*THE UBYSSEY'S* MAGAZINE 2022

# GOING VIRAL

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## CONTACT

**Editorial Office:**
NEST 2208
604.283.2023

**Business Office:**
NEST 2209
604.283.2024
The Nest 6133 University Blvd.
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

**Website**: ubyssey.ca
**Twitter**: @ubyssey
**Instagram**: @ubyssey


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# editor's note

*MARCH 15, 2022*

Well, it's been a year — not a good one or a bad one, just a plain ol' year.

This year, we've been a part of history. We've signed into Zoom meetings and begrudgingly turned on cameras, careful not to have our pajamas in frame. We've played drinking games to public health orders (don't take a shot everytime they say "unprecedented times" if you want to survive) and ironically — eh, and maybe unironically — tried our hand at TikTok fame. We've posted about our quarantine quirks and, like a salacious secret told at a slumber party, we've whispered about our plans for when "everything goes back to normal."

We've come back to campus, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, only to be shunned into another quarantine. We've been welcomed back — this time wearier, careful to savour every awkwardly-masked smile, every monotonous lecture and every caffeine-fueled study session with friends.

When we began our academic journey, we aimed to step into our futures. Instead, sometimes it feels like we can only look back at the moments we lost to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But we've done none of it alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intermingled in our communities for the past two years — like an awkward third wheel on our dates with destiny. Not only have we adjusted to a new normal but we've cultivated one right here on campus. Our communities are each unique — these special, sacred things — and they aren't going anywhere, no matter how unprecedented the future may seem.

This year we've gone viral with endless COVID-19 tests, Zoom calls and TikTok scrolls. From student to professor to TA to friend, we've all faced these unprecedented times together. Though this new normal may be a part of our lives for some time, the connections that we have forged and strengthened in going viral will stay with us forever.

— PALOMA GREEN, TIANNE JENSEN-DESJARDINS & SOPHIA RUSSO

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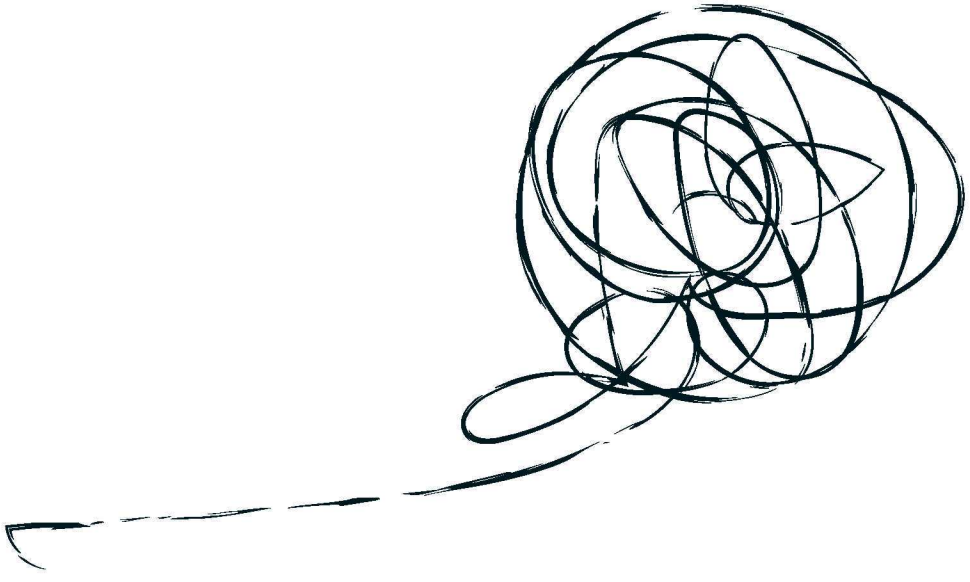
# In the pursuit of Art

Vidisha Khaitan

COVID-19 had side effects on all of us, even on those who weren't infected. These side effects included loneliness, procrastination, lethargy and general gloom. What better medium for catharsis than art? Students, faculty and staff at UBC strove to overcome the pandemic's dullness with artistic pursuits ranging from dance to crocheting.

"[Dance] would be something I look forward to — the only thing I might look forward to — just to release what I was feeling," said Maggie Reid, president of UBC Dance Horizons. "During the pandemic, when everyone [has] bottled up their feelings, you're able to express different things through the path of your movement, the tension in your muscles ... It's a great way to destress with the release of endorphins."



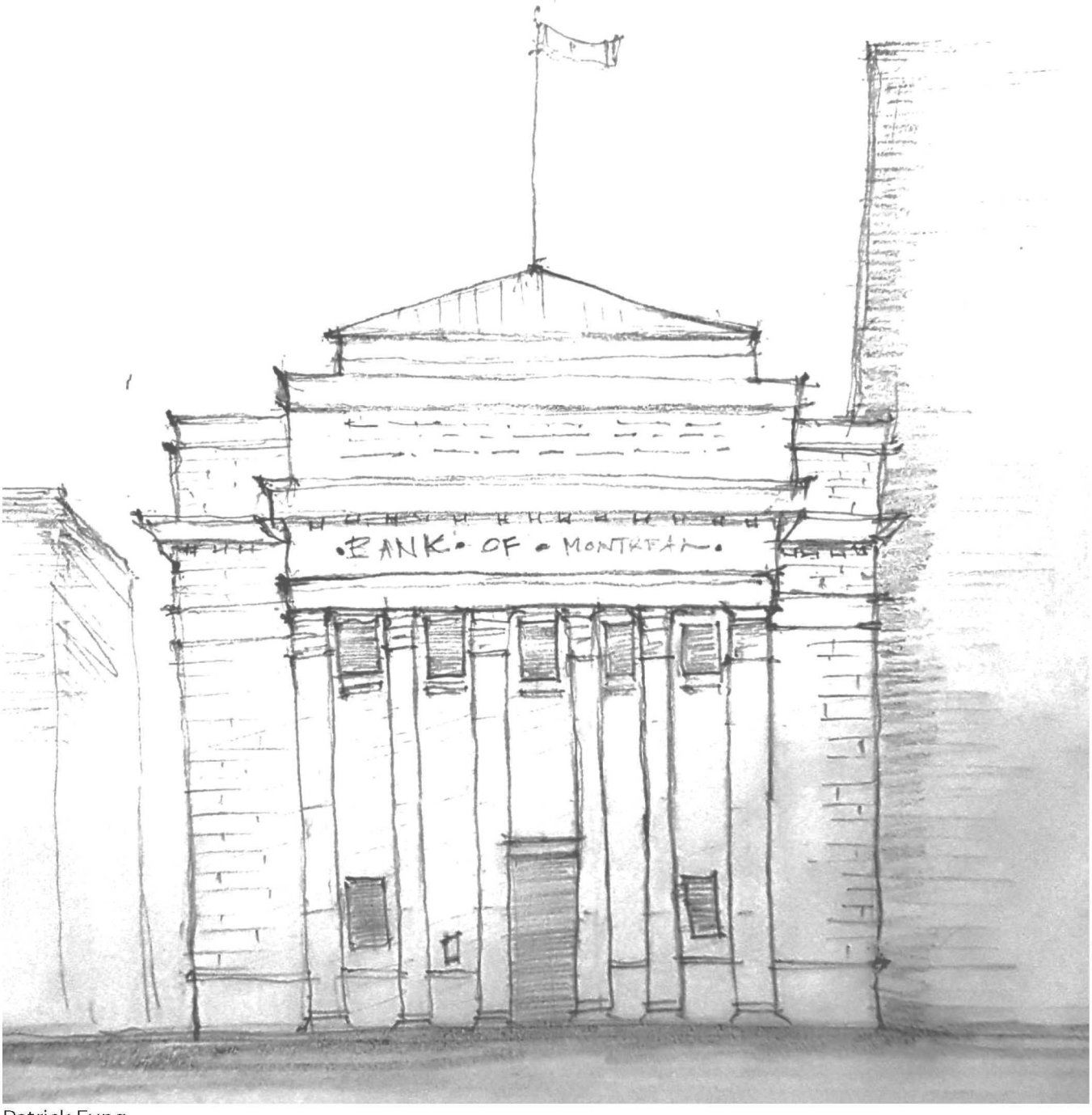
The magic of movement is something dance has in common with knitting. Sauder lecturer Dr. Zorana Svedic started a knitting and crocheting club in her campus residence, St. John's College, before the pandemic. Focusing on solving every stitch helps Svedic forget about problems that aren't tangled in her yarn at that very moment. "It's a good problem to have when you're trying to be creative and solve problems in [a] creative way and that can be expressed through poetry,

through painting," she said. "Any of these creative endeavours shift your brain to start thinking about those problems, the good problems, from some of the mundane things or even very stressful things that we deal with in the real life."

With the move back to in-person learning, the club continues to social distance and wear masks. "It still brings the people that want to do stuff together and I think we're going to go as long as we can," said Svedic.

Another resident of St. John's College who finds comfort in art is master's of architecture student Patrick Fung. He has been an active part of Svedic's knitting club since the first lockdown. Fung also plays the piano, but his main escape from the pandemic has been drawing.

"With art, it's really your chance to do something that's meaningful to you and something you can focus on and completely lose track of time ... it's strictly your time," said Fung. ●




Patrick Fung

Helena Miranda Ventosa

# In my absence

Lucy Luo

I have considered leaving, the silence of my absence
drifts away with the wind
What would they say to me? Would they sing for me? Send me away with the words of a love song so I know I have lived.

I see in their eyes childish chatters, clambering up my banyan tree in foolish fantasies
Mother tree's long beards were sweeping and generous
I see green roses, raw from their youth
Stumbling to reach, and prick.
Then at the seawall, trying. Crashing waves lick and lap at the jagged stone walls, rounding its edges as the sun dipped towards the glimmering sea
A silence was lost to the wind,
And I shrank in.
Within the city limits I hardened into a sojourner adrift
The bright tones of a sax, of some tunes sad and sweet
That I didn't know it complete.
The water crested and fell
As the dull drumming of the sea
echoed in the wind.

But I found myself in the mountains, guided by the mountaintop winds and I thought I had wings. I learned to breathe again through the alpine meadow speckled with purple buds and the icy blue lake awash with smooth silt and that's when
You found me

You found me. You found me you found me you found me
Within the city's cacophony, the cawing and clattering of crows, cradled in scars you found me

You cracked open my shell. Lights streamed in,
Rendering me overwhelmed with greed and gratitude

And when I get sucked back in I'll remember your touch and the stardust melody
And won't you miss me?

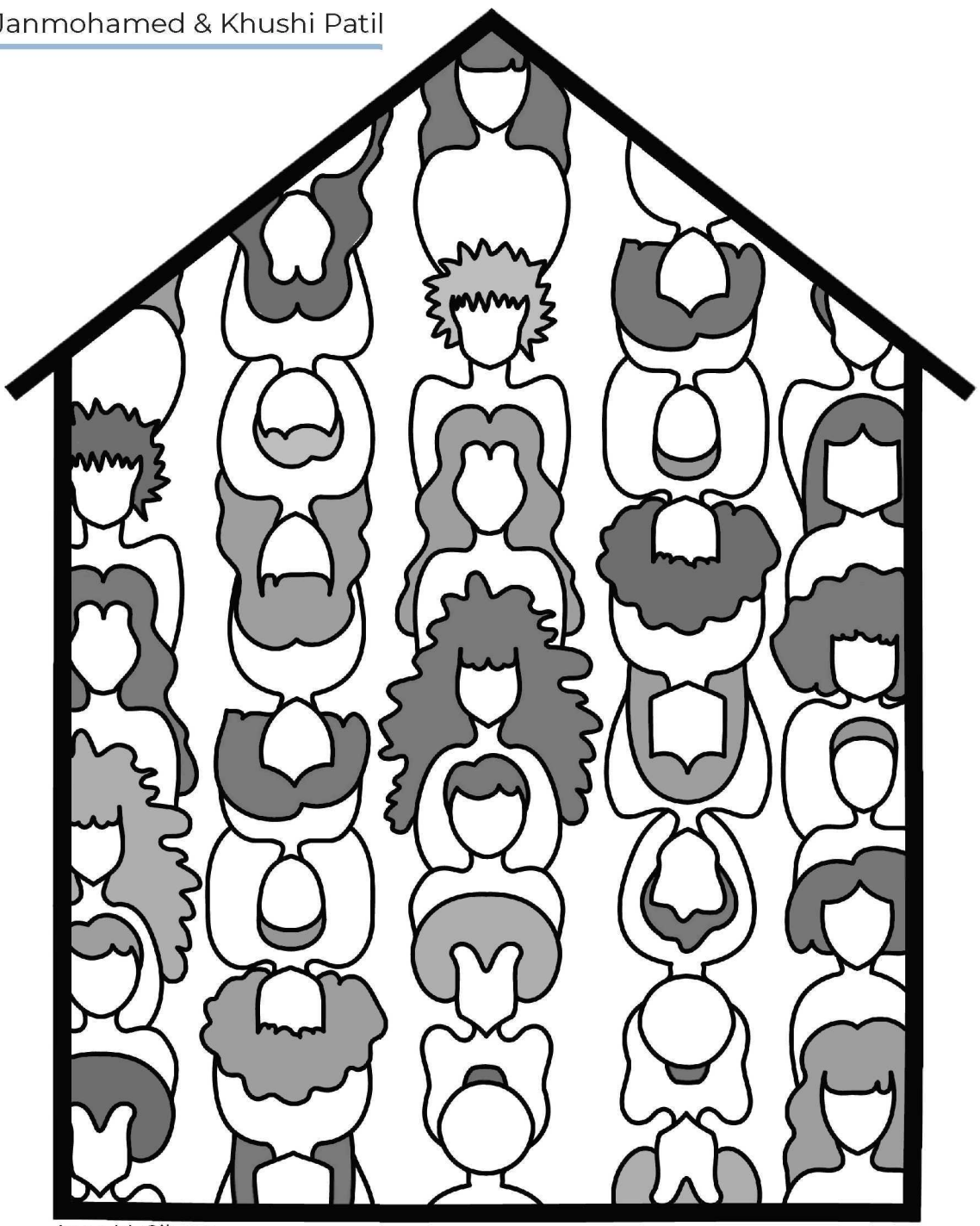
In my heart (the neurons firing forming beliefs) I know.
I know, darling.
Not only will they miss me they will sing and dance and cheer for me, scream on mountain tops till their lungs drop and oh may their souls be free
So if I do leave — ere I do leave — it's up to me to have tried truly every eve
And my breathing will sing with the wind ●

Helena Miranda Ventosa

# Home sweet home

## *How residence advisors create community during the pandemic*

Iman Janmohamed & Khushi Patil



Anna M. Gibson

Residence advisor Quinn's favourite memory from the 2021/22 school year was when she found community through Pokémon.

"One of my residents is a big Pokémon fan," said Quinn. "He plays [with] Pokémon cards incessantly and he wants anyone to battle with and I, wouldn't you know it, have two boxes of Pokémon cards, as well."

Quinn's name has been changed to protect her job security.

Quinn and her resident talked about the cards for hours and ended up having a Pokémon battle over the weekend. "It was just the sweetest little interaction," she said.

After a year of online programming, summer 2021 saw the return of in-person events in student residences. While the pandemic forced residence advisors (RA) to reimagine community building, concerns around UBC's approach to COVID-19 safety in residences led them to unionize after years of discussion.

According to Quinn, issues in first-year residences last year were a significant driver for unionization after it had been a "little whisper that was happening in the RA community" for a long time.

"RAs were not feeling safe in their job and in their community, which is ironic because that's our job. Our job is to make sure our community feels safe but RAs in first year [residences] couldn't even feel safe," Jeff, an RA whose name was changed to protect their job security, told The Ubyssey in April 2021 when RAs unionized.

While the exact terms of the collective agreement are still under discussion, Quinn said she'd like to see the university work with the RAs.

"I think it would be very productive for us to work together to make this space as best as it can be .... if they could just listen to us a little bit more," said Quinn.

## Housing community

Working as a residence advisor through the onset of the pandemic, being limited to online programming was difficult for Quinn when trying to build a close-knit community.

"It was truly unfortunate, because people want to find a community, especially in first year [residence] ... you go to a dining hall and you see everyone there and it feels weird to not know everyone who's at the dining hall with you," said Quinn.

"Not a lot of people want to be on Zoom when they don't have to be," she added. "Sometimes there's [just] silence and it feels so unnatural and an unnatural way to make a community."

RAs organized a variety of virtual and hybrid events over the past year, like distanced painting or cooking nights where students participated from their own rooms, as well as community-driven activities such as virtual art exhibitions and online gaming through Discord servers.

"Even at the most restrictive points of the pandemic ... our residence advisors have been champions of community building and their creativity to deliver exceptional virtual events has been second to none," said Andrew Quenneville, associate director of Residence Life. He noted that the RAs sought to fulfill their goal of building community, just as much during the COVID-19 pandemic as they did before.

In The Ubyssey's housing experience survey, students indicated that they would like to see more events in residence. According to one student who lives in Ponderosa Commons, online events weren't as engaging as in-person events.

The first in-person event Quinn held in September had a record-high attendance of 53 students.

"[Students] just wanted to be there," Quinn said, attributing residents' eagerness to the lack of opportunity to socialize and meet people in the online year. "I gave them a bunch of snacks and ... a stack of board games in the middle and then everyone just did their thing and I was like, 'This is so sweet.'"

Quenneville praised the adaptability of the residence advisors.

"Public health orders have come and gone and those often come with waves of transmission [but] so do the ways that residence advisors deliver events, whether those be in-person or virtually," said Quenneville.

## Waves of transmission

On top of community building, an RA's job also includes ensuring COVID-19 safety within student residence — but the scope of their responsibilities has changed since the start of the pandemic.

"The first six months to a year, things were changing, [and] I definitely had critiques of how UBC could be better," said Jesse, a residence advisor whose name has been changed to protect

their job security.

The uncertainty around COVID-19 rules in student residences was one of the drivers of the unionization effort. Lack of communication about fall 2020 residence closures and support in enforcing COVID-19 measures were also factors.

Following updates to the RA job requirements, their role includes the review and approval of function responsibility forms, which residents must complete if they want to host an event in their dorm. Optionally, RAs can remind students to wear masks and follow UBC Housing's COVID-19 policy in residence.

Student Housing and Community Services' (SHCS) COVID-19 policy follows UBC's own, as well as guidance from the Public Health Office. Students also must be fully vaccinated to live in student residence.

"I feel a lot more comfortable now than I have in the past," said Jesse.

Quenneville said that RAs take an "educational approach" when ensuring that students are wearing masks in residence areas.

"The outcomes of the RA position [have] not changed," said Quenneville, "but rather how RAs meet those outcomes has evolved with the evolving public health orders and direction of the university."

Besides educational signage, "any resident or staff [member] may politely remind another resident when it appears our rules are not being followed," wrote Andrew Parr, associate vice-president of SHCS in a statement to *The Ubyssey*.

Several students asked for more enforcement of COVID-19 rules, including mask wearing in residences, in *The Ubyssey*'s housing experience survey.

Quinn said that not having to enforce mask-wearing anymore was a "great relief of pressure for a lot of RAs." Before this academic year, RAs had to document students not wearing masks — something she described as "pedantic."

"It just makes us the masking police and it's not really part of our role," said Quinn. "Plus it sort of makes residents feel more hostile towards you."

Parr said that there is "an element of community responsibility" when it comes to enforcing COVID-19 procedures, like mask wearing, in student residence.

"We have asked, and continue to ask, that residents consider others in their actions," said Parr. "To date, we are very pleased with the fact that the vast majority of residents do in fact follow the guidelines as directed."

According to Quenneville, RAs are also not responsible for deciding if a student has to self-isolate. Residents who test positive for COVID-19 are required to contact their Residence Life Manager for further steps. The course of action is dependent on the type of unit a resident lives in.

If a student lives in a residence with shared environments or has roommates, they are moved to a designated self-isolation unit either on- or off-campus depending on the number of units available. Students may also choose to isolate off-campus as a personal preference.

Due to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation, changes in policy are communicated to RAs through email and their weekly team meetings, while residents are updated via email.

"For the most part, everyone follows these restrictions that UBC has put on their residences really well and I appreciate that a lot," said Quinn.

Survey respondents also asked for more transparency regarding changes in COVID-19 policy, rapid testing and potential exposures in student residences.

"UBC is not in a position to communicate about potential exposures in residence as that is the responsibility of [the] Vancouver Coastal Health [VCH] Authority as doing so would be contrary to Public Health's guidance," said Parr. "We will assist [VCH] when requested."

SHCS is taking an "educational and reasonable approach" to enforcement of COVID-19 policy in residence, said Parr.

"While no system is perfect, we are confident Student Housing is taking reasonable steps to support public health guidelines and Student Housing administration has the tools it requires to deal with exceptional circumstances," said Parr.

While the future remains unclear, Quinn is looking forward to hosting more in-person events.

"It's hard to make really deep, good connections online, I've found .... I really appreciate and value all of those little moments [with residents] from last term." ●

Isabella Falsetti

# Fostering my community

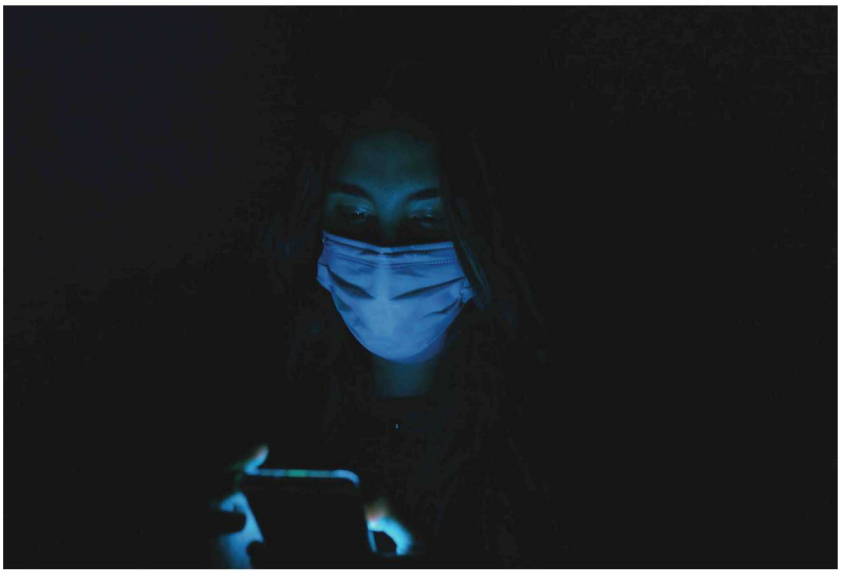
Manya Malhotra

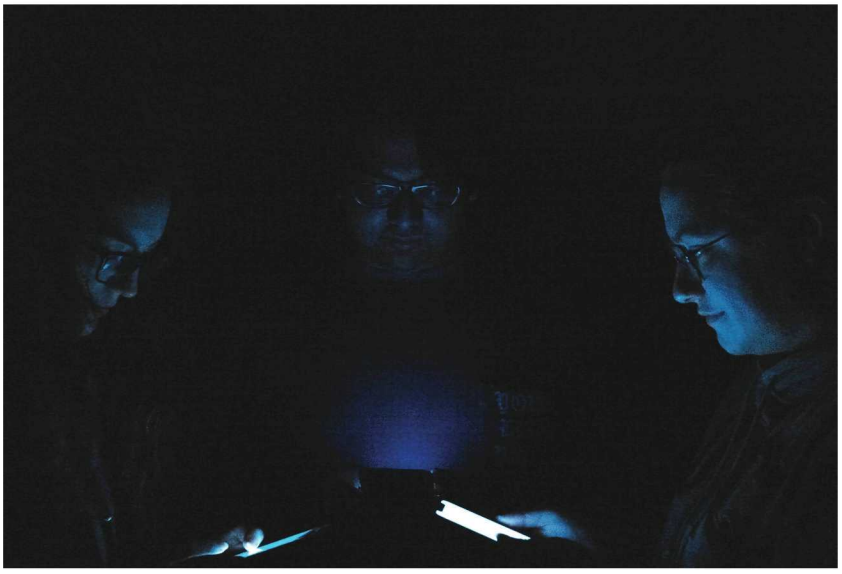
I had always thought of myself as the kind of person who would sit in front of the television, gorging myself on a sugary treat, rather than embracing the big bad world outside. But the pandemic proved me wrong. It made me realize how much human interaction invigorated me; it added a sprinkle of positivity to my day.

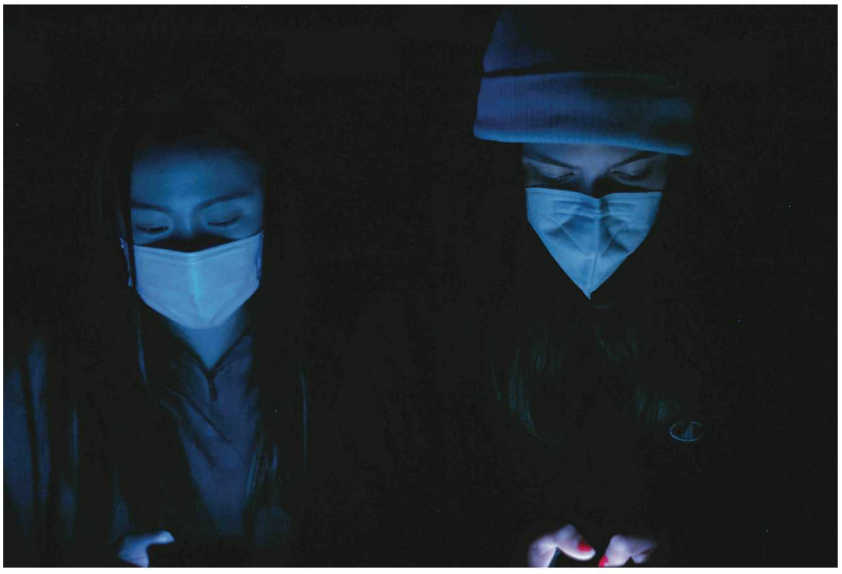
At the start of the pandemic, I found solace in attending classes in my pajamas and trying my hand at baking. The sudden stillness that had enveloped me was comforting and — dare I say — blissful.

But this lifestyle started to get to me. I was tired of my mundane routine. My dining table, however homey and decorated, couldn't replace a lavish restaurant table serving ambience and delectable food. My laptop screen had nothing on the large projector I once worshipped almost every weekend as I caught the latest film releases, surrounded by a bustling crowd of fans. Most importantly, greeting little pop-up Zoom boxes was nowhere close to the experience of in-person interactions.

During my mini social exile, an unfamiliar emptiness completely engulfed me. It was not just a lack of social interaction that I was missing, but a sense of purpose. I had always been academically-inclined at school and while I took part in the occasional ath-







Isabella Falsetti

letic event, I never felt truly at home there. I always yearned to be more involved, to form a sense of community under the big umbrella of high school life. I always buried that sense of loss that I felt, and it took a pandemic for that feeling to finally catch up with me.

As the pandemic progressed, the lack of social interaction and sense of belonging to a community made me restless, increasingly pessimistic and prone to rather elaborate temper tantrums. At this time of rampant emotionality and helplessness, I needed in-person interaction the most. Alas, I was starved of the one thing with the power to pull me out of my stupor and infuse me with the optimism I was desperately searching for.

Finally, the day had arrived — one everyone else in my life had been eagerly waiting for — and I jetted off to Vancouver to attend university. The city, with its vast sea and endless mountains, seemed out of my reach. The first couple days were a blur of nerves and disorientation. I felt like an outsider, a total stranger in a place where everyone around me was having the time of their lives.

I had forgotten how to conduct myself during social interactions. No matter how much that meek voice inside my head prodded me on, I was too afraid to launch myself into a social situation. After a few days of resisting all forms of in-person interaction, that now-familiar feeling of loneliness started to creep back into my chest. I realized that I couldn't allow myself to go down that rabbit hole that the last few months of being cooped up at home had mentally transported me to.

I needed to relearn how to take initiative and the perfect opportunity presented itself in the form of a college party. The connections I made there

helped me branch out and provided me with the impetus needed to navigate the campus social scene. Soon my weekdays consisted of productive studying and weekends were a colourful blur of food, laughter and excitement.

Despite this stimulating blend of interactions, there was still that sense of not being involved enough with my university. I wished to be a part of something bigger than myself. Like most incoming university students desperate to find their place at UBC, I was pointed toward clubs.

I decided to cultivate my love for writing by joining *The Ubyssey*. Initially, the fear of not being a strong- or experienced-enough writer prevented me from volunteering, but a chance to review a Christmas movie — putting my love for film critique to use — proved to be my ideal starting point in the world of journalism.

Through working with *The Ubyssey*, I was afforded the opportunity to dabble with different styles of writing, covering and reviewing events while occasionally diving into more creative, personal pieces. It both surprised and amazed me that professors and experts in the fields of arts and culture took the time to give insightful answers to questions I had prepared. As someone who had always lacked confidence, the experience was immensely validating. Being exposed to different backgrounds and opinions, broadened my horizons. Professional interactions do not always have to be nerve-wracking — they can also be enjoyable and unexpectedly comforting.

Attending events organized by *The Ubyssey*, volunteering to be a representative on Imagine Day and being teased by my friends for always talking about the newspaper, all contributed to me being able to find a community there. Sure, I complain about being saddled with work for the newspaper and how it stresses me out, but working creatively with people with differing perspectives is one of the most satisfying feelings I have experienced in a long time.

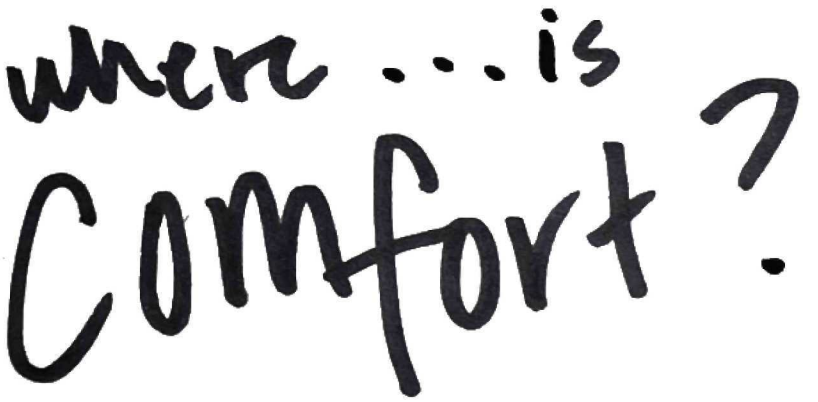
As a film buff, my next stop was the Film Society. During weekly workshops, we worked on scripts, built characters and prepared to create our very own film. The experience was a refreshing change from sitting behind my desk, consumed in the process of writing articles and scrolling through endless readings. I got hands-on experience in all things film as I bonded with the other members over mutual hatred for our roommates and deciding which drink from Starbucks's holiday collection was the best.

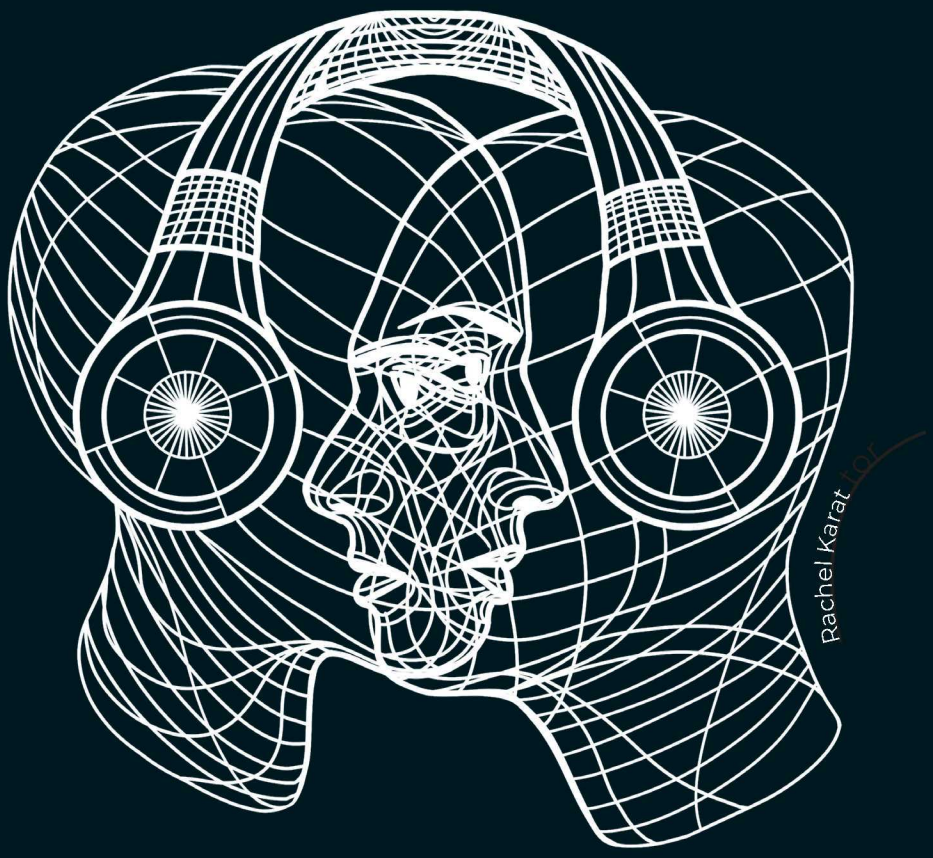
Eventually, though, schedules came into conflict and the film never got made. Had I not been a part of a community elsewhere, perhaps I would have been more disappointed with how things panned out with the Film Society. Still, there was something beautiful about the feeling I got while collaborating with people I didn't really know, but who shared my interests and goals. That realization made me want to get more involved in the coming term and rediscover the sense of community I found there.

Community to me is a sense of belonging, a place where I collaborate with others to contribute to something bigger than myself, something that binds me to UBC. Being reminded of what you have achieved and what more you want to achieve by working with these people can act as the guiding light that reignites your sense of purpose. It certainly did for me.

As an international student struggling for acceptance and a sense of comfort, I found my safe haven in the Film Society and *The Ubyssey*. The seemingly-insurmountable stresses and anxieties that my days bring with them magically vanish in the presence of those lovely people whose company I have come to look forward to.

I went into university expecting long-lasting friendships and personal connections to be the most important part of the campus experience. While I haven't fostered many of those connections within the clubs I have been involved with, the unexpected sense of belonging I have experienced here is what I will cherish the most from my time at UBC. ●






# Leveling up friendships through online gaming

Alexa Elizondo Gil

UBC Esports Association's Discord server doubled in users during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discord, a messaging platform popular with gamers, is organized into smaller, focused groups called servers and was used throughout the pandemic to foster community.

"[The rise in Discord members] came about, I think, because of people's desire to be connected with others who they go to university with through games, when they can't otherwise do it," said Zach McKay, co-president of the UBC Esports Association.

McKay's observation is not unique. Due to the virtual nature of gaming, it became a natural solution for many craving social connection during the pandemic. According to one 2021 Sage article, 71 per cent of respondents reported that their gaming habits increased early in the COVID-19 pandemic, and a majority of gamers reported that playing video games had a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Stock for a variety of games skyrocketed when the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, with *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* dominating the top of *Business Insider's* top 20 best-selling games during the first months of the pandemic. *Among Us* was the most Google-searched game of 2020 and spread across Twitch, YouTube and other platforms.

Research has also revealed the ben-

efits of gaming as a means to create community. One Danish study demonstrated that playing video games helped teens foster a social life and provided a "legitimate social space for maintaining friendships and/or coping with boredom."

## Vent with (s)us

According to McKay, there is often a misconception that the Esports Association is mostly for competitive players. *Among Us* helped counter that misconception.

"We were able to really invite new people who are more casual with video games, or don't have the same background, to build a community and make new friends," said McKay.

Kyle van Winkoop, a third-year computer engineering student and president of the UBC Game Development Club, emphasized that "the more cooperative a game is, the better it is at creating communities, and the more competitive it is, the worse." In the case of *Among Us*, players cooperate to find out who the impostor is.

In addition to *Among Us*, there are many cooperative games.
Grace Bu, a second-year integrated sciences student and external relations director for the UBC Esports Assocation, got into online gaming just as the pandemic started. Having previously only played co-op games like *Mario Kart* and *MapleStory*, Bu turned to gaming as a way to maintain contact with her friends. The club's Discord server helped her create a "genuine, authentic connection" with other members.

"Gaming was so interactive, and there was so much teamwork involved ... it was definitely a way for me to feel that connection and make it stronger during a time when everything was so difficult to maintain," said Bu.

## Pals and poggers

After the pandemic hit, Twitch, a streaming platform for gaming and various types of content, saw an 83 per cent increase in viewership.

"It's a way for you to have a shared experience .... I can just mention a funny moment that happened on a Twitch stream, and [regular club members] were also watching that too, so now you suddenly have a connection with that person," said McKay.

Bu also started watching Twitch streamers during the pandemic. Watching the streamers' group chemistry when they played with each other gave her a sense of comfort whenever she felt isolated.

"There's a community of people out there with similar interests and they're all having fun, and it definitely made me happier."

Not only did gaming help Bu connect with new people, it also helped her maintain the friendships she made in her biology class once UBC returned to in-person classes for the fall semester in 2021.

"It was one of those groups where I was like, 'Oh, they're really fun to talk to, but I don't really know how to become friends with them outside of this class'... but then one of them mentioned *League [of Legends]* and I was like, 'Oh, no way, you play *League*?'" said Bu.

## All fun in games

Online gaming is a way to bring people together, both on- and offline. As large amounts of people began pouring into the online gaming scene during the pandemic, van Winkoop witnessed firsthand how some games were not prepared for this sudden influx.

"Servers started to slow down and glitch because there were way too many people all of a sudden; even with very big popular games like *Apex Legends* that seemed to happen," said van Winkoop.

Despite server setbacks, gaming still provided a way for people to maintain and create connections during a period of isolation. This community meant a lot to Bu, especially during her first year online, and positively impacted the lives of many others amidst a pandemic.

"I was able to find friends during a time when friends were very, very hard to come by .... After going back online, I was able to hop back into that community and maintain relationships that I had made while we were offline," said Bu. ●

# packing list.

Iman Janmohamed

i'm moving

a loofah
jeans
my laptop
cough medicine (just in case)

for months and months
my life was a symphony of 'you're moving'
i was moving.

empty walls stare back at me
sickly
barren

photos of my friends and family
dances, games, concerts, trips
posters from interests past,
left peeling paint next to pen strokes marking height

the opera house filled with my friends, my family sang louder
as the days grew closer and closer

is moving worth it? what if i hate the city? what if i'm homesick?

socks
18 years, up and gone
my grad hoodie
18 years, packed into one suitcase

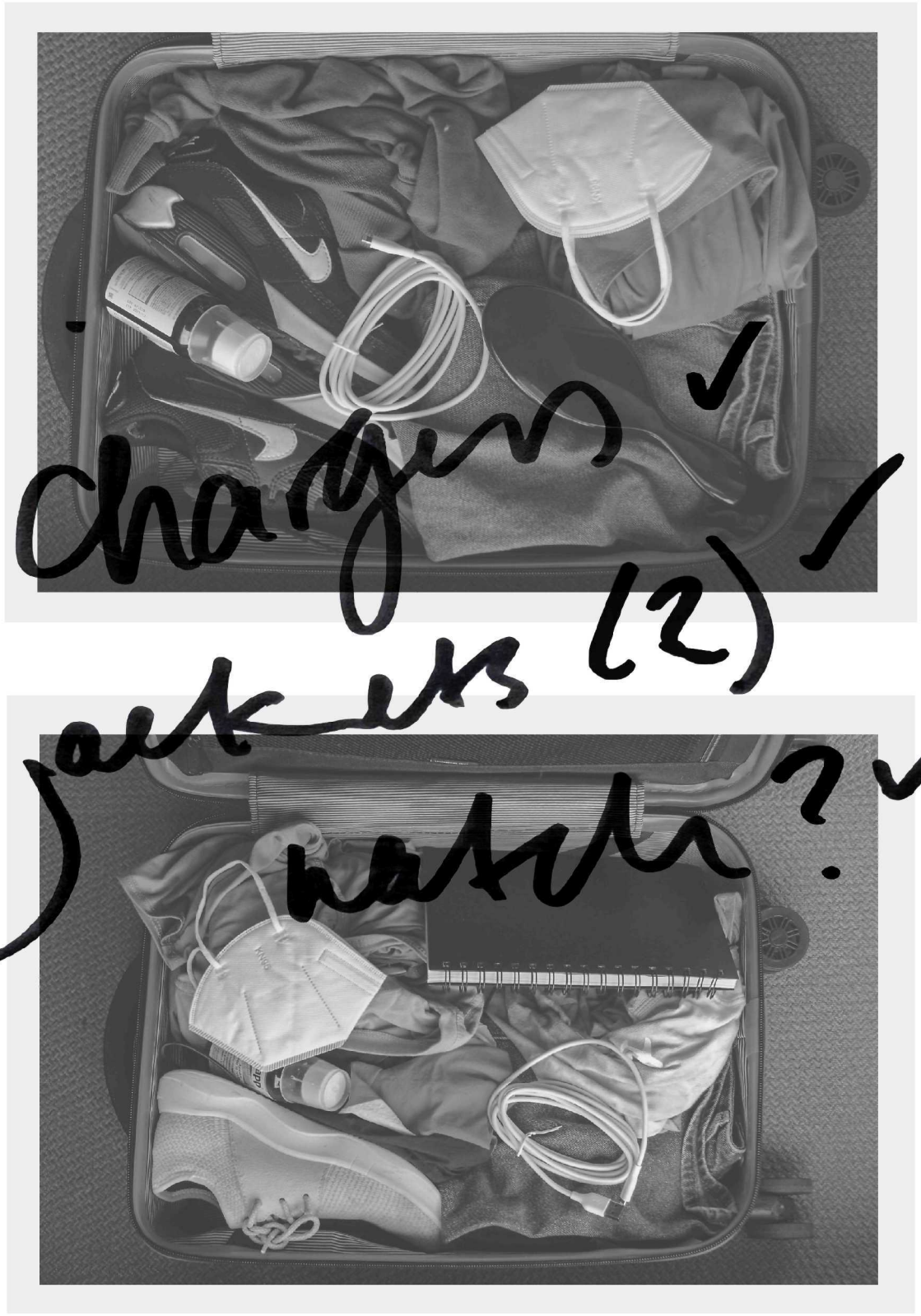
masks.
masks.
how many masks do i need?

shoes, my watch, maybe a jacket or two.
'you're moving'

the white and blue house
footprints mark then and
now
now.

what else am i missing?
what will i miss?

oh and my charger, too! ●




Emma Martin-Rousselle

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# ‘Road scholars’

## *The winding journey of contract faculty*

Cecilia Lee

“I’m going to try very hard to help you all learn this term,” my professor projected confidently to a classroom of nearly 200 students in the spring term of 2019.

“Especially because I don’t have tenure yet,” he joked.

The punchline wasn’t a jab at tenured faculty, but a remark on how job insecurity constantly necessitated his best performance. Non-tenured faculty have been struggling with a lack of job security and low pay since before the pandemic, but COVID-19 has presented additional challenges.

At UBC, the term “contract faculty” refers to sessional lecturers, who are hired for less than twelve months at a time, or lecturers, who can have reappointment terms from one to five years.

“What [academics] are finding is that there are fewer and fewer stable jobs and tenure jobs,” said Dr. Sarika Bose, chair of the UBC Faculty Association (UBCFA) contract faculty committee and lecturer in the department of English.

According to Bose, job precarity creates financial burdens, which makes it difficult for contract faculty to plan for the future and impacts their ability to make choices about their families.

A 2018 report from the Canadian Association of University Teachers found that full-time, full-year teaching positions dropped by 10 per cent between 2005 and 2015, while part-time, part-year teaching positions rose by 79 per cent in the same time period. Additionally, 48 per cent of contract faculty were working in another job, and 16 per cent had contracts with multiple universities between 2016 to 2017.

“Sometimes what happens is people get jobs on different campuses. There’s a kind of term for this, the ‘road scholars,’” said Bose. “... They’re cobbling together a living by teaching at all these different places.”

The minimum starting sessional lecturer salary is currently around $23,900, per the collective agreement between UBC and the UBCFA, though the pay scale varies widely by faculty and seniority. In comparison, the minimum annual salary for full-time lecturers is $64,872.

Despite the longer appointment terms and higher salaries, lecturer positions also come with increased workloads, including departmental or institutional service requirements on top of teaching responsibilities.

Dr. Benjamin Cheung, a lecturer in the department of psychology, has taught seven courses every year since becoming full-time faculty. In Cheung’s experience, lecturers often take on a larger teaching workload than tenure-track faculty.

“As a lecturer, my annual student capacity is [close] to seven to eight hundred across twelve months,” said Cheung. “... Interacting with that many students over the course of even just one term is a lot.”

Over the pandemic, Cheung struggled with his increased email workload in particular because students who needed to participate asynchronously were emailing him more frequently with questions.

“We care about the work that we do, we care about teaching, we care about the students. And we want to spend a lot of time on what we do. But I think ... I have to recognize that I can’t do that all the time,” said Cheung.

“I think there’s something to be said about being on a contract and

wanting to make sure that you're showing your best all the time. Otherwise, you don't know what happens with your next contract, you know?"

During the pandemic, Cheung and several other lecturers created a group chat to support one another throughout the transition to online teaching.

"We just stay in touch with each other ... or support each other," said Cheung. "Especially during the switch to online teaching, and there was so much uncertainty ... it was just nice to have a chat group of other similarly minded colleagues in the same position as you to sort of bounce ideas off of."

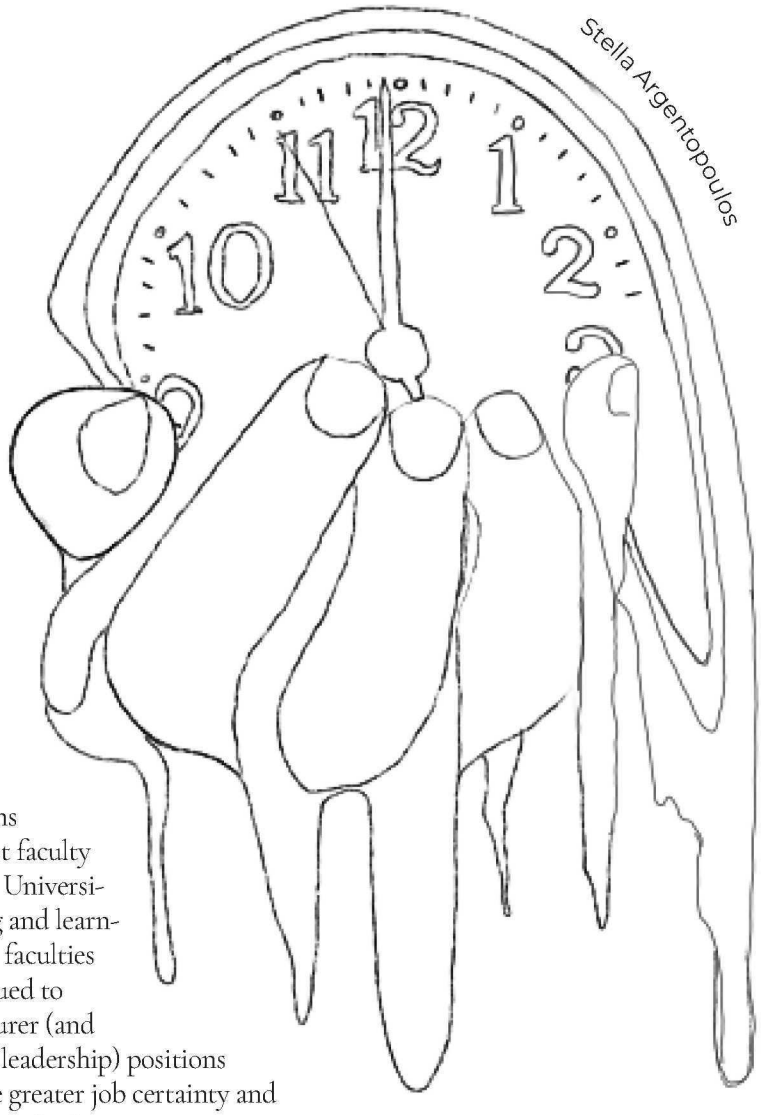
Job insecurity also has steep implications for academic freedom, which affords faculty members the right to teach and research controversial subject matter for academic purposes.

"For some people, the lack of job security means they don't have very much academic freedom to teach what they feel is important ... and they don't necessarily feel they have the freedom to evaluate students honestly. So that, at the end of the day, means knowledge is lost," Bose said.

According to data from the UBC Planning and Institutional Research Office (PAIR), the number of lecturers has increased from 301 in 2016 to 341 in 2020, while the number of sessional lecturers has decreased from 404 to 368 in the same time frame.

After the equivalent of three years of full-time service, sessional lectures are eligible for continuing status which comes with improved job security. However, lecturers are not currently eligible for an equivalent title.

In an email to *The Ubyssey*, Matthew Ramsey, director of university affairs at UBC Media Relations, wrote that "while UBC values the important contributions that contract faculty make to the University's teaching and learning mission, faculties have continued to [create] lecturer (and educational leadership) positions that provide greater job certainty and enhanced benefits."



Stella Argentopoulos

UBC declined to comment on whether or not greater job security would be established for lecturers that are continually reappointed, as they are entering collective bargaining with the UBCFA.

On a national scale, academic dependence on contract faculty has shown no sign of decline in the last decade. A 2018 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that reliance on contract faculty in Canadian universities "appears to [be] structural, rather than a temporary response" and has remained steadily on a slight incline during the decade leading up to the report.

An alternative approach, as seen in some provincial colleges such as Vancouver Community College, has faculty "regularized" after two years of service, allowing them to have a permanent position.

"That takes away all of those other worries in your life, [you] can really focus on enjoying teaching your students," said Bose.

"Having a professor who is not [impacted] by all these other worries, but is able to focus on [students] and is able to focus on the knowledge that they're making themselves can only be a great gift. That can only make things better for everybody." ●

Helena Miranda Ventosa

# Safety first — but for whom? Rethinking community safety at UBC

Nathan Bawaan & Elif Kayali

In late November 1997, more than 1,500 protestors gathered to protest the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference taking place on campus. They were protesting human rights violations from member states, particularly the Suharto government in Indonesia, and the growth of neoliberalism.

As protestors broke through security barriers, RCMP and Vancouver Police Department (VPD) officers responded with what CBC called "liberal doses of pepper spray" and mass arrests. Footage from the protest shows one officer hitting a news camera while spraying a group of protesters.

The actions of the RCMP and Vancouver police quickly drew backlash from the public and the university.

In a follow-up inquiry, Judge Ted Hughes found that law enforcement officers acted inappropriately and "in some cases, inconsistent with respect for the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Charter of Rights [and Freedoms]."

Almost 25 years later, the RCMP still has a detachment along Wesbrook Mall as UBC's Vancouver campus falls outside of the VPD's jurisdiction.

While there has not been an altercation of the same magnitude between law enforcement officers and students since APEC, recent incidents of racial discrimination involving Campus Security and the RCMP and police brutality against BIPOC individuals — including incidents at UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanagan in summer 2020 — have sparked a conversation around what a safe community means.

## UBC security's past

In June 2020, as protests spread across North America in response to racial discrimination at the hands of the police, UBC was reckoning with its own issues of police brutality against racialized people.

At UBC Vancouver, a Black grad student said that Campus Security wouldn't let him into Buchanan Tower based on his race. A week and a half

Helena Miranda Ventosa

later, an Asian undergraduate student at UBC Okanagan filed a lawsuit against the RCMP after a January 2020 incident where an officer dragged her out of her room during a wellness check.

Following the incident at UBC Vancouver involving Campus Security, President Santa Ono called for an external review of the agency.

"Sometimes it's really important to have an entity with an arm's length from the institution take a look at what has happened," Ono said when asked about the university's motivation behind the June 2020 review.

The review — conducted by Toronto law firm Rubin Thomlinson LLP — called on Campus Security to revise its security-related policies, implement diversity training and increase the diversity of its force. Campus Security was also asked to improve its standard operating procedures and its staff's connection with campus culture.

It also pointed out a lack of clarity around the nature of the relationship between Campus Security and the RCMP. The latter was left out of the external review because UBC does not have control over the RCMP.

Ali Mojdehi, director of Campus Security, wrote in a statement to *The Ubyssey* that Campus Security is committed to "creating a respectful environment, and a culture of diversity, safety and security" for the UBC community.

"This foundational commitment includes continually working with RCMP to improve services for our community. Campus Security is in frequent contact with RCMP and will continue to be so," Mojdehi wrote.

He added that as Campus Security is not a "law enforcement or investigative body," having a relationship with the RCMP is "imperative."

Still, first-year arts student Julianna Yue said the UBC community has aspects that don't feel safe, especially when it comes to being a student of colour on campus. Yue is Chinese and Cree-Métis.

One aspect of this issue is the presence of certain speakers on campus. Yue wrote a response to UBC Students for Freedom of Expression's event from November 2021 where Lauren Southern — a far-right pundit who has questioned the genocide of Indigenous peoples at residential schools — was set to speak. The event was later cancelled by UBC.

Another aspect is law enforcement. While Yue hasn't had a negative experience with Campus Security herself, she is concerned about the RCMP's presence on campus.

"[It's] concerning in a sense because of the RCMP's involvement with residential school enforcement, with the execution of Louis Riel and definitely all the stuff with BIPOC lives mattering and all these threats that aren't the same for white people," said Yue.

In a statement to *The Ubyssey*, Chuck Lan, staff sergeant of the University RCMP, wrote that he and University RCMP Operations Officer Eric Baskette work on a committee with UBC's vice-presidents, executive directors and Equity and Inclusion Office to develop an information packet for students and to create an outline of values for police awareness.

There is also a memorandum of understanding committee with the RCMP, Campus Security, the VP students and the AMS and GSS presidents that "provides a voice for students through their representatives," according to Lan.

"I am very proud of our efforts put forth during my time as the Detachment commander of [the] University Detachment, and welcome any feedback that could assist students, staff or the public," he wrote.

## The mental cost of 'security'

While both the RCMP and Campus Security emphasize their efforts to keep the campus community safe, their presence has a direct impact on some people's mental health and sense of safety.

Dr. Sara Ghebremusse, an assistant professor at the Allard School of Law, said she actively avoids certain spaces on campus to avoid encountering law enforcement and security officers.

"I don't want to paint all of them with a bad brush, but we know directly, the negative encounters that Black people have had with Campus Security and police in different spaces," she said.

According to Ghebremusse, societies have placed cultural significance on having a physical police presence in our communities. But for her, safety depends on her "sense of trust" in others on campus.

"I need to know that other people on campus can value the presence of those on campus who look like me. Racial profiling wouldn't take place if [people] viewed racialized people [and] Indigenous people as equals and not others," said Ghebremusse.

Ghebremusse added that the presence of Campus Security is harming students in ways that may seem "innocuous."

"No student should ever have to feel that just because of the way they look their presence on campus is questioned," Ghebremusse said.

According to Ghebremusse, there seems to be a "disconnect" between the campus community's understanding of student wellbeing and the resources available for students in distress, such as Campus Security and the RCMP.

"When you [are] trying to do something that is for the wellbeing of students ... any institution that has the ability to use force should not be called in to do that," Ghebremusse said.

Feeling unsafe on campus can lead to students experiencing serious health problems, according to Dr. Taslim Alani-Verjee, a clinical psychologist registered in Ontario.

"When we think about BIPOC students ... You can't trust the very institution that is apparently created to keep you safe but you also can't trust your community to be safe," said Alani-Verjee.

"That reminder that our safety is not as important or that we continue to be perceived as the threat, that is immensely costly on our mental health."

"Our attention is going to naturally be divided, and it's going to affect our self-worth, it's going to affect our sense of ability to see success," she added.

## Dimensions of safety

There are many dimensions to community safety besides one individual feeling unsafe.

Mars Johnson, a first-year arts student, was leaving the Pride Collective lounge on the second floor of the Nest one night late last year when he saw two law enforcement officers removing an unhoused person.

"They had some blankets and a coffee ... they weren't bothering anyone. They were just sitting there," he recalled.

He said the two officers didn't use violence when asking the individual to leave the Nest, but he still felt uneasy with the exchange since it wasn't near the building's closing hours.

"It definitely rubbed me the wrong way to see someone get asked to leave an open building just because they were seemingly unhoused," he added.

While Johnson said the officers looked like Vancouver Police Department (VPD) officers or the RCMP, *The Ubyssey* could not confirm as the VPD, RCMP and Campus Security required the exact date and time to check their records.

Matthew Ramsey, director of university affairs at UBC Media Relations, said in a statement to *The Ubyssey* that Campus Security regularly responds to calls concerning "unhoused individuals on campus who may be sleeping in private areas."

"[Campus Security] also responds to calls from community members when there may be concerns around behavioural issues with unhoused individuals. In those instances, they will attend and assess the situation, which may result in the individual being asked to leave campus," Ramsey said.

According to Ramsey, if the situation necessitates "police involvement" then Campus Security may call the RCMP to assist. If required, they might give first aid or call an ambulance and provide information on the nearest shelters.

University RCMP did not comment on its policy around unhoused people on campus.

Johnson thinks alternative methods like ensuring community members having access to "food, housing, safe consumption [sites] for drugs" are better for creating trust in communities than calling the RCMP or Campus Security.

Johnson said he and others in the Pride Collective — particularly those who are BIPOC — don't feel safe when law enforcement officers are around.

"I almost never see them around. [But] when I do, there's not really a good atmosphere ... And I've just heard from a lot of people that it's not the most comfortable [for them]."

## What safety can look like in the future

Twenty-five years after the APEC protest, and almost two years since the reported racial profiling incidents, the path to creating a safer campus remains uncertain.

For Johnson, education is key — whether that be anti-racism training for Campus Security or providing information on the housing crisis and the vulnerability of unhoused people to the broader campus community.

Ghebremusse said UBC needs to be more proactive in addressing concerns of marginalized people around issues of policing. She added that while the 2020 external review was helpful in addressing the shortcomings of Campus Security's operations, it was not comprehensive.

"I think it was kind of a missed opportunity to really rethink security and sort of its presence on campus and what it's really for," she said.

"It really doesn't institutionally get at the heart of the ways in which meaningful reform could take place."

Reimagining community safety not only requires improving Campus Security's operations, but also confronting privilege and power at UBC.

Ghebremusse said tackling the intersection of racial and socioeconomic privilege at UBC is a "serious undertaking" and would need to be a "top down reforming [and] reconceptualization" of the university's operations.

Yue agreed, noting that those with privilege need to understand the impact Campus Security and the RCMP have on BIPOC people.

"I think a positive step would [also] be having Campus Security working maybe with some of the Elders from the Longhouse and just having open facilitation," she added.

"But I know that's also challenging because most people don't feel safe around figures of authority [given] past issues and intergenerational trauma," said Yue.

Alani-Verjee said that although it's more common to think about safety as an "intervention," that's only "one version of community functioning."

"When we can all be accountable and we can have an ethic of consent and mutual respect, we don't need those same kinds of interventions or protocols," Alani-Verjee said.

"We're talking about common goals and common desires for one another to be well and protected and having the opportunity to thrive." ●

*Julianna Yue wrote for* The Ubyssey's *"NDNs at UBC" column twice in 2021.*

Emma Martin-Rousselle

# Chronically online

Tina Yong

During the pandemic, faced with a world that was coming undone and leaders who seemed to only accelerate its undoing, I found myself amid an personal revolution.

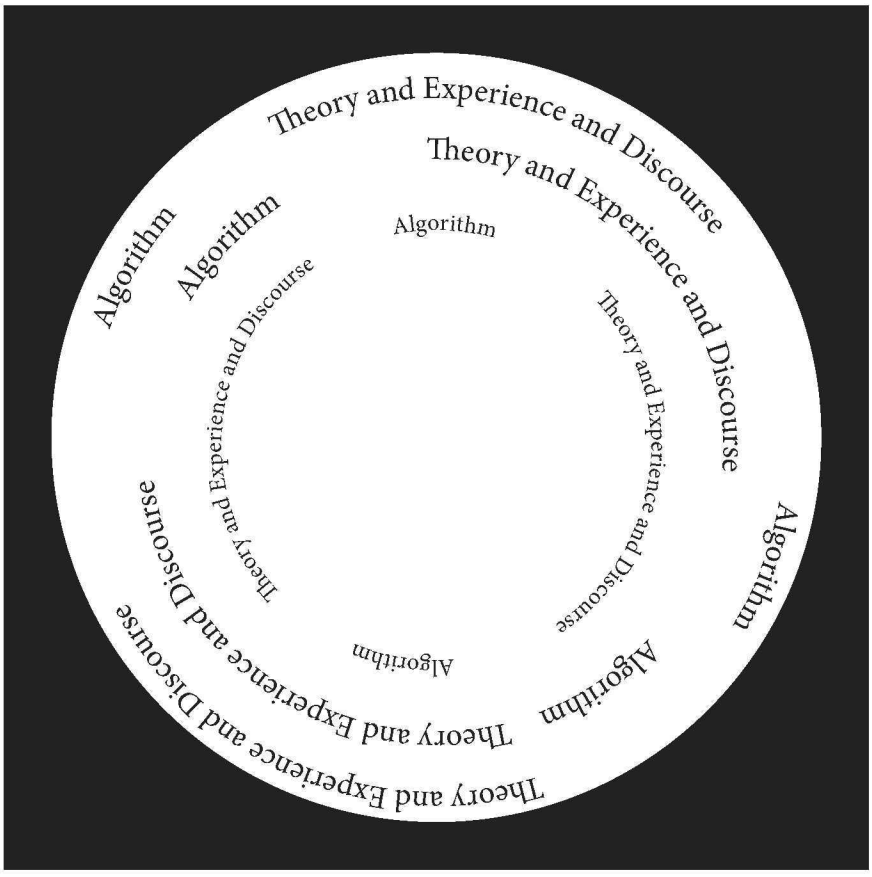
I learned about mutual aid and dissociative feminism, all while unlearning the myth that working hard will guarantee you a spot on the top rung of the socioeconomic ladder, or that doing so is the ultimate form of female empowerment. One could say I was "radicalized," but none of the ideas felt very radical because they made so much sense when I looked out the window and saw the alternative.

I'm reluctant to tell you about where I could've possibly discovered such a treasure trove of knowledge. And to anyone in front of whom I still wanted to maintain a shred of intellect or dignity, I would tell them that I learned about it by doing my readings like a diligent political science student would.

But I'll tell you all the truth: TikTok made me politically conscious.

It's hard to pinpoint when exactly TikTok detected my preexisting interest in politics and perfected the art of capitalizing on it. But it did. The algorithm started to feed me fewer and fewer cat videos and thirst traps and more and more comprehensive breakdowns of dialectical materialism and summaries of bell hooks's works (I still get a few thirst traps, but mostly of women wearing communism-themed hats.)

This is the space where I learned about microaggressions, and how many of them I had encountered or even perpetrated before having the language to validate my experiences; it's where I found the tools and courage to begin recovering from my eating disorder.




Most of the creators I came across were my age. They, too, felt disillusioned by a world that was becoming increasingly uninhabitable due to the climate crisis and ballooning inequality. They were frustrated that despite becoming ever more aware of these problems, there was so very little we could do as individuals to reform them. They could be my neighbour or even the person that sits beside me on the bus to campus.

These big ideas about economic and social justice wedged themselves, one by one, between me and my previous naïve understanding of our institutions and systems as mostly fair and good. It made me question whether the academic and professional path I was pursuing fit into this new understanding.

Using their own lived experiences and prominent theories, creators from all different walks of life showed me that inequality is baked into every aspect of the system we live under and that alternatives are more possible than we've been led to believe.

Although I was restricted within the four walls of my high school bedroom, the social and intellectual parameters of my world stretched on indefinitely.

The political discourse that unfolded within the TikTok microcosm was unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. They were messy, pretentious and bitter, but also unsanitized, funny and deeply validating. Conversations ranged from intergenerational trauma to the queerification of dairy milk alternatives.

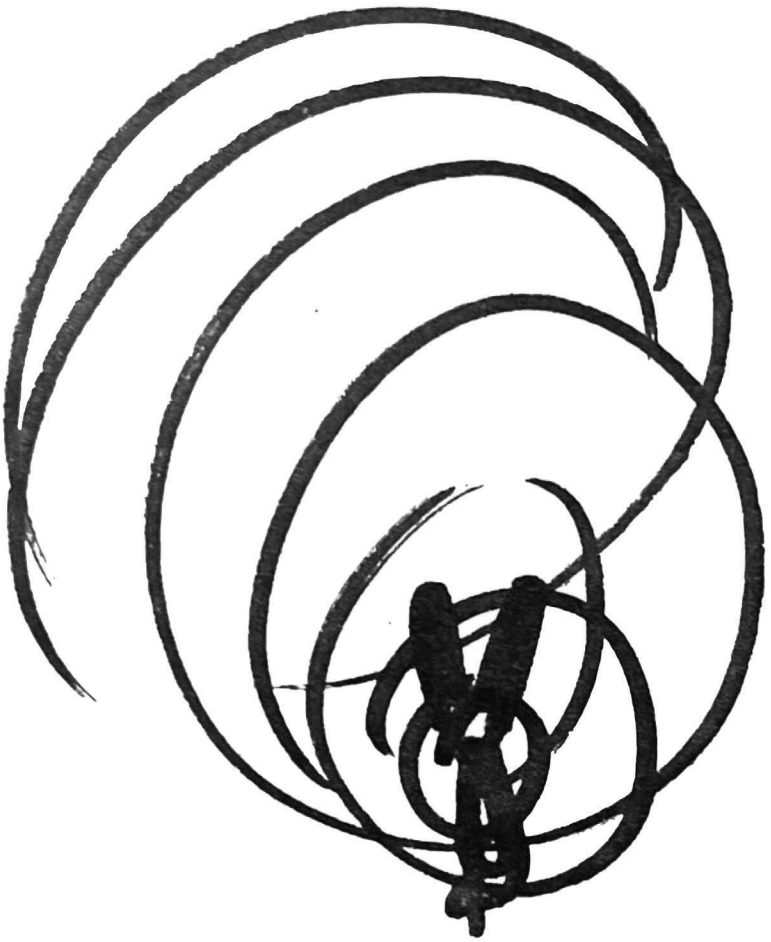
Like all communities, this one is made up of flawed individuals, most of them teenagers or young adults whose political opinions are forming at the same time as their premature brains. On the same platform where nuanced

theory is being broken down and activism strategies are shared by community organizers, there are TERFs, trolls and self-proclaimed male "feminists" whose efforts to dismantle the patriarchy begin and end with badly painted nails.

Setting aside all the flaws of the internet, I hold a deep fondness and appreciation for #PoliticalTok. It is the only space I've been in where a young person's ideas about how society ought to be structured are taken seriously. Adults and other chronically-offline individuals who insist that the debates happening on TikTok are of little to no consequence are dismissing its huge significance in shaping the political attitudes of an emerging voting bloc.

'Chronically online' is often used to pejoratively describe a state of disconnect from all that is human and important. Being told to 'touch grass' is fun and all, but during the pandemic, when all of us have been pretty chronically online, this term shouldn't carry the same stigma and scathing connotation that it once did, or maybe still does. There is inherent value in community.

Despite the mountain of genuinely trash takes that are littered all across TikTok, there are also well-thought-out, researched and informative ones. TikTok has taught me things I've never been exposed to in any of my courses. It's led me to radically reconfigure my belief system and orient it around less privileged points of view. This has been more important than ever as I reenter academic spaces after two years of online instruction, where knowledge must fit into neat, abstract and empirically provable categories, which often obscures real experiences of oppression that cannot be captured in footnotes and citations.



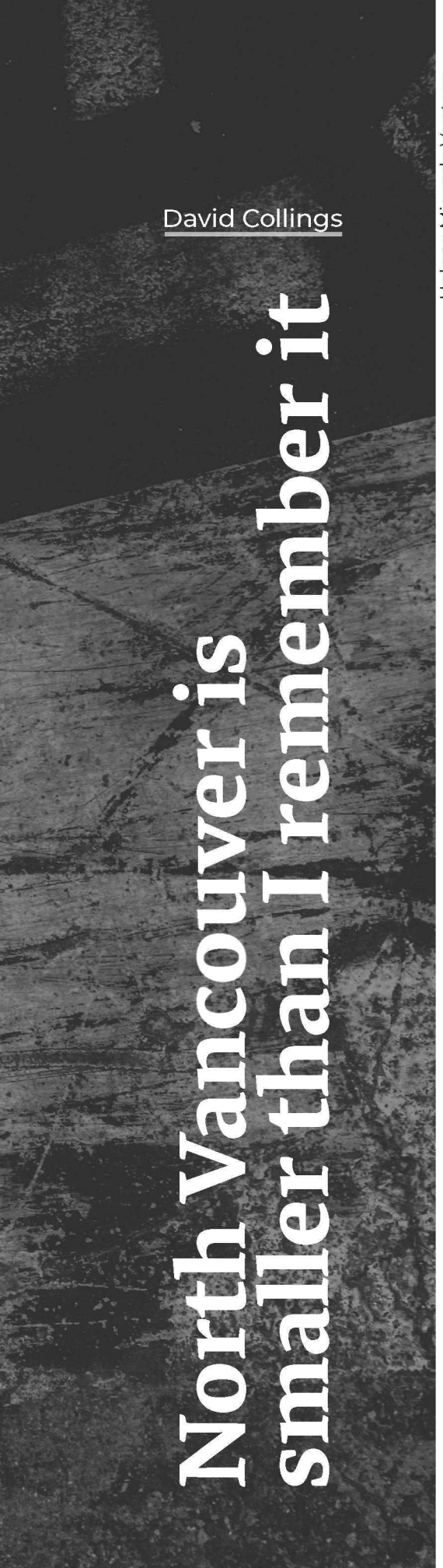
It's a space where people with shared trauma heal together while acknowledging the systemic factors that contribute to their illnesses, and there is something so rare about the level of vulnerability and critical thinking that can exist simultaneously within an online space.

I've never been able to find another community capable of replicating such a dynamic.

I stand before you as someone who belongs to the handful of insufferable people who post half-baked opinions about how much they hate men and capitalism on the internet. To me, making my silly little TikToks and commenting 'based' on others is a legitimate act of engagement with a political community — a community that is vibrant, curious and filled with people who share a deep desire to lament about how messed up the world is and hope to make it a little bit less so. Though TikTok can seem miles away from reality, this is my community.

Even as the pandemic wavered and went, I clung onto this community that was once my lifeline. As much as I have loved entering heated political debates and picking fights with the 'devil's advocate' in my political science classes at UBC, I have kept in touch with my chronically-online comrades because they remind me that community can extend beyond the bounds of campus.

If you are ever interested in joining us, you know where we are. ●



# North Vancouver is smaller than I remember it

David Collings

Helena Miranda Ventosa

When it was winter
And the world stopped
Did I know then where I wasn't?

Knew new streets through pictures and pixels
Knew crosstown the concept
Knew some day things would change
And the Seabus would carry me home
Across the harbour in the evenings
Hulking shipyard steel in half-light, too familiar for fear
Unmoving they have always — will always — stand like this
As fixed as home

I knew this
Until knowing met the city's asphalt body

And after class and
On the beach and
Between pines before the snow
Everyone all of a sudden said
We are the streets and signs of home
You haven't met yet
The city is a place and it is made of us
And there are other ways to cross the harbour

It is winter
And the wind the waves the snowflakes pass the window that
Thrums with contact between thick wheels and asphalt
And water beside, not beneath, is enough
I do not pass the quay
Or that street
Or that street
Or the playground one block up
And one block over from the quay
That I knew before
I had names for the streets

The bus stops to remind me
Where I wasn't
Was also
home ●

Helena Miranda Ventosa

Leen Naser

# Isolation contemplation

Peyton Murphy

Erica Patrick

First-year arts student Michael Vento said one of the easiest ways to find community is to sit down next to someone new and strike up a conversation. In just a few moments, you can connect with another person and learn about their interests, hobbies and more.

But the COVID-19 pandemic has made this type of connection difficult.

"I think the online learning … and the social isolation definitely took a toll on me because I'm very personal," Vento said. "I like to get out there. I like to talk to people. I like to be with other people."

For students like Vento, the impact of the pandemic is not just physical — the lack of community and social interaction is detrimental for mental health as well.

As students across Canada adjust to a life divided across masks and screens, studies have revealed that their mental health is suffering. According to one study from the University of Toronto, college students who did not have a history of mental health issues tended to have worsened mental health outcomes when socially isolated and lonely.

Understanding the biological basis for these complex behavioural outcomes is important to help students navigate how they are feeling during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Ubyssey* explored how social isolation can influence our mental health and wellbeing, shedding light on one of the unprecedented pitfalls of pandemic living.

## Starving for community

When he first moved into student residence and began navigating online learning away from the support of his extended family, third-year physics and math student Robert Beda felt the burden of social isolation. It was when he connected with others that this weight began to lift.

"The ability to hop on a Zoom call or a Discord server and just be together with other people as best one could would improve my situation," he said.

In an emailed statement to *The Ubyssey*, master's of health psychology student Talia Morstead explained that there is substantial evidence for an association between worsened physical and mental health and reduced social connection, with some literature suggesting that the key to a long, healthy life is having a social outlet.

In a 2020 *Nature Neuroscience* study, researchers used functional MRI to scan the brains of people who had been either socially isolated or fasted for ten hours. Subjects were then presented with pictures of food or social cues, revealing the same brain region was activated, regardless of fasting or isolation. This, along with the subjects self-reporting feeling of craving, suggested "acute isolation causes social craving, similar to the way fasting causes hunger."

But the pandemic has led to periods of isolation far longer than ten hours. Morstead wrote that social isolation increases the risk of depression and substance abuse. She also explained social isolation may impact our health by dysregulating mechanisms involved in stress response.

## Diverse difficulties

With school and work disrupted, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the lives of young adults, according to Morstead. However, they are not the only community that has been disproportionately affected.

In a study that tracked the prevalence of suicidal ideation among Canadians during the first ten months of the pandemic, UBC School of Nursing postdoctoral research fellow Dr. Corey McAuliffe and her colleagues identified several groups who are particularly at-risk.

These higher risk groups detailed in McAuliffe's research include those who are genderqueer, 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, single or have a pre-existing mental health condition or physical disability. She also noted that generally, BIPOC individuals have experienced higher rates of suicidal ideation, although this theme does not cross racial or ethnic lines equally.

McAuliffe's study noted that a "legacy of colonization" in Canada may lead to compounded stress for Indigenous individuals thereby impacting their mental health. In turn, the study asserted that sociodemographic factors also tend to intersect with sociopolitical factors and other aspects of an individuals identity, impacting their risk of suicidal ideation.

As Queer and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals are more likely to rely on a "chosen family" consisting of close friends rather than blood relatives, and whom they may be less likely to live with, they may be more likely to be separated from their support systems due to pandemic measures, according to a May 2020 survey conducted by the LGBT Foundation.

Referencing a family member's experience, Vento spoke of the burdens that parents faced during lockdowns and isolation. His concern is warranted — according to a *British Medical Journal* study, parents with children under the age of

18 living at home during the pandemic were at a much greater risk of poor mental health outcomes than those without. Concerns that were unique to parents with children at home included worries about their kids' physical and mental health outcomes, as well as their education and alternate childcare options.

According to McAuliffe, individuals who do not feel supported in their struggle with social isolation should not face these burdens as reflective of their own failings.

"There is a community level need to incorporate wellness, and that often doesn't happen for a lot of people," she said.

## Virtual connections

To cope with isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, McAuliffe emphasised the importance of searching for alternative ways to connect with others. Her research has shown that online communities — particularly those centred around gaming or other interactive hobbies — have the potential to foster connection and benefit mental health.

This was a reality for Beda, who cited the UBC Science Fiction and Fantasy Society's Discord server and a remote Dugeons and Dragons campaign as a few of the primary drivers in building community during the pandemic.

"I'm sure I'm not alone in finding enriching community through remote gaming in these trying times," wrote Beda in a stament to *The Ubyssey*.
Early on in the pandemic, Vento also explored online sources for connection, like TikTok. The diversity of communities on the app, especially the creators who shared relatable and "inspiring" stories were valuable to Vento.

When asked what drew him online, Beda highlighted that remote gaming during the COVID-19 pandemic remained a pleasant experience.

"[There's] a bit of solidarity one can have. Yes, the world outside is very scary in many ways," he said. "But when you can sit down and also share some sort of interesting stories within a game space as well, that's just a nice place for creating comfortable community as well."

## Finding your niche

McAuliffe stressed that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to coping with isolation. There are a select few activities that are proven to improve wellbeing for many people, such as incorporating exercise into your daily routine, meditating or meeting with friends and family outdoors when possible. But overall, it's up to individuals to learn what works for them.
Routine was especially important for Vento, as he cultivated a fitness routine with a close friend in the pandemic.

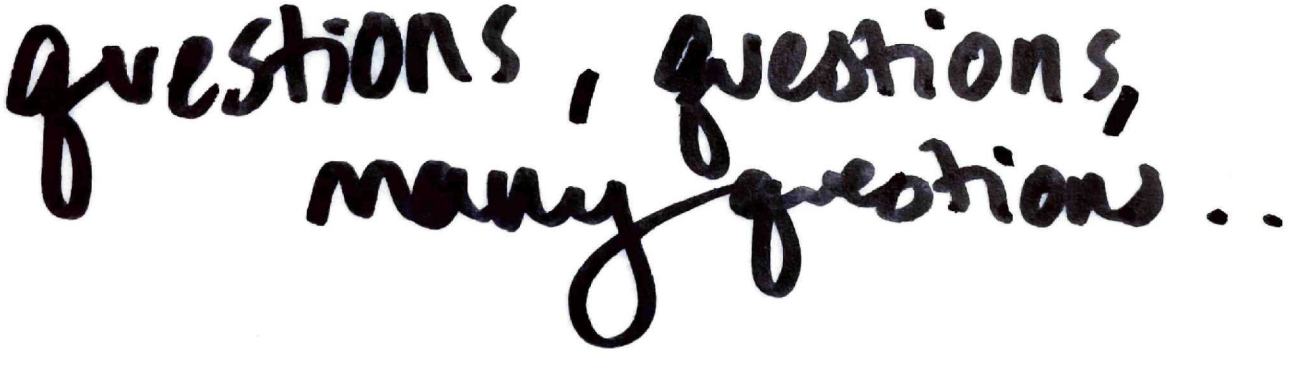
If you're struggling to find ways to connect with others through your interests, McAuliffe suggests that this could be an opportunity for you to create spaces for connection. Online communities for a wide variety of hobbies have expanded over the pandemic, showing that if you look for like-minded individuals, you won't have a hard time finding them.

"Identifying within yourself what feels supportive, and what doesn't, and honouring that," said McAuliffe.

Looking forward, Vento is "broadening the horizon" in his pursuit of community at UBC. He encouraged other students to join him in pursuing new clubs, engaging in small conversations with peers and treating each day like a new opportunity.

"I think there are several things to consider and one is that you're certainly not alone," Vento said. "I would totally suggest finding a routine that works for you [and] trying to be more social every day." ●

*— with files from Sophia Russo*



Melissa Li

# One small part of the crowd

Tianne Jensen-DesJardins

Sometimes I think that I caused the pandemic.

I spent all of my second year wishing I could use the five hours a day I spent commuting to school on other things. Namely, homework. But I didn't mean to mess up everyone else's lives just so I could get my assigned readings done a little earlier. I didn't mean to cause *this*.

Okay, so maybe I'm sort of, most likely, probably sure that I didn't cause COVID-19. It just happened to have really coincidental timing.

For instance, my extra long commute from Mission to UBC suddenly disappeared. My immune system didn't have to tackle the consistent colds I picked up during my five-hour commute. I could sleep in for the first time during my degree.

But not all the changes were good. There was no more running into classmates in line for my chai latte from Starbucks before class. No more stumbling upon events on campus. No more seeing friends at all.

With many of the social aspects of university stripped away, the days began to blend into one everlasting day, where the events of yesterday were also the events of tomorrow. Everything was COVID all the time: the news, the radio and even social media were

constant onslaughts of infection rates and hot spots.

So I adjusted. I watched YouTube yoga videos and nabbed some of the last weights from my local Walmart. I downloaded Zoom and got used to virtually connecting with people — and not just for class! I even took up crocheting and beadwork to stave off the loneliness.

But nothing felt real.

Everyday was the same. I'd wake up, slap my glasses on and turn on my computer. Opening Canvas and navigating my courses' homepages was something I could do in my sleep (and trust me, I know from experience). As I anxiously triple-checked that my mic was indeed turned off, I would begin to check my social media. No one was ever doing anything interesting, but even the boring stuff was worth reading when the alternative was rising case numbers and new restrictions. Classes would begin with the usual "Can everyone hear me?" and would always end with "Stay safe and see you next class. Well, virtually, at least."

The monotony began to bleed into my dreams. I would wake up and complete my morning routine only to wake up again, this time for real, when my phone alarm went off. I began to wonder if I was ever really awake. This, of course, kept me up most nights. Between general anxiety (because the world was going to shit) and existential anxiety (because my brain was going to shit), I felt like I was losing touch with reality. Did my comments have any consequence at all when the chat log was wiped after every class? Does it count as participation if I'm blearily staring at my screen, pinching myself, trying to decide if I'm really awake? Does anyone else feel like this?

Of course, the answer is yes.

When classes transitioned to a hybrid format in the Fall term, I began to notice some of the names I'd seen on Zoom popping up in my classes. Now they were much more than muted black boxes — they came complete with bodies, entire lives. It was like being a kid again, when running into your teacher at the grocery store made you realize that they had a whole life outside of the classroom. It was easier to bond over the hellscape that was last year when I could bring up that time class was cut short by a professor's kid having a meltdown in the background or an unfortunately-timed power-outage. The loneliness I'd felt the previous year started to thaw with each in-person conversation.

Turns out that I wasn't the only one struggling. A lot of the people that I connected with in those first few months of hybrid classes mentioned feeling similarly. They'd also had a hard time focusing in class. And motivation? Yeah, that went out the window almost as quickly as the home workouts. It seemed like almost everyone had a shitty year.

But now everything was fine again because we were back to in-person learning (well, half in-person learning, technically), right?

Wrong.

Melissa Li

Melissa Li

Everything still sucked, just slightly less so.

Sure, seeing my classmates and professors face-to-face was great, but it also meant that they could see me, which was a little hard to navigate after a year of hiding from the world in my room. Being able to roam the campus that I've come to love in my four years at UBC was fantastic, but it also meant that I had to physically come to school to go to class — so much for free time. And COVID-19 wasn't over. That panicky paranoia still hung over me like a weighted blanket, leaving my head exposed to the constant worry. The vaccine helped, but with new variants looming, I still felt exposed.

And on top of that, it just felt wrong to be surrounded by so many people after so long alone. Every bus ride felt like a guilty pleasure. Walking along Main Mall in the last ten minutes before any hour was an instant flashback to first and second year, before the pandemic made social interaction something significant.

It was like someone had given me a brief glimpse into the old normal but was holding it over my head threatening to take it away at any minute.

Not everything was bad. I learned to appreciate the benefits of being a student. I took advantage of office hours for the first time in my degree. I didn't mind the line-up for Starbucks in the Life Building as I waited to grab my chai latte between classes. I rediscovered first-year dining halls as I desperately tried to use up the rest of the money from my time in Totem in first year.

Campus became so much more than a physical space, and becoming one small part of the crowd was as exhilarating as it was terrifying. Being a UBC student meant more than attending UBC. It was also complaining about the long bus lines, getting excited to see the fountain turned on, physically feeling the relief in the air after walking out of a final exam.

It was being part of something bigger.

As a kid, it was my dream to go to the university where my parents met and fell in love. I thought that I wanted to go to UBC because it was another way to continue my family's legacy, to follow in their footsteps, but I was wrong. It wasn't the fancy stone buildings or the expensive piece of paper that I was searching for — it was connection. I wanted to submerge myself into university life and come out drenched. And I did, just not in the same way.

As I near the end of my undergrad degree, I remind myself of the friends I've met during my four years here, of the professors I've been lucky to learn from, of all the bus drivers I've said "Good morning" to. Whether your classes are online or in-person, the pandemic present or absent and your degree beginning or ending, the connections you make are what carry you through. ●

# From endemic to endgame: Why COVID-19 remains part of our communities

Owen Gibbs

At a press conference on January 21, 2022, BC Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry addressed changes in how the province is approaching COVID-19, and referenced similarities between the new measures and how other respiratory diseases are dealt with.

She added that the province wasn't moving into "endemic mode."

"We are clearly not in a place where it's endemic right now," Henry said. "What we are doing is adjusting to the changes that we've seen from the new variant."

But this statement from Henry is in contrast to another press conference from November 30, 2021. "We know this virus is endemic now," she said, "which means it is circulating in the community."

"We can no longer contain it with some of the measures that we had early on."

In turn, institutions like the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) have described "the expectation" that COVID-19 will become endemic.

"I think the expectation, the hope perhaps, is that we're headed to a situation of endemic circulation of the virus, probably some periodic changes to the virus," said Dr. Monika Naus, medical director of communicable diseases & immunization service at the BCCDC.

As described in a *Nature* article written January 2022, an endemic infection is when "overall rates are static — not rising, not falling".

As of February 2022, hundreds of people are testing positive for COVID-19 each day, with the BCCDC acknowledging that these numbers "likely underestimate the true number of COVID-19 cases in BC" due to changes in testing measures. Hospitalizations finally declined after peaking in January, according to the BCCDC, and masks remain a staple of daily life.

Oxford Professor Dr. Aris Katzourakis highlighted that endemic diseases can still be deadly. He emphasized that policymakers should not use endemicity "as an excuse to do little or nothing."

"Thinking that endemicity is both mild and inevitable is more than wrong, it is dangerous: it sets humanity up for many more years of disease, including unpredictable waves of outbreaks," according to Katzourakis.

Over the course of the pandemic, herd immunity — which was once the goal of public health experts and the provincial health authority — has slowly been seen as more and more unattainable. From emerging variants to vaccine inequality, an array of factors have contributed to the persistent presence of COVID-19 in our communities.

## Cracking the coronavirus

The best place to start is by understanding the basic science of herd immunity.

Herd immunity is achieved by isolating a virus and impeding its ability to spread. It is based on the idea that if an overwhelming proportion of the population is immune, then the ability of the disease to circulate is hindered.

Making communities immune to a disease is necessary for herd immunity, according to a 2020 *Journal of the Amer-*

*ican Medical Association* article.

Whether it be through a vaccine or through remaining antibodies from a previous infection, immunity reduces one's risk of getting a disease. Herd immunity also protects those who cannot get vaccinated by limiting the spread of the disease.

Therefore, if a large enough segment of a population is vaccinated, then the pathogen's ability to circulate is greatly reduced and new outbreaks cannot be sustained, according to a 2020 *Nature* news feature.

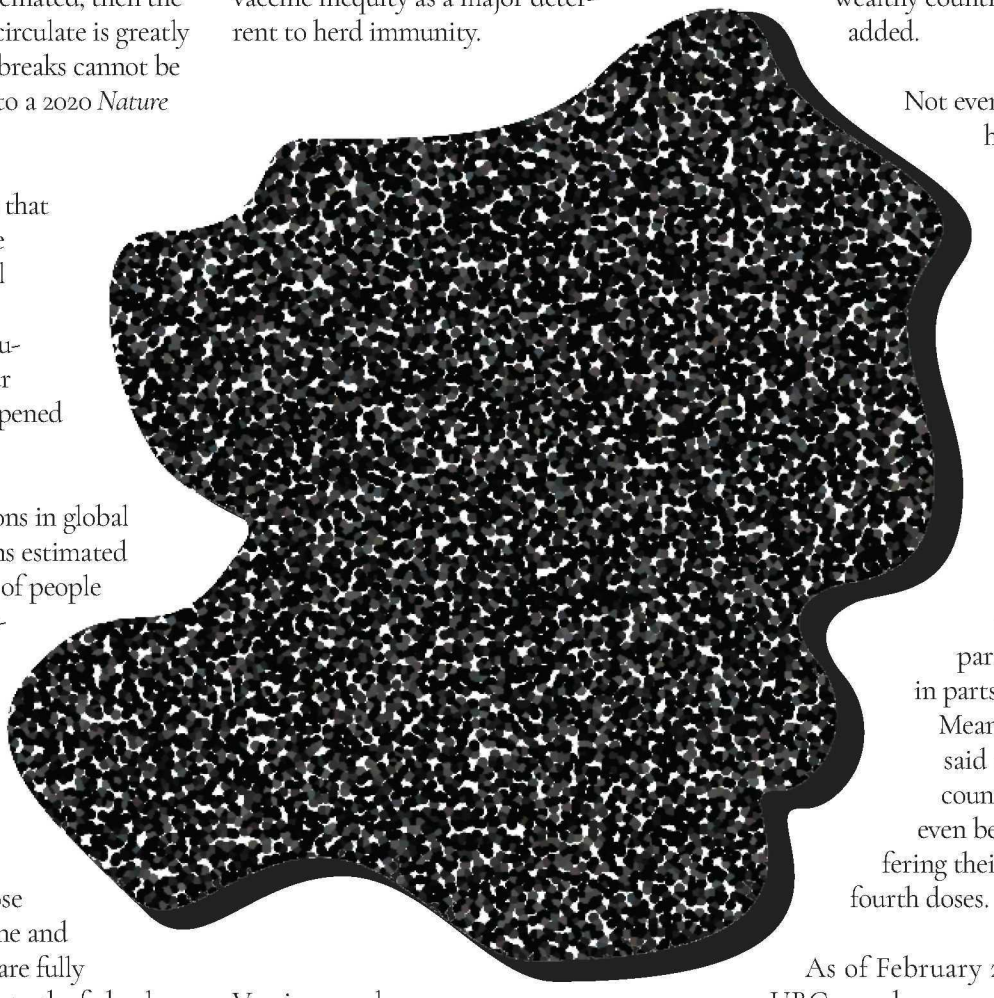
Naturally, this means that a high level of vaccine uptake is necessary all around the world for any sort of herd immunity situation to occur — which has not happened with COVID-19.

August 2021 predictions in global vaccination campaigns estimated that over 90 per cent of people would need to be vaccinated for herd immunity to be achieved against the Delta variant. As of February 25, nearly 85 per cent of Canadians have received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and just over 80 per cent are fully vaccinated, according to the federal government. Just 76 per cent of Americans are fully vaccinated, as described by the CDC.

But opposing factors for herd immunity go beyond the vaccination rate in high-income countries. Data scientist Youyang Gu explained in a 2021 *Nature* news article that herd immunity was "looking unlikely" due to an array of limiting factors like "vaccine hesitancy, the emergence of new variants and the delayed arrival of vaccinations for children."

## Vaccine sharing is caring

While some of the responsibility lies with those choosing not to get immunized, Gu's interview also pointed to vaccine inequity as a major deterrent to herd immunity.



Vaccine supply to many low-income countries has been limited, preventing citizens from receiving their shots, according to Vaccine Equity Expert and Assistant Professor in the UBC School of Nursing Dr. Katrina Plamondon. Instead, predominantly developed countries have hoarded doses from the pandemic's outset.

"Wealthy countries, Canada included, had the capacity to engage in all these negotiations with pharmaceutical companies and they sort of made guesses about which vaccine was going to work," said Plamondon. "They [made] lot of pre-purchase agreements with those companies to secure doses for their own populations."

"The vaccines were incredibly scarce ... It became a race among wealthy countries," she added.

Not even frontline healthcare workers have had the opportunity to get vaccinated in some places, according to Plamondon, particularly in parts of Africa. Meanwhile, she said that some countries have even begun offering their citizens fourth doses.

As of February 25, while UBC may have a vaccination rate over 90 per cent, according to Our World in Data, countries such as Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have rates as low as 0.074 and 0.66 per cent, respectively. Likewise, a *Nature* news article from September 2021 reported that fewer than one per cent of individuals in low-income countries are fully vaccinated.

This low rate puts the global population short of the threshold for herd immunity, and, as demonstrated by the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, immunity is not a concept limited by lines on a map.

"We don't live in bubbles where our borders are somehow protected by some sort of shield," said Plamondon.

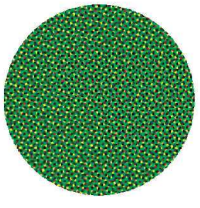
There have been multiple global efforts to overcome this inequity.

The World Health Organization (WHO) established the COVAX initiative in April 2020, where wealthy countries donate excess vaccine doses to be distributed to low-income countries. As of January 2022, COVAX had been responsible for the delivery of over a billion doses.

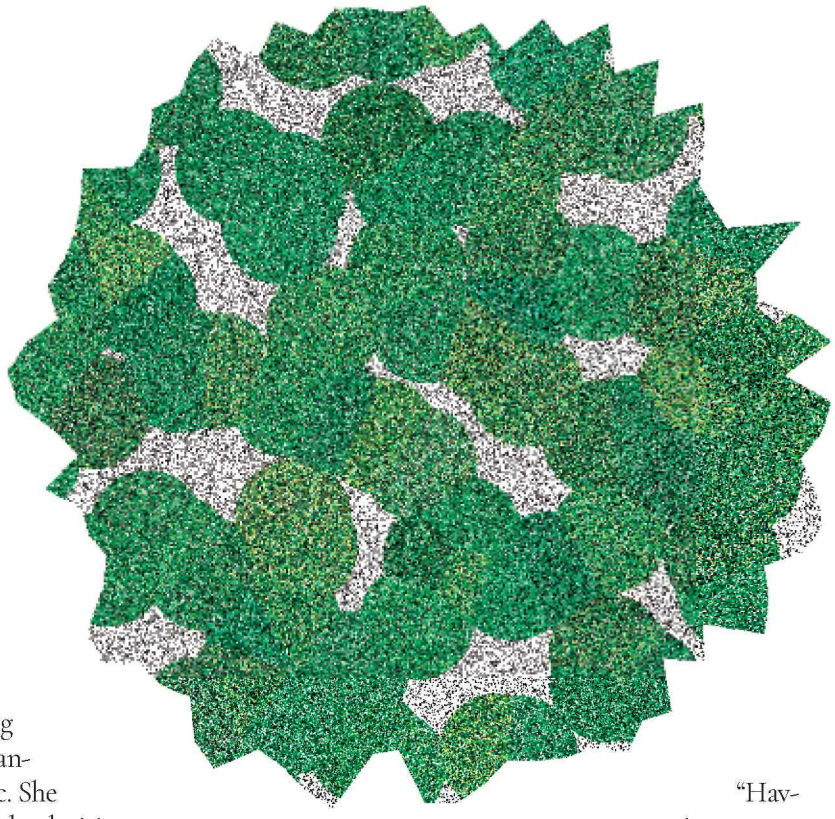
US President Joe Biden has voiced support for waiving intellectual property claims on COVID-19 vaccine development, which would allow producers in developing countries to more easily manufacture a vaccine for their own populations.

Despite these efforts, Plamondon said some countries may not see widespread vaccine access for another eight years at our current pace.

"What we end up doing is failing to recognize just how vulnerable we are to our own policies," she said. "A pandemic is by nature global, so things that are inherently global innature require global solutions, not national ones."



Plamondon said it's important to recognize the role that Canada has played in furthering systemic inequality during the pandemic. She cited the decision to ban travel from Southern Africa upon the identification of the Omicron variant by South African scientists as "very disappointing."



"The discovery of that variant by that laboratory in South Africa is actually a signal of science working well, and collaborative intentions working well. And Canada's reaction was not only ungracious but I would say not at all grounded in science," said Plamondon.

"We continue to not invest in mechanisms that allow for equitable manufacturing and distribution of vaccines."

## It's on like Omicron

With continued transmission due to vaccination barriers, the likelihood of COVID-19 mutating to create new variants is high, according to Infectious Disease Expert and Adjunct Professor in the faculty of medicine Dr. Horacio Bach.

"Having so many people around the world that are infected, you produce all the time new mutants," said Bach. "And since there are so many people infected, then the probability of getting a mutation is increasing."

New variants can also introduce an additional layer of complexity, as differences in the new version of the virus also impact the conditions needed to achieve herd immunity.

"The problem is herd immunity for one virus does not mean that you have herd immunity for another virus," said infectious disease modelling expert and UBC Zoology Professor Dr. Sarah Otto. "The level of immunity that we had for the [novel coronavirus] and even for Delta [that] was getting close to the place where we could open up is not enough for Omicron."

"Really, it's not that herd immunity isn't a useful concept but the recognition that evolution is chasing the

virus and causing what used to be herd immunity to fail."
In 2022, the Omicron variant dominated case loads both provincially and globally.

A December 2021 news article published in *The Lancet* estimated that Omicron could have an R-nought ($R_0$) as high as 10, meaning that each infected person transmits the virus to an average of 10 others while contagious. The same study estimated the $R_0$s of the Delta variant and COVID-19's original strain to be just under seven, and between two and five, respectively.

Given the abundance of hospitalizations and case loads — particularly in January 2022 — Bach hesitates to call COVID-19 endemic at this point. He also shared the expectation that new COVID-19 variants will continue to circulate.

"If it's endemic supposedly, one day we'll develop a new variant ... you get that, you bring that to Canada, and it's a new variant that the immune system doesn't recognize properly," said Bach. "So it's a circle all the time."

As variants emerge, vaccination still offers protection against severe illness. One August 2021 study compared the efficacy of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against either the original Alpha variant of the novel coronavirus or the Delta variant. Data revealed "only modest differences in vaccine effectiveness" after two doses of the vaccine, with two shots being associated with 93.7 per cent effectiveness for those with the Alpha variant compared to 88 per cent effectiveness for Delta cases.

In the wake of the newest variant of concern, the BCCDC recommends that residents seek a booster, writing "[a] third vaccine dose may help provide more protection from Omicron."

Naus emphasized that "the goal is to achieve as high vaccine uptake as possible" in order to support both individual and population interests.

## A new hope

So what can we expect life to look like in the future? No one really knows.

With regards to the provincial pandemic response, the BCCDC said in a statement to *The Ubyssey* that "there will continue to be changes over the coming months and years." In the meantime, students should stay home when they aren't feeling well "until they feel well enough to resume regular activities."

At times, UBC classes may have to go online, if just for a month or two like earlier in the term. The infrastructure necessary for such learning may need to be ready to be used at any time.

For some students, this uncertainty is ever present in both their academic and personal lives.

"We've been looking for this light at the end of the tunnel, for the pandemic to be over," said Emilie Wang, a second-year environmental sciences student and co-founder of UBC's Vaccine Literacy Club. "Honestly, as of right now I don't know what is going to happen in the future, what the future is going to look like."

For Wang, the lack of cohesive international response to COVID-19's latest developments presents particular challenges.

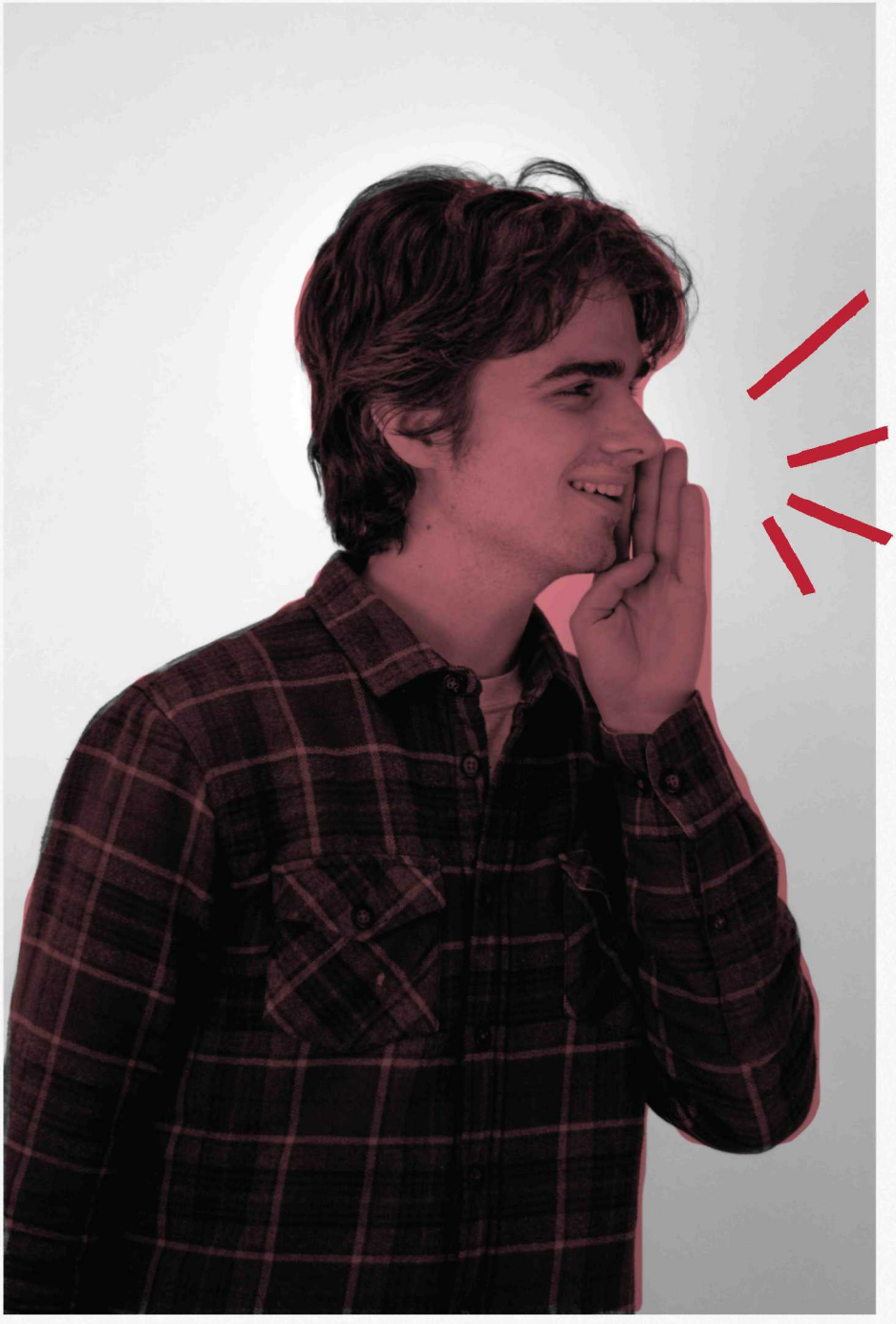
Not all countries have adopted the same measures to COVID-19 as BC. For example, China has continued an elimination approach based on hard lockdowns and border restrictions. As a result, Wang and her family will face major uncertainty for the foreseeable future when visiting with her grandparents, who live in the Chinese city of Xi'an.

Moving forward, Wang said that it is important to encourage vaccination, trust in our health authorities and focus on handling this together.

"Obviously, the pandemic isn't over yet right now and there's still very high case counts, a lot of hospitalization," she said. "I think it's still important to maintain trust in public health and to move forward in a way that is more unified."

As students and experts alike consider an endemic novel coronavirus, a future with communities intertwined with COVID-19 may be on the horizon. But for Plamondon, herd immunity was not a lost cause, but rather a monumental challenge requiring systemic change and unity to overcome.

"I really believe that more equitable futures are possible," she said, "but what would be required is a frank and honest look at what we want as a collective future." ●



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SHARE

# A pandemic is no match for a stone age brain

Lauren Kasowski & Sophia Russo

A group sits bundled by the fire, shoulders touching and voices low, as they enjoy the comfort of companionship.

This familiar scene could represent a couple of college friends roasting marshmallows by an open fire as they listen to the new Drake album just as easily as it could portray a family of weary Paleolithic humans spending a few quiet moments together.

As humans evolved, so did our communities.

But we haven't changed much.

Natural selection is an evolutionary mechanism describing population-wide change which happens as certain traits offer a non-random advantage for reproductive sucess. This results in beneficial traits being inherited — and becoming more common — in future generations. Our social affinities may be an example of this; according to a 2021 Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution research article, sociality paved the way for brain development, both in size and organization.

From the marked jump in brain size over the past several million years to the more subtle refinements as early as 3,000 years ago, sociality has remained an important driver — for modern humans as much as our stone-age ancestors.

"Our brains ... don't function any differently than they did thousands of years ago," said Dr. Mark Schaller, a psychology professor at UBC. "We are modern people, but

still living with a stone age mind."

And these "stone age minds," studies suggest, are hardwired for social connection. In the midst of a pandemic, students are left to endure the implications of a brain that evolved to be social — perfectly designed for anything but these unprecedented times.

## Let's start from the beginning

Humanity's earliest communities were valuable for survival. According to a 2017 *Scientific Reports* article on modern hunter-gatherer societies, mothers with more indirect social ties — more friends of friends relationships — tended to have better offspring survival.

As primates, we evolved from a lineage of social animals. Bonobos and chimpanzees, our closest living relatives, are social creatures as well.

A 2020 *Frontiers in Psychology* article summarized various ways human sociality — and by extension community — provided an advantage over our closest primate relatives.

The authors argued that a cooperativity-oriented lifestyle that incorporated tasks like toolmaking, hunting, foraging and taking care of other people's children made early humans "uniquely codependent and other-regarding compared to other great apes."

Emotional control soon became a beneficial trait for early humans, providing support for its modern day influence. With time, pro-social behaviours laid the foundations of kinship and cooperation that our current societies rely on.

## Fast forward 300,000 years

Despite the contrast between modern society and our stone-age brains, humans have been quite successful. The skills that were needed then, like problem-solving and cooperation, are skills we still need today — just presenting in different ways. Instead of discovering fire, we are faced with questions of food sustainability, systemic discrimination and space travel.

"The reason our cognition is so powerful is because it's an adaptation to living in social groups," said Dr. Edward Slingerland, a professor of philosophy at UBC who has done research in evolutionary psychology.

As described in a 2012 *Frontiers in Physiology* mini-review and a 2016 review written by anthropologist Dr. Robin Dunbar, the hypothesis is based on the scientific understanding that our brains grew as a result of living in complex social groups. According to Dunbar, "unusually complex" primate societies may explain the need for "unusually large brains" to manage the social hierarchies.

But to understand the relationship between brain size and social behaviour, researchers needed to first establish the "cognitive load" that is required, according to the mini-review. Figuring out exactly how neurons are arranged for a particular behaviour, as well as how many there are and the mechanisms employed to actually process information, is much easier theorized than done.

According to Dunbar, the ability to mentalize — an "archetypal form of social cognition" — mediates this relationship between brain size and social group size in humans.

Mentalizing, also known as theory of mind, is the social-cognitive ability that involves recognizing other people can have different emotions and mental states than our own. Singerland outlined the theory of mind as one way our intuition presents itself.
Living in communities has also increased the intuition that we use in day-to-day life. Schaller noted that a social community has an expectation of cooperation, and in turn reciprocity, and our brain evolved to identify the people who may cheat us. We use this intuition in situations ranging from group projects to romantic relationships.

## We helped ourselves along the way

To highlight the extent of human cooperativity, Slingerland referenced an analogy in Dr. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy's book *Mothers and Others: The Evolutional Origins of Mutual Understanding*. While human beings are capable of remaining in their airplane seat with their seatbelt on for long periods of time, chimpanzees would tear each other apart, creating a massacre in a metal tube.

"We cooperate on a scale that goes way beyond our primate relatives," Slingerland said.

Indeed, cooperation presents a benefit for peaceful coexistence in the complex groups that humans live in. Social factors, like culture, also play a critical role: though

cooperative behaviour may not be advantageous for the individual, it is beneficial for the group, as demonstrated in a *Nature Communications* study by Arizona State University researchers, Dr. Carla Handley and Dr. Sarah Mathew, which tested the cultural group selection theory.

By this theory, "culturally different" groups compete against others, thereby encouraging the spread of characteristics – like cooperativity – that give groups a "competitive edge," according to a press release on Mathew and Handley's study.

"People have the intuition that being cultural helps us cooperate," said Mathew in an interview with Arizona State University. "What we are showing is that culture allows groups to be different, and therefore to compete. It is this group competition — ironically — that sculpted our cooperativity."

Another theory emphasizing the importance of the group is the cultural brain hypothesis which, Schaller explained, expands on the social brain hypothesis.

It suggests that living in groups allows for the cultural accumulation of knowledge is "probably more important" than simply living in these large groups, according to Schaller.
The value of culture as a driver for the selection of social traits has been hotly contested, but studies like that of Handley and Mathew's provide much needed evidence to support these theories. In their study, Handley and Mathew asserted that culture-driven selection could shed light on some of the mysteries of our social brains.

"[Group-level selection on cultural variation] acting over human evolutionary history may explain why we cooperate readily with unrelated and unfamiliar individuals," they wrote, "and why humans' unprecedented cooperative flexibility is nevertheless culturally [limited]."

## A product of all that came before us

Community is often used to describe a society, but it can also be used for common interests. We seek out these smaller, common-interest communities — anything from Twitch streams to book clubs.

A preference for more limited social groups may be explained by Dunbar's number. Connected to the social brain

Karen Lin

hypothesis, Dunbar argued that 150 is the maximum number of stable relationships that humans can sustain at a given time. It's limited by the amount of raw brainpower we have, which is linked to brain size.
150 was not an arbitrary number for Dunbar.

"For most of our evolutionary history, we lived in relatively small hunter-gatherer bands [where] we would interact with 50 to 150 people on a regular basis," said Slingerland.
Online connections, it appears, have not been able to transcend the limitation imposed by Dunbar's number.

Ever keen to challenge his opposers, Dunbar published a study in 2016 discussing whether the digital age has confounded his three-digit dogma. Facebook friends do not equate to face-to-face relationships, with Dunbar writing that "there is a cognitive constraint on the size of social networks that even the communication advantages of online media are unable to overcome."

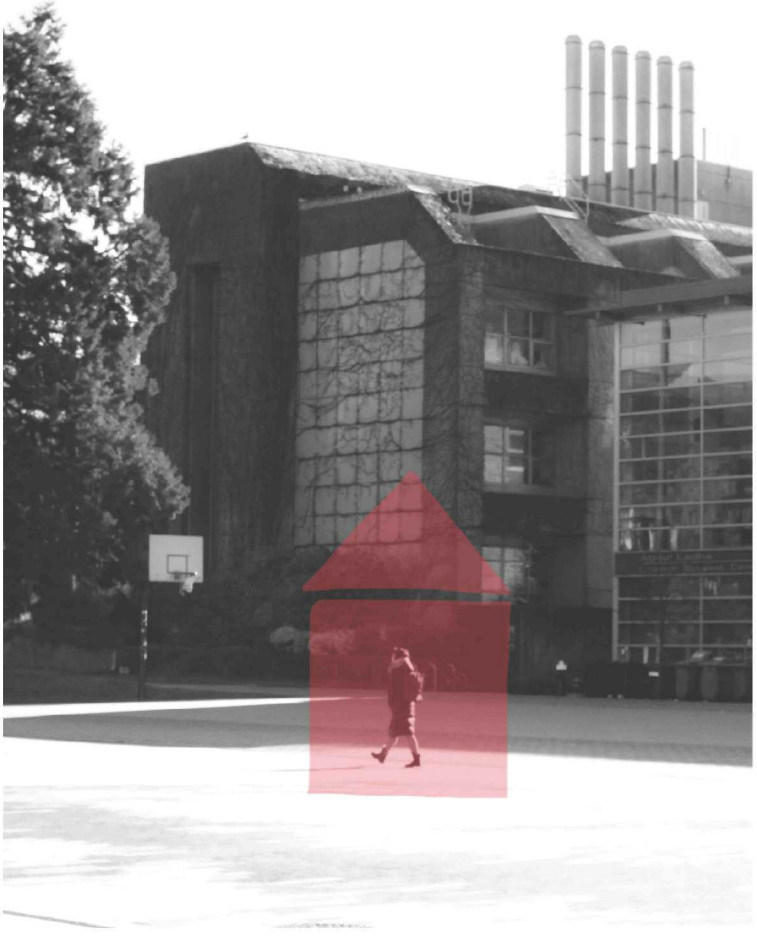
As the brain appears to have limits that persist in an ever-changing landscape of evolving communities, new questions arise for researchers like Dunbar, Mathew and Handley. Community is more than skin deep — it's in our bones, in the wiring of our brains and the relationships we crave.

Millions of years ago, early humans learned to co-exist and cooperate; sitting together by a smouldering flame, exchanging stories, sharing passions and finding community.

Today, these adaptive benefits suggest an intrinsic value in being together – now more than ever. ●

# The sound

Elif Kayali



Helena Miranda Ventosa

I remember the feeling I had when I first thought about the possibility of not being able to go back home in the summer. It was the feeling you get when you start falling while dreaming, or when your stomach drops and you feel like something is about to go terribly, *terribly* wrong.

In March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. Although there were few cases in Vancouver, people had already started buying masks and stocking toilet paper. It was a weirdly sunny Sunday and I was in my soon-to-be ex-boyfriend's basement suite, sitting on the living room couch surrounded by plants, watching the news. He started talking about what would happen if everything shut down and I started thinking about worst-case scenarios.

I remember laying down on his bed afterward and feeling the panic rising up in me.

# of laughter

*What if I can't go back home? What if I can't see my parents?*

At the time, I told myself not to think about it. It was only March; of course I could go home over the summer, or in December. But that didn't happen. I wouldn't be able to return to Istanbul until December 2021, almost two years later.

It's weird being away from your hometown for so long. After a while, you forget you had a life before moving to the city you're currently living in. You start forgetting that there is a whole other city with different streets, shops, weather and people in it that used to be your home. It happens slowly but surely as you build yourself a new life somewhere else.

I think it has to do with the fact that you replace things.

You get a new favorite coffee shop, you learn new streets and you make new friends. The whole process changes who you are as well. Not in a rigid 'before and after' way, but you start to lose a version of yourself who existed in the 'before,' a version that maybe smiled differently or woke up a little earlier. But beyond the small things, you build yourself a new support system. You start thinking about who you're going to call if you get sick, who can help you out with your move to a new apartment or who you're going to call after your breakup.

That's what I tried to do after moving to Vancouver, and I think I did alright. I know I did alright because my community kept me sane during the pandemic. Take all of 2021, for example: I was a mess, having emotional outbursts on the street every other

day. I would be listening to a song and it would bring up some memory and I would instantly be hit by an overwhelming wave of sadness and grief, missing my family, the feeling of hugging my mother or laughing with my dad. After a while, I avoided watching any sort of happy family movie because it would trigger a wave of tears followed by a sense of despair and tiredness that would stick around for days. I spent my time cooking more Turkish food than ever before and rewatching movies I had already seen back home to remember the look of Istanbul, to hear the humour and sound of my city. And let me tell you, some of those movies are really not that good. If it weren't for my friends watching those movies next to me, holding me close and sharing my pain, I don't know what I would have done.

When I look back at 2020, I think being broken-hearted when the pandemic first hit was actually a blessing. It was gut-wrenching, but it also allowed me to mistakenly believe that my main problem was my bleeding heart and not the ongoing pandemic.

Things changed once my parents developed some health problems. I started thinking about death — both about the fact that they would die one day but also about the fact that if I got sick, I would be so far away from my family. Far away from home. I felt angry that I couldn't be with them. I was incredibly privileged and yet not. I was so lucky to be able to make the choice to come to Canada, but not lucky enough to be born here. There's privilege embedded in that sentiment as well, and my own pandemic experience was amplified by my anxiety, but none of it changes the way I feel.

That's the thing about leaving your community behind. You do it because it's probably better for you in the long run. It might give you a better education, a better job and who knows, better rights? The small stuff. But it takes a lot away from you as well. It means you're going to miss family dinners, birthdays and trips. You'll grow up and your family will get older.

By the time I was able to go back to Turkey, my whole country — let alone my family — had experienced so much collective trauma that it was significantly different from what I had left behind. My peers were now unsure if they would find a job after graduation and pay their bills. People were converting their salaries to whatever asset they could afford the day they got paid because of high inflation. Food prices overtook my Twitter feed for a whole month. After years of hushed whispers, everyone was now openly talking about this cloud of anxiety they had been carrying around.

*What's going to happen to us?*

*What's going to happen to our country?*

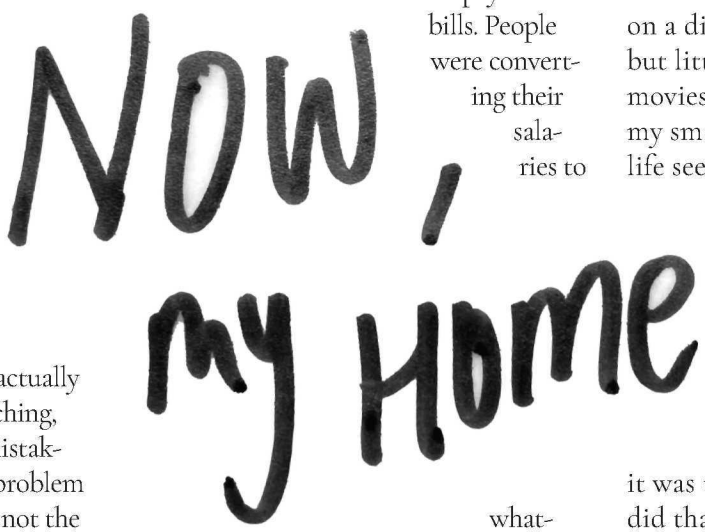
I believe that happiness has a sound. In Istanbul, it's the sound of a Friday evening with the city buzzing from excitement, a walk by the sea watching the seagulls, a concert at an underground dive bar or drinking tea with your friends while the sun is setting. Laughter. My city used to sound like laughter against all odds. I found out unhappiness also has a sound, and it's amplified by the masses.

You could say I moved across the world to get more opportunities in life, and at first I absolutely loved it. I reveled at the sense of freedom I got from moving out and being independent in my first year.

To my disappointment, 18-year-olds at UBC weren't any wiser or more passionate about anything than I was. Being alone in a new country on a different continent was scary, but little things like going to the movies or grabbing dinner with my small group of friends made life seem okay. I didn't realize it at the time, but that group of friends became the core of my community in Vancouver.

When my broken heart needed to be picked up at the start of the pandemic, it was the friends I made here that did that. I didn't have an easy time creating my community, but I'm beyond lucky that I ended up with the chosen family I have.

Now, two years later, both my parents and I are doing better. My anxiety subsided a little after finally being able to see them and they're working on taking better care of themselves. My anger towards the world still comes out sometimes; occasionally my stomach still drops and I feel something is about to go terribly, *terribly* wrong. But when I came back to Vancouver after my visit home, what do you know? Landing at YVR felt like coming home, too. ●



# Unbearably hard to hate

Aisha Chaudhry

A dull headache began banging in my skull during my family's Christmas party. Soon after, my throat ached with irritation and my sinuses had become a desert. I had COVID-19.

For better or for worse, no one will ever forget 2020. Anything deemed nonessential was closed, the whole world was in quarantine and the government announced strict bylaws banning any meetings between people from different households. I live in a multigenerational household with my elderly grandparents, and my stomach churned at the mere thought of how much havoc COVID-19 could wreak in my house.

One would imagine that my grandparents, who have a whole list of pre-existing health issues, would be tyrannical about taking every possible precaution. Surely, they understood how dangerous this virus could be, right?

Wrong.

Their priorities were skewed. Family always came first to them. Despite

Sofya Andrews

Sofya Andrews

the threat of a deadly disease, my grandparents regularly chose to throw caution to the wind and regularly invite my relatives to come over. Each visit was a gamble, a roll of the dice on whether this would finally be when our luck ran out.

Family is unbearably hard to hate. These are the same people who raised me with a surplus of love, but I struggle to view them with the same untainted adoration that I did as a child. COVID-19 acted as a catalyst for my realization that had somehow remained invisible for 17 years.

I saw whose voice was being thrust to the sidelines to make others comfortable. No one likes to acknowledge the real world when it does nothing but ravage one's little utopia, but by refusing to recognize reality, someone could absolve themselves of any responsibility. How can you be guilty of something if you were completely unaware it was happening?

My family's lack of caution was not connected to the abundance of conspiracy theories at the time or any belief that COVID-19 was a hoax. Instead, it stemmed from their faith. They're a very religious bunch. Their arrogance was built upon the presumption that their piousness would keep them safe. In their eyes, this virus was a warning from God that society was on the wrong path.

As a child, my bedtime tales were stories from the Quran, and plagues were a comon way in which one way God liked to express his frustration with humanity.

I have an unsettlingly vivid memory of my uncle talking about how this pandemic was from God for the disbelievers. It was a Friday afternoon and I was sitting on the ground, pressing my palms against the rough texture of the carpet as he delivered the sermon. It lasted an eternity. When he began to explain how this pandemic was a sign from God, I bit my lip to hold back my laughter (and slight irritation). It all sounded like nonsense. Who were we to judge? His gruff voice rang through the room, making it impossible to block out. A stark metallic taste filled my mouth when he said those words.

About a month later, my entire family got COVID-19.

It was during Christmas dinner that my initial symptoms began, and during which we all probably spread the virus to each other. The irony continues to mount when I remember we have never had a Christmas dinner before. Why? Because we don't celebrate Christmas. I have absolutely no idea why we decided to start in the middle of a pandemic. One second I'm sitting at the dinner table, and the next I have a swab being rammed up my nose, I'm getting calls from concerned relatives and a wave of overwhelming anger is consuming me.

In total, nine of us were sick.

My family thought it would be fun to play the blame game: who brought home the virus? A storm of accusations hit my phone in the form of WhatsApp messages. All I could hear was my phone's blaring buzzing. I quickly gave up on reading the messages as each one suffocated me with nausea and anxiety. It was pointless. All the adults in my life felt so immature and I wanted to give them a lecture at the ripe old age of 17. Instead, I chose to curl up underneath my blanket and let the COVID fog numb my brain. If everyone had simply owned up to their actions, my illness could have been at least tolerable. They, however, once again chose to conveniently burden someone else with the consequences. I was left with an ocean of ambiguous feelings about my family. How do you move forward with someone after that? What's to say they won't do it again? People rarely ever learn from their mistakes when they're not held accountable for them. Perhaps it's not my responsibility to fix this division. Maybe it's up to my family, or whoever initially created the conflict by spreading harmful misinformation about COVID-19, throwing parties during quarantine, attending anti-mask protests or whatever else they've done. It should be up to them to own up and realize their wrongdoing; otherwise, their actions won't change. They need to take the first steps to right their wrongs.

Sofya Andrews

Although these memories have been stuck in my head ever since, they were pushed to the side with a relatively calm return to campus in term one. Sure, I spent most of it refusing to take off my mask even when I was completely alone and sanitizing my hands raw, but it was fine.

Term two, however, had a rather shaky start. Thanks to the Omicron variant, UBC announced that the first month of classes would be online. The news was met with some backlash: I remember one student even chose to convey their frustration by sending AMS executive Eshana Bhangu a malicious email, blaming her for the decision.

Suddenly those old questions sprang to the forefront of my mind as they became relevant to my community. Initially, I was also upset with courses being online, but then I wondered if this was the only option for other students to safely attend classes. Did the person who sent the email think about how their message disregarded the voices of those more vulnerable? If we had come back to school and cases had soared, who would have suffered the most?

Would anyone have been held accountable?

The pandemic continues to highlight divisions in our communities and social circles. Perhaps it can provide an opportunity to reflect on whether something simply being an inconvenience to you is a privilege and whether you need to mend any bridges you've recently set on fire. ●

March 13, 2020

Shu and Audrey Golsteyn

March 13, 2020

March 13, 2020

## Bridget Meehan

March 13, 2020 I hosted a party for my sister's eighteenth birthday
Red cups laden to the brim with sticky, peachy liquid
Strong enough to make me smile after one sip.
Carelessly offered hugs and exchanged niceties
Naïve to my future
Safe in familiarity
Locked to the comfort I felt with you, and you and you.
Days crept into months and what was time really?
When hours overlapped with one another the way the waves folded in to the sand;
A haze of YouTube Zumba and the fast fashion of foods: avocado toast
How did this time alter my identity?

I would like to be able to offer something wise after all of this time
And everyone asks
what you did with your quarantine
All I did was endure it and keep moving
I didn't even make the whipped coffee
My sister did and I resented the taste
And I became more afraid of the grocery store than flying and
My own fears transcended fear itself
Morphing away from specifics
Into some overarching dread
Walking is more fun than it used to be and I check the weather app more frequently
I don't know if this is a product of the pandemic or my inevitably constant aging
I read less for fun and the music my dad shows me is cooler than anything I can come up with on my own
I can tolerate black coffee and
I would choose my mom's chicken pot pie over pizza
I know how to keep a plant alive and how to kill a plant when you neglect its very existence and
I learnt that a person is just a person
No matter how badly I want them to be more.
Is this COVID or am I just growing up?

All I've realized in two years, four waves
Endless negative antigen tests,
And one lonely positive,

Is what a flawed concept true happiness is
I perceived joy as perfect moments and carefully crafted events
Graduations and weddings and flowers
But happiness is waking up in a good mood
On an overcast day
Pouring coffee into my favourite mug that might still have residue from yesterday
Sleeping in my roommate's bed when a flight of stairs feels a little too far away
Sitting on the deck
Gord Downie's voice humming in my ears echoing into the thick air
The only light is from the flame burning off of her cigarette
And drinking cheap red wine from a bottle
That never seems to end
Feeling unbothered as I sip something that will stain my teeth
The darkness makes me feel safe and I feel more drunk off of this moment
Than I do from the wine in my stomach

And the eyes around me are warm and pretty and tired
And I feel seen
And I trust I'm not the only one
I'm laughing about something I'm going to forget as soon as I walk down that broken staircase
And I'm laughing about being young and I'm laughing about feeling old and
Isn't it funny how familiar this feels even though this is new?
If I could just keep this moment in something other than the frameless photo magnetized to my fridge

It's impossible to pinpoint exactly when a moment becomes a memory
But I knew in the moment
This feeling was meant to last. ●

# ‘Tightening of constraints’: How immunocompromised students navigate the return to ‘normal’

Jasmine Cadeliña Manango & Elif Kayali

Terri Anderson planned to become a social butterfly in 2020.

She was going to meet up with friends at coffee shops, go to writing events and break out of her shell. Due to her social anxiety, the fifth-year creative writing major hadn’t been spending time with a lot of people.

“I was like, ‘This is it, things are only going up from here …. I’m going to be hanging out all the time in the lounge. I’m going to be going to all the events. I’m going to be spending so much time with people,’” Anderson said.

But when COVID-19 hit, everything changed.

At first she was worried about her father’s health because of his age. But once she started taking immunosuppressants herself, her comfort level dropped even lower.

Being immunocompromised means an individual’s immune system isn’t able to work properly to protect them from infections, making them more vulnerable to serious illnesses.

COVID-19 has been particularly difficult for immunocompromised students. According to a study published by *The Public Library of Science One*, immunocompromised patients are over three times more likely to die if hospitalized due to COVID-19 compared to individuals with healthy immune systems.

On top of the health risks amplified by the pandemic, Anderson struggled to maintain a sense of community because of the social isolation that COVID-19 safety requires.

“[Now] I meet up with people for Zoom writing sessions and stuff, but it’s lonely,” Anderson said. “I feel pretty isolated.”

For students like Anderson, coming back to campus means bearing the risk of getting COVID-19 in exchange for a degree. It also means navigating a community that seems to be moving on from the pandemic without them.

## Decisions loading

In the 2020/21 school year, UBC made the decision to hold classes online for the entire year. But the 2021/22 year has been a mix of in-person and online, depending on the professor and the COVID-19 situation at the time.

The timing of UBC’s decisions around in-person and online schooling, specifically this academic year, has been particularly tricky for immunocompromised students to navigate.

President Santa Ono announced the new vaccine declaration and rapid testing policies on August 26, 2021. The university launched the program on September 7, the first day of classes for the winter term, though the enforcement of the policy deregistration for students refusing to comply only came into effect in January 2022.

More recently, on December 22,

Alida Rahemtulla

2021, UBC announced that term two classes would be online until January 24, 2022, following student outcry around in-person exams. The return to in-person classes was delayed to February 7, on January 12, 2022.

The more time that UBC takes to announce their decisions regarding instruction during the pandemic, the less time students have to prepare.

"If you are someone who is more at risk from [COVID-19], you're probably taking extra steps and more complicated steps in terms of getting prepared and getting to campus in a certain way," said Anderson.

Dr. Sylvia Fuller, a professor in the department of sociology, said that she feels similar to Anderson regarding UBC's communication strategy during the pandemic. Although not immunocompromised herself, Fuller's partner is a highly immunocompromised transplant recipient.

"It's a lot to try and keep track of what's going on and it was certainly very stressful waiting to find out what UBC's plans were at various stages in the pandemic," said Fuller. AMS VP Academic and University Affairs Eshana Bhangu also criticized UBC's communication throughout the pandemic. "We keep saying that [UBC needs] to communicate timely, timely, timely and then they do it at the last minute," she said.

Matthew Ramsey, director of university affairs at UBC Media Relations said "UBC has made every effort to communicate as quickly as possible throughout this pandemic."

"The [COVID-19] situation has changed quickly, and often with little or no warning. We would ask for students' patience, as this organization, which is the size of a small city, adapts and evolves to changing health guidelines and health imperatives," he added.

Ramsey said that UBC is going "above and beyond the health guidelines" by distributing masks and implementing the rapid testing program for students.

"We appreciate the concerns, and we know that comfort levels vary from person to person with returning to campus. We have tried to put into place a framework for addressing those concerns as best as we can," said Ramsey.

UBC's COVID-19 policies and procedures have followed BC's Provincial Health guidelines — something Charlie, an immunocompromised graduate student whose name has been changed to protect her health information, said she thinks doesn't make sense.

Charlie said UBC needs to consider that the Vancouver campus is a relatively small, isolated area populated by a mix of both commuters and residents who engage with BC COVID-19 policies in varying levels of compliance.

"I feel like it's too much of a risk for me to participate in this in-person learning," she said.

Similarly, Anderson feels that UBC only listens to some students' concerns, such as those bemoaning 'Zoom University' and social isolation, and not to the concerns of others.

"It often feels as though they're going to say the more popular answer for as long as possible," she said. "It doesn't feel like [UBC is] actively trying to protect people who could be more vulnerable. It feels like that's kind of an afterthought."

According to Ramsey, the university made the decision to return to mostly in-person instruction on February 7 following "extensive consultation with its internal communities" and in accordance with health guidelines.

"This isn't a question of popularity, it's a question of trying to get people back in class after close to two years of predominantly online learning," said Ramsey.

## Losing compassion and accessibility

Coming back to campus also sparked concerns from Anderson and Charlie that accommodations that had become the norm during the pandemic would once again only be accessible through formal procedures.

For Charlie, one benefit of the pandemic was that people around her gained an understanding of accessibility and became more compassionate. It became "acceptable" for her to not attend in-person events.

"There were no questions," said Charlie. "The lack of justification that I have to provide really made me feel like it was a much more supportive community than it maybe would have felt in the past."

At the university, many instructors became more flexible with absences. UBC even allowed students to defer some exams in mid-December if they were concerned about COVID-19.

But those compassionate practices aren't written in policy. Policy LR7, a joint Board of Governors and Senate policy for accommodation for students with disabilities, explicitly states that it does not apply to students who are experiencing temporary health issues.

In those cases, students are instructed to file for academic concessions as outlined in the UBC Calendar.

According to the policy, if there is uncertainty whether a student is experiencing a "temporary health issue" or a disability, their instructors and UBC staff should consult with the Centre for Accessibility (CFA).

The two policies leave immunocompromised students with few options — enrol in classes and risk being denied accommodations or take a leave of absence. However, for immunocompromised students, taking a leave carries significant consequences.

"When you take a whole term off, you have no access to any of the university resources, you have no access to funding, [you] have nothing," explained Charlie.

Both Anderson and Charlie want more flexible support systems to remain in place after UBC has returned to fully in-person classes. According to Bhangu, the AMS is still advocating for "accomodations and options," like multi-access instruction and recorded lectures for immunocompromised students.

"When you hear stuff like, 'It's time to live with the virus, stop living in fear, let's just go back in person.' I totally understand and respect that. But it is important to remember that these groups cannot just live with the virus," said Bhangu.

Janet Mee, director of the Centre for Accessibility, said the academic concessions policy, while not specific to supporting immunocompromised students, is "very relevant" to providing immunocompromised students with accommodations to meet their program requirements.

"That policy particularly has been interpreted in a very broad and flexible way during the pandemic in order to address some of the unexpected consequences of the pandemic itself," said Mee.

## Mental health consequences ongoing

Outside of logistical challenges, this pandemic has been hard emotionally on immunocompromised people.

"A lack of control [and] a lack of certainty about the future is a primary concern [for adults with disabilities] that's contributing to decreased mental health," said Dr. Kathleen Martin Ginis, director of the Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Management.

Martin Ginis worked on the COVID-19 Disability Survey. While the study focused on adults with disabilities in general, it did not investigate the experiences of students as their own distinct population.

Noorjean Hassam, UBC's chief student health officer, encouraged students to access any kind of mental health support they find most appropriate for themselves. She explained that meditation, mindfulness exercises, school clubs, online counselling and UBC's Wellness Services could all be helpful for students.

"There's so much evidence to show that most people's negative mental health impacts of this isolation loneliness can be addressed in those ways and those ways are really effective if people put that honest effort into trying them out," she said.

But UBC's mental health services do not target immunocompromised students. Bhangu thinks that's an issue.

"In terms of mental health support, I think always more can be done," said Bhangu. "When you have a student body of 56,000 plus students, just adding one or two counselors doesn't really make the difference, so I think they really need to be targeting equity-deserving groups."

## Looking ahead: new normal needed

Both Charlie and Anderson are in the last year of their respective programs. The finish line is in sight but they're not quite in the clear yet. There were several times over the past few years when both of them made the choice to persevere instead of taking a leave of absence.

"I thought about taking a leave a few times because it's just been so much more difficult to be successful," said Anderson. "But I'm almost graduated now so I guess I'll just power through this term."

With COVID-19 restrictions being peeled away, Anderson hopes that people don't forget the risk of getting seriously ill has not disappeared for students like her. She also hopes the support that immunocompromised students received during the pandemic doesn't disappear either.

Similarly, as society continues to return back to 'normal,' Fuller wants people to remember the strain that the pandemic has placed on those with weakened immuned systems and their loved ones.

"Every time there's a loosening of restrictions, it's a tightening of constraints for those who are immunocompromised, and those who love them." ●

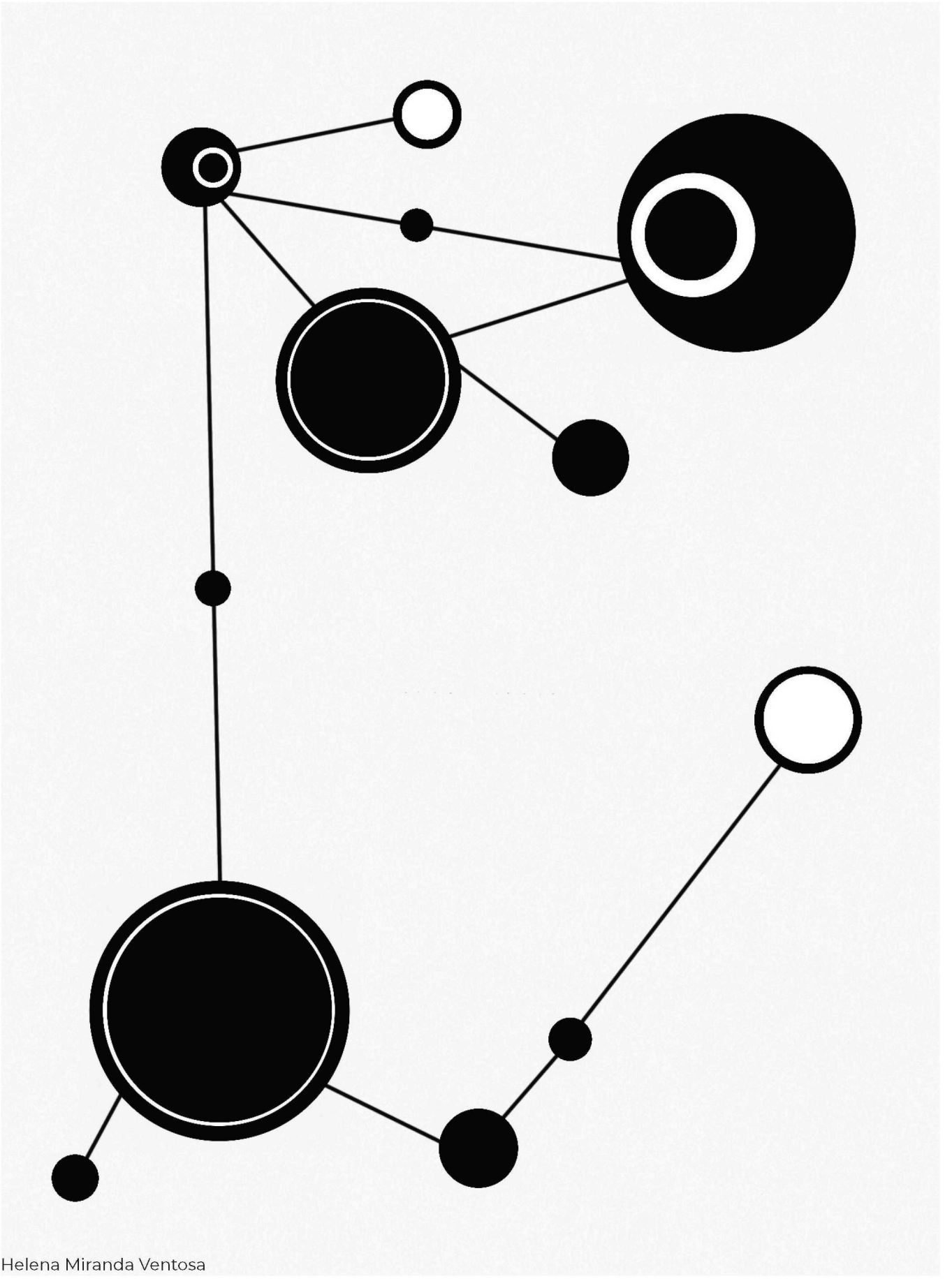
Helena Miranda Ventosa

# hybrid

Lauren Kasowski

when the world stopped, we connected in the one place we still could
we unlocked parts of ourselves, found spaces we didn't know we needed
mutuals became synonymous with friends
we talked into the night or into the morning
time zones didn't matter
but now —
a press for in-person partnerships
for passively passing time together
for clarity a screen can't capture
for long awaited embraces, refamiliarizing the feel of skin against your own
we miss it, need it even, but
it's not mutually exclusive
not with the future's certain uncertainty of which kind of connection we can have
normalize the value in both ●

Helena Miranda Ventosa



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