

From justice studies to journalism: Grad student finding the balance between beliefs and ethics

By Megan Lupo

PHOENIX — Anne Mickey's first act of social justice occurred when she refused to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance during her junior year at Pinnacle High School in Phoenix.

Acting alone in her seat, the then-16-year-old said she did not plan an exact day for her public display of activism but decided over that summer to demonstrate her position at school— a progressive resolution for an only child who grew up in a self-described passive liberal household.

“The reasons might be obvious but liberty and justice for all, that's bullsh\*t to me,” Mickey said. “Also, I was uncomfortable with the reference to God because that's just weird for children to have to stand up and put their hands over their hearts and pledge their allegiance to their country every morning.”

Although she said she never saw her act as defying authority, the administration threatened expulsion until she agreed to postpone her advocacy for the next academic year when she'd be put in a class with a less-offended teacher.

From senior year on, Mickey said she never again stood for the Pledge of Allegiance and the national anthem.

Four years later, Mickey, 22, still vocalizes her stance on various issues. Today's statement for Mickey is more subtle with her black T-shirt, proclaiming, “Defend our communities, defund police,” worn to support prison abolition.

Although Mickey received her bachelor's degree in justice studies at Arizona State University (ASU) in hopes of becoming a civil rights attorney, she said she found the law profession to be too “competitive and self-serving.”

Her pursuance of a master's degree in investigative journalism at ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication was inspired by the impact of her undergraduate honors thesis topic on the 2014 fatal police shooting of 17-year-old Chicago native Laquan McDonald.

It was through the work of investigative journalists that the public was able to see McDonald's autopsy record and dashcam footage, exposing police inconsistencies and corruption, and Mickey said it was then she realized the power that that profession can have.

Often times, she said she counts to 16 to recognize how many bullets ripped through McDonald's body.

Mickey said she hoped to emulate the writing style of investigative journalism for her thesis and traveled to Chicago on the third anniversary of McDonald's death.

There, she went to community organizations' meetings and spoke with their members, visited McDonald's grave and attempted archival research yet she said she didn't have the proper knowledge on how to conduct an interview or collect further information.

Mickey's instincts toward journalism coincided with her reading the announcement for the Howard Center for Investigative Reporting on the ASU Now website. Switching from her original graduate study of justice studies, she applied to the Center and was accepted.

While Mickey's career plans have changed, her beliefs have not, causing an internal conflict of remaining unbiased.

"I think I'm going to need some time to put into practice just biting my tongue and not ripping into someone for what they just said," Mickey said, who's the facilitator of advocacy for ASU's Rainbow Coalition and the programs and events assistant for the ASU Center for the Study of Race and Democracy.

One area where she said she won't compromise is the possibility of never being able to participate in political demonstrations. There are previous protest signs stacked behind her in her Rainbow Coalition office.

Despite her conflict, she said that the works of investigative journalists have always influenced community organizing, and she wants to be a part of making that difference with her coverage of topics or events.

Aspiring to investigate what she called her "three p's" — police, prison and politicians, she said she hopes to stay in the area and someday work at the Arizona Republic.

"There's still things left to change," Mickey said. "There are plenty of issues. I just see it as really important [to focus on local and state matters], and Phoenix is growing."