

Expressions

Secrets: Unveil Your Truths

As I walk around campus trying to find a common denominator between all of us, I was slightly shocked. Living in a world with different races, gender identities, sexual preferences, religions and many more, it was hard to find the silver lining. "Well, we are all humans, there's no secret there," a fellow peer of mine said. A secret, something many of us carry everyday. Luggage that may be too heavy, even for baggage claim. A secret, a safety net. A place where a human being can confine to or express themselves with an audience of one. There's beauty in every secret and a sparkle in every story. Our secrets may be too big to handle but our inner glow shines brighter. With every tear, a gold and silver lying appears. Embrace yourself.

When coming up with this year's theme, I made it a goal to give the minority of our student body a platform for their voice. With each secret comes with a story that was hard for many to share. Upon reading, my only request is for the reader to open their mind in order to accept what is typically unacceptable in today's society. Unveiling the underlying truth behind how it feels to be the minority is a gift I bring unto you.

Expressions is East Carolina University's minority publication that strives to provide an alternative and

Letter From the Editor



If I told you a secret, could you keep it? If I unveil to you the truth of the people, would you listen? Everyone has a secret. A truth about them that the public eye could not bear to accept.

My name is Sierra Williams, the head editor of this year's edition of "Expressions," a minority based publication through Pirate Media 1. On behalf of ECU, Pirate Media 1 proudly present, "Expressions: Secrets, Unveiling Your Truth." For this publication, I wanted to unleash the forbidden truth of what it means to be a minority in today's society but in a creative, secretive way. Through narratives and poems, my vision for this publication is to help the minorities of ECU's student body by creating a platform for their voices to be heard.

Our mission this year is to pour into outside races and communities while having those outside races and communities pour into us. This all-inclusive publication will capture your interest and place you in the lives of your fellow peers. So many secrets have yet to be told, and so many voices have yet to be heard. If I granted you the confidential code to the minority of the world, would you treasure it?

Will you keep our secrets?

Sincerely,

Editor-in-Chief, Sierra Williams



Table of Secrets

06

In All My Glory
by Octavia McClean

09

The Truth About Me
by Justine Cuevas

11

Too Cold to Write a Poem
by Alyssa Coleman

15

What Are You?
by AC Billson

16

Different Shades of Black
by Anais Roller

19

What it is Vs. What it Should be
by Lennox Tucker

20

Africa Needs Love Too
by Astrid Guessennd

21

African-American Proverb
by Kierra Garret

25

Ace of Queens with an Aro Through my Heart
by Tory Rose

Trigger Warning: Some of the content in this publication contains subject matter that may be triggering for some readers.

27

Mind Over Matter
by Kaleah Braswell

29

All Ye Who Are Weary
by Taylor Parrish

31

Honey Trap
by Jahad Carter

33

The Stillness
by Blessing Aghimien

35

Edicius
by Tamia Smith

36

Tag You're It
by Tiana Robinson

38

Check Up on Me!
by Carmelia Ward

42

Opened
by D'Mya Sanford

45

Black Men Need Love Too
by Daniel Roberts

In All My Glory

Octavia McClean

My secret is hidden, yet so loud.

One would assume that my secret isn't legitimate,

But hear me out; it's real.

My secret is the struggle to love all of me in today's society.

You see our media is infatuated with Eurocentric

Standards of beauty,

But that's only a sector of the secret.

The secret also contributes to the self-hatred of

My stretch marks, my rolls, my thighs that rub together,

My arm fat that swings.

What it takes to be a black plus-sized woman in America is...

Resilience.

It takes adjusting your crown even when you look in the

mirror with tears in your eyes.

It takes loving every. single. square. inch.

of your beautiful body.

It takes knowing that intersectionality for you

is already three strikes:

Being black.

Being a woman.

Being a bit on the heftier side.

I've learned and I am still learning to love all of me.

Some days, I love me one hundred percent.

Others, I make sure to avoid mirrors and selfies.

My secret is slowly but surely being broken.

I am beautiful, in all of my glory.





Photo by Kate Francis



Photo by Kate Francis

The Truth About Me

Justine Cuevas

"Ok, now you can smile."
"Smile?" I questioned
The simple request from the dental assistant
Froze me
What is my smile?
All my life I've hidden behind a smirk
I hoped my dimples would make the pictures complete
There I stood as an adult and had no idea how to smile
I had to reinvent myself
The woman from up north who moved down south
Not just a woman
A minority, a Latina with curves
In a place where blue eyes and blonde hair ruled
While split ends and dead hair
Circled on the floor around me
My curls embarrassed me
I punished my hair straight with heat
I craved the busy city noise
The culture that flowed through the streets
I pause at the cashier every time
Anxiety spreads through me
Knowing I must pull out the red, white and blue card
Judged because you're getting help from the "government."
You fight to apply
Only to barely get enough to make a full meal during the week
The struggle is not only real
It's heartless
And as a minority, it triples in threat
Unfortunately, there are people out there
That dislike the color of my skin
Dislike my accent
Dislike the difference I represent
The hatred
The rage
It will try to break you into pieces
Their truth
They fear me, they fear us
Trying to understand me is too hard
Judging before understanding is easier
Losing is not an option for cowards
Accepting me
Means relinquishing who they claim to be
"Make America Great Again"
Simple words used to start wars
We were already great
But our color, accents, languages, and race
Is so beautiful
It blinds



Too Cold to Write a Poem

Alyssa Coleman

I couldn't write a poem
because it was too cold,
as if a snowman
waddled into my room.
He was wearing a black felt hat
with a red flower.
His black scarf laid about his shoulder,
like a snake ready to strike.

He threw ice cubes all over my room.
My mirror on top of the dresser
was displayed like white makeup
dripping down
Kim Kardashian's face.

My fingers popped out of my sleeves,
like butterfly eyes out of a cocoon.
They were ready to write,
until the cold struck again.
The snowman broke the bedroom
window.
"Wish Wooo" roared the outside world,
taunting me to run
into even colder snow outside.
But I stayed put,
as snow covered me
up to my neck.
I felt like Dante's ancestor,
while the snowman's
hand scraped against my face
like tree branches
against a metal door.

Cold shivers ran down my back
like an icy waterfall,
as my arms performed
like bridges snapping in two.

I woke up,
ready to fight the snowman.
But he was gone,
like most demons
leave when you awake.



Photo by Kate Francis

עֵת הַיְיָ

לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

עֲדֵיךָ

עֲדֵיךָ

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IDENTITY

IDENTITY



Photo by Frank Byungura

What ARE You?: A Perspective on Being Biracial in White Communities

AC Billson

"What ARE you?" is a question I dread hearing. Being biracial is my not-so-secret secret. A part of me that I don't tell everyone about, but one look and you can tell I am not white. I am the product of an American father who spent time in Brazil on a work assignment, where he met my mother. On the outside, I am brown-skinned, but on the inside I very much identify as white. I speak very little portuguese, I know pretty much nothing about soccer, and I dance like I have two left feet. I like to read and play video games, I watch football and drink beer, I have an office job and hate Mondays, and I am attracted to white women. For all intents and purposes, I am white.

"Ok, but like, what ARE you?"

So why don't I feel white? The question that has haunted me my whole life, including now, are those three words, "what ARE you?" Sometimes it is delivered in a curious tone, as if my racial identity is a fun fact about me. "What are you?" they ask, innocently, sometimes at the beginning of a friendship or relationship. Other times, they come at it much more aggressively, verifying that I am not a "Mexican trying to steal your job", or a "Muslim trying to bomb your country."

"I know you're not Mexican, so what ARE you?"

I have been asked this question over and over my whole life and I still don't know the answer to it. If I explain that I am half Brazilian, then people either want to dazzle me with their knowledge of Brazil ("they don't speak Spanish there, right?") or they want to challenge me on my appearance ("really? I always thought you were Asian," which yes, is a real question I get from time to time). When it comes to my skin tone, it feels like a scarlet letter, a badge I wear on the outside to signify that I am different than everyone else, and that I should be treated differently as a result.

Now, a criticism I have gotten before when I voice these concerns to someone asking me my favorite question is that I am too sensitive, too easily triggered. You're right, I am sensitive to the idea that I need to summarize my existence to you in just a handful of words. That the sum total of my existence, thoughts, ideas, needs and desires, all are reduced to the roll of the dice on what parents I was born from. If you are white in America, you are never questioned what your ethnicity is. You take your 23 and Me tests and subscribe to Ancestry.com to be able to claim something exciting about your family ("did you know I'm 1/8th Cherokee," or some other neat-o fact about your family tree).

"I'm 1/8th Cherokee, 1/12th German, 1/18th Polish, 1/256th Scottish...What ARE you?"

My partner is biracial as well. She is the product of a half-Cuban, half-Native American man and a Caucasian woman. In many ways, she is browner than I am. She can sing and dance to salsa, speak great Spanish, and can cook all sorts of foreign foods. She, unlike me, is very white on the outside. She once told me this story about when she was a child, her father would have to carry around her birth certificate with him because no one would believe that such a dark-skinned man would have a white child. They just assumed he had taken her. It just goes to show that being biracial is never about ethnicity, it is entirely about skin-tone.

So, to the curious white person who innocently asks your biracial friend, "what ARE you?" I hope that you can understand why we don't exactly LOVE that question. What AM I? I'm an American, I'm just a regular guy who happens to look brown, and I would appreciate if you did not treat me any differently. This country is founded on immigrants and is a melting pot at its core. Diversity shouldn't be a fun fact, it should just be the norm in our society.

Different Shades of Black

Anais Roller

When people talk about growing up black, they tend to focus on hair, clothes or music. Rarely do we ever talk about growing up black in a family of multiple shades.

Yes, I'm brown skin. Yes, my sister is light skin. AND yes, we are full sisters.

Why is it that white people can have one sibling with brown hair and another with blonde and it's never questioned whether or not they are full siblings?

Why is it that a white person can have a sibling with blue eyes and a sibling with green eyes and it's not assumed they have a different mother or father?

Why is it that my darker skin and kinky curls makes people think I can't have a sister with lighter skin and loose curls?

Why does that have to make us less of siblings?

Why is it that my dark brown eyes and my sisters light brown eyes means my mother has two baby daddies?

Why do I keep on having to ask why?

Yes, my sister is my full sister, and NO my sister is not "mixed" because she's light skin with light eyes.

It's time people realize that black comes in all shades.

It's time to realize that you can have the same parents and have kids with two different complexions and features.





What It Is vs. What It Should Be

Lennox Tucker

My life is like a diamond being under pressure for years to become unbreakable. Mistakable with my unyielding will devoted to success for I cannot fail. The position I'm in is not by chance but because my ancestors are holding firm when they set sail. No sacrifice is in vain meaning I cannot live a life and be plain; I'm not normal, I'm extraordinary. My skin colored bronze and hair is nappy. I have the presence of a beast with the mind of a philosopher.

Judged before my voice is heard and killed because a traffic stop occurred. My reality is being stopped because I cannot be the owner of the car I purchased. We live in a world where you can die just from being born with a suntan. I see it clear, my vision is not blurred; no bias in my heart, just bad blood from history out of my control. I aspire to set the record straight, for we all are no different from one another. We are one of the same; humans blessed with the gift of life. Sharing the same goal of prosperity and no amount of negativity can change that. I

've been on this earth 21 years and can say with pride I never had strife towards anyone who was undeserving. Don't judge me on my appearance...you don't know who I am inside. Living the life I lived would've made anyone in my position lose their mind over the stress and disrespect. Belittled because my melanin stating I was different from the rest making my potential be overlooked. Yes, my hands are dirty with scars cutting deep to bone. not due to carelessness but only for my hustle of having to work twice as hard for half the rewards I earned.

Stereotypes will bring out the worst in a person even when we all coexist every day in life. Collaboration is a beautiful thing; it provides benefits to all teams. Mistake it by diverting the force to resistance and it stops all motion forward. If we can all be taught to love no different than we have learned to hate, we can all live together and not be profiled, getting beat or slain on the streets.

Illustration by Jay Coachman

Africa needs love too

Astrid Guessennd

From the stretch marks on my skin
To the texture of my hair
To the pearls on my hips
And the gloss on my lips
Generations aware of our reality unfair
Hated I have seen
Rejected I have been
I have never felt loved but rather used
Even when all I had was you
Sensitive soul in a tropical weather
Believe in all I went through
Mettle no longer to be proved
Love was all I needed
Scorn was how I was treated
Mentally abused
Soul confused
Pain excused
And skin tattooed
I, African need love too
My people were not enough for you
What selfish you are
to appropriate my art
Once again it still is not enough
You needed my all too
I, as Africa did not need you
I, as Africa will never need you
However, I, as Africa want you

And I, Africa have to save myself from you because
Africans need love too

African-American Proverb

Kierra Garrett

I knew you were the one
when I asked you about your first
love
and you said it was yourself.
Although you were taught that
Black men were only made to
provide,
you decided that you deserved to
love and be loved.
You said, one day, you'd teach
your son
the things you had to learn on
your own-
what it means to be a Black man in
America
and how to love yourself even if
this world don't.
And I'll admit,
I don't know anything about being
a Black man,
but I want you to teach me
everything about loving one.
I wanna know how you carry
the weight of the world on your
shoulders
and still manage to stand up
straight,
how this world ain't made you
cruel yet.
I see the way you stiffen up around
police
like they don't know your name
but they know you ain't innocent.
I wanna know if your reaction is
from personal experience.
But I don't like to see you tense,
so tell me how to loosen you up,
how you like to be touched,
how you like to be fucked.
I want to see your soul.
I'll show you mine if you show me
yours.

I wanna hear you talk about
anything.
Cause somehow,
everything you say sounds like an
African proverb.
And now, when I ask you about
your first love,
you say it was me-
that new love is only worth it if it's
greater than the last.
And I agree.
And suddenly,
I remember every past lover as if I
had met them
tomorrow.
But you feel like God, scientifically
proven.

And, one day, I'll teach our son
what you taught me.
I'll tell him that
I wasn't woman until I met you,
I wasn't poet until you entered me,
and he is our greatest
collaboration.
And I know they say that
raising a Black boy in America
is harder than raising the dead
or
raising a Black boy in America
is raising the dead,
but this is not resurrection.
This is immortality.
This is the manifestation of
everything good inside of you
multiplied by all this love inside
of me.
And he will only ever be loved.

And if he ever asks you who your
first love was,
I hope you say that it was him.

EQUALITY

The word 'EQUALITY' is rendered in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a vibrant rainbow gradient, transitioning from yellow at the top to blue at the bottom. The text has a 3D effect, with multiple semi-transparent layers offset from each other to create a sense of depth and movement. The background is solid black.

EQUALITY

This is an identical copy of the first row, featuring the word 'EQUALITY' in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a rainbow gradient and a 3D layered effect on a black background.

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Photo by Kate Francis



ACE OF QUEENS WITH AN ARO THROUGH MY HEART

I am asexual. I am aromantic. I should not have to answer questions on why. That should just be accepted, and yet, so few accept this. Because supposedly it “feels good”. To who? To you? Well I’m not you. Everyone is different. Some people like fries, some people don’t, and it’s the same with sex. I shouldn’t have to explain that to you, but since you asked so graciously, I will.

I am a woman. I recognize that. I cannot escape what genetics and history have given me. No matter how many layers of jackets, makeup, hair and other methods of hiding that I wear.

I do not like physical contact. I do not like comments on my appearance. I should not have to explain why and yet, people feel as if they are owed one. They do not. But again, since you asked so nicely, I will give one. And maybe you, or someone, reading this will listen, and better yet, understand. I have experienced abuse. Physical and emotional. I have been sexually harassed online and in real life. I have been touched when I have not wanted to be. I am insecure. For many reasons. About many things. I have been bullied. By both peers and by people that I should not have been bullied by. I have been talked to in ways that I should not have. By people that I have trusted, that I should not have. I have been reduced to an object, something as tangible as a doll that you can own and play with. Abuse and contort at your own whim, and then thrown away. And I was thrown away. I was not receptive, so I was discarded into the nearest receptacle, without a second thought. Without a care. Without an “Are you okay?” Without anything. And I still lay there. Every night.

I have identified as asexual and aromantic since before some of these events. Do not belittle my sexuality as a response to my trauma. I have never been interested in dating. Even as a child, I never had a crush or saw a teen celebrity as cute. It just never crossed my mind. It’s always been innate for me. I don’t know why. I can’t control it. I didn’t choose this. But it’s who I am. Is that so wrong? Why does it even matter? Love is love. So love thy neighbor platonically. I love people. I do. Just in my own way. It’s just who I am. And you know what? That’s A-okay.

~Tory Rose





Mind Over Matter

Kaleah Braswell

The feeling you can't
shake isn't simply the
calling of two bodies
being put together in
one night.

No, it's the desire
to be held and kept
in a semi psycho-physical
state in which feelings meet
the mind and conscious.

To get each feeling
confused shall be the
worst span of sickness
within the mind while
the heart tries to sustain
its own homeostasis.

You can try to ignore
the true source of
where the crying
and pain echoes but
to ignore one is to
aggravate the other.

Again, to be the stereotypical
"Weak sex"
that only falls for the
feelings;

To reject longing and loneliness that
Will eventually come to
your own surface, skin, or
mind over what actually
matters which has yet
to be found or told.



All Ye Who Are Weary

Taylor Parrish

Feeling the crisp night air
My breath hurts with every inhale
As I walk beneath the wintery stars
With my body freezing, yet also numb
I pray to God and ask Him why I deserved this
What can I do?
Where can I go?

Please God, help me
The heavens sung to me
All ye who are weary come home
But how?

Heaven is always a fingertip away
Teasing and pulling away
Taunting me with every breath I take
I fall to my knees
And I pray expecting an answer
God, would you forgive me if I just let go?
Would you allow me to stand by your side?

Still, no physical home within my sight
I made my own
Just out of everyone's sight
Tucked away into my own corner
Free from this world
The never ending silence sets in


The snow covers everything
White, sparkling, new
As the world grows darker and darker
I want to call out for help
But no one listens
And I'm terrified of the dark
So, I pray to the Lord above
Please take me home
And save me from this frigid darkness

Honey Trap

trigger warning

Jahad Carter

Photo by Frank Byungura



By the time I turned 20. I had come clean to the world about the biggest secret I have ever had. Like honey in a mug filled with tea, I let this secret sink to the bottom of my soul. I did not let anyone see who I really was in the inside. More importantly, whom I really loved and who I aspired to come home to and kiss as they watched over our children.

As I cried in silence, my tears would soak the floor while I released sighs that fell on deaf ears. I prayed almost every day for God to give me a sign as to why he made me the way he did. Why he would allow me to grow up in a society that teaches me to hate myself? Why he would condone violence and anger against people who just want love? Why he would make me, Chris, gay?

Until one day I felt His word say, "Just do it." And that's exactly what I did. I stepped into my truth and told everyone closest to me that I felt an illuminating rainbow in my heart. My soul blossomed like a flower and I grew to love myself despite being taught to do the opposite. I began to date boys, wear face masks and quite frankly twerk to any song with a beat. However, I wish this was like any other Disney fairytale that had a magnificent ending.

The small taste of this new life reminded me of a time where I would go in the woods and pick honeysuckles with my older sister. I craved more and more drops of freedom in my rural town of Greenville, North Carolina. Then November came and as the leaves fell, little did I know I soon would too. It began as I smelled the sweet smell of community, friendship and inclusivity. I heard of a sanctuary that I envisioned was being crafted by magical hummingbirds that drank nectar and sang songs.

Looking back now, my eyes were blinded by a luminous light of a bright future that felt a bit more comfortable. I was lured in with a welcoming narrative and for a while I believed it. It felt so warm, so comfortable, yet so insidious. As I write this, I can feel the tears forming in my eyes while I begin to reminisce on the day that changed me forever. It was in the middle of winter when I felt like I was caught in a riptide, being whisked away from the shore. With the waves being the pain of broken trust and the shore being the world I thought I lived in.

Without beating around the bush, I'll tell you what happened. I was objectified by

someone who was supposed to be benevolent. Then I learned that his behavior was normalized by beneficiaries of him. Most importantly, I internalized my pain because I was afraid that if I spoke out, I would hinder a community that needed a break. I remember feeling a surprising slap on my back that forced me to be bent over in front of a man I didn't even know. I remember he rubbed up against me and I heard a repulsive voice saying, "assume the position." I remember being in a state of frozen shock and looking to my peers as they're mouths dropped to floor. I remember turning to him and him patting my face as if I was being a good boy.

For me, this sanctuary turned out to be a bed of honey, that at one point I believed to be cozy. I wore a mask of happiness for the sake of the community and I was hurting deep inside. The scenario played over and over in my head to the point where I couldn't sleep. It was almost like I was watching reruns of my least favorite show and the remote was nowhere to be found. Whenever someone touches my back now, I can't help but think back to the time I was violated in room full of complacent people. Now I'm stuck with scratching the dried honey residue off me as I learn to live with this new person in the mirror. As I learn to cope with not saying something sooner, because if I did, I may have protected someone from my violator. A new secret formed from my blossoming soul and as the days went on it became harder to deal with.

That riptide I got stuck in may have swept me into the deep trenches of the sea, but I learned to swim. I floated along with the dark ocean current and it felt like I wasn't going to make it out alive. The only thing that kept me going was a humming melody that played in my head. As I exhaled the pain from within, my breaths sounded like a grieving brass instrument. As I walked, talking to God, each step felt like the beating heart of a drum. As I wrote my poems, my tears hit the page as my words created the lyrics of my new normal. A normal that consist of me tearing down walls that have once been impenetrable. A normal that makes me weary of promises and sweet smells of honey. A normal where I refuse to ever let my wings become trapped by someone who was supposed to liberate me. For I will be the only person who can free myself from this trap, or shall I say "honey trap."



Photo by Binta Touray

The Stillness

Blessing Aghimien

The stillness, of stillness
The still of the silence
As fragile as the glass on my window
As pure as the beauty of a meadow

Stare into the distance and distance yourself
From the chaos and damage for a minute
Instead search for the stillness
The quiet mending still

Find yourself that peace
That sacred serenity
Surround yourself and focus
For all eternity

The still that won't just fade
The still that won't stray away
That separates the pain in half
Like you're walking on jagged glass

The stillness of stillness
The still inside
The still of time
That we stray and hide

From the ones we love
From the ones we tell
From the hollow heart
Locked inside our own selves

Edicus

****trigger warning****

Tamia Smith



Photo by Kate Francis

I feel the cold of the thin, sharp razor
Slit through my skin
And instantly all the pain is gone.
All emotions dissipate.
I'm free again.

The blood drops steadily to the floor.
My arm trembles as I lose more of it.
deep breath
Tears fall from my eyes,
Stinging the cuts on my arms.

But nothing can stop me.
I dig deeper into my flesh.
Hoping to hit the right spot.
Hoping to finally be done.

My knees buckle, unable to hold me.
I collapse to the ground.
Trembling, blood covers my T-shirt (and the cold,
inviting floor).
The razor slides across the ground.

I outstretch my arm, trying to wrap my trembling
finger around the blade.
But it's too far to grasp.
My body weakens as each second passes.

I'm ready to die.
Ready to get rid of all the pain for good.
It's easier this way.

Truth is I was afraid to die.
Especially like this.
For it would only hurt those who love me.

The truth is I didn't value myself.
And still to this day, I'm not completely there.
Those suicidal thoughts, they still pierce my mind.
And it's hard not to relapse, I promise you.

The truth is coming out NOW! It's no longer a
secret:

Truth is, suicide is the second leading cause of
death for African American youth, ages thirteen to
nineteen.
But we don't hear about it enough. Yet it's
happening to us! Daily!
And sometimes it's right under our noses.
Sometimes it's your best friend. Your sister. Your
brother. Roommate.
It's me. It's possibly you.
But you're, no wait, we're scared to seek help and
support.

Because of judgment.
Because of the "ain't nothing wrong with you's!"
And the "You'll be a'ight's."
And the infamous, "What you got to be sad
about? You got it made's."

You see mental health in the Black community is
"non-existent"
To us included in the community and to those
excluded.
Black people are seen as "strong" and "powerful"
So we can't possibly have mental health issues.

But trust me we do.
We're not just strong-minded people.
We suffer too.
And often, it's worse...

...because we have to hide it.
These troubles sit within us,
Building in strength and pressure
Until it's too late,

Now we've combusted.
We've been consumed by the fire.
And it's either suicide
Or attempted suicide, but more often the former.

And only then does it finally "exist"
When the person it affected most is no longer
around
No longer around to speak out
No longer around to get help

And when we live, that's bad too
Because now you're labeled as "crazy"
And it's like everywhere you go you hear the
whispers:
"She tried to kill herself"; "He's suicidal"

And it's not fair,
Not fair that the only way light is shed...
...on the mental health of African Americans
Is when they've killed, or tried to kill themselves.

So let this piece of literature, this art
Let it tell, not only my story, but the story...
...of so many African Americans with mental
health issues
Let these words serve as exposure to the truth.

The secret is finally out:
Black people suffer from mental health issues, as
well.



Tag You're It

Tiana Robinson

To be black, alive and woman
is like a never ending
game of tag
but instead of friendly hands chasing after me
its hands asking
to touch my hair, my body,
to cover my mouth
only for vanilla hands to pour creamer down my throat.

You see this game of tag
is only a game for them.
This game has been going on for a while now
I'm scared that
I might
run out of breath.

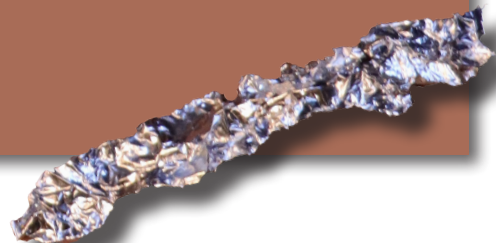




Photo by Frank Byungura

Check Up on Me!

Carmelia Ward

Older people would tell you that a pretty brown skinned girl like me has not been through anything in life, but they have not even taken the time to check up on me.

Growing up a preacher's kid in a world full of sinners and being expected to do no wrong is hard, it hurts, but no one took the time to check up on me. Trying to be perfect, please my parents, live by the Bible when I knew I was not happy with that steady lifestyle, but I stayed in it because no one would check up on me.

Having no voice in a home where my daddy was always working and my mom called all the shots so I was told to shut up and do what I was told, even if I did not like it; I wish there was someone who was there to check up on me. Learning at a very young age that my sexual orientation was distasteful to my family and hearing my mom preach about how it was an abomination under the word of God broke my heart so bad, but still no one would check up on me.

When I would force myself to be someone I was not so that I could feel loved and be showered with things, I thought would be pleasurable to me. It made me feel empty, but no one would check up on me.

After the birth of my beautiful baby girl, a dark cloud came over me and I felt like all was lost. So I diagnosed myself with postpartum because I was ashamed people would think I was crazy, so I did it before the doctors did. Afterwards I became different, I walked different, I talked different, I dressed different, started harming myself and I even thought, "Hmm, maybe I am crazy." My friends that I thought were my friends saw the changes and told me I needed to chill and ducked off on me, but they never came back to check up on me.

One verbally, physically and sexually abusive relationship later, I lost my vision, I lost my voice, I lost my sense of intelligence, I lost my sense of love. Most of all I lost me, but no one was there to check up on me. Then I began blaming myself and turning into a monster drinking until liquor tasted like water, smoking until my nights became days and I asked my sister, "Why am I still here?" Instead of her telling me, she told me I needed to get help and after that I gave up all hope that she would ever take time out to check up on me.

A year later, after destroying my GPA and becoming broker than I've ever been physically, mentally, emotionally and financially, I came across a man. This man would tell me I was the most beautiful thing he had seen, and he knew I was smart so he would help me get through school. He wanted me to come over and talk so we could work out something. The first few visits he would give me money to simply sit there and keep him company, the last.... Oh, how I wish I had a friend to check up on me.

After that night I felt tainted, I became disgusted with myself, I was the only one to blame. I never spoke about it, I went to the hospital where I was diagnosed with depression, but I refused medication because it was my fault. It was all MY FAULT. I was too busy being wrapped up in being perfect and refraining from being a burden that I expected for someone to check up on me, before I could check up on myself.

"Depression?" I say. "As in a mental illness?" These people were calling me sick and after all these years I felt it. "Not me, no way." A preacher's kid isn't supposed to live this way, feel this way, hurt this way, but it's happening and it will not stop...



Photo by Kate Francis

Illustrated by Jay Coachman



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“▷”

D'Mya Sanford

Finally finding someone who understands, is like finding a cure to
the monotonous heartache of
faking normalcy.

Every niche opinion,
Everything you have always consciously labeled as idle babble;
Has found solace in the expression of memories and conversation.

Creating a quixotic relationship so precious that neither platonicity
nor romance are sufficient in
the categorization of your relativity,
More than words can warrant,
More or less, essentially supernal,
Continual, without the possibility of abandonment.

The harmony to every melody you've ever sung,
The answer to every question you've ever asked,
With the exception of,
"Who's going to initiate it all"?

Photo by D'Mya Sanford







Photo by Kate Francis



Black Men Need Love Too

Daniel Roberts

Would you believe me if I told you that African American men do not get the respect and love that they deserve from everybody else? Would you believe me if I said that they did get the love they need? African American men have dealt with a lot of oppression and racism throughout human history. It seems that in 2019, things are getting worse and worse with the outlook on black men. You see black men all over being portrayed as thugs, criminals, on top of reports being put out on police brutality. When you get on social media, you have people posting gang fights that occurred all over the place. Instead of trying to separate or end the conflict, people hype it up and break out their cameras, wanting to see our black men kill each other. That is what is portrayed all over the world.

What about those little incidents where you have people of other races judge our black men and put them in a stereotypical category that says that they cannot be more than what society says they can be? We say that all men are created equal, but by looking at how divided we are not only in the United States but all over the world, that is something one should not believe in. Going to a predominantly white institution and trying to survive in a society that places black men at the bottom of the food chain in terms of opportunities for jobs, promotions, scholarships, you name it and more times than not, black men are not at the top of the list. In a world that has been influenced by technology, social media and stereotypes, all black men need love too. If everyone did spread that love we all desperately want and need from everyone not just people of one race or another, but literally everyone in the world including our African American brothers, this world would be a much happier place to live in. As stated before, our black men need love too at the end of the day.

To our contributors...

I want to personally thank you all for shattering barriers to break stereotypes, shift perspectives and highlight the beauty of what we stand for. I want to remind you all that your secrets are not the negative aspects of you but the aspects that can help someone else as they relate to you. Your courage, your resilience, your story, you... You are what made this publication even possible. Thank you because without you all, this publication would not be possible.

To our readers & supporters...

Thank you all for taking the time to read and embrace our secrets. Placing yourself in the lives of others to gain a different perspective to stimulate society as a whole, was the main purpose of this publication. Thank you all for continuing to support and grow with us as we make it a goal every year to have the minority of voices heard from miles away. Expressions is all of us. Everyday we wake up to the person we want to be and we express ourselves as we stride through life unbothered by society.

To Rhema Bland,

Thank you for allowing our vision of unveiling truths pour onto the student body of ECU. With your support and leadership, we thank you.

To Terrence Dove,

Your guidance will never go unnoticed and we thank you for always being there when we needed you the most. We appreciate your trust in us to produce a memorable piece of art.

To Annah Howell,

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To Designers, Illustrators, Models and Photographers,

Thank you all for letting your imagination and creativity run free. Your contribution is what elevated our publication. Your dedication will never go unnoticed while your talents will forever reign.

Sincerely,

Sierra Williams

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Student Media Professional Staff

Director: Rhema Bland

Administration Support Associate: Janet Rollins

Publication Adviser: Terrence Dove

Advertising & Marketing Adviser: Tim Davis

Production Adviser: Annah Howell

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Expressions is currently accepting submissions for our next issue. Contributions can be any illustrations, poems, short stories, photographs or non-fiction works. All submissions should include your full name, major and classification. Please send all work to expressions@ecu.edu. Those pieces selected may appear in our next edition.

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