LISTEN, Garnet & Black has always been about pushing boundaries, but this semester we’re testing the limits of both our team and our readers. It hasn’t necessarily been an easy experience, but it absolutely has been worth it.

This semester, we set out to tell the stories that haven’t been told – to get into the nitty-gritty details of some, what could be considered, taboo topics. It’s been tough, and we know that some of the stories that lie within the next few pages might not be easy to read either. But why choose to be uncomfortable? Isn’t it so much easier to look away, to leave a room, to stop reading a story? The answer is yes, though it’s hardly ever better. To put it simply, the weight of human existence is heavy for all of us. It can feel like too much to carry on our own. It may be easier for us to not shoulder the weight of experiences that aren’t ours, but think about how much lighter that load could feel if we all just sat in the feeling of being uncomfortable for just a few minutes. We hope that as you read through this section of the magazine that you allow yourself to feel all of your feelings, whatever they may be...
...We’re all human, let’s share the weight of that together.
I am forever grateful to be a Black woman, but I’d be lying if I said it wasn’t hard. To be a Black woman and live in the world is a full time job. We have to worry about political, social, and economic issues that have overshadowed the basic rule of life: to live. To be Black in this world, we have to fight to constantly stay afloat in the deep waters of systematic racism and prejudice. To be Black women in this world, we have to do all of the above, plus make sure to abide by the rules penned in fine print. While these rules were put in place with good intentions, society’s interpretations left them scarred. It’s beyond putting on sunscreen before you leave the house or wrapping your hair at night; these societally-tainted rules have minimized, controlled, and put conditions on the growth, confidence and well-being of the Black woman.

I asked Black women on campus and on social media what they feel are rules that we are expected to adhere to. Through the responses, I’ve realized how much of a box society has attempted to place us in and it’s time to address it.

Rule #1: Be strong.

Society’s interpretation of a Black woman’s strength is the ability to carry the weight of the world on her shoulders without buckling at the knees. “People expect us to be Ms. Superwoman...sometimes we need help,” Labria Rhaney, a freshman at the University of South Carolina said. Many Black women will hide the fact that they are at their wits’ end, just so they won’t be deemed weak. Winthrop class of ’23 student, Alexiona Carwise, said it best: “It’s amazing to be strong, but when is there time for self care and reassurance?”

The roles of the Black woman have been manipulated to satisfy the lifestyle of those around them, not their own. Black women are expected to turn their independence off in order to stay within the lines of femininity, but turn it back on when in male-dominated spaces. Ji’ya Scott ’24 wrote, “We’re expected to be independent but not too independent, but not overly dependent either.” God forbid Black women step on a man’s toes because then they risk becoming too masculine to be sought after.

This time spent on other people has taken away from the time Black women have to themselves, thus having negative effects on mental health within the Black community. “Prioritizing ourselves gets lost when trying to help others,” Rhaney ’25 said. According to John Hopkins Medicine, “... compared to their Caucasian counterparts, African-American women are only half as likely to seek help” Mental Health Among African American Women. This is not to mention the fact that society has conned Black women into “toning ourselves down and suppressing the way we express our emotions,” Korbyn O’banion, junior at UofSC said.

Contrary to popular belief, Black women are not superwomen. They can’t be at the front lines of racial discrimination, persevere through exclusive and uncomfortable work environments, then come home to cook and clean, and have the energy to maintain a social life and relationships without the proper mental breaks and emotional support. Black women should be able to display vulnerability without being labeled as weak. They should be able to seek help without being labeled as crazy. At the end of the day, we are still human. It’s imperative to give Black women a break for the sake of their well-being.
Rule #2: Be humble.

“When a woman is assertive, she’s a b****; when a man is assertive, he’s a boss.”
- Nicki Minaj

In the event that the Black woman is exuding the power she has worked hard to achieve, she is told to “humble” herself. Humility was always depicted as a good thing, but for Black women, it has acted as a silencer, rather than a trait of good character. A Black woman’s success, in all forms, makes society uncomfortable. Throughout 2021 alone, the media has provided plenty of proof of this.

Through the rise of their music and social media presence, both Chloe Bailey and Lizzo have been ridiculed for loving themselves. It became so bad that both women have had to have emotional conversations with the media just to explain why they love themselves. Black women are forced to defend their possession of self-esteem, just for people to try and diminish it.

Sha’Carri Richardson was America’s home girl - until she wasn’t. After a successful meet, Richardson was praised, and the “I’m Her” statement took social media by storm. However, after the Olympic incident, she hasn’t been allowed to be confident without being reminded of her mistake. The media has changed the narrative and has made her out to be a mean girl because the world refuses to let her move on from it. Ali W., UofSC class of ’22, says, “We’re expected to take criticism and not say anything about it. When we do, we get called angry or have an attitude.”
Rule #3: Be seen, but not heard.

“The number one rule [for Black women] is to be seen and not heard!”
- Caley Bright ’24

As soon as a Black woman opens her mouth, she is said to be loud, ghetto, too opinionated or always complaining. “When we voice our opinion, we’re seen as loud and aggressive,” Tyra Latimer ’23 said. Black women are expected to speak up only when society calls for it; however, many were raised to believe that “closed mouths don’t get fed.”

Black men have been known to silence Black women, especially in the case of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Based on Time’s Up Foundation, “3 of 4 sexual harassment cases are never reported. When they are, 75% experience some form of retaliation” Black Survivors and Sexual Trauma.

In the media, Megan Thee Stallion was practically bullied for being shot by a Black man. While the full story isn’t clear, it doesn’t take away from the fact that she was the victim of a shooting, yet somehow that’s been ignored. To this day, the Black community wonders how R. Kelly was able to get away with his antics in the ‘90s and early 2000s, but look at how people treated Megan.

Black women are allowed to say what they feel, when they feel like it. Black women are worthy of being heard, validated, and understood, no matter how “loud” we get. If Black women make you feel small, that’s a personal problem.

I have barely scratched the surface of all the rules of Black women. There are so many others that hold them back from their true potential. Next time you see a Black woman, send words of encouragement while she battles the unjust rules of society, I guarantee she needs it.

It’s imperative to note that the Black community has played a huge part in attempting to humble their women. There is so much internalized misogynoir within the Black community, and unfortunately, it is validating society’s toxic approach towards Black women. Put simply, “it be your own people.”

Black women should be able to be loud and proud about their success. According to CNBC writer Courtney Connelly, “regardless of a Black woman’s desire to advance in her career, insurmountable barriers ahead of her make it harder to reach the top” How corporate America’s diversity initiatives continue to fail Black women. There is so much work that goes into being a successful Black woman in society.

Justice Kelley ’22 expresses, “[Black women] have to be above average to get by, while your peers are able to be average and get by. You have to be the best of the best to even get a seat at the table.” After climbing their way to the top, it would be scary to think that, after all of that, they can’t simply be proud of themselves.

Applaud the Black woman in your class, on your Twitter timeline, or at work, whether for big accomplishments or small, it’ll make a huge difference.
Walking into Brock Sansbury’s office, one can see a pile of books with “Daring Greatly” by Brené Brown on top. He explained that he uses the book to teach about the power of vulnerability to the members of the Courage Center.

The Courage Center (TCC) is a designated Recovery Community Organization, which is an independent, local, nonprofit organization led by representatives of local communities of recovery. The mission of the Courage Center is to provide a “safe, supportive, recovery focused setting for young people and families on their journey to recovery from substance misuse or abuse disorder.” They serve members of the community ages 14 to 26.

Deputy Director Sansbury explains that recovery has to be approached in a different way with adolescents and young adults because the brain is developing. The team at TCC implements a program called MAAPS, or Midlands Adolescent Addiction Peer Support. The MAAPS curriculum is evidence-based and equips young people with the tools and skills they need to carve out a positive life and future for themselves. Furthermore, this program is completely free and TCC offers no-cost transportation assistance if needed.

Sansbury is a person in long-term recovery from addictions that began in his youth. He embraces his powerful story of recovery to relate to and inspire the young people engaged in MAAPS at TCC to live beautiful lives free of substance abuse.

Sansbury grew up in the Midlands, raised by his mother and grandfather. His parents divorced when he was young, and his father was an alcoholic — thus not present in his life. He remembers feeling different from his peers at a very early age. “I remember,
early on in life, I thought differently than
other people." He became obsessed with
activities like sports and with his identity
as a popular kid.

Sansbury smoked his first cigarette
around 11 or 12 and started smoking
marijuana around 13 or 14. When he
smoked his first cigarette, he threw up but
remembered thinking he couldn't wait to do
it again. He drank for the first time in sixth
grade, got sick and then couldn’t wait to do
it again. "Most people with normal thinking
capacities don’t think, ‘I can’t wait to get
sick again.’ And, of course, I didn’t know
what that meant at the time," Sansbury said.

He partied through middle and high
school and surrounded himself with
people who were doing the same things.
Over time, he began getting kicked off
of sports teams and his grades declined.
Sansbury said he had no interest in life at
all and barely got out of high school. After
graduating, he took a gap year and worked
and partied with the same people every
night. Over time, "the nights got later, the
drugs got harder, the people got sketchier."
He went back to school at Midlands
Technical School and UofSC, but flunked
out. Sansbury described that he didn’t have
drive and didn’t know who he was. "I was
trying to be this thing that I wasn’t, while I
was slowly morphing into the one person I
couldn’t stand and didn’t want to be, which
was my father," Sansbury said.

For the next six years, he felt like his life
was crumbling around him. Things started
to spiral around age 22, and then at 24, the
DUI’s and arrests started to come, and he
began facing consequences. "I wouldn’t
change any of it because I don’t think
without the kind of mindset that I had, the
consequences that followed, I wouldn’t be
here talking to you today."

In August of 2012, Sansbury tried his
first opioid and became heavily addicted. In
January of 2013, he got another DUI, and he
describes that year as a blur. He was selling
drugs, getting robbed and spending time

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That moment changed everything for Sansbury.

He decided that, although things were going to be difficult, he was going to do what was necessary to get better.

with harmful people. Sansbury had dated a woman for ten years on and off and they got back together the summer of 2013 and she tried to save him. He tried to stay sober, but his addiction slowly crept back into his life. By September of that year, they had parted ways.

He ended up living alone in a house with a maggot infestation and no air conditioning. Sansbury was 35 pounds underweight, couldn’t take care of himself, had no food in the house, no gas in the car and no money in his account. All he had was a freezer full of liquor. Somehow, he managed to always take care of his dog. “I did not eat the dog food, people have asked me that before,” Sansbury said.

Every morning, he’d wake up, get some change from his coin jar, go to the gas station to buy a Coke, then come back and chase it with some liquor until he passed out. He did this every day. One day in mid-October, the woman he had dated previously kicked in his door and said she was going to call the cops or he was going to call his mom, but she wasn’t leaving until he made a choice.

Sansbury decided to call his mom. His mother and grandfather came and stood in his driveway. When Sansbury faced them, his mom said, “you’re either going to live or you’re going to die, but I’m done watching you die.” That moment changed everything for Sansbury. He decided that, although things were going to be difficult, he was going to do what was necessary to get better. Two weeks later, he was at a treatment center in Florida. He stayed in a sober living house, living with other young people recovering from addiction. After a year, he moved back home and went back to college.

He went back to school two years after recovery, and attended the College of Social Work at UofSC. He was still trying to figure out who he was, where he fit in, and was welcomed with an incredibly inviting environment. He wasn’t sure if he would feel accepted in a college environment because of the culture of partying and drug use, but through the health and human services at UofSC, he found a place for himself in recovery. People knew he was in recovery and embraced him for it. He met with deans and professors: “I never would have thought that that would happen,” Sansbury said.

Sansbury explains that in other parts of the country, collegiate recovery programs, sober housing, sober fraternities and
I should be dead and something kept me here to carry the message forward. So one person saved is good for me.

Sororities are very common and thriving. At UofSC, he met with three of his peers, formed Gamecock Recovery with the Substance Abuse Prevention and Education (SAPE) office and started providing a safe, supportive space for students in recovery. They had eight students at most come to the meetings, but he emphasizes that even “if it’s one person who could utilize the services, that person should have a seat at the table.” He believes this group is so important at UofSC because of the culture of binge drinking and the pressure students feel to participate in it. “And my thing is always, you shouldn’t have to sacrifice your recovery for your education or vice versa,” Sansbury said.

Sansbury had found his purpose in life again. “My family was back, my friends were back, purpose, for the first time in my life, was very relevant and deep. The passion to help other people was a fire lit inside me and I’ve been doing it ever since.”

After graduating from USC, Sansbury started working at The Courage Center. TCC was just given a three-year grant from SAMHSA, or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The administration just awarded more than $123 million in funding through six grant programs to 31 organizations in the country to combat the nation’s overdose epidemic. TCC is the only organization in the southern region to receive the grant.

This grant allows them to continue to have the program office on Park Road and the administrative office on Augusta Road and to hire some new people. Furthermore, TCC can now work with other aspects of the community, like the criminal justice system, the education system, the medical services and first responders. “trying to bring everyone to one table and provide better community support,”Sansbury said.

Sansbury hopes they can continue their pilot program with EMS called CORE, Coordinated Opioid Response and Engagement, which is the first in the country. In this program, they give pouches to EMS that contain resource cards, TCC phone numbers and a phone. The medical professional gives this pouch to those in an emergency related to substance abuse. TCC will try to contact them within 72 hours. If they can’t, then it turns into a house call where EMS and some recovery coaches from TCC will try and make physical contact to offer them more support or at least give them Narcan and Fentanyl test strips. Sansbury says the team at TCC hopes to expand this program into Richland and provide these pouches to social workers embedded within the hospital. They also hope to have someone from TCC embedded within the hospital, once things are alleviated with COVID-19.

For those interested in getting involved with TCC as an ally, anyone can become a peer recovery coach through training or volunteer at events. For those looking to become a member, Sansbury says that “everyone is welcome here.”

Throughout the conversation, Sansbury emphasized how grateful he is to be here and how everything he’s been through has given him the strength and passion to help others. “It just happens that I’m this individual in recovery. But when it’s both of your worlds and then you’ve got relationships and family, it’s all about a nice little balance. And it’s an honor to at least attempt to balance it because I should be dead and something kept me here to carry the message forward. So one person saved is good for me.”
When reports of sexual abuse go unnoticed by the university, a group of students make sure that somebody is listening.

BY ALEX RUIZ • PHOTOS BY AARON FALLS • DESIGN BY CASEY HALL

In light of the “Fire Voros” movement, news of UofSC history professor and faculty principal of Maxcy College, Dr. David Snyder, sexually harassing a student from 2018 up until 2020 had come forward earlier this year in March. In an article by FITSNews, UofSC alumni Mary Elizabeth Jones had filed a lawsuit against Snyder and described, in detail, what he had done to her. Jones had also explained what UofSC had done with the situation in which she said she felt like, “the problem.”

Once this article came out, five students from UofSC, some of whom used to live in Maxcy College and were very close to Snyder, felt unsettled after reading the news about their former faculty principal. The students were rather disappointed to also find out nothing was going to happen to Snyder.

In April, the five USC students broke into Maxcy College and proceeded to paint a mural on one of the stairwells. What was the mural? A tribute to victims of sexual harassment and abuse. On the walls, it said things such as, “BELIEVE SURVIVORS,” “YOU ARE NOT ALONE,” as well as the National Sexual Assault Hotline number and the on-campus hotline number. Now, with the University planning to paint over the mural, these students want to immortalize their work somehow, and have decided to do an anonymous interview with Garnet and Black to talk about the Dr. Snyder allegations and why they responded the way they did.

Their initial feelings when they first read the article was shock, they had no idea how to feel or say about it. “We were shocked because it was someone so close to us,” one of the students said. “It was someone we lived with. It was someone who had access to our homes.”

Three out of the five students who had painted the mural used to live in Maxcy College their freshman year and they talked about how often they were alone with Snyder and talked to him about personal things. They trusted him and looked up to him, so upon hearing the news they were distraught, but they knew they had to do something.

When asked why they painted the stairwell specifically, one of the students who used to live in Maxcy said that the stairwell was something that meant a lot to all of them. The student heard that Snyder was originally planning to hire an artist to paint the stairwell but due to COVID-19, the plan fell through. The group decided to take that opportunity. “We wanted one part of Maxcy to have nothing to do with him,” one of the students said. “We were angry. We wanted to make something that said, ‘this is a real problem. Look at this.” While painting the mural, they had the intention of keeping it positive, not wanting to slander Snyder nor Maxcy College in any way. They wanted to make it all about the victims, not the abusers. They wanted to reassure victims of sexual abuse that they are not alone.

THE MAXCY STAIRWELL
“It’s already hard enough to report something like this,” one of the students said. They explained how difficult it is to reach out to the University and how UofSC has almost done nothing with reports of sexual abuse. Victims of professors on campus are especially vulnerable due to the superiority held over them. “They have control over your grades,” the student explains. “If the university doesn’t believe you, then you have this professor who doesn’t like you anymore.”

Another student, who has no affiliation with Maxcy College, was asked why they decided to participate in painting the mural, especially with the consequences it had and bravely, they talked about their own personal experience with sexual assault. They talked about feeling as though it was their fault—if they had, “said no ten more times then maybe it would’ve done something.” But it wasn’t until years later that they realized it was not their fault at all.

They want to make it known that although the University is known for not doing much when it comes to sexual assault, there are counseling and psychiatric services available to students who have experienced those traumas.

The mural in Maxcy College is not just a response: it’s a message. A message to those who are victims of sexual abuse. It’s a way to say, “We see you. We hear you. You are not alone.” It’s a positive message to reinforce that as UofSC students, everyone has a voice, and they use that voice for those who can’t. The mural is a symbol of activism, of sticking together and advocating for each other. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, the University is planning to paint over the mural. “We think it isn’t right to paint over it. We didn’t do anything disrespectful,” a student said. The students aren’t surprised the University will paint over it, they are actually surprised they haven’t done it yet. The students explained that if the University paints over the mural, then they will be painting over sexual assault resources that students could need. “We painted things that people need to hear. We want people to know someone is listening to them. We are listening to them.”
If you or anyone you know is a victim of sexual abuse, assault, and/or harassment, here are a few resources:

**Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention and Prevention Hotline (On Campus):**
803-777-8248

National Sexual Assault Hotline:
1-800-656-4673

https://sc.edu/safety/interpersonal-violence/contacts/index.php

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**Editor's note:** Following the digital publication of “The Maxcy Stairwell,” Breanne Grace, Faculty Principal of Carolina International House at Maxcy and Thornwell Colleges, has since reached out to Garnet & Black to assure the permanent preservation of the Maxcy stairwell mural. To find out more about UoSC’s plans for the mural’s future, a follow up interview with Grace can be found at www.gandbmagazine.com.
between tuition, housing, basic needs and fun, college is expensive. Occasionally, a conventional part-time job just won’t cut it when students have bills to pay. Some students turn to sex work to keep themselves afloat and even to build confidence.

Sex work, one of the world’s oldest professions, is a huge umbrella that encompasses many different jobs, not just prostitution. According to Sex Workers Outreach Project USA, sex work also includes things like erotic dancing, webcam work, adult films and being a sugar baby.

Although sex work is illegal in most of the United States, activists push for decriminalization and discussion of voluntary and consensual sex work.

These activists point out that certain demographics, like women, are more likely to get involved in sex work and need the financial benefits it provides.

One anonymous student has a profile on SeekingArrangements, a website with a growing 3 million users that helps sugar babies connect with sugar daddies and vice versa. A sugar daddy is a man who gifts the sugar baby in exchange for services. As a sugar baby, she goes on dates and receives a payment after the date. Occasionally, she will perform a sexual act for a higher sum of money.

Being any kind of sex worker is a choice. She made this choice mainly because it’s “easy money.” She said, “Once you get over the headspace of it all, like you just got to dissociate, then you can do anything.”

A survey done by Save The Student shows that 10% of students would consider sex work in a financial emergency. The economic impacts of COVID-19 have dug students into an even deeper hole of debt than before the pandemic.

SeekingArrangements states that the average sugar daddy is 38 years old and makes roughly $250,000 yearly. The average sugar baby on SeekingArrangements makes $2,800 monthly from her sugar daddy. This is enough for a student to at least cover rent and groceries for the month.

Mentorship is also a benefit of seeking a sugar daddy. The opportunity for a student to make connections with a successful person in their field is valuable.
The job also comes with responsibilities like maintaining good shape. “You get a reason to work on your body because it’s literally your job,” the student said.

Of course, there are downsides to being a sugar baby. For one, it can be very degrading. “I always feel icky after the fact, because it kind of goes against my moral standards,” she said. She feels remorseful when she uses people for money, but knows that it’s consensual and goes both ways. Not only is she using her sugar daddies for money, they are using her. “So that makes a world of difference,” she said.

Boundaries play a big role in sex work. She points out that her work has taught her how to set boundaries and say no. Sometimes clients will try to bribe the workers, but the student knows that it’s important to know your limits and stick to them.

Even with the rise of platforms like OnlyFans, where over 1 million creators monetize off of exclusive sexual online content, sex work is still a taboo topic. Students who consider themselves sex workers are faced with the dilemma of whether or not to hide their work from their family and friends. This particular sex-working student finds that being a sugar baby on websites like OnlyFans and Seeking-Arrangements is difficult to keep hidden because the worker needs to promote themselves in order to gain subscribers or relationships.

The student does not consider her job to be less valuable than a part-time job. However, she does feel like it is more stigmatized. “It requires the same amount of commitment, if not more,” she said. Just like a server, her job is to keep her customers entertained.

Another UofSC student receives part of her income from her OnlyFans platform. Although OnlyFans is not her only or main source of income, it helps her stay financially stable, mainly paying for emergencies.

She holds that having an OnlyFans requires a certain level of self-confidence. “It matters how you present yourself and how you feel about yourself,” she said.

The OnlyFans worker was struggling with body image issues prior to starting up her OnlyFans, but she faked it until she made it. “I was taking pictures that made me feel good and I would have fun.”

In regards to the stigma around being a sex worker, particularly with OnlyFans, she claims she gets more backlash from guys than girls. When she first started her OnlyFans in February, she had a boyfriend. Anytime she posted, she would have to show him first and get his approval.

Now that she feels more empowered in herself, she doesn’t need permission from anyone to post on her platform. She reaps the benefits and loves it.

“I never, ever, ever will feel degraded by anyone,” she said. “Because I know myself enough to not let anyone take that shine away.”
It’s important to be self-assured if you’re thinking of starting your own OnlyFans. It’s easy to become obsessive over checking your account and seeing how you are growing when you’re self-conscious about what you post. She tries to only check her account about twice a week, just to see if she gained or lost subscribers. “So you’ve got to learn how to put it out of your mind,” she said. It’s normal and okay to lose fans every once in a while and it has nothing to do with the way you look.

Sex work can also be dangerous. The risk of being sex trafficked or being violently attacked is higher for sex workers than the average student. Meeting in public minimizes the risk for a potential sugar daddy or sugar mommy to overstep the worker’s boundaries.

A male student also considers himself to fall under the wide umbrella of sex workers. On the weekends, he dances in minimal clothing at a local queer club for tips. He agrees that it’s good money, making it a better option than a more traditional job. Also, the hours are flexible and working in a bar can actually be quite fun.

The U.S. is full of thousands of strip clubs. These clubs collectively take in $6 billion every year and dancers make about $17 per hour. He has a good time working but emphasizes the importance of staying vigilant, as he is responsible for his own tip money. “Drinking on the job is fun,” he said. “It’s definitely a big perk, but you always need to be in control.” There are times when other dancers’ money will go missing in the dressing room.

Sex work in a public venue can definitely be awkward, since anyone could walk through the door. He recalls a specific horror story, when a fellow dancer’s high school teacher came into the bar while he was dancing. “It’s kind of nice because there’s this mutual understanding that you guys are both doing something you’re not supposed to be doing,” he said.

This student has clear boundaries, like no removing underwear or kissing on the mouth during private dances. Sometimes, clients try to push these boundaries. “Then it’ll be 10 awkward minutes of them trying to make out with me and me pushing them off,” he said.

Although the hours are good and don’t interfere with class times, he wishes that he didn’t have to always work so late. “I don’t get home until like 4 a.m.,” he said.

If sex work is the best option for a student and they know what they are getting themselves into, it can be a good way to keep up with the cost of living and studying. Of course, it’s important to set boundaries and always play it safe. It’s a risky job for those who choose to pursue it, but being a server at a restaurant or store clerk isn’t for everyone. Some of us need more risk, more fun and, of course, more money.
WHEN YOU GO ON social media nowadays, you might see a new addition to users’ profiles. On Instagram, it’s now an option to put pronouns next to your profile name for everyone to see. To a cisgender person (someone who identifies as the sex they were assigned at birth), they may not understand why putting your pronouns in your bio is important. However, to people who are transgender or non-binary, it’s a lot more significant than many others would think. In LGBTQ+ spaces, it’s become just as important to introduce your pronouns as it is your own name. It’s necessary to understand why the normalization of pronouns is happening and why cisgender people have to do it, too.

Upon first meeting, it takes only a glance for people to assume each other’s gender. Assuming can not only be harmful, but also invalidating to people who identify differently from that first assumption. Gender has become a controversial topic among conversations in 2021, and for the most part, is uncomfortable to discuss. The first step to making gender a topic that everyone can talk about is to start with asking each other, “what are your pronouns?” With this question, people can begin to respect each other with the understanding of what their respective gender identities are.

Three LGBTQ+ USC students have continued this conversation for years, and were able to share their insight on their experience with gender and talk about how they express themselves in their everyday lives.

BY ALEX RUZ • PHOTOS BY SYDNEY BONAPARTE • DESIGN BY SAVANNAH NAGY

WHAT DOES GENDER MEAN TO YOU?

The world is ever evolving and changing, especially with its attitude toward gender.
NAME: Zen, Zenith, or Em  
YEAR: Junior  
PRONOUNS: They/Them  
GENDER IDENTITY: Non-Binary

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED QUESTIONING YOUR SEXUALITY OR GENDER IDENTITY? HOW WAS THAT EXPERIENCE FOR YOU?

For my sexual orientation, I wanna say I was 15 or 16 and for my gender identity I was 17. I felt I was probably non-binary but I was too afraid to do anything about it because I didn’t think anybody would recognize me and use my correct pronouns. When I was a four year old child I was saying things like, ‘Mommy, I’m a tomboy,’ and my mom would say, ‘no, you’re not.’ She didn’t even want me to say tomboy; she would always tell me, ‘you have plenty of feminine interests. You are a lady,’ and I would think, ‘that’s not me.’ So, growing up I knew I was a tomboy, and it wasn’t until I met someone who was non-binary that I was like, ‘wait, that’s a thing?’ and made me realize that was me.

DO YOU THINK COMING TO COLLEGE HAS ALLOWED YOU TO EXPRESS YOUR IDENTITY MORE OPENLY? ARE THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU ACCEPTING OF YOUR IDENTITY?

Yes. I come from a very conservative home and my parents are hyper-conservative, so being here, four hours away from my home and able to be myself is so nice. They misgender me and call me the wrong name, it’s a stressful time. I came out to them as a trans-man because I thought they would be able to understand that better, but they didn’t appreciate it. The only reason I came out to them was because they kept asking and asking until one day I told them, because what are they gonna do about it? Nothing. Despite that, though, my friend group is very supportive of me, and sometimes disgender people will come up to me on campus and compliment my mask with my pronouns on it.

HOW DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR GENDER IDENTITY? FOR EXAMPLE, IS IT THROUGH THE CLOTHES YOU WEAR? THE WAY YOU ACT? THE THINGS YOU DO?

Definitely a lot with my clothing, but it’s always very hard for me to find a nice androgynous balance. I tend to lean masculine to try to pass as just ‘not a woman,’ but it’s very hard to pass as an androgynous, non-binary person, because people always want to put you in one box or the other (male or female) or just take a guess if they can’t tell. I also bind my chest to help with that. The other way I express myself is to let people know my pronouns as often as I can. I put it in parentheses beside my name, when I introduce myself I say my pronouns, my mask has my pronouns — I try to put them out there so I don’t get misgendered.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO THOSE WHO ARE QUESTIONING THEIR SEXUAL OR GENDER IDENTITY? WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE THEM?

I wanna say to them it’s okay to explore, it’s totally fine. Feel free to try different things and you don’t have to commit to one thing, you can realize later that one identity doesn’t fit you, but another one does. I started out thinking I was asexual, but then realized that wasn’t correct. Gender is fluid, you can change.

WHAT DOES GENDER MEAN TO YOU?

Gender is a very interesting topic. It’s not just the box society puts people in, it’s more than that. The most simplified role society can place on a person is either nurturing or protective and boxes like that, trying to divide a whole population of people, just doesn’t work. There’s no one person dictating the rules of gender.
HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED QUESTIONING YOUR SEXUALITY OR GENDER IDENTITY? HOW WAS THAT EXPERIENCE FOR YOU?

“For sexual orientation, it was probably in eighth or ninth grade, and for my gender identity, I was seventeen or eighteen. I feel like it wasn’t necessarily “scary,” it was just like, “Oh, that makes sense.” It was scary at the start, but then I found a label for it, and it wasn’t scary anymore.”

DO YOU THINK COMING TO COLLEGE HAS ALLOWED YOU TO EXPRESS YOUR IDENTITY MORE OPENLY? ARE THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU ACCEPTING OF YOUR IDENTITY?

“Oh definitely, 100%. My parents don’t really care about what I do, but the high school I came from was really small, southern, and everyone knew each other. It wasn’t a good environment. I feel like everyone around me is pretty accepting of it, especially people I didn’t think would accept it. The worst I got from it, luckily, is just people who say, “I don’t understand what that means!” and having to explain it 800 times.”

WHAT DOES GENDER MEAN TO YOU?

“I feel like it’s just another label. It’s just a check box on a piece of paper that I’m checking off for another person, it’s an expectation from people that you pick either “male or female.” I don’t like the box. It’s too crowded in the box. Gender is too big of a spectrum to be putting people in boxes.”

HOW DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR GENDER IDENTITY? FOR EXAMPLE, IS IT THROUGH THE CLOTHES YOU WEAR? THE WAY YOU ACT? THE THINGS YOU DO?

“I feel as though a lot of it is through clothing. It varies by the day, because I feel like there’s times where I dress androgynously, and if you were to pick me out of a crowd someone would say, “oh, there’s the non-binary one!” Then there’s days where I dress more femme and no one would even think I was non-binary. I wouldn’t say I act masculine or feminine, but I act non-binary. Basically: I do whatever the heck I want.”

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO THOSE WHO ARE QUESTIONING THEIR SEXUAL OR GENDER IDENTITY? WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE THEM?

Express yourself and try whatever you want. If you like it, you like it! If you’re in the guy section of any clothing store and you think, “wow, I really like that shirt!” then get it, go buy it! If you get serotonin from how the shirt looks on you, then maybe look into that, figure it out.
NAME: Dillon
YEAR: Junior
PRONOUNS: He/Him
GENDER IDENTITY: Transgender Male

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED QUESTIONING YOUR SEXUALITY OR GENDER IDENTITY? HOW WAS THAT EXPERIENCE FOR YOU?
I started questioning my sexual orientation when I was 13, and I didn’t start questioning my gender identity until I was 18, and I’m 19 now. When I was figuring out my sexual orientation, it had been an ongoing challenge because I had been using the wrong “pieces,” so when I figured out my gender identity that helped me come to a more concrete answer on what my sexuality was.

HOW DO YOU EXPRESS YOUR GENDER IDENTITY? FOR EXAMPLE, IS IT THROUGH THE CLOTHES YOU WEAR? THE WAY YOU ACT? THE THINGS YOU DO?
I just try to be myself, and the way that’s interpreted, I hope that’s the way I want. The ways I consciously express my gender identity is to look at guys who I find vaguely attractive and see what I find attractive about them so I can obtain it for myself. So that’s why when I first started transitioning I wore a lot of “frat boy” clothes. The days when I feel gender euphoria are the days when I look like a frat guy.

DO YOU THINK COMING TO COLLEGE HAS ALLOWED YOU TO EXPRESS YOUR IDENTITY MORE OPENLY? ARE THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU ACCEPTING OF YOUR IDENTITY?
Well, in high school I had other friends within the LGBT+ community so I was already comfortable with my identity. People in my life currently are very accepting of my identity. I’m fully out to my parents, my grandparents and even to my super-religious grandma.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO THOSE WHO ARE QUESTIONING THEIR SEXUAL OR GENDER IDENTITY? WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE THEM?
Express yourself and try whatever you want. If you like it, you like it! If you’re in the guy section of any clothing store and you think, “wow, I really like that shirt!” then get it, go buy it! If you get serotonin from how the shirt looks on you, then maybe look into that, figure it out.

WHAT DOES GENDER MEAN TO YOU?
For me, gender is how I perceive myself. And again, how I hope others perceive me. It’s how I hold myself to certain standards to make me feel in alignment with who I feel I am.
EVERYONE’S EXPERIENCE with gender and sexuality is different — there’s no right or wrong way to figure things out. If it’s scary or confusing, just know there is someone who is going through the same struggle. Dressing however you want, expressing either your feminine side, masculine side or even both, is validating in more ways than a lot of people can imagine. When someone who has struggled with their gender identity is addressed with the correct pronouns, the gender euphoria they feel is why it’s important to normalize the question in everyday life. All it takes is for someone to ask, “What are your pronouns?”
The pressure for women to remove their body hair is analyzed and explored.

BY SARAH HUDOCK-JEFFREY • JACOB GARCIA ZAMBRANO • DESIGN BY CASEY HALL
From a young age, women all over the world are expected to shave, pluck and wax their body hair. This ideal is so ingrained into society that many don’t see the unfair double standard and sexist implications. While the movement to reject this standard began with second-wave feminism, women are still burdened today with one question: to shave or not to shave?

Dr. Kathryn Luchok is a faculty member of the Women and Gender Studies Program and affiliated with the Anthropology Department at the University of South Carolina. Her research areas are reproductive health, health and gender and diversity, equity and inclusion. She believes the topic of body hair on women is very under-discussed. “Much of it is taken for granted, and sometimes people do not even realize why they automatically do some practices,” Luchok said.

She explains that body hair removal has not always been the norm for women. The first safety razor was produced in 1901 and was intended for men. During World War I, women couldn’t wear stockings every day due to a shortage of nylon and thus showed their bare legs. Many started shaving and, in 1915, the first women’s razor was released, dubbed the Milady Décolleté and encased in rose velvet packaging.

To continue to sell these razors when the war ended, advertisements heavily encouraged women to shave their legs and underarms “because to not do this was to be unkept and dirty. To be feminine and pure was to be hairless,” Luchok said. She explains that humans are one of the least dimorphic species, meaning we don’t have as many physical differences between females and males as in other species, so we have created the standard that to be hairy is to be manly to emphasize those differences.

Hair is even associated with enhanced power, as in the story of Sampson and Delilah in the Christian Bible. When Delilah cuts his hair, he loses his power. So, women removing hair also can be seen as removing a challenge to masculine power. The stories of two women at UofSC demonstrate how these harmful stereotypes created in the early 20th century persist today.

Shardae Lamar, a senior political science major, has struggled with feeling unfeminine due to her body hair. She said her experience with her body hair “has been kind of the average girl’s experience, but times two because I have polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).” Lamar found out she had PCOS in middle school. It causes women to have a deeper voice, grow hair in places “that aren’t feminine,” like the back, chest or more on the legs and face, and essentially have more testosterone than the average woman. When Lamar was in middle school, she didn’t feel feminine because of the symptoms. She felt that there was pressure from society that a woman with body hair was not feminine.

Sophomore sociology major Eliza Mitchum said her body hair at times has made her feel dirty and unkempt. Mitchum has felt ashamed of her leg hair. “I realized, after a couple weeks of not shaving, my legs would get hairy, and I felt gross. And I’m like, why do I feel gross and dirty with long leg hair, even though I’m bathing myself,” Mitchum said. She believes this feeling has a lot to do with societal pressure. “The societal norms are that women should be smooth, and that makes them pretty and delicate and soft. And that’s just ridiculous.”

Luchok describes that advertisements from the beauty industry and other media have created a narrow beauty standard. Many women from around the world have darker body hair, yet this image of a white, hairless woman is portrayed. This standard originated in the United States and, for some time, other cultures tended to be more natural when it came to body hair.

The ideal of hairlessness in women has been developed by the patriarchy. In general, women’s bodies are scrutinized, policed and controlled. Luchok explained that women are expected to alter their bodies to stay “forever young to control women’s fertility.” Furthermore, with the relatively recent advent of pornography, this standard has expanded. This form of media shows women as hairless, even with no pubic hair. Because pubic hair comes in around puberty, this standard infantilizes adult women, making them look like little girls, not adult women with power. Mitchum believes the pressure for women to remove their body hair is one of “the most glaring double standards... not shaving is so unprofessional and unclean.
for us when men can just exist however they want.”

Despite the rampant misogyny, large majorities of women have bought into these societal norms. The pressure to shave is perpetuated by not only traditional media and advertising, but by social media, families and peers. Mitchum started shaving her legs when she was 13. She was embarrassed of the thickness and length of her body hair and all her friends had started shaving. Other kids would even point out her leg hair and make fun of her for it. So, Mitchum began shaving her armpits and legs and continued for years, and even spent two years shaving her arms as well. Lamar felt very unconfident due to her body hair in middle school as well. She underwent painful and expensive laser treatments to remove the hair, and the maintenance was very tedious.

Both women eventually decided that the pain, discomfort and frustration of shaving was no longer worth being accepted by society. Mitchum noticed that shaving irritated her skin and led to razor bumps, especially her armpits. She decided to make a change, “And I realized, this is not worth it. I am just going to be a human being and have hair,” Mitchum said. And she hasn’t shaved regularly for three years now.

When Lamar got to high school, she began to care less about the hair and noticed that her boyfriend at the time didn’t care either. She started to accept her body hair and stopped doing the laser treatments. “I was like, I’m not gonna put myself through all that again, and I just accepted it, really,” Lamar said.

However, they also both choose to shave sometimes and do what makes them most comfortable and happy. Mitchum never shaves her underarms, and only shaves her legs in the summer. For Lamar, her relationship with her body hair has undergone many changes. When she began at Livingstone College, before she transferred to UofSC, she participated in marching band and they had to wear basketball shorts. “Because I would rarely shave my legs, I didn’t like wearing shorts, but I was like ‘it’s hot,’” Lamar said. So she began to shave. Lamar discovered that she likes the way it looks and the smooth feeling. However, she doesn’t do it all the time, mostly just for special occasions or going to the beach. “Shaving every single day, the standard, would be tedious. So I just shave whenever I feel like it.”

Her current body hair routine includes shaving her legs, underarms and getting her eyebrows waxed. While she doesn’t enjoy the process of shaving or waxing, she likes the feeling afterwards. Lamar emphasized that she now shaves and does other forms of body hair removal for herself, and not anyone else.

In recent years, more girls are growing up seeing women in their own lives and celebrities embracing their body hair. Luchok refers to examples like Julia Roberts, Madonna and Miley Cyrus, who have been photographed with underarm hair. Also, she mentions that some fashion magazines have shown female models with leg hair. “As examples continue in the media, women rethink beauty rituals that tell us there is something inherently wrong with our bodies the way we are. Accepting each other as we choose to be is a step toward combating shaming and enforcing of body hair norms,” Luchok said.

Mitchum said the body positivity movement has taken off in recent years and given women of different body types, races, genders and sexualities representation, the kind of representation she didn’t have when growing up. However, Mitchum would like to see the movement become more representative of women with body hair.

To any woman feeling insecure about her body hair and shaving without truly wanting to, Luchok recommends looking at photos of women rejecting the status quo, experimenting with longer periods between shaves to see what actually happens and talking with her friends. “She may find out she is not the only one who hates to shave.” Luchok said, “people should be able to handle their body hair however they see fit, and it should not be a way to judge or stereotype individuals.”

Lamar believes that when it comes to beauty standards like hairlessness, everyone should be true to themselves. “If you feeling beautiful involves you putting yourself through pain that you don’t want just to live up to a beauty standard, then that’s not fair to yourself. So, just be you, be who you are, accept whatever dimple or freckle or hair, whatever you have, because we’re all different. So it doesn’t really matter” Lamar said.