

# milk.

bath spa's student magazine • 2023



the **ALTERNATIVE** issue

## alternative

adjective

1. activities that depart from or challenge societal norms.  
“an alternative lifestyle”

2. thoughts and opinions of students aiming to depart  
from and challenge societal norms.  
“an alternative viewpoint”

**think:** more often than not, the alternative opinion is  
quietly the most common

the milk team, 2023

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS



HOLLY MORRIS

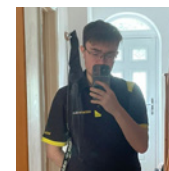
MEGAN WILLIS

A lot has happened since the last edition of *milk*, which was published in 2021 and created remotely by a team scattered across the UK. At that time, many of us were unsure of what the future would hold for students. But that future is now our present, and with it comes the relaunch of *milk* for 2023. When we were brainstorming concepts for this edition, we agreed that to pretend the last three years hadn't happened would be disingenuous. But, rather than focusing on what we had lost, we wanted to validate and celebrate your journeys and discoveries. With that, **The Alternative Issue** was created – a collection of stories, perspectives, experiences and studies on what it means to be a student at Bath Spa University. We have not shied away from revealing what life is now like for students – read Megan's feature on work/life balance on page 26, Adam's exploration into mental health on page 24, and discover what gender means to Maisy on page 10. This magazine is proof that we have taken on challenges and thrived. It is a celebration of success as well as a recognition of what we've lost, with the community at the centre of it all. As a team, we're honoured that you've shared your stories and shown us what it means to be a Bath Spa University student in 2023.

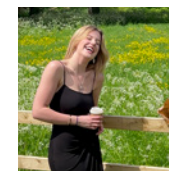
We hope you enjoy the issue.

Holly  
and  
Meg

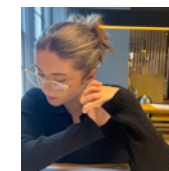
### MEET THE REST OF THE TEAM!



BEN MATTHEWS  
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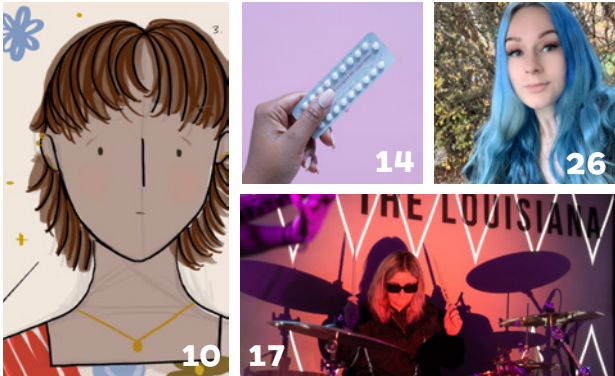
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Illustration: Maisy Driver; images: Cultura Creative from stock.adobe.com, Chris Illingworth

# Udderly Different

EMBRACING AN ALTERNATIVE WORLD



Words: Megan Willis & Holly Morris

**W**hat milk do you have in your coffee? It was once a simple question with a straightforward answer: blue, green or red milk. If your preference wasn't available, you either politely declined the drink altogether or spent the next ten minutes deliberating over what was the best milk to have. In 2023, however, there are so many milk options that they have their own dedicated section in every high-street café's hot drinks menu.

Finding an alternative to cow's milk used to be a Tolkienesque quest; but now, the presumption is that you will have alternative milk in your latte, and why wouldn't you? It's trendy, helps the environment and caters to many of our dietary requirements. The last time I asked for cow's milk, the barista looked horrified, awkward and sorry for me all at once. I wasn't offended in the slightest but it did make me reminisce about a world we once knew so well and how different it now looks.

## Embracing change

There are alternatives to every way of life because, as human beings, we have always taken change head-on. We evolve, adapt and eventually overcome – and adopting alternative ways of living is at the core of that. So when Boris Johnson addressed the nation in March 2020 with the orders of the first of many lockdowns, we had no choice but to say goodbye to everything we knew and devise alternative ways to get by. For most, that involved waking up earlier to complete a Joe Wicks workout, while others helped older family members get to grips with Zoom so they could feel more connected. But, for some, the alternatives were being shut away in their bedrooms for fear of what this unknown illness would do to their bodies. Meanwhile, others were completing degrees or working three jobs to make ends meet.

Many of our modern alternatives are ones we wish we didn't have to choose, but that doesn't mean there aren't ones we don't welcome. There has been a long overdue need for change in the way we eat, or in gender identity, or in representation of women in music or for diversity in film. We have

seen a massive shift in the 'norm' of what these things mean for all people. But why? Is it a political, environmental or just social choice? While the reasons don't often matter, it always makes life so much more interesting.

## The time is now

We have discovered and expressed ourselves in ways we've never been able to before – physically, mentally and socially. You were once regarded as 'fussy' if you asked about food alternatives. If you identified as anything out of societal norms, you were mocked or your voice was left unheard. But times have changed and so have we, and for the first time, we seem to be living in a society where communities are *truly* welcoming alternatives.

We're still figuring out how to live in this new world, so now is the time to embrace those alternatives for all the love and joy they bring you. We have the choice to change for the better and we are doing that. So travel the world, explore and discover your identity, try that new adventure you've always been too scared to do – what have you got to lose? ■





# FROM THE MARGINS TO CENTRE STAGE

Words: Holly Morris

## **EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE**

## **ALL AT ONCE USHERS IN A NEW ERA OF DIVERSITY FOR HOLLYWOOD**

**C**inematic game-changer *Everything Everywhere All At Once* made waves at the box office for many different reasons; but the one thing everyone agreed on was that this film is totally extraordinary.

Directed by visionary duo Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan (aka the 'Daniels') the story takes viewers on a

remarkable journey through multiple dimensions and cultures. The film revolves around Evelyn (Michelle Yeoh), a Chinese-American matriarch who unexpectedly discovers her hidden connection to a vast multiverse. This revelation then unravels many themes about family, identity and the power of embracing one's heritage. While many of the critics dismissed

the film's story as a nonsensical mess, these opinions were soon crushed as producer Jonathan Wang stood on the stage accepting the Academy Award for Best Picture. This accolade also proved that the image of Hollywood is finally beginning to change and that those who have demanded more diverse and inclusive storytelling are finally being heard.

### **Story not stereotypes**

According to a Luminate Film & TV report, in 2022, actors and directors of Asian heritage in Hollywood productions increased by 7.7% and 5.9% respectively. Yet, as an industry, Hollywood still lacks the visibility for communities who are not white.

Every award season sees a parade of the latest young white actors on the scene, with a sea of news coverage and opportunities pushed their way. Meanwhile, a select community of Asian actors have had to uphold generational representation in order to fulfil the role of 'token ethnic minority', trapped to live out detrimental, white-washed stereotypes for decades. The Asian community is more than Kung Fu masters, kawaii fangirls, tech nerds and evil geniuses – they deserve to see the beauty and anguish of their culture on the big screen... just like everybody else.

*Everything Everywhere All At Once*'s success demonstrates that modern audiences crave diverse narratives and

that inclusive storytelling can captivate viewers while breaking box-office records. Evelyn's story is a bold celebration of multiculturalism and seamlessly weaves elements of different cultural traditions and mind-boggling science fiction (including fighting off multiverse enemies with bum-bags and buttplug-shaped trophies, saving raccoon chefs, and playing pianos with frankfurter sausages for fingers...). But it also shows conflict, resistance against identity, disassociation between family and the desire to know that people love you no matter what – and that those are universal struggles regardless of skin colour or culture.

Movies like this open doors for more voices to be heard, encouraging emerging talents to explore their own cultural experiences and reshape the landscape of cinema.

### **Disrupt and dismantle**

By featuring diverse characters with depth and complexity, Hollywood has the power to dismantle existing stereotypes and present a more authentic portrayal of individuals from different backgrounds. This helps normalise the experience of *all* people, fostering empathy and understanding among viewers

*Everything Everywhere All At Once* is only the beginning of this will to disrupt the industry and inspire filmmakers to create narratives representative of the world in which we live – proving to critics worldwide that their lack of understanding is not representative of our own. ■

Illustrations: @smartstart1 from canva.com; gradients: NARANAT STUDIO from stock.adobe.com



# BEYOND THE BINARY: — WHAT GENDER MEANS TO ME

Gender is a minefield.  
Let's start with that

Words & illustrations: Maisy Driver

**G**ender is putting a reminder on Instagram that 'they/them' isn't optional; it's crucial. Gender is staying up until 2am making a PowerPoint on how to get pronouns right. Gender is arguments about whether you deserve to exist. Gender is the debate the Conservatives adore, that they salivate over, that they wait for. Gender is not an argument; it's a conversation. My gender is not for them to decide.

My gender is something I find difficult to define; I have now learned to simplify it when I have to explain it. I don't know how to state it in a lyrical, hypothetical way – it's easier to keep

it plain in order to avoid confusion or backlash. The minute it becomes confusing is the minute you become gradually undermined. Therefore, how I identify is varied depending on the situation.

To my co-workers, I am non-binary, and to my mother, I am her sweet little girl. To myself? I shift and change as and when I need to. I take on a gender-fluid identity, and yet, you will never hear me introducing myself this way. This is because if you give cisgender people the choice to label you what they already know you as, they will pick it over anything. They will steer clear from using a mix of pronouns if you offer one they already understand. →



“The lack of gender had given them wings. It had allowed them to soar”

I use all pronouns, but have spent so long not identifying as feminine that the set of pronouns that go along with femininity feels a little offensive. I align with it, understand the association, but find it difficult because it is something I have held at arm's length for a long time. So, despite identifying as gender-fluid, outwardly presenting as non-binary is more simple.

### Gender euphoria

My gender is purely my own. Nobody knows it as well as me because I do not give them the space to try to understand it. There have been so many things taken away from queer people that I will not let my identity be devalued by someone else's questioning. Gender, for me, means I don't owe anybody an explanation of who I am.

Gender means different things to different people. To some, it is their lifeline; to others, it means nothing at all. It's curious to observe different queer identities and the ways in which they outwardly present. For this article, I asked people about the things that make them feel euphoric; hair, clothes, tattoos were

a few of the answers. I loved these and resonated with them – my mullet was a defining moment for my gender identity as it was the first time I told anyone I wasn't gender-conforming. Other responses included that a deeper understanding of their childhood dysphoria was euphoric. And also that the little 'silliness' that comes alongside being gender non-conforming has been a comfort to transgender people far and wide. The most common response, however, was about freedom.

### For freedom

All my friends, all the people they spoke to, expressed that their new identity made them feel free, almost as if the lack of gender had given them wings. It had allowed them to soar, to understand their place in a world that has often been cruel and demeaning to the trans-community. The gender non-conforming label has allowed people to just be as they are, without the demands of masculinity, femininity, or any other constructs that fit us into cramped glasshouses. The lack of label has allowed us to roam free, regardless of how we each feel about our very individual experiences, and our very individual bodies.

Gender is also my chosen mother asking me how to use my pronouns correctly just so that she doesn't mess them up. It's laughing at my manager as she stumbles her way through how to refer to me – her heart is in the most right and warm place that it can be. Gender is solidarity when you see someone with a pin badge like the one on your own backpack. No matter who you are, or how you identify, gender is about choice. Gender, or perhaps the lack thereof, is finally feeling free. ■

# taste buddies

**Harriet Sadler** shares how food connects us to ourselves and the people around us

While many of our daily routines became smaller during lockdown, food was the part of my life that was magnified. I felt I was simply just killing time in between breakfast, lunch and dinner. I spent most of my days flicking through recipe books, shopping for ingredients or in the kitchen preparing food. The part I enjoyed most was making the meals look beautiful, delicately garnishing my colourful creations to get that perfect 'Insta-worthy' shot. All this while my family waited patiently at the table, ravenous (they admitted the wait was always worth it).

Having studied Food and Nutrition at BSU, I understand what food is good for us – we are constantly taught what to eat more or less of. But what isn't advocated enough is how the whole process of preparing a meal can nourish us. I'll admit not everyone will be as excited

by different types of mushrooms or stock cubes as me, but it is undoubtedly true that enjoying a home-cooked meal around the table with people you love will always be good for you.

Discovering that food is not only necessary for life, but it's also my hobby, has allowed me to bond with people in so many ways. (And no, that isn't just because I bribe people to be my friend with tasty baked goods...) Living with a housemate who has coeliac disease made me aware of how problematic food intolerances can be, especially when socialising. I could see how it could feel really isolating. My love language for this friend became making all our meals gluten-free so she could join us (so I guess you could say I bribed this particular friend). These evenings we spent eating together were the ones we bonded the most. ■

# Do you want *sides* with that?



The normalised suffering that young women are expected to go through needs to be addressed. **Sophie Lee** explores the bad side of birth control...

**T**he first appointment I had with my GP to discuss birth control left me feeling terrible. This health professional seemed very quick to dismiss me and I felt patronised when I was told the risks of having sex (as if I wasn't already aware). It made me feel shameful and full of guilt, when all I was doing was taking responsibility for my health.

I decided to go down the birth control implant route. This meant I wouldn't need to worry about having to speak to the doctor as often compared to choosing the contraceptive injection or the pill. Once this implant was inside, the embarrassing nightmare would be over. I already had the awkwardness of collecting the implant from the pharmacy where I had to declare what I was picking up in front of a queue of strangers. What's more, I wasn't fully aware of the side effects; they just told me to read the leaflet. At that point it was too late to back out. I attended the appointment feeling like a complete nervous wreck. Luckily, the woman who did my procedure was friendly and made me feel at ease.

Once the implant was fitted and I was bandaged up, the doctor told me to check the placement of the rod once a month to make sure it hadn't moved. "It can move?!" I said in horror. She told me there have been very rare cases of the implant getting lost in women's bodies. There were

reports of how one even travelled to a woman's lungs. I couldn't believe I hadn't known this before the procedure. Sore and confused I left feeling blindsided, clutching the leaflets that laid out all the possible side effects I might experience. With regards to this, I feel like I've experienced every side effect going from personality changes to mental health issues. But most of my female friends have also experienced something similar so I never thought to complain. And this is where the problem lies; women have been fighting for decades to be heard on these issues begging not to be dismissed with harmful labels such as 'dramatic' or 'sensitive'.

## Do not complain

The experiences of women who have been negatively impacted by birth control is often swept under the carpet, despite the fact side effects can be as severe as infertility, cancer and blood clots. Young girls think nothing of going on to birth control as soon as they become sexually active because this has become the norm. But how much do they know about the potential side effects and harm?

As a young woman I went on my own journey trying to find the right contraceptive. I was lucky enough to have a supportive mum; without her I would have been hesitant to seek health

"I've experienced every side effect from personality changes to mental health issues"

advice. The overwhelming amount of contraceptives are not necessarily a bad thing, but it can be intimidating for any female, especially young girls, trying to make sense of the medical terminology and decide which option is best for them.

Non-hormonal alternatives such as barriers, diaphragms and cervical caps are mostly the responsibility of the female. The only current birth control for men are condoms and the new contraceptive gel – things that aren't 100 per cent effective or hugely popular with the younger age bracket. There have been clinical trials to test for a male birth-control pill but because of participants dropping out, the testing hasn't been safely or properly carried out. And why were these men walking away? It's because of the risks and side effects – the same risks and side effects that women go through every single day... However a medication (similar to the female pill) called Dimethandrolone undecanoate (DMAU) is currently being tested. This contraceptive suppresses sperm counts and male sex hormones. Time will tell what the outcome will be. →



The birth control pill is currently being studied for the effects it has on the female brain. The pill shuts off the brain signals that prompts egg release and development, but how much do we know about how this destruction of a natural process is really affecting the brain?

I spoke with more than 40 women aged 14 to 25 and every single one of them suffered side effects after taking the contraceptive pill. When I asked what these issues were, I often heard the phrase: 'Oh, you know, just the normal stuff', following a list of horrible, life-changing symptoms, such as mood swings, weight change and mental health problems.

### Let's talk

The truth is the conversation needs to be louder, so that all people can hear what the side effects and implications

“People need to hear what the implications of female birth control are...”

of female birth control are. At Bath Spa University we have a higher proportion of female students, so if speaking to a health professional seems daunting at first, reach out to coursemates, female lecturers, anyone you feel comfortable with. There is no shame in talking about these issues, you will be surprised at how many women will be able to relate to what you're going through. ■

## Support for students

**BSU students can book a wellbeing or GP appointment on campus if they want to discuss their birth control options.**

You are also encouraged to register with our local surgery in town, **Fairfield Park Health Centre**.  
Phone: **01225 331616**  
Email: **bswicb.fairfieldpark@nhs.net**

The **Riverside Sexual Health Clinic** in Bath offers help and advice for contraceptives and more.  
[www.ruh.nhs.uk/sexualhealth](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/sexualhealth)  
Phone: **01225 826855**  
Email: **ruh-tr.theriversideclinic@nhs.net**

The **NHS contraceptive guide** also has plenty of information.  
[www.nhs.uk/conditions/contraception](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/contraception)



# KUDOS

Alternative sounds, influences and style combine.  
**Georgia Woollard** talks to the Bristol-based band

Photography: Chris Illingworth

**F**ormed in 2021, alternative band **Kudos** first met as students on the **Commercial Music degree at BSU**. They have since gone on to play the **Louisiana in Bristol**, and **Moles and Komedia in Bath**. We catch up with singer **Tom Bettle**, drummer **Mia Holmes**, bassist **Billy Chester** and lead guitarist **Tom Hugo** to discover the story behind their sound.

What comes to mind when you think of the word 'alternative'?

**TB:** "Not pop culture, but something that opposes that like using alternatives in day-

to-day life or anything that goes against the social norm. In terms of music, I'd say anything unconventional. When you think of conventional music you could think of pop music, and I suppose we're consciously trying to steer away from that and create more alternative sounds."

What bands have influenced your music?

**TB:** "We all have individual influences – David Bowie, The Smiths, Radiohead, old 90s shoegazing bands, as well as noise music. It helps that we're into the same genres and sound, so our creative



visions don't often clash. We also probably have influences that we don't even realise and that have contributed to Kudos and our creative process."

### How did you come to form the band?

**BC:** "It was actually over a Facetime call between Tom Bettle and Tom Hugo in 2019 for a tutor group meeting."

**TB:** "Yes! I remember Tom Hugo mentioning he needed to change the strings for his guitar but he didn't know how to do them, so I offered. Fast-forward to the skills-sharing day at the start of the course and I didn't know what he looked like because he didn't have his camera on, so I was a bit lost looking for this guy. However, someone introduced us and our friendship bloomed. He also had connections to Billy so it made it easy for us to have him join. Mia was already in so many projects we didn't think she'd want to join but she was all about it! So yeah, we're all good friends and this band now just feels like fun!"

### How has life as a student on the Commercial Music course at BSU affected your music?

**MH:** "We've met a lot of others that do the course and therefore they've inspired us, even if we don't realise it. Meeting these people has opened us up to other music too, which means we end up going down different pathways of experimentation and inspiration. University has definitely made us go to more gigs, which has changed our lifestyles as we're surrounded by music a lot more."

**TH:** "In terms of writing, some of the modules we've done have encouraged us to get our creative juices flowing, which is good because some of us don't write so much if it falls on us individually. It also

brings us together as a band because before this we hadn't really written songs with others before, and we've written quite a few as a band now. The same goes with the performance modules, which have made us gain more experience together."

### As well as your music, your image is kind of alternative too. What inspired this look?

**TH:** "Bettle's look came after we started making songs..."

**TB:** "I remember one gig where I was wearing whatever the hell I was wearing – something casual, for sure – and I was thinking about the way I deliver songs and what process my mind goes through when performing them. I just held the thought of what Kudos' songs meant and started to question how I could represent that not just in the musical element and performance but in the appearance. So, yeah, that's it really."

### Tom, do you feel like you can mask the real you behind that persona on stage?

**TB:** "Wow, interesting! Maybe, I feel like my 'real' personality stemmed from the persona of Kudos and the appearance of it. Actually, my delivery on a lot of the songs are from personal experiences where I've felt a lot of emotion."

### Do you guys have any backstage rituals before you go out to play live?

**BC:** "Sometimes its chain-smoking out back, ordering a pint of cider or applying eyeliner. Bettle has a glass of water, gets changed and listens to certain songs to get him in the zone."

**TB:** "Yes, I listen to special songs that help the emotion start flowing – mainly Bowie, but it differs each time. But yeah, we also just mill about."



**Tom Hugo:** "The modules we've done at BSU have brought us together as a band"

### Are there any playlists on Spotify that have a similar sound to Kudos?

**MH:** "Hmmm, we haven't actually listened to any curated playlists recently! But, we were thinking about creating one for anyone that listens to us – it will hopefully scratch that itch for when we can't release music, so they have similar songs to listen to in the meantime."

### What do you want people to feel when they listen to your music?

**TB:** "Whatever they want to feel and interpret the songs how they want to, it's completely open." ■

Visit <https://linktr.ee/Kudosband> for links to Kudos' Spotify, social media, gig dates and more

They say to write what hurts  
 Whatever lies within  
 I say  
 Let them watch  
 As I unravel all my  
 Sins

I shall

b  
l  
e  
e  
d

Out on paper  
 Blotchy  
 Red  
 Ink  
 As my memories  
 Beg  
 To

t  
a  
o  
l  
f

And I try to  
 make them

Sink.

Pain on paper  
 The pen  
 screaming  
 For a break  
 As the hand who  
 Is writing  
 My  
 Story  
 Has filled each page  
 With  
 Heartache

Clawing at my soul  
 C r  
 a c  
 k i  
 n g  
 Open my chest  
 As I find my  
 Worst  
 To produce my  
 Best

## write what hurts

*My first poem has a rather sad tone. I wanted to explain why writers often have to open up to painful realisations in order to create meaningful work. But I happen to think this is a beautiful process, and so I believe that the poem itself – despite its tone – is not negative, just truthful.*



by  
**maisie**  
 taylor-williams



SINK  
 SINK  
 SINK  
 SINK.

## ode to the poets

*The second poem is about my love for poetry, and how this artform has the power to change the world and bring in new ideas. The poem expresses how the literary arts are powerful, yet challenging; but that this does not compare to the freedom we get when expressing ourselves on paper for the world to see.*



I write what I cannot  
 scream  
 and I scream what I cannot write  
 for when I am at my desk  
 I feel the most  
 empowered  
 sat writing by candlelight  
 I speak in one stanza  
 what I couldn't say in a  
 lifetime  
 my words are my weapons  
 and poetry is my crime

everyone has wounds  
 we fight them for being sore  
 poets  
 you see  
 are mere people  
 who had to  
 fight  
 a little more

a piece of me is left  
 on every page that I write  
 writing is like a drug  
 and I'm as  
 as a kite

we turn ourselves inside  
 and out  
 to produce a piece of work  
 that others may not know anything about

the pen fills my page with such utter  
 bliss  
 poetry is art  
 poetry is  
 justice

i scream  
 what i cannot  
 write.



# Mum's Not the word

Motherhood is not a chosen destination for all women. But why are those who opt for a child-free life viewed in such a negative light? **Daisy Hadley** says it's time to change the script...

The expectation for women to bear children is as old as time. But if your plans don't include kids and you have purposefully chosen a child-free existence, why is this so stigmatised? I created the 'Mummy's Not For Me' campaign as part of my Media Communications Final Project at BSU, with the aim of transforming the stereotypes associated with voluntarily child-free women, and, in turn, traditional expectations of femininity.

Children often learn behaviours, ideas and attitudes through observation and imitation. This inspired me to create a campaign and book with positive role models and representations of voluntarily child-free women to help young readers understand that a lifestyle removed from traditional femininity and motherhood is still a worthwhile and fulfilling one.

In November 2022, I examined 218 picture books in Waterstones. Not one of these featured a child-free woman who expressed they were child-free by choice. Only four books featured adult female characters who were not mothers. On the flip side, 121 of the 218 books featured mothers as warm characters who comfort their children, offer advice and save the day. The disparities between mothers and non-mothers in children's paperback books are clear, and women who express they are child-free by choice are non-existent.

## Rewrite the narrative

My campaign is centred around a book for children aged 4 to 8 and tells the story of Belle the bear. Because Belle has chosen not to have bear cubs, the creatures of the neighbouring forest believe she is cold, nasty and unloving – all stereotypes



commonly associated with voluntarily child-free women. One winter, the animals of the forest discover they have forgotten to prepare for hibernation, and their only chance of survival is to reach out to Belle. After doing so, they realise she is in fact a gentle, kind and fulfilled bear.

To accompany the picture book, I have created complementary drama lesson plans that exist within Belle's world. There is also a Spotify playlist that is magical, positive and uplifting – all the things voluntarily child-free women are!

## Positive action

Although on the surface this campaign may appear to be focused on women who are child-free by choice, it is in fact part of a bigger picture and aims to redefine the hindering and oppressive gender roles that have dictated the identity and lived experience of women for centuries. My 'Mummy's Not For Me' campaign takes a positive step towards abolishing the gender script to show that choosing to be child-free as an alternative is just as rewarding, fulfilling and giving as being a mother. ■

Follow [@mummysnotforme](#) on Instagram and Facebook. Read the book, listen to the playlist and more at <https://bit.ly/bellebear>



# MENTal Health



**Adam Nesbitt** shares how a period of introspection helped shape his wellbeing for the better and led to a life-changing realisation about what it means to be a man

**C**oming to university was a game changer. And, leaving behind a small Irish town for the ‘big city’, I was compelled, like every other student, to adapt to an exciting but daunting new life. Pretty soon I hadn’t a care in the world.

I was thankful I had settled in and was feeling comfortable in this new-found freedom that involved partying, socialising and meeting new people. That was until lockdown and, suddenly, I had a lot of time on my hands. I reflected on my teenage years and tried to grapple with how I coped

with the hurdles that came my way. Pushing away negative emotions, I never wanted to be seen as weak or as someone who wasn’t in control of themselves. After all, it wasn’t manly to be sad. Subscribing to toxic norms of what it meant to be a ‘man’ led me to bottling up my negative emotions.

In the past, any time I repressed such feelings and convinced myself I had ‘gotten over them’, I was actually storing them away. Waiting for a mountain of emotions to grow until it inevitably came crashing down upon me. This realisation was

euphoric. Suddenly, so much made sense! Social isolation had allowed me to piece myself together, enabling me to go through an unexpected period of self-growth and improvement. By the time I returned to university I felt whole again – something I hadn’t felt in a long time. I had completed a journey I hadn’t realised I’d started...

## Awareness in action

Instead of seeing masculinity as something separate to my mental health, I’ve come to appreciate them as connected. But in a world where men like Andrew Tate perpetuate a harmful and even sexist ideology of masculinity, male mental health has become an even more debilitating health crisis. Shunned into silence, men are fed harmful narratives that encourage them to keep it in rather than speak it out. Their emotions are valid, and yet, according to the Office for National Statistics, men have consistently accounted for the majority of suicides in England and Wales for the past 30 years. Just last year men accounted for 74% of the total registrations of people who had taken their own lives.

There is a clear demand for help. Incentivising men to reach out and seek support (whether that’s with friends and family or from professionals) is vital to ensure positive wellbeing. Not just for the men themselves, but for the other people they share their lives with.

For myself, I continue to campaign for men’s mental health awareness; something we can all do! I recently bought a hoodie from fashion awareness brand, Boys Get Sad Too ([boysgetsadtoo.com](http://boysgetsadtoo.com)),


“Subscribing to toxic norms of masculinity led me to bottling up my emotions”

who contribute a tenth of their profits to UK-based mental health charities and campaign for exposure on men’s psychological health. Other men’s health charities and companies include Movember ([uk.movember.com](http://uk.movember.com)) and the Campaign for Living Miserably (CALM) ([thecalzone.net](http://thecalzone.net)).

## Talk the talk

Another way to get involved is by simply having the conversation. *That* conversation. Mental ill-health is never comfortable and is never easy to discuss, but I believe it’s important to remember that one such uncomfortable conversation, involving active listening and empathy could be really life changing.

Friends and family have an equally crucial role in destabilising the harmful norms that have kept men and boys silenced for decades. Never be afraid to reach out and check-in with the men in your lives. It’s something I have always appreciated, whether it was at a time when I repressed my feelings or not. Male mental health is currently a major health crisis. But it doesn’t have to be. ■



# a day in the life

Work, study, work, study,  
rinse and repeat. [Megan Willis](#)  
reveals the reality of the grind

*MONDAYS: AM - UNI 9-12*

*PM - WORK 2:30-8:30*

*TUESDAYS: AM - UNI 9-12*

*PM - EVENING OFF?*

*IF NOT, PM - WORK 2:30-8:30*

*WEDNESDAYS: AM/PM - WORK 8:30-4*

*THURSDAYS: AM - WORK 8:30-12:30*

*PM - UNI 2-5*

*FRIDAYS: PM - WORK 1-8:30*

*SATURDAYS: AM/PM - WORK 8:30-5*

*SUNDAYS: AM/PM - WORK 8:30-5*

**R**ight now, at the age of 22, the term 'work-life balance' just isn't in my vocabulary. I am in my final year of uni and commute to campus three, sometimes four, times a week from Swindon where I live. I also work 30 hours a week as a Barista Maestro at Costa (assistant manager without the pay...).

If I wasn't working, I wouldn't be able to go to uni, the train and bus fares are too expensive. If I wasn't working, I wouldn't be able to afford rent, or clothes, or toiletries. These are the things I have to pay for, and that's before I can go out for lunch with a friend or for drinks with my partner – the

things I'm told to do at this age before 'I get old and have responsibilities'.

I've been working since I left secondary school; as soon as I was able to work I did. I started college in the new school year and worked weekends in a café, picking up extra hours in the school holidays. So, for me, being in full-time education and also working a job to earn money has always been normal.

## [A study in speed](#)

Originally, I applied for a course at my local college, because going to university was never something I thought I'd be

able to do. But when I was at work one afternoon, I received a call saying because not enough people applied, they'd like to offer me a place at Bath Spa University instead. This phone call was one, maybe two weeks before the semester started so living in uni accommodation wasn't an option. And that's when I became a commuting university student.

A typical day-in-the-life article is usually quite upbeat but I think it's important to reveal the reality of what it's like for many students. The cost-of-living crisis is having a huge impact on young people at the moment, and not

having a stable income is often a source of stress because student finance just isn't enough. If I wasn't working, I wouldn't be able to live the life I do now, and it's not even a lavish one.

## [Time pressures](#)

My schedule doesn't take into account the travelling I have to do everyday to get to work or uni. It doesn't take into account any time I squeeze in to see my friends or family or partner. It doesn't take into account the two-hour driving lesson I have every week, or the extra 15 hours studying I do for my uni courses, or the

housework I have to do, or just time to look after myself. I can't remember the last time I had a day off to just do nothing. This current way of living is more common than it ever was, especially for students. Most people in higher education juggle studying full time with picking up work hours whenever they can. Some uni students who don't commute have to travel back to their hometown every holiday to work, so even if someone isn't working during term time they have to make up for it during the breaks. It's frustrating and upsetting for many because there isn't really any other option; this is our reality now and for many students in the future too.

The life we have to live is one of work and not much else. Once we finish university we then have to find a job; one that hopefully is in the industry we want to work in. Some may apply for jobs straight away, some may stay in their current jobs to save up money until they're ready to start looking, some may have no idea what to do next. But we all have to figure out how we're going to get by.

### Life skills

You could say this daily grind has prepared me for life beyond university. Because I've had seven-day working weeks for pretty much three years now, I'm used to an intense work life. I know how to manage my days almost hour by hour to ensure I maximise my time well and complete everything that needs to be done. But I have a feeling that this 'work-life balance' thing that people are always talking about might not be something I'll experience for a few more years... ■

“This is the reality of far too many uni students now; we have no choice but to work ourselves into the ground just to survive”



# Time to grow

Holly Morris, an Academic Achievement winner at 2023's VC Awards, bids farewell to BSU

**K**nowing a chapter of your life is drawing to a close while you're still living it is a surreal feeling. And with the end of the academic year in sight, the weight of saying goodbye is getting heavier every day. In a few weeks, I will leave this campus, walk across the graduation stage and move on to find my place in this world. It's a daunting prospect.

While attending the Vice Chancellor Awards in May, I took advantage of the open bar and chocolate fountain, and sat in the amphitheatre, admiring how the campus and surrounding commons were glowing gold from the sunset. Later in her opening

speech Vice Chancellor Sue Rigby said something that particularly resonated with me as she celebrated our past academic year: "We're coming through with green shoots and thriving."

This closure to my degree is not the end of my story. I've done all the growing I can do here, and now I need to move on to continue learning and grow even more. I will always cherish my time at Bath Spa, but I know I have been given the support to ensure I achieve everything I've worked so hard for.

Shoots transform into plants when they're given space to grow, and I can't wait to see what flourishes in the next chapter of my life. ■





**An extra-special thank you to:**  
*Jasmine Clark & Esther Molyneux*  
for your brilliant design work,  
& *Chloe Tissiman*  
for your editorial know-how

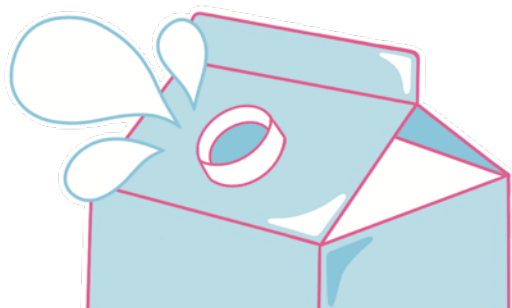
**And thank you to:**  
*Neil Baber, Irving Huerta,*  
*Gemma Matthews, Davina Rungasamy,*  
*Helena Steele & Sam Stewart*  
for your support and feedback

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**Cover illustrations:**  
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bath spa's student magazine • 2023