

NC STATE UNIVERSITY



Viral* Blackness

An Emergent Zine

Women's Center and African American Cultural Center Spring 2021 Exhibit

*This zine is dedicated to ALL Black people.
Our Black pasts, our present, our presence, and our futures.
To the dandelions that were taken from the ground too quickly.
To the dandelions floating in the breeze ready to find new homes.
We have everything we need.
We are everything we need.
To the dandelions growing together,
in the concrete,
standing and existing in the places that don't want you...
To the dandelions coming and going and leaving their mark on the world.*

Inspiration for the use of the dandelion

"dandelions don't know whether they are a weed or a brilliance. but each seed can create a field of dandelions. we are invited to be that prolific. and to return fertility to the soil around us." – adrienne maree brown.

Blackness is that prolific.

Dandelions are often treated as weeds -- things that exist where they don't belong. But where else do flowers belong but where they grow and thrive? Dandelions are flowers; they are hard to get rid of. They are resilient and hardy. They give little pieces of themselves with the slightest breeze and are able to grow even more abundantly. Dandelions embody every aspect of what it means to be viral -- unwavering, budding, flourishing, growing; and they're cute too.



Opening Message

The art in this zine –the stories, the photos, the images—were submitted as a response to a call for proposals for an emergent project called “Viral* Blackness.”

Viral as in... flourishing, expanding, energetic, fervid, aggressive, growing, thriving, vigorous, zealous, amplifying, augmenting, budding, burgeoning, sprouting, growing, spreading, swept. (if something is viral, it cannot be: contained, controlled, stunted, static)*

2020 has been a year and it isn't even over. First and probably most significantly, we have experienced a global viral pandemic, which disproportionately affects Black people. We are watching the burgeoning of national protests for Black Lives, with every state and every major city engaging in action to amplify the experiences of Black people. Tik Tok has grown and Black people continue to create viral challenges (It's the ____ for me; Don't Rush challenge, etc.). Tabitha Brown's energy, her family, her vegan cooking, and “her business” has swept through the country and into over 3 million people's homes. Cardi B and Megan thee Stallion amplified Black women and femme sexuality with W.A.P and caused a viral stir about sexuality, agency, and women's rights.

We've also lost so many Black people. We've lost them to the pandemic, to gender-based violence and transphobia, to physical and mental illness, to deportations, and police and state-sanctioned violence. We've seen Blackness exploited, co-opted, cat-fished (or Blackfished as some may call it). We've seen the story of Meg thee Stallion and Tory Lanez creating divides amongst us in how we respond to violence against Black women. We lost a Black superhero, Chadwick Boseman, someone who shifted Black culture and gave so much of himself while battling cancer.

And in the midst of all of these things, there have been moments of Black joy, while also mourning and honoring black lives – reminiscing, singing, and dancing along with Versuz. Joining along with sprouting indoor and outdoor Black gardens. We laughed and kept it two virgils with folks. Over the course of this year, Blackness has proven to be viral, in that it's not static, it cannot be contained, stunted, or controlled. It is expansive, thriving, energetic and unapologetic.



Throughout the next few pages, you will witness the work of the following artists. They have provided these bios and snippets of themselves in addition to practicing vulnerability in their art.

Tiffany Dangleben is a 3rd year doctoral student. She is passionate about combating disparities specific to African American families of children with autism, as well as, educational inequities for all children in the K-12 public school system. Dangleben strives to better the quality of life and educational experience for all children as promised by the United States law. Dangleben teaches a psychology course at NC State, enjoys exploring new cities and natural attractions, as well as, crossword puzzles!

Tatiana (Tots) Height is a Chicago-native, pet parent, hood feminist, environmentalist, and doctoral candidate in Agricultural and Extension Education. Their research focuses on environmental justice, multicultural environmental education, and community development in marginalized communities. Prior to attending NC State, Tots received a Master of Community and Regional Planning and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In their spare time, they enjoy karaoke, canoeing, kayaking, archery, TV, books, movies, traveling, and quality time with friends. Tots also maintains a personal blog, has a burgeoning career in community development, and has had the pleasure of being invited for a number of paid speaking engagements.

Nieya Garland, "I am a senior, studying Chemistry and Criminology with hopes of becoming a forensic scientist. Art has been my outlet, my voice, and my peace. I hope to uplift as many people as I can through my art, specifically those who look like me. Black people will forever be my muse."

Tatiana "Tia" Canada is a scholar, activist, and fashion/beauty content creator. While balancing her life as a first-gen student in a masters program, she finds that her true authenticity shines when she is able to create and feed all aspects of her being. She finds that her "viral Blackness" feeds into her work, academic studies, publications, and artistic medium that makes up her identity.

Alexis Briggs is a second-year doctoral student and a blooming creative.

Alexius Pearson "Hi, I'm Black Y"ll - This poem comes from a separate part of me that decided to give me a call after 10 years. It is a reflective piece, a healing peace, it's a transparent moment. This made me happy and hopeful it makes you feel what you need too."



chaniqua simpson is a lot of things. sometimes she likes to be an artist, which she learned that she was good at. sometimes chaniqua likes to write and tell stories and share with the world. chaniqua is finding comfort in herself, her home (since now she has to spend more time there) and in her body.

angela gay-audre, is a human who believes in love, journeys, and emergence.

Joanay Tann, "y'all can call me jo. I'm a junior majoring in Sociology and minoring in Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies. I'm a 20 year old Black lesbian who is passionate about liberation and healing. I enjoy questioning all of the things and engaging in solutions that are all-encompassing. I'm also really interested in writing, but please don't ask me to write. And I enjoy buying books, but please don't ask if I've actually read them. In my spare time, I enjoy twitter discourse and playing sims."

Kahlia Phillips is a black cis andro woman. south rocky mount native. virgo sun/cancer moon/libra rising. writer. baby organizer. black queer feminist/womanist.

Christopher Moore is a recent graduate with a passion for photography, sports, music, and social justice!

Khadija Parker, "This is what I did to pass the gnawing, endless amount of time."

Rasheedah Fletcher, "I am loved and a lover. I receive joy and exude joy. I work in education, and I'm cute."

Geena Washington, "Just waiting on my stimmy"

erin nae is a storyteller animating the lives of Black girls and women in both her research and in her art.



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Part 1:



It's the ____ for me...

(joy)

(spirit)

(growth)

(love)

(Blackness)

What does it mean to exist as a Black person in this moment?

Black Joy *Verb*

- The inevitable ability to live in chaos but not be of chaos
- The unintentional, sometimes intentional example of CHOOSING happiness, Joy, in a world not made with you in mind

Black Joy *Noun*

- The spirit inside blackness that allows me to live and love in this world amongst white supremacy, oppression, violence and now a damn virus... did I say oppression? I say it again because it's deep

... continued

I digress....

Em hm *Noun* ...

The spirit inside of me that wakes blackness up, thankful for this life while still existing in duality! Because while we love our black ass lives, most of the time we are one word from a cuss out, the best cuss out, that people will never know about because THE JOY OF THE LORD IS BLACK STRENGTH!

Black Joy HITS DIFFERENT!! It commands the attention and recognition of all who encounter it.

Many people ask me, you are always so joyous, how do you do it??

I have one of two answers:

1. It is just in me
2. Because I must!

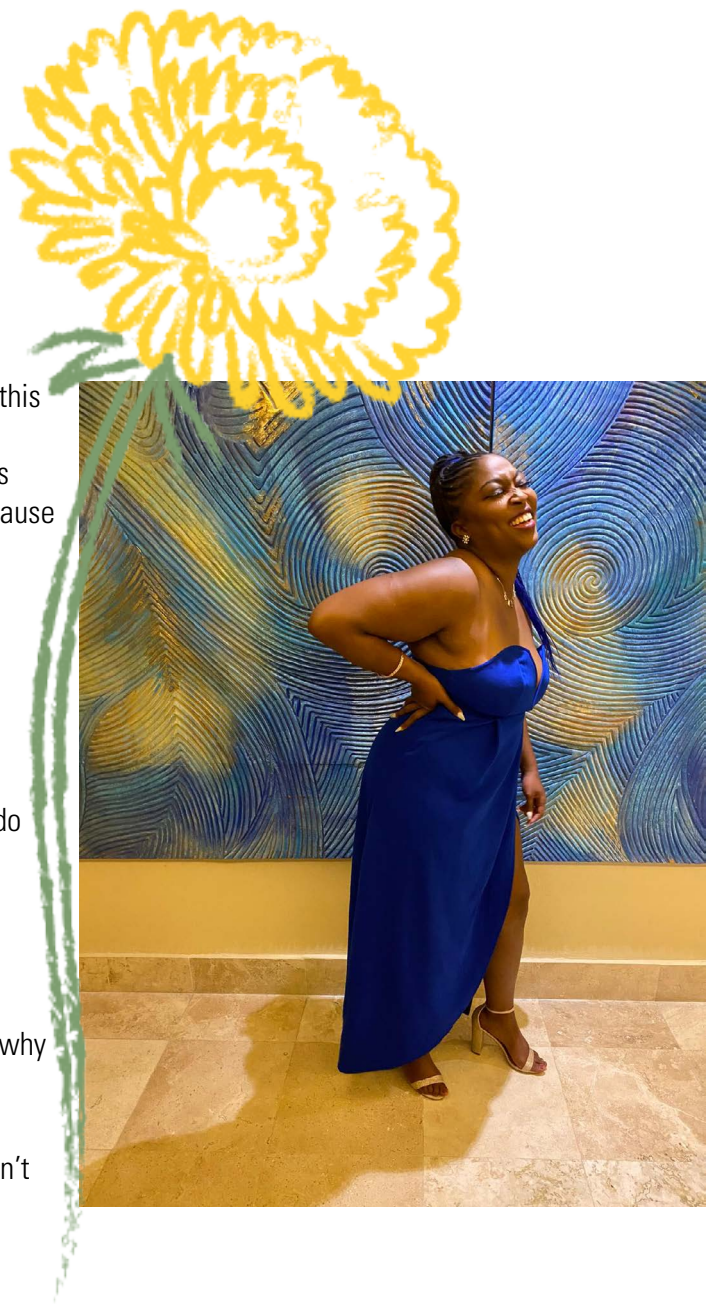
This world will not be the thief of my joy but the very reason why I go so hard!

So while the world would tell us blackness, black Joy, those DEEP IN THE SOUL laughs, are not welcome... people wouldn't try to tap in if it weren't such a big deal... if it wasn't viral!

My Black joy has been going viral... people have been trying to figure out how and why we keep smiling, stylin, profilin and most of all ... continuing to love, it's because that spirit that is within us is beyond this world, it's universal. Talk about clout.

My blackness has always been, always will be because the joy I have will always be noticeable, a change agent for my own and others, and because it is irresistible.

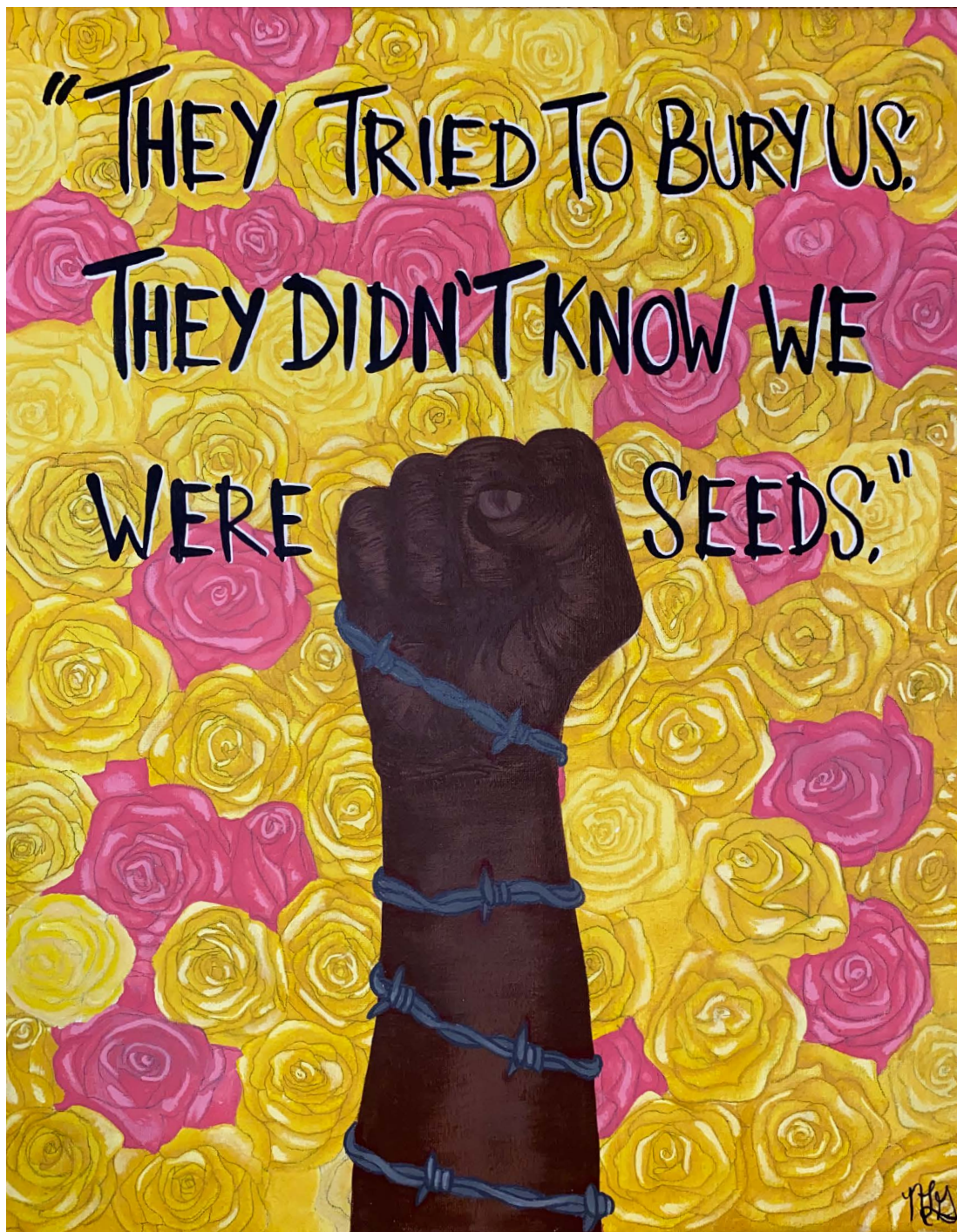
COVID hot, cops came and took, politicians lied and promoted a hate group that seeks to destroy my people. All of the systems of the world I exist in, are against me. Absent of blackness as a priority...you ask how has my blackness gone viral this year? I ask when did it stop? I see blackness everywhere... even if it isn't announced. Blackness is forever!



From "Black Joy"

Rasheedah Antoinette (she/hers)

NC State Alum, '20



"They tried to bury us. They didn't know we were seeds." Black people have endured so much and sadly, we continue to do so. Black lives are taken from us daily, black culture is appropriated, black bodies are abused, black women are neglected, black men are disrespected, and the list goes on. Despite it all, black people continue to grow. Blackness is viral-- it cannot be contained; it cannot be buried.

"Seeds" | Acrylic 16x20 canvas
Nieya Garland (she/hers)
NC State Student

Hi, I'm Black Y'all

What is Black, What is Blackness.....
Depends on what version of me you ask, what space I am in, what day of the week it is or
what color my mood is projecting
It can be easier fo' me to tell you what Black Ain't instead of what is but
Today I'm feeling a lil orange, yellow, a slight green and before I ate dinner kinda mean
Blackness is the ability to be who I am and what I feel proudly
Blackness is the past, present, future
Blackness is an essence
It is the balance of reality and mythology
Some couldn't believe how fly Black was, is, and will foreva be
My Blackness is excellence, Black is joy
Black is block parties with water wetting your face from a fire hydrant
Eating a 50cent popsicle from the corner store
Black is so powerful it leaves people wanting more
But being Black is exclusive
Blackness is going viral being unapologetically Black
During a pandemic while challenging -isms that wish they could stifle the Blackness
We NOT created, not scienced, not built
Black just is
Blackness is femme, it is her, it is him, it is zir,
Black is trans and being Black is transformative
Black is love, light, and peace
But Black is also "come outside lil....come outside"
We are teachers, sales associates, nurses, activists, doulas, janitors, authors, welders and more
Blackness is what your existence is built upon
Blackness is the well-oiled machine that keep the universe turning
The atmosphere is influenced by us, built on top of our experience, and it will be for us
Even if the atmosphere has to be dismantled and rebuilt
Blackness is honestly, grace, it is liberation.
What Blackness ain't is monolithic and it can't be contained!
I'm Black y'all ...

This poem comes from a separate part of me that decided to give me a call after 10 years. It is a reflective piece, a healing peace, it's a transparent moment. This made me happy and hopeful it makes you feel what you need too.

"Hi, I'm Black Y'all"

Alexius Pearson (she/her/hers)

NC State Staff



Part 1 Debrief

**It's the ____ for me...
What's it for You?**

Reflection Writing

- What did you get out of viewing and reading these pieces?
- How do elements of the dandelion show up in the images and writings presented here?
- What moments, experiences, and realities do these pieces capture?
- What adjectives are used to describe Blackness?

Part 2:



Sitting with myself; feeling myself.

This section features art that specifically centers the self, the body, the experience of “being” during 2020.

“TIREDT”

Kahlia Phillips

I wrote this journal entry back in September 2020 as I was navigating a full zoom semester in grad school, for the first time, while also figuring out my place as a super new political organizer in a Black radical political organization. This entry is vulnerability in real-time and working through consistently experiencing fatigue, depression, and high-functioning anxiety. I do this emotional venting while also declaring that I deserve healing and that it is mine to have because I declare that it is so. Healing is viral blackness to me.

“I find myself exhausted. Not just physically but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually worn out. Twitching in agony. Smoking until the anxiety mellows out and levels off. Sometimes on the verge of tears. Sometimes at the expense of the perception of mental toughness. Looking for a way out of depression.

I find myself wanting to be and do more but feeling stuck and stagnant. Not enough credentials. Not enough books read. Not enough experience. Not enough confidence. Not enough time. Not enough time. Not enough time.

I find myself lacking discipline, self-compassion, and balance. Wanting to do it all. Then wanting to do nothing. Operating in cycles of start and stop rather than a continuous and ongoing smooth journey. Never fully comfortable in either state. Shallow deep breaths. Performing experiences. Autopilot. Checked out. Burnt out. “Living just enough for the city.”

I find myself in constant physical tension. Chronically tense and tight muscles. Muscle cramps. A neck with kinks. Calves with the occasional Charlie Horse. A scattered brain. A body neglected. Placing the unfortunate and self-destructing demands over the self. I deserve better. I deserve healing.

I deserve healing that restores balance. Healing that honors boundaries. Healing that introduces me to what it actually feels like to be at 100%. (1) Healing that allows for intimacy and vulnerability to flourish. Healing that allows me to receive pleasure with no guilt or shame. Healing that grants me access to imagination. And love. And care. And abundance. And joy. And sensuality. And transformation. And things that I cannot name because they have yet to be discovered and/or desired. Healing that reminds me that I am worthy...now. Ashe.”

(1) Honestly as I think about this notion of self-preservation, I’m thinking about how that’s not enough. Ideally, I would be loving and operating in my overflow but...baby steps.



This 3-part submission is an essay and a couple of journal entries that captures some of my thought processes in 2020.

From “Reflections & Reckonings”
Kahlia Phillips (she/her/hers)
NC State Alum, ‘19

We're in a:

panoramic
Pandemie/Pandemy
Parallelogram
Pani
Panini
panopticon
pandora's box
Polar express
Panasonic
pandemic



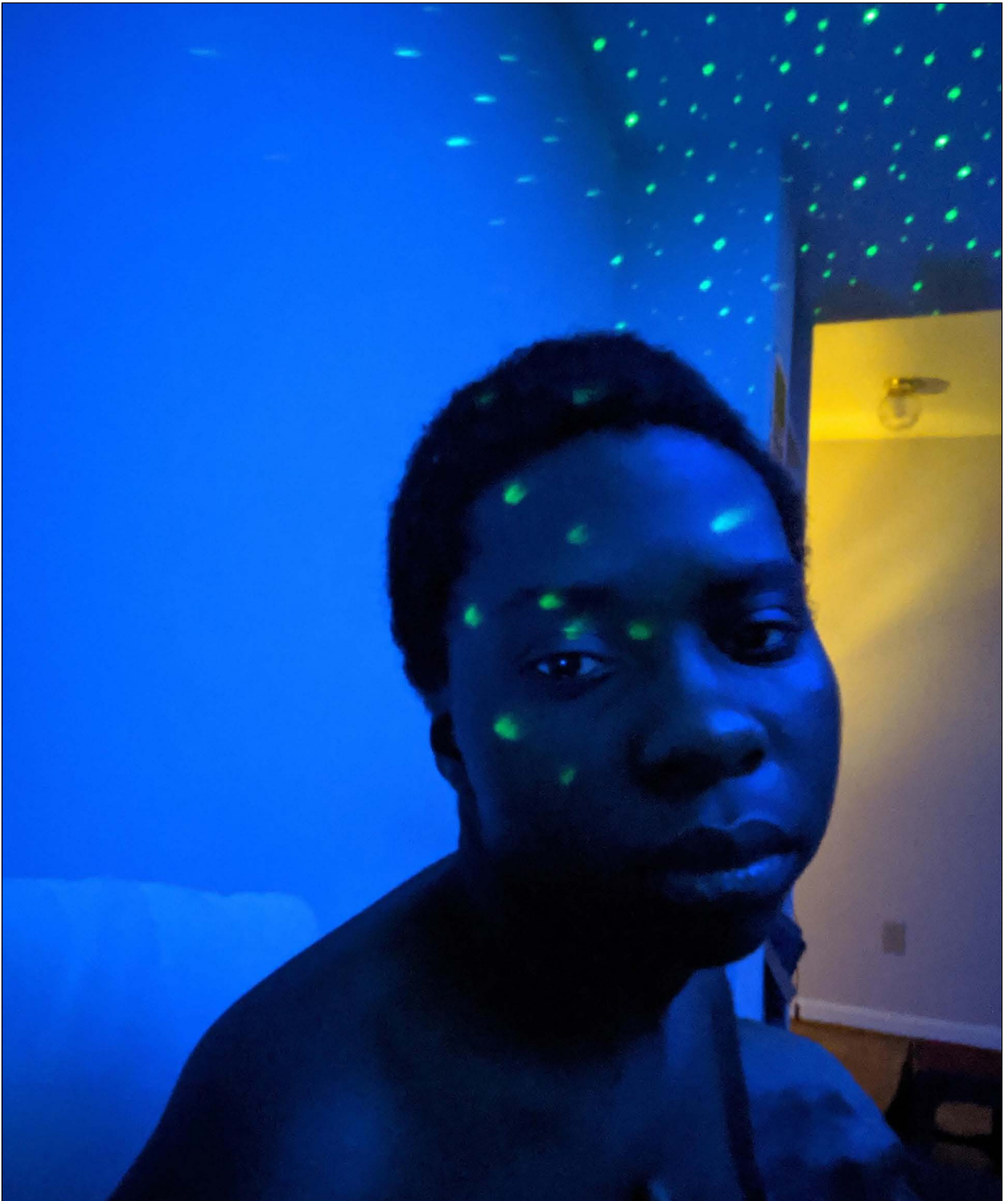
AND WE LOOK GOODT!



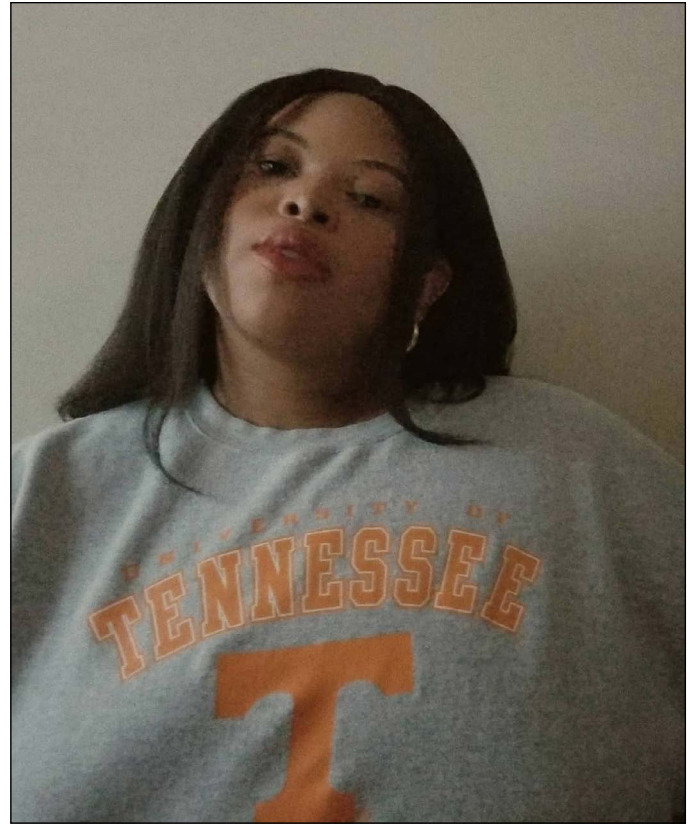
“Untitled” | self-portrait in quarantine
Alexis Briggs (she/her/hers)
NC State Graduate Student



“Khadija is bored, but takes great photos”
Khadija Parker (she/her/hers)
Undergraduate Student



Moonlight Junelight
Geena Washington
NC State Staff



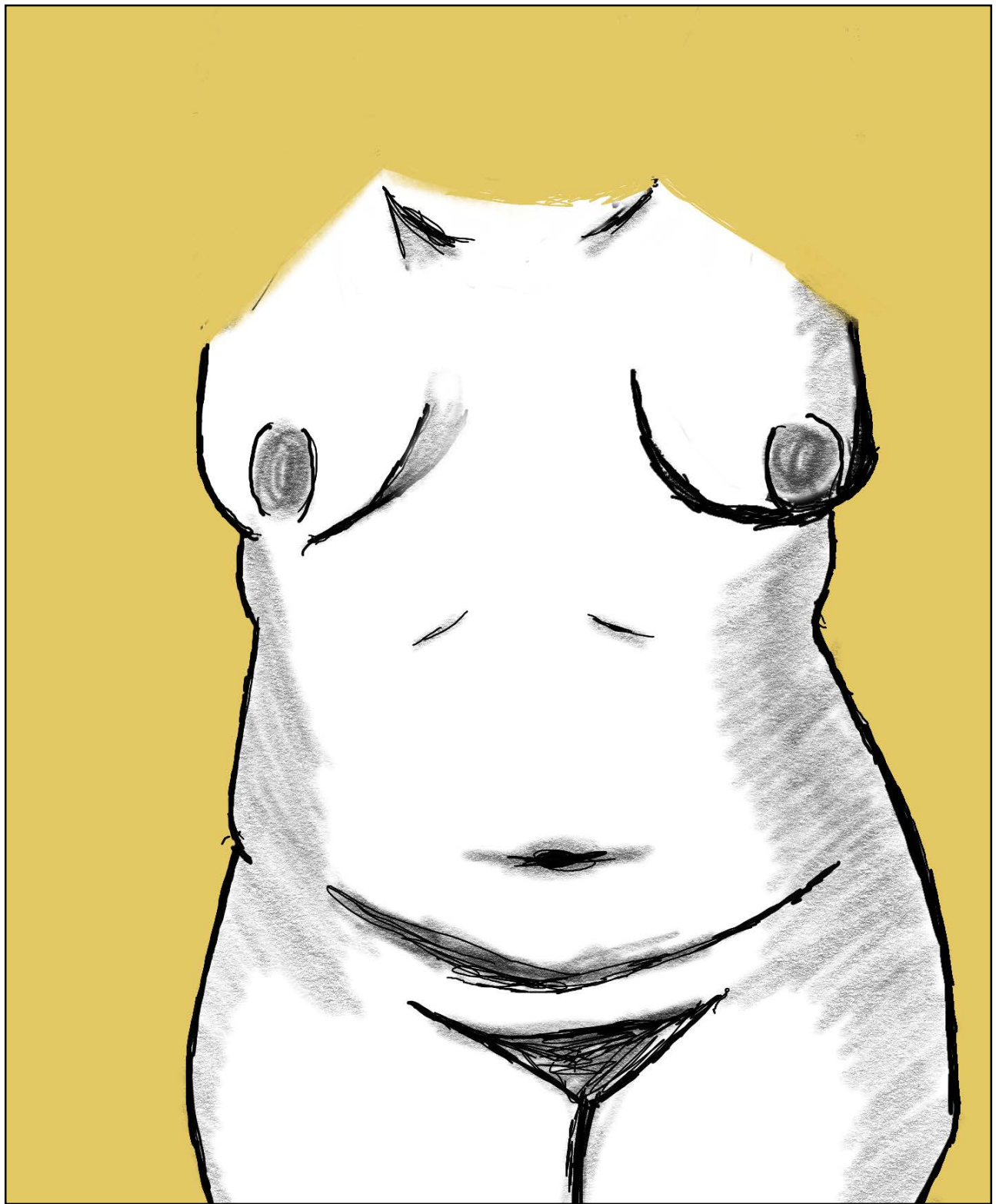
these photos are self-portraits taken in my favorite crew neck, on my go-to makeup look, on a cloudy winter day, in my home. I captured this “homebody” because I was physically in my home, but also because these pictures represent my authentic self. my love of beauty, hair, fashion, winter, warmth, my dad’s hometown team, and the joy I get when looking at how at home I felt in my body. how in that moment, I felt so at home.

homebody

Tatiana “Tia” Canada (she/her/hers)
NC State Graduate Student



“Business as Usual”
erin nae (she/her/hers)
NC State Alum, '19



This series is an exploration of bodies and sometimes, most of the time, my own body.

from bawdy: a digital art series
chaniqua simpson
NC State Graduate Student

“Sexy? IDK Her”

Kahlia Phillips

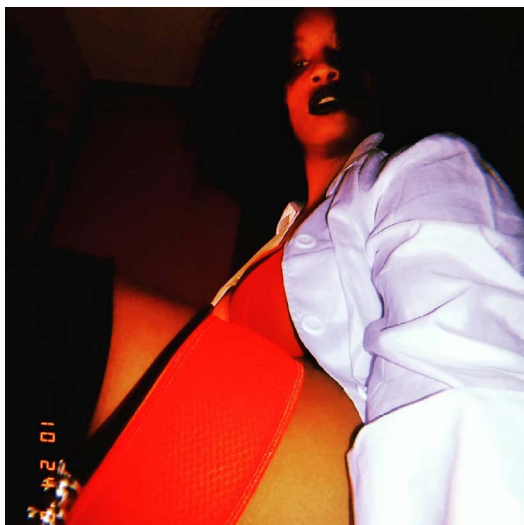
This entry, which was written in early October 2020, came before my Halloween “Doctor Desire” costume character. This was my most elaborate expression of sexiness to date. Here, I am working through my conceptions of sexiness in relation to my own identities and leaning into my own limitations of sexiness. I don’t think my public display of “Doctor Desire” would’ve happened without teasing and clearing these things out and without the willingness to be seen in a different light.

“Something I’ve been thinking about recently is my relationship to sexiness or sex appeal. It was blatantly clear to me that I don’t think of myself as sexy. It’s always been a subtle thought in the back of my head since I’ve been sexually active. Sexy feels like, to me, something that is more convincing and connected to femininity and I don’t have a strong connection to it in that way. I think my andro-ness and being considered not conventionally attractive is also a part of why I feel this way. I’ve, for the longest time, have considered it implausible to achieve it so I focused on other ways to be attractive or charming. I suppose I like being funny and smart. This is not to say that these traits are contradictory to sexiness, but I don’t be feeling sexy. But I’m intrigued by it and that’s why I feel insecure about not having that type of connection to myself or my past partners.

Anyways, sex appeal feels unattainable to me even though I want to tap into it. But knowing that sexiness also grants access to things and pleasure, not having it makes me feel inadequate. IDK.

Seduction makes me feel uneasy, like it’s so off-kilter for me. Like a long reach. Something that takes a considerable amount of energy instead of it being easy and organic. It also feels like something I have to convince people of instead of just being and existing, at least that’s how I’ve considered it.

It’s also bringing back stuff about being seen. I’m scared to allow others to see me because I haven’t seen the full gambit of myself and now, I feel like I’m editing what hasn’t been written or been allowed to be expressed.”



This 3-part submission is an essay and a couple of journal entries that captures some of my thought processes in 2020.

From “Reflections & Reckonings”
Kahlia Phillips (she/her/hers)
NC State Alum, ‘19



Part 2 Debrief

Sitting with Yourself; Feeling Yourself

Reflection Writing

- What are some things that you have come to appreciate about being alone since 2019?
- What are some things that you might have taken for granted before the pandemic?
- Have you learned anything new about yourself since the pandemic started? What are you going to do with the new information you have learned?

Body Practices

- Turn on your favorite songs and dance to them. Make sure to move every part of your body in ways that feel good.
- Take walks whenever possible, even if it's around your house.

Pleasure Writing

- Create a list of things that make you happy.
- Create a list of people that make you happy; commit to calling them sometimes.

A simple line drawing of a hand holding a yellow flower. The hand is rendered in a sketchy, brownish-orange style, with fingers curled around the green stem of the flower. The flower has a bright yellow, daisy-like head. The drawing is positioned on the right side of the page, partially overlapping the title.

Part 3:

LOVE'S CRAFT

One of the most beautiful things about humanness is our capacity for growth, change, and to redefine ourselves. This growth often happens during times of change, whether positive or negative or somewhere in between. The next pieces engage with doing change, being change, embodying change, embracing parts of ourselves, finding things we love, challenging dominant narratives, and telling our own stories.

Sweet Potato Pie

Offered by Joanay Tann

"When I was younger, I was a very picky eater. My family would make huge feasts for Thanksgiving and Christmas, but when it came to desserts, I would not touch anything except vanilla ice cream. When I came to North Carolina for college, some friends that I met put me on to sweet potato pie. I remember sitting in the AACC, and someone brought in a box, and they were like, "jo... you have to try it if you don't like it, that's cool, but you gotta try it." I took a bite and immediately thought: "girl, why have you not been eating this???" . Fast forward to about two years later, I'm in Maryland for Thanksgiving and could not find sweet potato pie in the store for the life of me so I decided to make it at home."

Ingredients

- 1 lb sweet potatoes peeled & chopped
- 2 medium sized eggs
- 1/2 cup evaporated milk
- 1 tbsp pure vanilla extract
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp ground ginger
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 8 tbsp salted butter softened



Directions (note: add more spices until you feel like it's tasty enough)

1. Toss the peeled and chopped sweet potatoes into a medium sized pot, and pour in about 4-6 cups of water.
2. Place the pot over high heat, and boil the potatoes, until they are fork tender.
3. Once the potatoes are done, drain the water, and let the potatoes cool.
4. Toss the cool sweet potatoes into a mixing bowl, and whisk until the potatoes are nice and creamy.
5. Sprinkle in 1 tsp ground cinnamon, 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg, 1/4 tsp ground ginger, and 1 cup granulated sugar.
6. Next, add in two medium sized eggs, 1/2 cup of evaporated milk, 1 tbsp vanilla extract, and 8 tbsp of softened butter.
7. Whisk until the mixture is nice creamy and airy.
8. Remove the dough from the refrigerator, flatten it out, then place it into a 9 inch pie pan.
9. Bake the pie shell for 7-10 minutes on 325 F.
10. Remove the shell from the oven, then turn the heat up to 350 F.
11. Start adding the sweet potato pie filling into the pie shell, and smooth it out.
12. Bake the pie for 45 - 50 minutes.
13. Let the pie cool until it is room temperature.
14. Enjoy!

Black is Fearless

Tiffany Dangleben

"Little girls must be seen and not be heard." - Mother/Grandmother

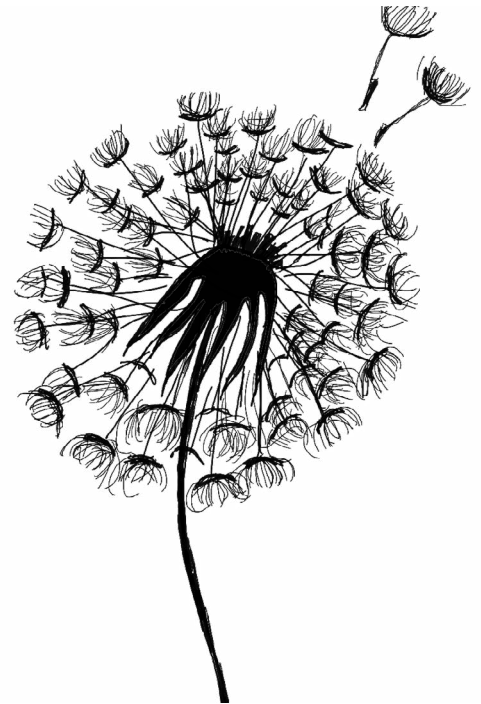
I did not know it then, but my whole self was being silenced. Through the years I've learned how to be seen and not heard. How to be in the group and not the leader. How to be present and not shine. How to be in a doctoral classroom and not speak. Now I find myself breaking the rules of gendered social norms that no one agreed upon, not even my grandmother. I'm not sure where that idiom comes from. I also don't care to know. To know opens the possibility to understand. Understand this... it is year 2020 and I - the Black woman, educator, self-advocate, lover of self and heard from platforms near you - will no longer live in the shadows. For what? For why? For who? For how?

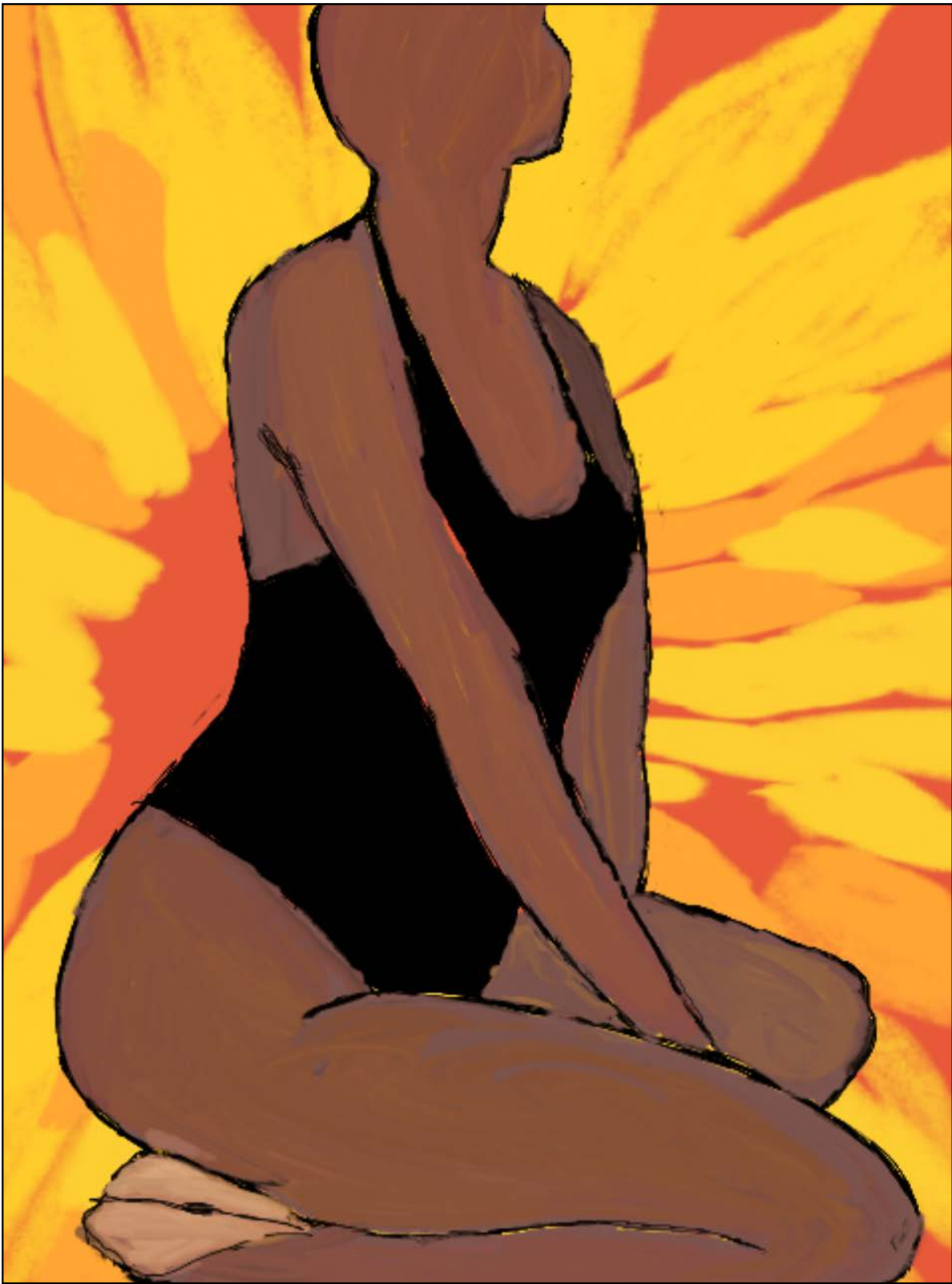
I felt so othered. Far removed from the world in front of me and in my hand. I scrolled through watching other Black women be great, love and be loved back, shout and be shouted at, protect and... well, it's a work in progress, but damn they did that! I felt a constant nag, a tug, a slap, a push on my spirit to do, to replicate, to create a rendition, to live, and to create change. To be the change. To live authentically. To be in fear and do my thing anyways. Regardless. Period.

Fear is one hell of a captor, though. It stifles growth on the bounds of safety. Of course, it's fictitious. Imagined protection cloaked in poison. You think you love it here. It's easy to feel that way when you don't know how green the grass is on the other side. One thing about me is... imma find out, eventually.

One day I snuck out of fear in the middle of the night and ran. I didn't know where I was going, I just ran. I didn't look back either, no shoes or nothing Jesus, because ain't nobody got time for that. Eventually I found shelter in a place called "my damn self." I thought that was a funny name for a rest stop. I met some lovely people there. Well, there was Voice, she was pretty radical. There was Advocate, she looked out for me. And then there was, Spontaneity. She did a lot of things on the whim and then said, "It's above me now." I took a little something with me from meeting these people. Their character traits helped me grow. Helped me sing. Helped me love. Helped me help myself. Helped me help others. Helped me educate. Helped me see my worth.

Sometimes I send a letter to the fear residence and update them on how I'm doing. I thank them here and there for protecting me in their own special way and giving me what they could. I want to say fear is proud of me. It's okay if they're not because I am. And that's enough. I've learned that to be a Black woman in 2020 is to not let fear hold you hostage. It's to step out and be you in the face of your naysayers. It's to see yourself first. It's to advocate for self. It's to exist and know that within that simplicity of breath, there is revolution - there is fire.





*i drew this photo of oluwatoyin salau who was murdered because we ignored her cries.
and because 2020 was violent towards us. this is an image of a beautiful photo she had
shared of herself. she looked so vulnerable and beautiful and i wanted to capture that and
the fire in her heart. #trustBlackwomen*

oluwatoyin
chaniqua simpson
NC State Graduate Student

Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Tatiana (Tots) Height

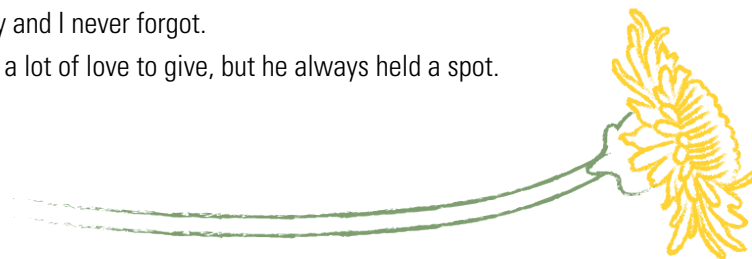
Daddy cooked dinner for the family every night.
Daddy wanted to do everything right.
Daddy didn't know the man who gave him life.
All daddy knew was granddaddy Height.
He was looking for the day but found perpetual night.
Daddy just needed home because the streets were a fight.

But daddy didn't know how to build a home.
Daddy'd keep a job for a few months and then he'd be gone.
Daddy found solace in crack cocaine.
Daddy wanted to escape, but he had to remain.
Daddy keeps fantasizing - Daddy keeps dreaming his dreams.
But daddy won't reach them because the system demeans.
Daddy wanted six but had four kids.
He should be taking care of them, but the circumstance forbids.

Daddy didn't meet his bio until the age of 31.
We only got seven years with him before his life was done.
It was brain cancer that took him but at least he wasn't gunned.
Daddy went to the widow with his hand out and for that he was shunned.
Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

I met my first love at the age of 13.
Before him, I was depressed, but he made me serene.
We sat on the porch and daydreamed about the future.
He'd play sports and I'd make music.
Two years later he was still my man.
He was more than a lover, he was really a friend.
Until one day, he stopped coming around.
Didn't give me any warning, left without making a sound.

Years went by and I never forgot.
My heart had a lot of love to give, but he always held a spot.





Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Tatiana (Tots) Height

Every once in a while, I would google his name.
Never found anything, it was always the same.
Time pressed on and I thought he was dead.
All sorts of scary thoughts went on in my head.
Until one day I found out my love caught a charge.
He got messed up in something and found himself behind bars
I knew what it would take to find closure and feel better
I put pen to paper and wrote out a quick letter.
At least he was alive but much changed through the years.
Reopening that door unlocked a flood full of tears.
I thought maybe reconnecting meant we were meant to be,
Then it was revealed that my love had HIV.
Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?
My brother was born in Chi City, did he ever have a chance?
Started out real sweet but the hood made its commands.
Daddy dubbed him junior but he did everything to fight it.
However fate made the plan, there was no way to rewrite it.
Brother made good grades but fell in with the wrong crowd.
To them, his life didn't outrank the hood code that they vowed.

Brother did all he could to be a good friend.
The ultimate sacrifice was taking a bullet meant for another man.
But to me, that man was really just a boy.
Because of his actions, our family lost our joy.
Though the boy is not the only one to blame.
5-0 played a part but they displayed no shame.
They called for an ambulance but one never came.
His eyes were once ablaze but they lost all flame.
The pigs stood in a circle and let him die.
Then they went to his mother and told her a lie.
Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?
Is this what it means to love a Black man in America?



Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Tatiana (Tots) Height

Bakari Sellers said the only ones who truly love Black men are Black womxn.

Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Is this what it means to love a Black man in America?

Nikki Giovanni told James Baldwin that Black men give the best of themselves to the White man and bring the frowns and the anger home.

"If you love me, lie to me" she said. "Fake it with me, is that too much for the Black woman to ask of the Black man?"

Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Is this what it means to love a Black man in America?

Dani McClain opined about the sacrifices Black womxn make to attain marriage if marriage is attained at all.

Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Is this what it means to love a Black man in America?

Michelle Alexander reminded us how many of our men and womxn are enslaved in the prison industrial complex.

Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Is this what it means to love a Black man in America?

Kimberlé Crenshaw alerted us that Black womxn are killed by the police too.

#SayHerName

Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Is this what it means to love a Black man in America?

The strong Black womxn. The angry Black womxn. The widowed Black womxn.

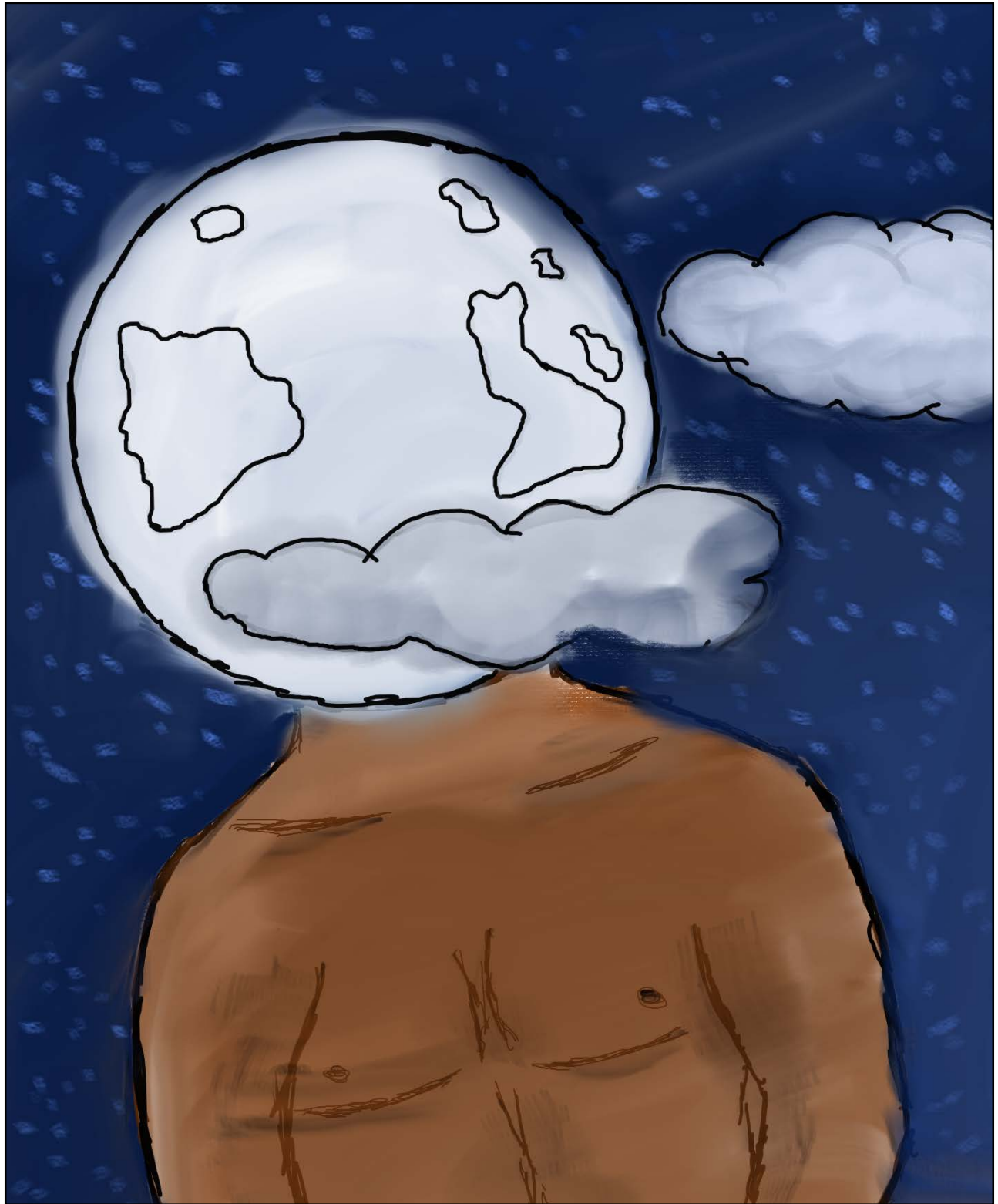
The grieving Black womxn. The educated Black womxn. The fictional "welfare queen" Black woman. The aggressive Black womxn. The hyper-sexualized Black womxn. The single Black womxn. The ... Black womxn.

Is this what it means to be a Black womxn in America?

Is this what it means to love a Black man in America?

This is a poem that had been on my heart for a very long time and was fighting to come out. The title is a question that I begun to ask myself and the story includes personal experiences as well as observations from feminists, activists, and scholars whose work I follow.

Tatiana (Tots) Height (she/they)
NC State Graduate Student



MOON



“The Evolution of a Sunset”
Christopher Moore

Name as Viral* | another stop on the journey home

angela gay-audre

I begin this by saying I have always had a strong dislike for having to explain myself, yet it is one of those things I have always done the most. I grew up Southern Baptist in rural Eastern NC. I was raised to be meek, to turn the other cheek, and apologize profusely at the smallest inconvenience. I heard quips like “little girls are not to be seen or heard” and “don’t talk while grown folks are talking.”

Through the paradigm of what it meant to be a little fat Black girl I was created and I am creating through explanation; as justification and as declaration. The use of explanation as accounting is a tool of white supremacy. The very language that surrounds explanation is rooted in the binary of right and wrong. It is rooted in colonial values and beliefs of whiteness as supreme that assumes anything else requires mitigation. It’s an apology for existing in ways that someone else, who believes they hold power over you, have not declared valuable. Such a definition leaves space for the improper thought that what someone has offered up as themselves is open to critique and debate.

But duality.

Explanation, I have learned, is more. It is plausible and definite and emergent and fluid. It is dialogue that has the ability to be grounded in simplicity and explication simultaneously. This site of explanation, I believe is what allowed space for the emergence of unapologetic Blackness. A Blackness that exists in multifaceted ways and requires no accounting, defense, or apology. Unapologetic Blackness, for me, is closely linked to human evolution. It is Black folx actualizing, recognizing their power, and authoring identities. I imagine it is akin to Black folx sitting at their throne in a plush velvet robe meeting their own desires and saying “you are welcome to join me, but take off your shoes when you enter my house. THIS is holy ground.”

This is holy ground. I am not a place I offer openly for much perusing, but, I’ve been asked, “tell me about your name?” a demand with a question mark. My name really ain’t nothing special except that it is linked to me, a divine spirit guided by the light that fringes darkness and borders more love. How I want to respond to the inquiry is by explaining how

I am shedding old bone.

Creating new earth.

Salt to flesh.

When I rest, I am home.

In a name

the one I chose.

Instead, I typically begin with something like, “well, tell me about yours...” an invitation to be my guest or since I am also kinda cheeky, a question that makes one inquire about their own whys rather than mine.

There are three points of entry about my name and our collective whys: socialization, convenience, and power.

Socialization. I have always had a lot of expectations placed on me. Socially constructed scripts about who I am and who I could become based on my actions or inactions. Often in this process, we are outsiders to ourselves as we become authored by what is around us. I have always questioned this process, not quite able to fathom my divination coming from outside of me; the home from where I have experienced a full range of emotion and formed acceptance from skin memory. My name is memory and intimacy of and alongside myself. It is my futurity and inspiration. It is internal power that resonates with the deepest unsocialized parts of myself that recognize I am a part of the Creator, thus I create and name myself outside of what had been pre-determined before I could consent.

Name as Viral* | another stop on the journey home

angela gay-audre

(In)convenience. It is (in)convenient to be at home with yourself. Note, I didn't say easy. I said (in)convenient. Currently, I am existing here somewhere in a ~~paragraph~~ *edit: pandemic.* I am blessed with the ability to work from home, a privilege I do not take lightly. Sitting at home, however, has meant a homecoming where I have had to think about what it has meant for me to know and understand myself in ways that contribute to as well as contradict the liberatory politic I hold for myself and others. It has been shadow work, naming/challenging, and constantly moving in tandem with a reflection that sometimes seems (un)familiar, yet supremely gorgeous like the waterfall I only get to visit in my dreams. My name is a reflection of how I have come to know myself as an expansion beyond the convenient and the convention.

Power. "If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies' for me and eaten alive (Lorde)" I tell my own story and my name is a reflection of the big and small parts of me that may get shared in spaces like this or in candle-lit rooms under cozy blankets as the moon creeps across the sky. My name is vulnerable, is personal, therefore it is political because it is an unveiling of self-definition and a wielding of determination. Similar to how Audre Lorde wrote for herself and her aliveness I too author for my liberation. My name is a place where I allow my power to reside publicly as a human who has the ability to reimagine themselves and let its truth be her power. It is a beacon that marks my claim on everyday freedom and pleasure.

A Point of Clarity

My name is angela gay-audre, spelled in all lower case. It is not meant to draw attention, although I know it will. I am not the first to spell my name in this grammatical style. I will not be the last. My last name is a gift that alludes to my partnership with a beautiful human who, though it was never said, I think chose to honor me by choosing a name for us that felt so beautifully right it never ceases to astonish me. This last name is also a rendering of the me who has lived in this body with a bloodline full with generational curses and ancestral magic. My first name is one that reminds me of how my mother long ago found a message of beauty, hope, and faithfulness in me. The spelling is my restoration on the journey home and the necessary transformation needed to navigate new pathways.

For those of you still wondering about my name, in a very non-cheeky way, I hope you also explore your own and what it means to you, how it shows up for you, and what it communicates about you. Does it honor you?

For those of you wondering should you spell my name in the way that I spell my name. Should I spell your name correctly? Should I honor you, your history, your future. The answer is always yes. Who I am is non-negotiable. Who you are is non-negotiable, unless you are negotiating with yourself.

Thank you for seeing me as I see myself. Thank you for seeing me and allowing yourself to be seen. Thank you for seeing us.

with love,
acg-audre

angela gay-audre (she/they)
NC State Staff



“acg-audre”
erin nae (she/her/hers)
NC State Alum, '19

Viral Blackness & the Paradox of Identities

Kahlia Phillips

When I thought about the concept of “viral blackness” and glanced at the list of synonyms, the words that stuck out to me were flourishing, growing, and expanding. Being viral also hinting at the inability to be contained. This wild card year of 2020 has had me grow in ways that I could not imagine and that has helped me become more of my authentic self. In thinking through this concept, I started to think through the paradox of identities. The paradox of identities being that identities are both useful and useless at the same time. Useful because it grants access to language that feels affirming and useless because we live in a society that operates under a scarcity model and so we do not honor the many ways of being a particular identity. So, we feel pigeon-holed into what we think our identities mean to the outside and constantly ask ourselves, “Am I _____ enough?” I have been processing how abundance, as a framework and a pedagogy, could perhaps be a way to combat this paradox and I’ve been exploring that in this super taxing year.

Story time. I want to start off by introducing myself. I am Kahlia Phillips (she/her) and I am a Black cis androgynous woman born and raised in South Rocky Mount, NC. When I think about the paradox of identities, I think about my historical relationship to the concept of femininity in my upbringing. There was a time where me being andro, the term I have grown up with was “tomboy,” was not that much of a big deal in my pre-pubescent because the expectations of my girlhood were different. Once I began my stages of puberty, the rules changed. Starting my period meant that I was a woman now and I think that is when a lot of things started to change for me in terms of expectations. There became more a pressure to become more femme and with that pressure came a ton of resistance on my part when possible. My mom loves to embarrass me and retell this story about how my grandma bought a cute pink bra/panty set this one-time years ago. I remember hiding it in the couch cushions (not well because they were easily found) and my reasoning for hiding them was simply because I did not like the color pink. Pink, purses, hugs even was coded as feminine to me and I wanted no parts of it. I think I also had an awareness of anything femme in society, or at least in my immediate material world, was considered weak. As a rather quiet, intelligent, introspective, depressed, and anxious child, the last thing I needed was to be considered weak. So my resistance transformed into femmephobia, deeply internalized misogynoir, and arguably toxic masculinity for the bulk of my formative years and I’ve engaged in a great deal of unpacking to undo all of those things to better show for my community and myself.

Viral Blackness & the Paradox of Identities

Kahlia Phillips

I mention all of this context because this year alone has given me the opportunity to unpack some of those things further. If anyone follows me on social media, I've been challenging myself to post more selfies so there's some documentation of my journey. I've been allowing my self to explore a more femme expression these days and I've found it to be fun and perhaps healing. I've noticed that I feel more willing to express that aspect of me when I feel safe. I think that femme-ness has allowed me to name that I have a desire to be taken care of and handled with tenderness. I've found that I'm more experimental in that space. Even trying new things like pole dancing has given me a new perspective of femme-ness as strength because pole work is no easy feat. I've also discovered that some of the aspects of my masc-ness came from a place of protection and insecurity that should be honored.

What does all of this have to do with the "paradox of identities" or "viral blackness?" Leaning into and exploring the femme-ness of my being does not mean that I've done away with identifying as an andro woman. As that's the point. According to the internet, "androgyny is the combination of masculine and feminine characteristics into an ambiguous form." However, sometimes I have no desire to be ambiguous. Sometimes I really want you to get into this bad bitch aesthetic. Sometimes my comfort is way more important than any femme aesthetic and I just want to be more covered in hoodies and sweats. Opting out of this scarce model of what andro means for me is me tapping into viral Blackness. Its very existence is abundant and uncontainable, not strict and limiting. Blackness is inherently viral simply because it doesn't seek to be defined by the white gaze. I am who I am, and I'll be who I need to be when the moment summons it. Perhaps viral Blackness is a form of liberation when operating from a framework of abundance?

This 3-part submission is an essay and a couple of journal entries that captures some of my thought processes in 2020.



From "Reflections & Reckonings"

Kahlia Phillips (she/her/hers)

NC State Alum, '19



Part 3 Debrief

Reflection Questions

- How do you find power in stories, your stories in particular.
- Have you taken the time to “name yourself?” Who are you?
- Naming yourself is sometimes very hard. What makes it hard?
- What does it mean to tell your own stories?
- How do you craft your stories of your own?
- Why is this important, especially for Black people?



Love and Thanks

The artists

Staff of the Women's Center and the African American Cultural Center

Jaqueline Perry and OIED Communications

Dr. Yaba Blay

You, who have taken time to read and experience this zine

About the Women's Center

The NC State Women's Center serves as a resource and catalyst using evidence-based practices for transformative learning on both the individual and institutional level around issues of gender, equity and interpersonal violence. We build and create a community of authentic and engaged allies and leaders to pursue gender equity and social justice, enhancing the campus climate through education, advocacy, support and leadership development.

To learn more about the Women's Center, visit: go.ncsu.edu/womens-center

About the African American Cultural Center

The African American Cultural Center promotes awareness of and appreciation for African American and other African descent experiences through activities and events that enhance academic excellence and strengthen cultural competence for the campus and surrounding communities.

The African American Cultural Center stays actively engaged in the academic life of NC State with programs, resources and services that facilitate the cultural, intellectual and social growth of the entire university community.

In support of its mission, the Cultural Center maintains a Library and an Art Gallery.

To learn more about the African American Cultural Center, visit: diversity.ncsu.edu/aacc