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Center for Student Involvement
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Dear Fusion readers,

We’ve had a tremendous year at Fusion. We launched the new website, covered a wide variety of topics that really matter to our community and now have finally turned out our annual print copy.

But the hard work doesn’t stop now. We’re trying to position the magazine to make sure 2016-17 is the best year ever for Fusion. Working on staff and budget decisions can be a big part of this, but developing readership and knowing our audience is by far the most important thing we can do to make Fusion awesome.

So we’ll keep researching, writing, reporting and designing, but if there’s something you want to hear about, tell us. If you think we could do better on something, let us know. If you’re new to the community and want to know or learn something, give us a shout. Better yet, come work for us.

And please remember: you don’t have to be LGBTQ to be a part of our community. Being an ally means you live your life in a way that refuses to support the oppressive nature and behaviors many still choose to reinforce.

So straight, gay, queer or purple, just get involved. Learn something and make new friends, because if you’re not doing that, then what are you doing?

Fusion hopes to share in the experience of creating and recording the history of the LGBTQ community at Kent State. We want to inspire allies, education and positive movement in and outside of the queer community, so come help.

Much love,
Melinda & Kieran
How healthy is your diet? Are you sleeping enough? How often should you be exercising? We spoke with Mallory Packard, intern at the Office of Health Promotion at Kent State, to see how students can maintain a healthy lifestyle despite the stresses of college.

MAINTAINING YOUR WEIGHT

Ever heard of the “freshman fifteen?” Many students gain a few pounds their first semester or two. So how can students keep track of their weight?

- Know what weight works for you. A healthy weight for one person may not be right for someone else.
- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise regularly. These are equally important.
- Be conscious of what works for you. Noticing when certain patterns of eating, working out and studying work for you can keep you productive, happy and healthy.
- If you want to lose weight, experts suggest losing no more than 2 lbs per week.
- Developing good habits takes time. Doing too much too fast can lead to giving up or creating even more unhealthy habits. Take it easy.

HOW TO FALL ASLEEP WHEN YOU AREN’T IN HISTORY CLASS

How much sleep do you need? Turns out the quality of your sleep can be just as important as the amount.

- Young adults between the ages of 18-25 should get 7-9 hours of shut eye each night.
- If you feel groggy, try adjusting your sleep schedule. An extra 30-60 minutes (especially in the morning!) can do wonders.
- Turn off your electronics! Our brains are programmed to equate light with daytime, so stay away from screens for at least an hour before bedtime.
- Avoid pulling all-nighters. They can negatively affect your concentration and your mood.

THE TEMPTATION OF PIZZA AND HOW YOU CAN SURVIVE IT

When you’re busy, junk food can be tempting, so here are some ways to make healthier choices.

- Practice moderation. It’s OK to indulge every once in a while, just don’t go nuts.
- Don’t jump head-first into your diet. Just like exercise, slow and steady wins the race.
- Don’t shop on an empty stomach. It’s harder to shop smart when you’re hungry.
- Cook in bulk and freeze the leftovers.
- Prepare your lunch the night before. You’ll save yourself time in the morning and won’t have the opportunity to eat junk.

EXERCISE FOR THE STUDENT’S SCHEDULE

If you’re swamped with work, how can you stay active outside the gym? Here are some suggestions.

- Go for a jog or run.
- Do yoga.
- Clean your dorm or room.
- Take the stairs.
- Walk instead of taking the bus.
- Swap your desk chair for an exercise ball.
- Find workout videos online (FitnessBlender, YouTube).
- Study your notes or textbooks while on the treadmill.

I CAN’T STRESS THIS ENOUGH

Any student can tell you how much stress sucks. Here are some ways to manage your time wisely and keep stress to a minimum.

- Use a planner to keep yourself on track and organized.
- Remember that regular exercise and healthy meals can boost your mood.
- Take a break once in a while. Relaxation is healthy.
- Do something fun! All work and no play …
- Meditate. Ohmmm.
- Keep in mind that stress isn’t fun, but it’s normal and manageable.

Hopefully these tips will help you stay focused, healthy and ready to take on the world. Packard says, “I think that positivity is always key to a healthy lifestyle. Having a positive attitude can help you in whatever healthy change you are trying to make, along with plenty of resources and a strong, personal discipline.”

**These tips are Packard’s opinions, and she encourages visiting the Center of Nutrition Outreach or the Student Recreation and Wellness Center for more information.** 🍕
AN EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE

RACE, DISCRIMINATION AND TRANSMISOGYNY

By MJ Eckhouse

A STATE OF EMERGENCY

Although visibility is a useful tool for progress, it does not equal acceptance. The year 2015 brought unprecedented transgender visibility, including the highest reported rates of trans murders. These victims are overwhelmingly trans women of color. Addressing this crisis requires considering its underlying factors.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much research on the subject. International reports of violence against trans people have only been systematically collected since 2009. Many trans people do not report crimes against them due to legitimate concerns of humiliation, physical violence, victim-blaming and police brutality.

According to a 2013 report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, transgender crime victims are seven times more likely to experience physical violence when interacting with the police compared to cisgender victims. Knowing this, under-reporting is not surprising. Plus, cisgender journalists, police and EMTs often inaccurately document trans victims. This leads to incorrect and insulting headlines like, “‘Man in dress’ found dead.”

DISAPPOINTING EXAMPLES

When reporting the death of Bri Golec, a trans woman allegedly killed by her father, Akron police used he/him pronouns despite corrections from local transgender support group members. Ignoring trans people’s actual genders interferes with pressing hate crime charges, renders statistical data inaccurate and disrespects the deceased.

“When we investigated the case of Golec, he was dressed as a male and his girlfriend was there,” said Akron Police Information Officer Lieutenant Rick Edwards. “We [had] no prior knowledge of him being a transgender or any of that community, nowhere until organizations started calling [...] If he was then he was, but if he was, [we weren’t] trying to hide it. He was dressed as a male, all his body parts [were] male.”

According to Akron’s LGBT Liaison Lieutenant Cynthia Christman, all Ohio police academy recruits are required to complete 12 hours of diversity training. She added that in previous years this was not the case.

The same insensitivity is applied to housing trans prisoners. Inspector Bill Holland explained Summit County’s policy regarding incarceration, saying if transgender people “were ‘born female’ and have ‘female genitalia,’ they will be housed accordingly.”
THE MYTH OF DECEPTION

The fallacy that genitals determine gender provokes another dangerous concept: the trap. Men accuse trans women of trapping them into sex, as if their existence is dishonest. In some cases men become so disgusted with their attraction to trans women, that violence — even murder — results. In 49 out of 50 states, if a man is charged, he can legally plead the “panic defense,” blaming the victim for his reaction, which legally excuses him from guilt.

Like cis women, trans women are sexualized and defined by the cis-constructed contradiction between different aspects of their bodies. Popular pornography emphasizes this perceived contradiction, exploiting the “transsexual surprise” narrative.

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

Unemployment is another systemic and crucial issue for the transgender population. Trans people are four times more likely to live in extreme poverty, with annual incomes under $10,000. Workplace discrimination forces many into sex work for survival, putting trans lives in danger of violence and incarceration.

In some areas, sex workers avoid carrying condoms or lube because police can use those as evidence against them. Cases of the “anti-condom” enforcement gained media attention in New York City, where 99 percent of recent diagnoses of HIV were transgender women. Of those, approximately 90 percent were black and Latina.

It’s clear minorities aren’t just at risk, they’re also targeted. The highest rates of extreme violence are among black trans women. This trend stems from the intersection of racism, poverty and transmisogyny. Cissexist culture upholds the idea that trans people are inferior, dishonest and unworthy of basic rights and respect. Additionally, structural racism increases the likelihood of discrimination and violence, leaving trans women of color powerless against a society that considers them subhuman.

Viewing trans women as sex objects also has dangerous consequences. Monica Loera, a sex worker and trans woman of color, was the first trans person to be reported as murdered in 2016. As in many of these cases, a john killed her. Because his ideas were bolstered by sensational media voyeurism, politicians legislating bathroom access and the porn industry reducing human beings to “trannies” and “shemales,” the killer didn’t see Ms. Loera as a person. She was dehumanized enough to be considered disposable. The importance of treating trans women like humans, not sex objects, should be clear.

INCARCERATION AND VIOLENCE

When trans people are incarcerated, they are nearly always housed according to the gender assigned at birth and/or placed into solitary. They suffer physical and psychological violence. We spoke with a local trans man who related his experience with Summit County police. Fearing workplace discrimination, he spoke on condition of anonymity.
“He pulled me over, and everything was fine until he checked my ID. He kept calling me this female name and obviously I don’t look female. Once he pulled me out of the car I was like, ‘Okay, just so you know, I’m trans, I go by [name]. Could you please call me [name]?’ And he was just like, ‘Well, the law says that you are [birth name], and you are female, and that’s the way I’m to refer to you.’ So, in every sentence he referred to me by my female name and emphasized the female pronouns,” our source said.

“"We don’t have any restrooms here for you."”

“He took me, on the way to to get booked, to two different police stations, to parade me around and show me to other police officers, saying, ‘Look at the freak!’ They laughed, and he put me in the car and took me to another place, and took me, finally, to the booking station. I don’t know if there wasn’t a restroom or if he was just being a dick, but I asked if I could use the restroom, and he’s like, ‘We don’t have any restrooms here for you.’ I felt very humiliated.”

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Learning to recognize systematic oppression is crucial. We must realize this violence stems from fear and ignorance, and grows with misinformation and self-interest. To hem this violence, we first must notice its motivations.

Transphobia begins with the notion that cisgender is the default, because everyone is assigned a gender at birth based on the appearance of one’s genitals. Transness becomes othered and can only be validated by cisgender professionals. All states require a doctor’s note and/or surgery to alter a trans person’s legal documents. Three states, including Ohio, refuse to correct original birth certificates under any circumstances.

The widest propagated narrative of trans lives is the definition of being trapped in the wrong body. “An X trapped in aY’s body” and “ThisY was born an X:” Defending the humanity and legitimacy of trans people requires understanding that no one is born any gender. We are assigned a gender at birth, and our parents, teachers, government employees, doctors, peers and media enforce that gender’s rules, punishing us when we stray from society’s expectations.

Listening to people who live outside gender’s rules can help us replace the ideologies we’re all taught during childhood. These ideas are so entrenched that most people don’t even notice them, let alone critically examine them. Many people believe the idea that women have vaginas and men have penises is a universal truth. Protecting trans people means unlearning these harmful ideas.

The next step is to talk about it. If you hear someone say something like, “She looked hot but then I saw it was a tranny!” you might say, “That’s not okay to say. It makes me uncomfortable to hear her talked about like that.” Objecting to this hate speech sends a powerful and necessary message to the speaker and anyone within earshot. You can plant a seed of change.

“The next step is to talk about it.”

Micro-aggressions like these matter because people justify violence with ideas. The ideas that trans people are wrong, that sex workers deserve whatever they get and that trans women are deceitful are rationalizations to excuse and ignore violence. They encourage the dehumanization of trans women, making violence against them acceptable.

Education programs to enact and improve cultural competency in law enforcement, correctional, educational and medical facilities and other institutions must be started and maintained. According to a GLAAD study in 2015, only 16 percent of Americans said they know someone who is transgender. Though that figure has doubled over the past seven years, it still leaves a large majority of people who only associate the word “transgender” with pornographic images, murder victims and celebrities insulated by wealth.

If you don’t know anyone who is trans, you do now. I am a transgender man named MJ, and I’m more than willing to be the “trans friend” you reference when you hear transphobia. “Hey, I’ve got a friend who’s trans and they’re just people, like everybody else.” Those statements go a long way in fighting transphobic violence and discrimination.🌈
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LGBTQ Studies

Minor is established
Trudy Steuernagle, Dr. Robert Johnson, and Dr. Molly Merryman are inspired to form an LGBTQ minor while fighting for domestic benefits for staff and faculty.

Intro to LGBT Studies
First taught by Dr. Dan Nadon in Merrill Hall.

Dr. Johnson resigns
Accepts position at another university and leaves to pursue this opportunity.

Moves from Sociology to Arts & Sciences
The program moves to A&S, Dr. Berrong's home college. The coordinators are not given an administrative stipend for the work they do with the program.

Dr. Berrong resigns
Dr. Berrong leaves due to a lack of support in Arts and Sciences.

2001
2002
2003
2006
2010

Dr. Robert Johnson becomes coordinator
Dr. Johnson serves a dual role as the Director of Sociology and LGBTQ Studies Coordinator.

Dr. Richard Berrong and Dr. Dan Nadon are co-coordinators
Dr. Berrong is the program adviser and Nadon is the principal instructor.

Play for incoming freshman represents LGBTQ life on campus
Joint event between LGBT Studies and Theater Department. Play performed at the Week of Welcome for new freshman on campus. Two performances of stories based on the experiences of LGBTQ students at Kent. Both performances are completely filled.

Dr. Merryman becomes co-coordinator with Dr. Dan Nadon
Dr. Nadon nominates Dr. Merryman, who was faculty at the Trumbull campus at the time.
The Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality at Kent State is the product of a long struggle by esteemed faculty to gain rights and visibility on campus. Nearly two decades ago, KSU began offering courses within the LGBT Studies minor. The curriculum has overcome many obstacles, guided mainly by Dr. Molly Merryman and Dr. Daniel Nadon. The LGBT Studies minor has steadily evolved into something that the campus’s queer community can be proud of and has paved the way for the Emerging Center.
In the last five years, Kent State has grown significantly as a progressive and inclusive campus for the LGBTQ community. The 2015-16 academic year marks another great step in history with the creation of the new Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality.

The “Emerging Center,” as nicknamed by its founders, will support the faculty and curriculum for the LGBT Studies and Women’s Studies minors, as well as the new Gender and Sexuality major and minor. The center is a product of the LGBT Studies minor, which was founded by Dr. Robert Johnson, Trudy Steuernagel and Dr. Molly Merryman 15 years ago. This was the first LGBT Studies program in Ohio.

The role of coordinator has changed hands several times in the long history of the program. After Dr. Johnson left Kent State in 2002, the LGBT Studies minor lost its main pillar of support. The program began to depend on co-coordinators Dr. Daniel Nadon and Dr. Richard Berrong, but there was no support from administration within the university.

Dr. Merryman served as coordinator for the LGBT Studies minor at Kent State for about five years, sharing the position with both Dr. Nadon and Dr. Laurie Wagner at different times. In April 2015, Dr. Merryman and Dr. Wagner resigned in protest of the continuous lack of support from the university.

The program remained unfunded since its formation in 2001, relying on volunteer coordinators and faculty from outside departments to teach courses.

In her letter of resignation, Dr. Merryman wrote, “I can no longer be the coordinator for an academic program that I know has lost its national standing because it lacks any structural support. It has smart students, accomplished faculty and a fresh curriculum. But without support, all of those are languishing [...] Coordinator after coordinator has been told that if we care about our students and this program, it is up to us to volunteer our time, our knowledge and our scholarly lives. In stepping down, I am imploring university administration to do what’s right and support the scholarly lives of LGBTQ students and the lives of other students interested in learning about LGBTQ lives. In other words, if Kent State University administration cares about LGBTQ students and LGBT Studies students, it is up to them to demonstrate that commitment by offering a tiny budget amount so that the LGBT Studies program can continue.”

Dr. James Blank, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, was the first to respond to Dr. Merryman’s letter with monumental support. Dr. Merryman approached the administration with a proposal for funding the LGBT Studies minor, but Dr. Blank took it a step further and proposed that Dr. Merryman create the center.
Change has already begun with the hire of Lauren Vachon, the first full-time assistant professor of the LGBT Studies minor. Vachon began teaching the Intro to LGBT Studies course as a graduate assistant in Spring 2012 and came back in 2014 as adjunct faculty to teach the course online through 2015. As full-time faculty, Vachon is teaching four classes this semester including Intro to LGBT Studies and LGBT Methodologies. She is working with Dr. Merryman to develop new curriculum for the minor as well.

Outside of developing new curriculum, the center is also focused on creating the new Gender and Sexuality major and minor. It will begin to offer more online courses to provide access to regional and non-traditional students, and plans to bring on-campus academic programming and speakers. Over spring break, students from the LGBT Studies minor will travel to Athens and Lesvos for a one-credit course about gender and sexuality.

The recently created Living-Learning Community will begin offering space in Fall 2016 for LGBT Studies minors or anyone enrolled in the required LGBT Studies course. The learning community, located in Korb Hall, will help introduce students to the university, make connections and build a community.

The center will be officially established in the Fall 2016 semester. Recent discussions among university leaders have named several possibilities for the location of the Emerging Center. Potential locations for the office include Bowman Hall and what was previously the Women’s Center. The Women’s Center has been relocated to the Alumni House.

Vachon looks forward to establishing an official space for the center. Not only will this development aid in the launch of the Emerging Center, it will give students and faculty involved with the programs a place to call home. Looking further into the future, Vachon hopes the center will one day expand into an institute.

Lauren Vachon is the first full-time professor of the LGBT Studies minor.
The I’ll Go With You campaign is quickly gaining traction at Kent State and by next fall should be campus-wide. The campaign was started by a couple of friends identified on their official website — illgowithyou.org — only as the letters G and H.

According to the website, it was started with inspiration from the I’ll Ride With You campaign which serves to protect Muslims from violence while using public transportation in Australia. The website says “What if [LGBTQ] allies responded to #WeJustNeed-ToPee the way good people responded to possible anti-Muslim violence with #IllRideWithYou?”

The goal of the campaign is to make campus a safe place for transgender individuals, which includes the safety to use the restroom. The majority of transgender assaults occur in restrooms because people are offended by a trans person using the same facility. Allies would wear a pin with the words “I’ll go with you” on it to symbolize to trans people that it is safe to ask that person to accompany them to the bathroom.

Sophomore political science major Jackie Knutti is the student spearheading the campaign at KSU. She says it will help create a safe space for trans people and it will help unify the various letters in LGBTQ and inspire them to work together for a common goal.

Knutti is using the spring 2016 semester as a time for planning, and she hopes to have the campaign in full swing by the fall. Knutti is working with Trans* Fusion, PRIDE! Kent and interns with the LGBTQ Student Center to decide how to implement the movement.

Ken Ditlevson, director of the LGBTQ Student Center, completely supports the campaign and called it a very effective way for allies to send a message of support to the trans community.

Ditlevson stressed the importance of allies both outside and inside the LGBTQ community saying, “people think that it is always the straight allies standing behind the LGBTQ movement but really we need allies within our own community.”
Cisgender gay men can be trans allies. Trans straight women can be lesbian allies. Ditlevson sees the campaign as an opportunity for the “community to work cohesively” and for those within the community to support each other.

"Gay men can be trans allies"

When asked about his plan for implementing the campaign at KSU, Ditlevson said it's going to be a collective decision but the goal is to have the I'll Go With You buttons available at no cost to students. He hopes to make the buttons and distribute them at various events such as Blastoff, PRIDE! Kent, and Trans*Fusion events and at other university events throughout the year.

Sophomore forensic psychology major Alice Freitas identifies as a trans woman. She calls the campaign a “great step for the university.”

Freitas says many trans people choose not to use public bathrooms and instead rely strictly on universal restrooms. KSU has 30 universal restrooms on campus but only five out of the 11 buildings on front campus are equipped. Freitas has classes on front campus as well as some classes in buildings that do not have universal restrooms.

Freitas explains that when nature calls she frequently must leave the building and find a universal restroom. The I'll Go With You campaign will help give Freitas — as well as all trans people — the freedom to use the restroom in any building and feel safer doing so.
College is a time for learning, growing and trying new things. Indeed many begin to understand themselves during and after their experiences in school. One kind of education students typically get is sexual. While not everyone experiences this, a number of people might finally escape the social and cultural bubbles they grew up in, and understand their sexualities better in the unrestrained landscape of college.
That said, there’s a catch. People in those social/cultural bubbles — a student’s family and friends — often view sex as something unfit for general conversation, something dirty. They create generations of people who haven’t had as many chances to discuss and be challenged by others when it comes to views and behaviors leading up to sex, and even during or after the act.

This becomes a problem during those heated moments before two (or more) people have sex. Misunderstandings, uncertainty of consent and more can happen when people aren’t willing to hold off for a moment and discuss what they want or expect.

It’s understandable to some degree. When you’re both kissing, grabbing and taking clothes off, who wants to stop and chat? They’re clearly interested, right? Well that’s where things get confusing. Sexual assault is defined by the US Department of Justice as “any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient.”

This may sound like an open and shut case. They’re making out with me, they’ve been saying dirty things all night, how could this possibly not be consent? Well here’s the simple truth: consent to one activity isn’t consent to others. Just because someone is OK with kissing, petting, or oral, that doesn’t mean they’re interested in going all the way. Taking off clothes isn’t always an invitation for sex — maybe some people just like making out naked. Maybe a hand under their shirt is OK, but a hand down their pants isn’t. If you don’t stop to ask, you could be breaking serious boundaries.

So how do you know what your partner(s) might consent to? Well, of course the best way is to just ask. It’s awkward, it may dull the sexy mood you were working all night to get going, but it’s really the best way for both you and your partner(s) to understand what you want, and of course, what you don’t want. Asking can ensure you don’t upset someone by doing something they’re uncomfortable with, and that they won’t push any of your buttons — well, except for the buttons you do want pushed. No one wants to ask their partner’s age either, but not checking is a mistake that has huge consequences. Be sure you know who you are having sex with and what they are OK with.

Another advantage is you hearing the word YES. This is important. Just because someone hasn’t said no, doesn’t mean they’ve said yes. They could be too timid to tell you they aren’t interested, or might even feel threatened. You might be totally unaware you’re making out with someone who is potentially too afraid to tell you no, doesn’t want to upset you, or might feel too under pressure to protest. So how can you avoid this? If you’re making out with someone, try this: If you haven’t already gained consent, just stop. Become a statue entirely. Don’t make any moves, don’t try to kiss, just lean back a bit and be still. See what they do. It takes two to tango after all. Are they trying to kiss you? Are they grabbing you? Are they clearly performing actions that an unconsenting or terrified person wouldn’t? But this is just one way to tell if you’ve got a willing participant. Remember: You can always — you guessed it! — just stop and ask. Take a moment, less than five seconds, and say “hey I just want to make sure, are you OK with this?” If they say YES, you’re in the clear!

But this is assuming the person can consent. If someone is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they cannot consent. Period. No ifs, ands or buts. But what is drunk? Is one beer still in the clear? Maybe, maybe not. Alcohol does different things to different people. A 5’10” male weighing 200 pounds and a 5’4” female weighing 140 pounds can drink the same amount of alcohol, but one could be able to consent while the other could not because they’ll hold their booze differently. So how much is too much to consent if everyone is different?

“Sex doesn’t need to be serious.”

It’s important to remember that there’s no clear answer, so always be cautious. Let’s say you want to have sex with someone, and they’ve consented. You know they’ve had at least some alcohol, but you aren’t sure how much. Ask yourself this: “Are they ok to drive?” Would you trust this person to drive you home right now? If you have even a little doubt, take a rain check. If you don’t trust them with a car, you can’t trust them to be making important decisions with their bodies. This isn’t a fool-proof strategy, rather this is a general guide that I personally use when deciding if a person can consent. The best option is really for both of you to sober up, then make these kinds of decisions.

Sex doesn’t need to be serious. Sex can be fun and spontaneous. Despite all this advice, keep in mind that sex itself is relatively simple, and you should enjoy yourself. But always remember not everyone shares your opinions, viewpoints, or expectations. Not checking with someone beforehand can turn sex from simple and fun into complicated and messy real fast. No one wants to get hurt, and keeping an open line of dialogue can keep things smooth. 😊
BODY POSITIVE

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

Rue Monroe — they/them  
Mara Cash — she/her  
Willemina Davidson — she/her  
Jon Martin — he/him  
MJ Eckhouse — he/him  
Brian J. Heraghty — he/him  
Kasey Hoover — they/them

“Everyone that participated in the photoshoot is beautiful beyond words, and I hope those who view these pictures in the magazine recognize this positivity and, in turn, recognize their own beauty.”
“I want people to see trans bodies in a neutral and beautiful way.”
“Despite all the negativity you may endure, you can love your body.”
“Rainbows are beautiful for being more than one color.”
“I hope it turns them on.”
ASEXUALITY & BDSM

By Kyana Mojica
Illustrations by Ashley Smithkey
For many people the words “asexuality” and “BDSM” should not be in the same sentence. Thanks to common misconceptions, negative attention from the media and sensationalized works like “50 Shades of Grey,” there seems to be only one stereotype: If you’re into BDSM, you’re a sex-crazed maniac that wants to do weird shit.

Many people think that the only way they can participate in the BDSM lifestyle is through sex. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with being sexual but that’s only part of what BDSM is about. There’s so much more to do and learn, especially when it comes to cultivating relationships. But it’s not easy when you’re surrounded by people who feel differently.

My asexual journey has been nothing short of difficult. Dating can be horrible, especially when navigating online dating apps and dealing with crappy conversations, creepy old guys, nerds who try too hard, the lack of gorgeous women that actually answer you back and finding people on the common millennial kick of “we can date, but we can’t say that we’re official even though we are.”

It becomes even worse when the majority of people on online dating sites only want hookups and/or have no idea what it means to be into BDSM. My fetishes are sometimes too extreme for beginners and many people aren’t adventurous. I’ve been exploring and learning about fetishes for six years and while I’m no expert, I have more knowledge than the average Joe. Being into BDSM isn’t a requirement for me, but it’s sure as hell a lot more fun if you aren’t afraid to go beyond the blindfolds and silk ties.

So how can you be asexual and kinky? Well, for me it’s simple: My actions don’t revolve around penetration or any sexual contact. I meet my wants and needs through mental and emotional connections as well as through kink and play. But what does that all mean?

In layman’s terms, I prefer the experience of it all rather than relying on sex to “get my rocks off.” Some asexuals have figured out their own way of “having sex,” which is outercourse. Intercourse is penetration while outercourse involves more heavy petting, kissing, and rubbing and is not as invasive but still intimate and sensual. Some would say it’s a middle ground, somewhere in the non-kinky more “traditional” ideas of sex, while everything else that’s “non-traditional” is considered kinky. My tastes are in the middle and have the best of both worlds.

Talking about the fetish part is easy, but finding someone you trust enough to do these things with is the hard part. BDSM is grounded in trust in mental and emotional relationships. Most people require trust before they are comfortable doing kinky things or playing out a BDSM scene. Many — myself included — would never have BDSM one-night stands with complete strangers.

A scene is defined as a pre-planned time and space where two or more participants lay out what they’d like to have happen to them, what they’d like to do, and the rules in acting out these desires. Playing out an entire scene with someone you just met and know nothing about can be scary and downright dangerous, and most people rely on some sort of connection first: meeting a few times, discussing likes and dislikes and generally getting to know each other. Some people even insist on having some sort of romantic relationship or dating before actually doing anything kinky. It just truly depends on the person and what they want out of it. Personally, I’d like to have a relationship with someone before diving head first into “floggers and chill.”

While dating and trying to find someone with similar interests and fetishes is hard, the stigma I get from people both in the queer and BDSM communities can be even more overwhelming. I’ve explored different labels and identifiers since high school, but finally settling on asexual has gotten me the most backlash of all. Although more supportive people in the queer community are mostly accepting of unfamiliar identities, there are still some that are not. Some get annoyed when I don’t want to hear conversations about sex or they get upset that I don’t want to have sex at all. People think there’s something wrong with me, or they study me like some sort of freaky science experiment, especially when it comes to BDSM.

Very few people actually separate sex from kink and fetishes, and I believe there is a need to teach people within and outside of the BDSM community. I think if people realize that being with someone who doesn’t want to have sex isn’t the end of the world, stronger connections can be made and people can have more fun. I have a lot to give as a person, and you can be sure I can knock your socks off if you give me a pair of handcuffs. 😊
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The government of the Australian state Victoria will apologize for unethical legislation which criminalized homosexuality.

The government’s leader, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, announced that he will make an official apology on May 24, 2016, for the state’s former laws sentencing homosexuals for as much as 15 years for having sex with another man, though it had always been legal for females. The apology will mark nearly 35 years since the Victorian legislation criminalizing homosexuality was lifted in March 1981, legalizing gay sex between consenting partners.

Premier Andrews spoke at Melbourne’s Midsumma Pride March, during which he touched on the state’s historic laws, calling them “shameful.”

“These offenses should never have been a crime,” Andrews said. “Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1980, but for those convicted under the old laws, it’s been a long wait to clear their names.” The announcement followed the introduction of legal reforms as part of the government’s new expungement process, which is part of the Andrews administration’s “equality agenda.” The process will allow men convicted of homosexual sex to have their records wiped clean.

“The expungement scheme will right historical wrongs and free individuals from unjustly wearing a criminal record,” said Andrews. The plan will apply to all past “sexual and public morality offenses” that once criminalized consensual homosexuality including buggery, gross indecency with a male and offensive behavior.

“These laws cast a long, dark shadow of prejudice that still stands today,” said Andrews, “and our apology is one small but meaningful way to right that historic wrong.”

Victoria is making even more strides in righting the wrongs of its past. A government bill will soon be introduced outlawing conversion therapy on minors in Victoria, the first Australian state to do so. Same-sex parents will also be able to adopt soon when a bill legalizing same-sex parent adoption goes into effect in September. In July 2015 Victorian Minister of Equality Martin Foley announced the appointment of inaugural Gender and Sexuality Commissioner Rowena Allen. Allen’s role as Gender and Sexuality Commissioner will be to integrate the advocacy of LGBTQ rights within the government. 🌈
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