaker, particularly hostility from religious and political opponents. They saw her work as a threat to the status quo and pre-existing foundations of tradition, and thus sought to bar it from viewership by Indian audiences.

On January 18, Bar Le Ritz PDB screened Deepa Mehta's *Water* as the 13th installment of FEMMES FEMMES, a series of monthly film screenings, which collect donations for local charities aiding women and children. The series is organized by local artists Anika Ahuja and Rebecca Ladds and aims "to highlight strong female presence in cinema," specifically focusing on the intersections of violence, sexuality, and mental health in feminist discourses.

[Mehta] is known both in India and in the American film world for pushing the envelope, and for telling the stories no one else is willing to.



RAHMA WIRYOMARTONO | The McGill Daily

The Elements Trilogy, Mehta's most notable and controversial work, began in 1996 with *Fire*, a film about two Indian women, sisters-in-law, who fall in love with one another while stuck in loveless marriages to cruel and uncaring men. *Earth*, the next in the trilogy, came out in 1998. It tells the story of a young girl growing up amidst the strife and violence of the 1947 partition of India, after the country gained freedom from the British. Both these films open up dialogues which Indian cultures and people often attempt to suppress – the former, regarding romantic relationships between women, and the cruelty of the heterosexual relationships in which they are trapped, and the latter, regarding the ongoing violence and ethno-religious disputes between Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Parsi people in India. Mehta holds a mirror up to Indian audiences and diasporic communities, forcing us to confront long-held prejudices we perpetuate through tacit approval. She calls Indian cultures out for their xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, and the perpetuation of other forms of systemic violence.

While she is critical, I have yet to see a diasporic Indian filmmaker who does justice to India's beauty in the way Deepa Mehta does. Raised in India and now part of the diaspora, I am moved by Mehta's depiction of my country: something about it stirs within me the call to return – a reminder that while home is half-way across the world, it is also deep inside my own bones, embodied through the experiences of my mother, and her mother before that, and her mother before that. I find myself simultaneously on the outside of the stories she tells and deep within them. While both the time and locale are outside of my lived experiences, Mehta's stories occur within a legacy of womanhood built on the experiences of being a woman in India, rooted in Indian cultures and traditions. There is some universality to these experiences, and a part of me would like to hope that Indian women are deeply bonded to one another through these experiences, forming a greater female nationhood. But as someone who no longer lives in India, and who has been alienated to a significant de-



TAYLOR MITCHELL | The McGill Daily

gree by its current political climate, I also find myself outside of this sisterhood. I wonder if Deepa Mehta feels the same way.

I have yet to see a diasporic Indian filmmaker who does justice to India's beauty in the way Deepa Mehta does.

Water (2005), the last in the Elements Trilogy, is no less controversial than its predecessors. Set in 1938 Varanasi, a city in northern India, *Water* unflinchingly depicts the experiences of Chuiya, an eight-year-old child bride who is widowed at the beginning of the film. As per a specific Hindu tradition, which is dictated in the sacred texts by Manu, "a virtuous wife is one who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste and reaches heaven though she has no son." The film follows Chuiya as she is sent to a widow's *ashram* – a concept I find difficult to translate into English, except to perhaps describe it as a communal living space for people bound together by some sort of religious or sub-cultural identity. This is where she meets Kalyani, a beautiful young widow who makes the very human mistake of falling in love with a man when she has been forbidden from doing so, and Shakuntala, a solemn older widow who takes on a disarmingly affectionate maternal role in Chuiya's life. The film is unapologetically focused on the development and exploration of these women, who exist in vastly different worlds despite occupying the same one.

In Kalyani's world, her beauty renders her hypervisible to the men around her, to the extent that she is coerced into prostitution by the matriarch of the *ashram*. These same perceptions of beauty render Shakuntala invisible. With her dark skin and short-cropped

hair, she is overlooked not only by men but also by the women of the *ashram* who take her for granted. With this invisibility comes a degree of agency: as Chuiya enters Shakuntala's life, the static nature of Shakuntala's life in the *ashram* is replaced by a sudden, desperate need to protect the innocence of a child. These maternal feelings enable Shakuntala to act boldly, in a way no other character in the film seems to be capable of.

But as someone who no longer lives in India, and has been alienated to a significant degree by its current political climate, I also find myself outside of this sisterhood. I wonder if Deepa Mehta feels the same way.

By contrast, Kalyani's actions often echo those of the men around her, both in love and in violence. Her decisions are influenced greatly by the man she is in love with, who she plans to leave the *ashram* for – this would have been an escape from the confines of widowhood, had he not let her down in the relationship's greatest moment of struggle. Her final act is committed in pain and humiliation, informed by her experiences with both her lover and the man she is coerced into having sex with for "the benefit of the *ashram*," according to its matriarch. Kalyani's fate is a terrible one, and the blame for that lies largely with the men who made it so – and yet, her

is half alive

the eyes of a diasporic Indian



RAHMA WIRYOMARTONO | The McGill Daily

character left me wishing for greater depth and exploration, especially in comparison to Shakuntala or Chuiya. Perhaps this is why the fates of Kalyani and Shakuntala diverge so greatly, despite their origins in the same space. Both women find themselves sacrificing everything for love, as the film comes to a close, but in vastly different ways.

Water is, at its core, a plea for the protection of innocence. Chuiya remains a child despite having been married off in childhood, and widowed not soon after. She remains a child even after being abandoned at the *ashram* by her parents, who had no other choice according to the dictates of archaic Hindu custom – which they could have chosen to ignore, at the risk of social ostracism. But they do not deviate from what is expected of them. Although the isolation of widows in India is nowhere near as commonly practiced as it once was, it is still acknowledged as a form of social death, in which the widow becomes a shade of her former self, not permitted to interact with others in the same ways she once used to and barely allowed to be herself to the same degree she once was. When Chuiya enters the *ashram* for the first time, she meets the wicked matriarch Madhumati (who, I might add, is a crucial illustration of the ways in which misogyny can be enacted by and through women themselves) who says in Hindi, “Our holy books say that women are a part of men when they are alive. When husbands die, God knows, half of a woman dies too. How can a half-dead woman feel pain?” To this, Chuiya replies simply, “Because she is half alive.”

At first, Chuiya makes everything around her softer, more open – especially Shakuntala and Kalyani. Kalyani becomes almost child-like when she’s around Chuiya, and this wistful optimism carries into her relationship with the young lawyer she falls in love with. There is hope, in that love, that tradition can be cast aside in favour of an unbreakable bond; that when she wishes to get re-married, which is a sin in widow *ashrams*, those who occupy positions of authority will step out of her way and allow her to do so. This love is so wrapped up in

its own passion that neither of the lovers foresee the violent and traumatic end – dictated by custom and tradition – that they are bound to meet. *Water* ends on a dark and painful note, reminding audiences that innocence, while resilient, is not unbreakable – especially when faced with the cruelties of misogynistic sexual violence, of which both Kalyani and Chuiya are made victims.

The wicked matriarch Madhumati [...] who says in Hindi, “[...] When husbands die [...] half of a woman dies too. How can a half-dead woman feel pain?” [...] Chuiya replies simply, “Because she is half alive.”

Midway through *Water*, when Shakuntala is working in service of the local pandit (holy man), he asks her, “Shakuntala devi [goddess], you’ve been working with such sacrifice and devotion for so many years. Has it brought you any closer to self-realization?” To this, she answers gravely, that “if self-realization means a detachment from worldly desires, then no.” He replies swiftly, “Despite this – never lose your faith. Never.” Thus, *Water* also asks a pivotal – yet often unspoken – question to Indian audiences: what are we supposed to do when our faith fails us? Religion is deeply intertwined with Indian tradition and cultural ideology, but the values present within this rich history often push to

the margins the most vulnerable members of Indian communities.

At surface level, Hindu tradition often associates womanhood with Godliness, but this is most often not embodied in the treatment of women by the state and its population. Rampant misogyny places burdens of labour (both emotional and physical) upon women, strips them of their agency and ability, and of course, enables the constant threat of rape culture for women of all ages. All of this has left me torn and confused over my feelings toward my own country. None of these problems are unique to India, and if I catch a non-Indian person criticising the prevalence of misogyny in India while not examining the same situation in their own nation, there will be hell to pay. However, they are problems that I have experienced and seen people I love experience them too. I have never been able to understand how a culture can claim to liken womanhood with Godliness, but still enact such violence upon these same women. To see these realities play out, and to not be able to do anything to help my sisters across the nation, breaks my heart.

The place of men in this film is an ambivalent one. Until the last two minutes of the film, I found myself not caring at all for the main male character in the film, Narayan – the young lawyer with whom Kalyani falls in love. One might describe him as a “soft boy,” in contemporary Internet slang – he plays the flute while sitting at the riverside waiting for his true love to arrive at nightfall, he has a picture of Mahatma Gandhi on his wall, and he engages in discourse on the liberation of India from the British and of the widows of India from their own archaic ideas. But where does this translate into action? Narayan’s presence in the film is a passive one – spurring only negative plot points, if anything – that until this point I have mentioned him a grand total of once. I would argue that his presence exists solely to bring the film to its conclusion, which turns the face of the audience toward the hope of a brighter future, one where Chuiya is rescued from the strife of a widow’s life.

The whole film is oriented toward this



yearning for something better. I find that this is true for many of the films coming out of India, both in the past and present. This sentiment began even before the independence of India from the British – there has always been a sense that the nation is collectively reaching out, trying desperately to grab hold of a future which promises them better lives. You can see it today in the migration of people from rural to urban India, and from urban India to other parts of the world, in search of a better life. You can see it echoed in stories of the independence movement against the British, in which the whole country was gripped by the fiery will to take back what the British had stolen from them. You can see it in the ways the current government implements unwise and irrational economic and political policy, with the misguided belief that they will lead the country to a better future. You can see it in the love and fervour with which much of the population believes in a God, many Gods, all taking different forms in the vast and diverse systems of belief found across the country.

If I catch a non-Indian person criticising the prevalence of misogyny in India while not examining the same situation in their own nation, there will be hell to pay.

And you can see it in the way Shakuntala turns her face up to the sunshine in the final moments of *Water*, watching the departing train that carries her beloved Chuiya away from the pain of the *ashram*, and into the bright hope of a liberated future.

TAYLOR MITCHELL | The McGill Daily

Reliving the awkward phase

Puberty takes centre stage at Tuesday Night Café's *Be Tween*

LOUIS SANGER
 Culture Writer

Tuesday Night Café Theatre Company's *Be Tween* opened January 18 at Morrice Hall. Written and directed by Concordia student Phoebe Fregoli, the show managed to be at once thoughtful, funny, and endearing. The original one-act tells the story of a group of teenagers stumbling through their feelings as the big dance approaches.

Yogurt tubes, playground basketball, and crushes are all central to the play, which draws most of its laughs from nostalgic references to awkward middle-school moments. Set transitions are accompanied by mid-2000s hits like *Beautiful Soul*, *Kiss Me Thru The Phone*, and *Low*. The play's exploitation of nostalgia may evoke more than funny and relatable moments for those who grew up in the mid-to-late 2000s. This tactic of creating an odd, asynchronous aesthetic made the play's cheesy moments, old-school slang, and almost-forgotten references into something familiar yet out-of-place.

Although fantastical, *Be Tween* is an endearing play. The relationships between the characters, exaggerated archetypes of middle-school teens, are simplified to saccharine

best-friendships and misinformed rivalries that are easily overcome. The dreamy manner in which the characters walk through their troubles is unrealistic. However, with the play's skillful acting and effective plot development, somehow it all works – as the audience becomes emotionally attached to the characters, their actions become charming and welcome.

This tactic of creating an odd [...] aesthetic made the play's cheesy moments, old-school slang, and almost-forgotten references into something familiar yet out of place.

Queer relationships are formed as the play concludes, ending it off on an optimistic note. Though normative ideas about sexuality have been and are still pervasive in most middle-school environments, the play sought to subtly dismantle these norms. None of the characters differentiated between heterosexual and queer relationships, creating a sense of unquestioned acceptance. Heteronormative attitudes are absent from not only the play, but the characters themselves.

Fregoli's script is strong, but the play benefits most from her directing. Middle-schoolers are often professional daydreamers, and the characters in *Be Tween* are of no exception. Their fantasies – a first kiss, for example – take the form of monologues and are acted out on stage. Bedtime rituals allow for further insight into the characters as they all go to bed on the stage next to each other, but in their own worlds. These are only a few of the moments where Fregoli's creative directing stood out.

Be Tween is a feat – a play that manages to cover important social issues, provide a happy escape, and bring out a shared history that many of McGill's current students will remember.



On the set of *Be Tween*.

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We must dismantle the racialization of violence

On Saturday January 21, millions of women, femmes, and allies across the world marched in support of women's rights and in opposition of the new Trump administration. While the Montreal Women's March included Indigenous elders and speakers of colour who emphasized intersectionality, the majority of attendees worldwide were white, cisgender women. The marches were praised for being "peaceful": supporters extolled the fact that there were no arrests of protesters at many of the marches, despite the size of the crowds. However, the fact that the marches were deemed "peaceful" speaks more to the fact that the march was populated mostly by cisgender white women, than the fact that they were non-violent. If the march were majority non-violent protesters of colour, there would likely have been arrests, based on a racialized conception of violence. The number of arrests was determined not by what happened at the protests, but who was at the protest.

Racialized people are assumed to be violent even before they act. Since colonialism, racialized people – particularly Black people – have been seen as 'dangerous,' 'irrational,' and 'inherently criminal.' Trans people and undocumented immigrants face similar stereotypes. The elevation of their position in society (which is often the result sought by protests) is a further departure from the current status quo than elevation of white women: for this reason, cis white bodies are seen as 'rational,' 'safe,' and 'civilized.' This allows white people to protest and

enact resistance without being perceived as violent, and without provoking state violence in response.

The state enacts violence against those who it deems to be violent. Protests which focus on the rights of queer, trans, intersex, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour are met with heavy police presence, as well as condemnation from the mainstream media. This is nothing new. Nonviolence by racialized people is always met with violence, especially during times of Black or Indigenous resistance in North America. For example, nonviolent Black Lives Matter protests are met with violent responses because Black bodies are read as inherently criminal and aggressive. The numbers of arrests at Black Lives Matter protests – and more generally the high incarceration rates of Black people – then only serve to perpetuate the stereotype that Black and racialized people are inherently criminal.

Before we brag that the Women's Marches had very few arrests because the marchers were "civil" and "peaceful," we must consider that the march was only considered peaceful – and treated as such by the police – because of the demographic. White women enjoy an enormous amount of protection from police violence, because whiteness is not read as inherently criminal. Ultimately, we must carefully consider which actions we deem to be violent, and whether that reading is a product of the actions of the people, or their privilege.

—The McGill Daily editorial board

ERRATUM

"Speech bubbles in the spotlight," January 23, Culture, page 17: a pullquote was misattributed to the author's latest article when, in fact, the quote was from a previous article written by the same author. The Daily regrets the error.

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Lies, half-truths, and absolutely no chill.

Weekly editor gives up, retires to Gerts

Even editors need a little break

PHLAR DABDOUB & NOCHILL CECILE
The McGill Weekly

Weekly editor Nochill Cecile has decided to permanently retire to Gerts amid the continued and utter failure of The System and under the crushing weight of uncertainty, regret and disappointment. “I feel like I’m one step closer to fully realizing my full bougie nihilist potential,” she said loudly to a crowd of disconcerted onlookers, who were hailed to the scene upon hearing Nochill snap aggressively and wondered if a game of pickup acapella was about to happen. “Why did you actually leave though?” I asked her, catching her in a private moment. “Honestly, I’ve had enough of dudes who major in regurgitating theories and misin-

terpreting the *Communist Manifesto*. Can all these turtlenecks just sit the fuck down and read past the ‘Introduction’ of *Capital*?” she confessed to me. “What would you like to drink?” the bartender asked me, “I’ll have a whiskey on the rocks. Cecile do you want anything else?” “Yes, I want a blanket acknowledgement that we need to engage in a revolution right now, but apparently that’s too much to ask for.”

Throughout her career at The Weekly, Nochill held all of her resentment towards the world inside of her. She was quiet. She was introspective. But that was 2016. Nochill came back in 2k17 with full force, bursting into the office in the sub-basement of the SHMU Building, declaring: “NEW YA, NEW MOI!!!!” She was brassy. She was assertive. She was done with

pseudo-intellectual ‘noise artist’ bros who threw around the word ‘neoliberal.’ When asked about this “new her,” she replied “I’m leaving old Cecile behind. New Cecile is louder, sassier, and just doesn’t give a shit. New Cecile will finally teach that entitled white boy in her conference about nuance! Her new mission is to have softboys fear her. I am done.”

However, Nochill confessed she wasn’t altogether done with the future: “I’m starting a brown girl only reading club where we get together and are able to share complexed, fully-formed, nuanced thoughts on socialist political theory, without being interrupted by a ‘well, actually...’ We also share receipts of softboys who have wronged us. There are chants. We hold hands. There are also free samosas.”

Fed up with no one believing that she’s sworn softboys off for good, and being in the mood to dish out some receipts, Nochill offered the crowd of friends and curious onlookers highlights from her short, yet expansive, encounters with that softboy who usually sits in the corner of your conference section, plays bass in a shoe-gaze band, wears a baseball cap backwards and is probably from Toronto (or Maine). “I live for drama,” she whispered, before she began recalling her worst encounters with these boys:

“Was Lenin a Marxist?”

“Did you know Beyonce perpetuates corporate feminism?”

“So, I’m an ecofeminist.”

“So, do you ferment your own Kombucha?”

“Reverse racism”

“I recently read *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde, have you heard of her?”

“Do you wanna go to a David Lynch documentary screening together?”

“I’m kind of over the New York scene”

“Hey sorry it’s not you, I’m just in a rough place right now and trying to figure my life out”

The brown girls only reading club is a far off venture. For now, Cecil Nochill will fill up her time with a Wes Anderson marathon (not The Darjeeling Limited though) and spend her time at home with her parents, who will guilt her about being a halfway activist because they went to one anti-Trump march in Toronto. She still keeps a small photograph of Marx in her wallet.

