

**To be loved and love at the
highest count
Means to lose all the things I
can't live without
Let it be known that I will choose
to lose
It's a sacrifice but I can't live a lie
Let it be known**

—Adele



CARLETON COLLEGE
GSC
GENDER & SEXUALITY CENTER
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THE GENDER & SEXUALITY CENTER PRESENTS:
EXHALE IDENTITY SERIES
To Be Loved



WINTER 2023

Exhale Identity Series

Exhale Identity Series is hosted annually by the **Carleton College Gender & Sexuality Center (GSC)** as a way for the Carleton community to share their experiences, stories, and art to reflect on a specific theme related to identity.

This project is also centered around fostering connections and community building; although some may not share the exact lived experiences of those that submitted to the Exhale Series, they may find a piece of their own identities reflected in these pages.

This year, the theme is focused on what it means To Be Loved, as a way to explore our complex understandings of love in its many shapes and forms.

Through this prompt, we hope that community members will find a useful way to share, process, and reflect on their own story of love and the truth behind its meaning.



Editor's Note

This year's Exhale Identity Series is a reflective journal. A journal that allows us to openly express our experiences with the topic of love. What does it mean to be loved? How have we viewed love in our past and present lives? What does love mean to me?

For as long as I can remember, I never truly saw love portrayed through the lens of queer people. Love is more than a passionate sex scene. It's actions, pleasures, and experiences.

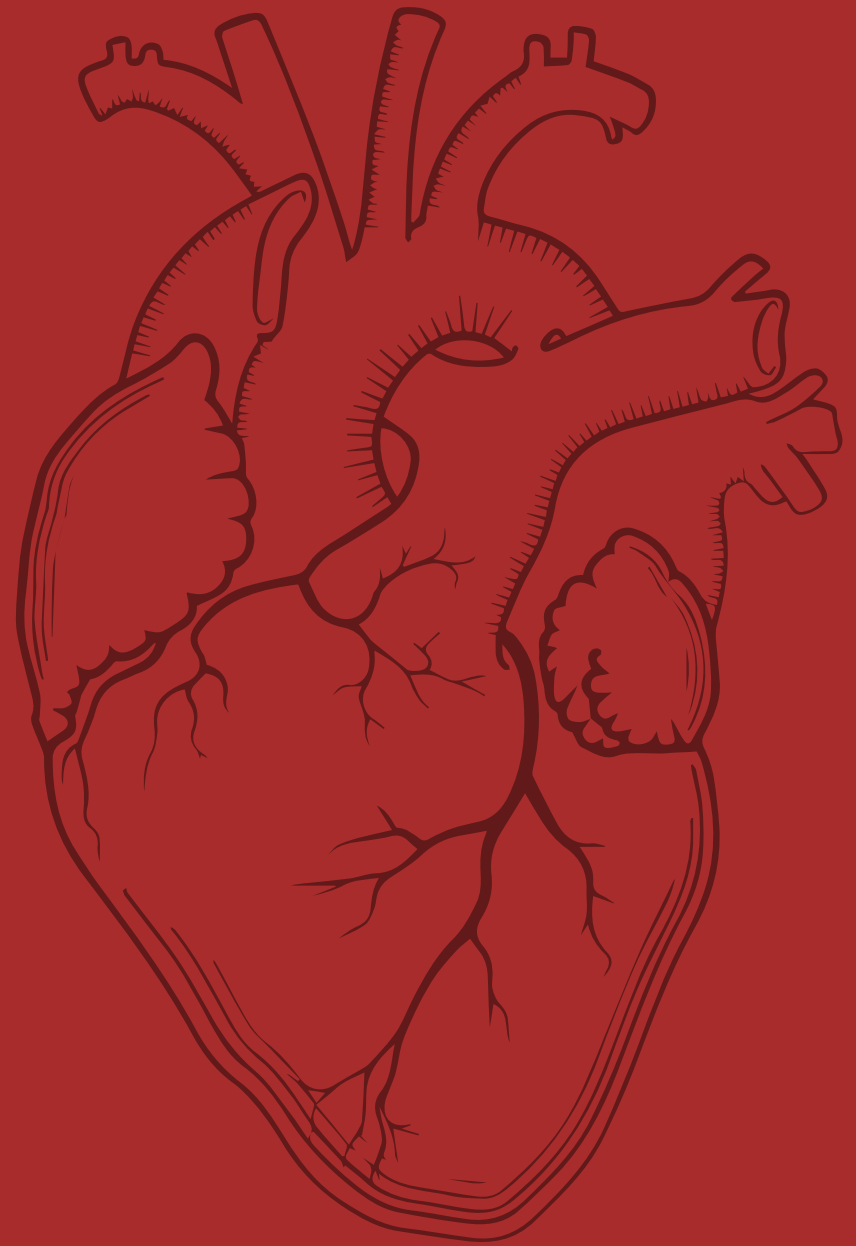
This series serves the purpose of opening your mind to redefine love and its meaning. Love is a practice and a routine. To be loved to the highest degree goes beyond the standard.

We must look deeply at our experiences to find our authentic meaning for love. Love can be painful and traumatic while creating a space for healing and growth.

Join us as we explore what loves means to each of us in this year's publication.

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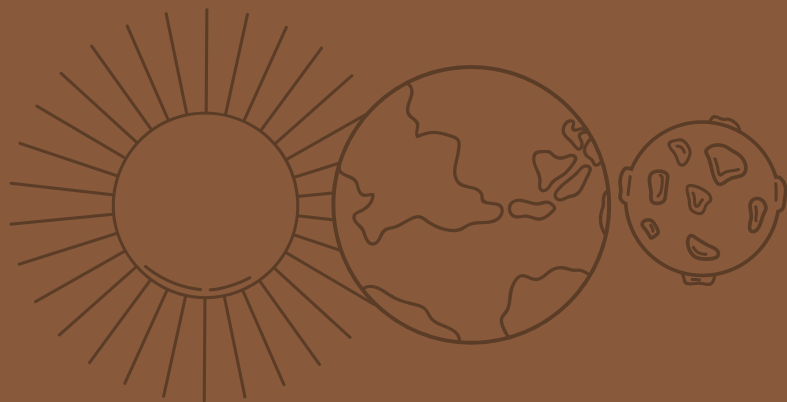
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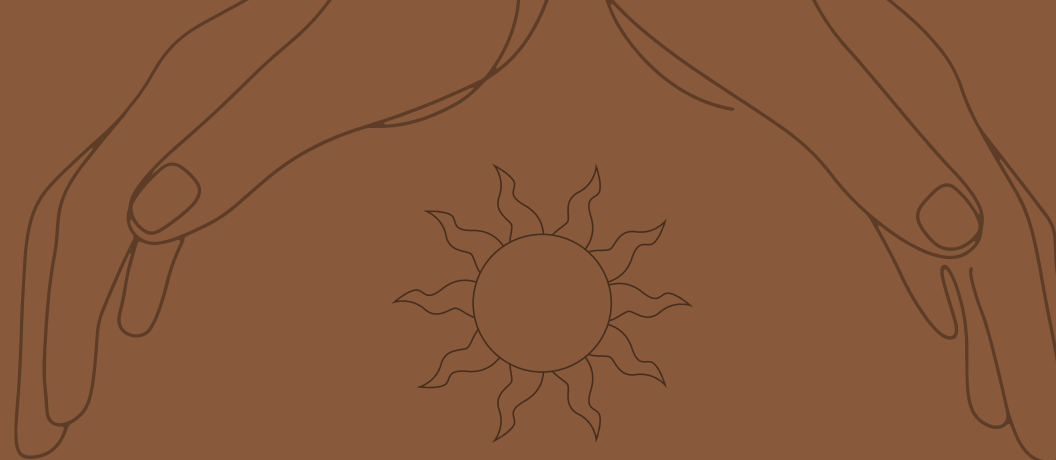
After Maggie Rogers

GRETA HARDY-MITTELL '23

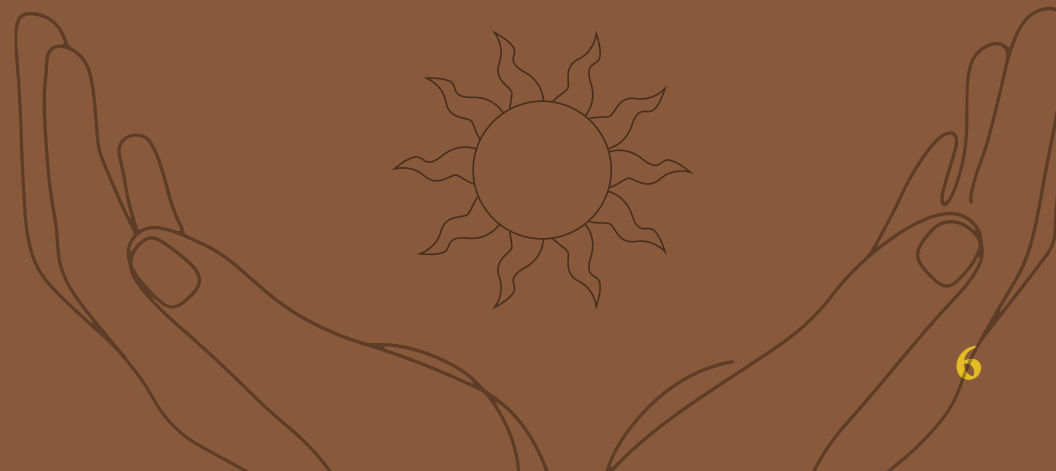
At what point does simply friends
stop sufficing for us? We run to each other
upon heartbreak, when we need to feel the world
in all its wild beauty, for laughter that refuses
to end. I fall in love more often around you.
The poems start flowing when your words
infiltrate my brain. Shall I call you my muse?
There is so much we do not share—
my convictions, our conditions,
your pursuits—still we fit together
like we were meant to meet. Promise
you will not leave like my other loves;
we'll keep circling each other like the sun.



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*I wrote this poem inspired by a song
and in gratitude for a particular
friendship. It became a reflection of
how queer friendship has gone so
much deeper, lasted so much
longer, than any romantic or sexual
love in my life. This is the love that
nourishes me, the love I want to
shape my life around.*



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A Little Wooden Ball

ANONYMOUS CW: Cursing, blood

My hands slide against the grain, I'm sure to notice something

The contours, craftsmanship, must, the beauty, I must feel a splinter soon, or there must be a divot somewhere on the wood

And when I find it, I'm sure to feel it; I'm sure to slide against the grain in search Until I find the little dent, a perfect fit to cup my fingers

And afterward, I'll never move again.

There's something wrong with this tailored, lovely, perfect wooden ball.

Because not only is there no divot, There is no must, there is no grain, there are no soft curves smoothly lacquered, I can't sense the craftsman or feel the shapes or see the perfection they tell me I will find This is just a shitty piece of wood

Yet you and all the others still fawn over it completely. Me, I've never gotten the appeal.

I have been combing through the thick, I have been waiting patiently,

I've taken in examples, never stopping, everybody's examples,

I have been feeling up and down the sides and waiting, feeling for a hint.

The slivers leave no trace, no bloody prints to mark a perfect trail—

I'll set it down, this perfect, tailored, loving ball And think how I don't want to take the lead.

Maybe the perfect divot actually comes along and finds me.

What a fucking pleasure that would be.

It's often difficult to move through the world as an aromantic - constantly looking for something that feels like it should be there, that everybody tells you is waiting just around the corner and will solve all of your problems, but you know you'll never find. This piece tells a little about my personal experience looking for this enormous Love I hear about but have never felt.




stardust on small streets

LILLIAN BERETS '23

sunshine on my cheeks
the world pauses
sun sets on small streets
remind me
of elders
guiding me on my path
of sunbathed sidewalks
life stories unfolding
over the phone
sent me sweeping the town
rooting their words in
trees and purple house
on the corner next to the
park full of snow now
tears frozen on my cheeks
remembering them in crystals

I tilted my head
following the pausing awe
of another on the sidewalk
as we passed
stars settle the deep sky
glimmer grandparent voices
guiding me through
this tiny town's streets
take me home
set my feet with your love
across spacetime
I am now and forever
your body and history



birch tree on my journey
reminds me of
our song
walking up hills in
wet cool
we saved worms
told one another love
laughed into the fog
measured and wished
the distances until
they became too far
love is stardust now
and with the soil

house on the corner in yellow
we settle into the warm wood
nights giggling over our open
untouched books
princesses from yesteryear
worlds to understand
find our ways in
love deeply and fiercely and terrified
holding one another
in and on first steps
recount our childhoods
over dinner so we can
imagine our now and soon
grandmothers old and grumpy
someday loving this world

fountain in the square center
a quiet market gathered in
spring sunshine
treasures we will treasure
boomerang time and totebags
raspberry cheeks as
scones melt on our storied tongues
imagine the movie loves
live out our own loves
tracing footsteps
towards vegetables and
popcorn sugar
loving the stories of a
complicated world

as sunshine brushes
my cheeks
full of love
to be loved
on sidewalks and
over dinner tables
in stardust and
within tree roots
my loves

For me, love settles into concrete places and beings like trees and sidewalks and paths traced into a town's streets, and it is all at once the past and the present and the future. I connect love, and what I have learned that it means to be loved, to my elders and teachers as some have passed on their genetics and all have passed on their stories. Love falls into the stars I have above me when loves leave, guiding me even if I cannot sit with them at tables or wander in markets as I can with the other people I love.

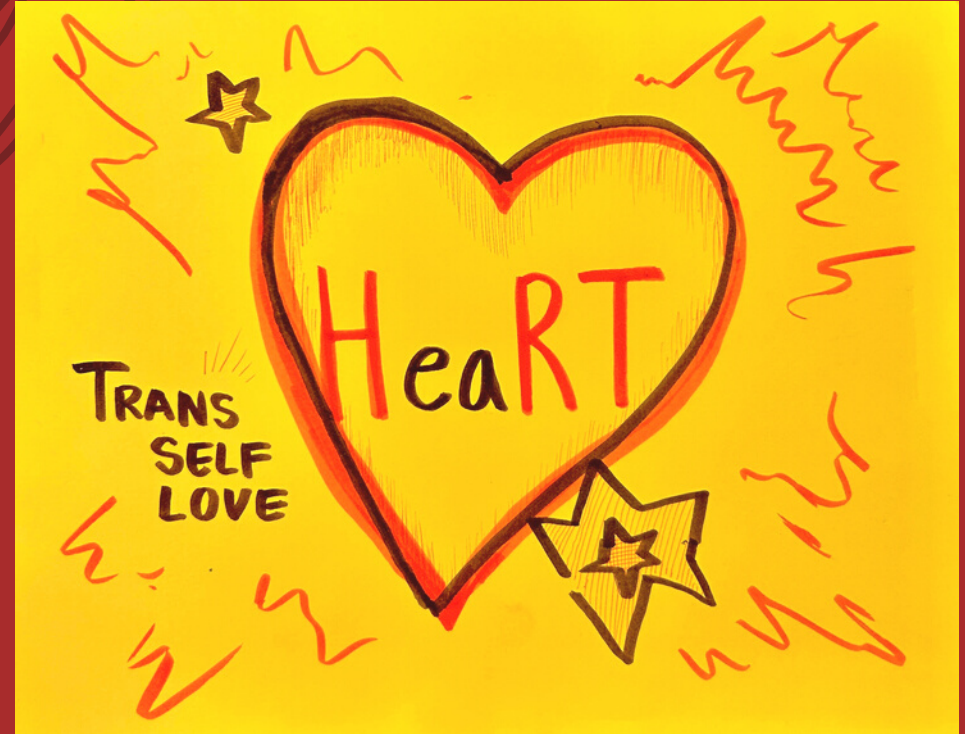
GSC Squirrels

CLARK GLYMPH '26



HeaRT

CLARK GLYMPH '26



I'm starting HRT in the same week as Valentine's day and it's a form of my self-love as a queer person this week.

Surrounded By Love

JANET SCANNELL, STAFF *CW: Death, Queerphobia*

I was a baby dyke in the 1980's. That was a time when gay pride was hard to come by, at least for me. I was a young adult 15 years after the Stonewall Riots and 15 years before Matthew Shepard's death. It was hard to imagine being loved by society or my family, which made it hard to love myself and to venture out of my closet. But the love of the gay community saved me.

Everybody, queer or straight, has to figure out how and when they reveal themselves to friends, family, and co-workers. It took me 10 years (including a 4 year relationship) before I told my family that I was gay. My mother blamed my father and my father blamed my mother, and they both avoided telling their friends about their lesbian daughter. They "accepted" me, but it didn't feel like unconditional love.

I was lucky to be spending my late 20's in the Bay Area.

There was so much gay community in San Francisco and Berkeley, where my college friends lived, and also in the South Bay, where I lived. I went to gay potlucks, women's bars, women's concerts, women's seders, gay & lesbian concerts, gay pride parades, and (my favorite) women's music & comedy festivals. It was at the latter when I heard a song about "holding on to the pride" that I felt my heart open. I kept singing with tears of joy running down my cheeks.

After years of hiding and feeling "different", I finally felt whole and at peace. I was ok. In fact, I liked being different and choosing the life that made me happy. It was there, surrounded by love, that I chose love over guilt. I was good. I was home.

This story is about self-acceptance, and how being part of a loving community helped me get past my guilt about being gay. This story happened in the 1980's, when the vast majority of queer people were in the closet.

Freedom

REHANA NAIK OLSON '23



I drew a person with wings surrounded by a rainbow and dipping themselves into it. From the other side of the rainbow, you can see that they start to come out rainbow-colored. Mostly, this is about self-love and letting yourself fly into your own colors. I think true love is like that.

Chosen Family

AUTUMN GROSS '26



The GSC is a very fun and safe place to be. We're a bunch of queer rats. Rats are good.



CHRYSALIS

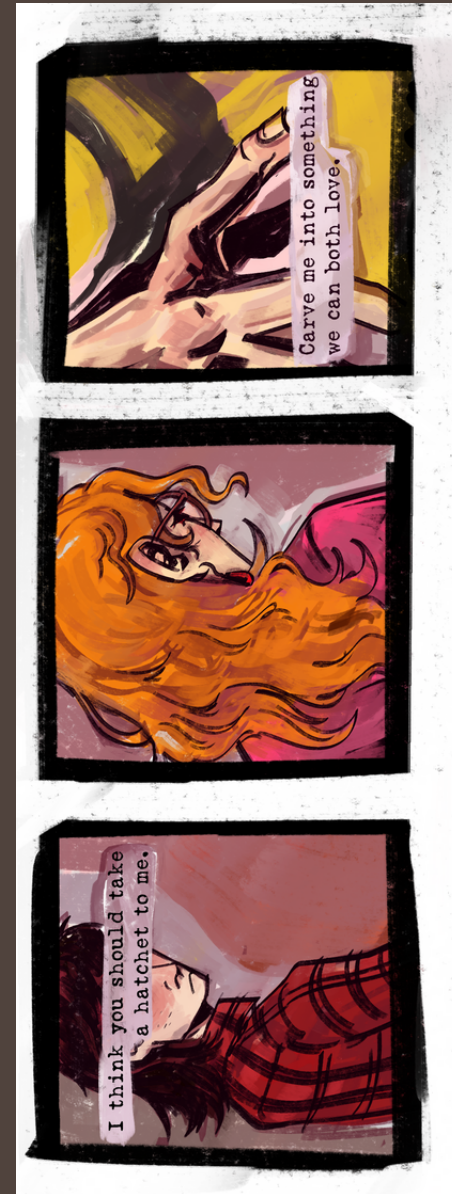
WREN THOMAS '26



neither my partner nor i have access to medical transition. this is about that.

hatchet lover ii

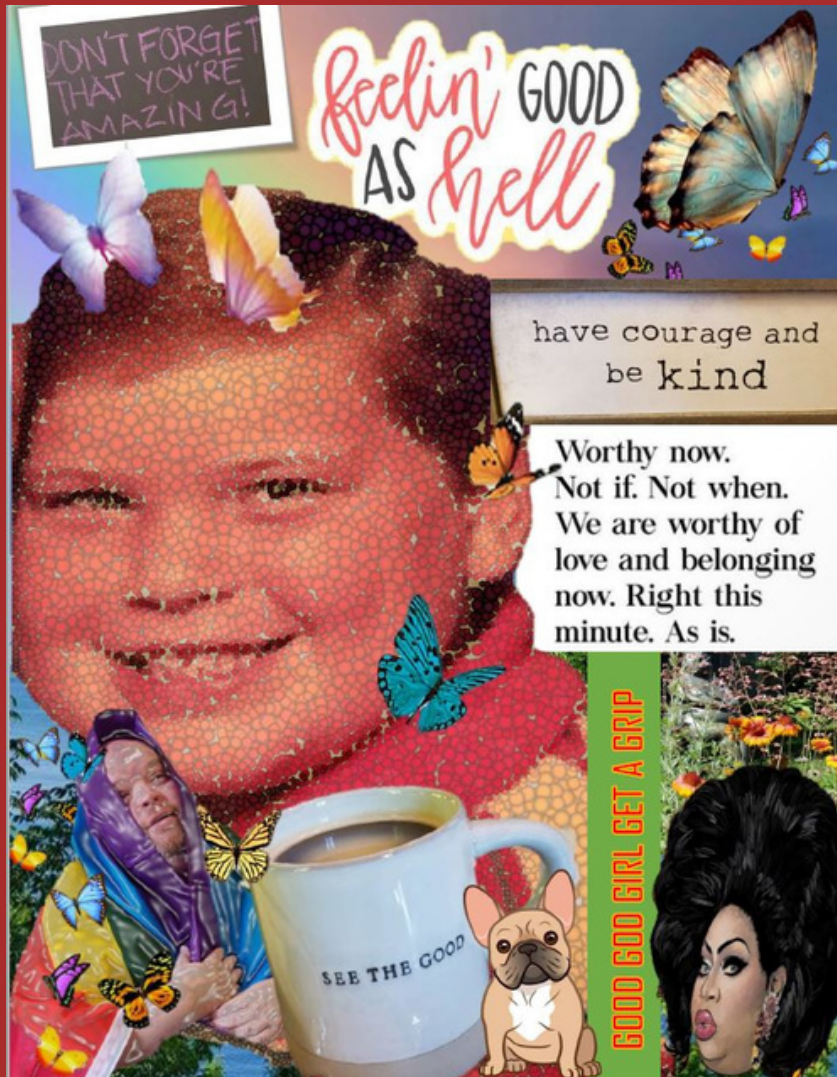
WREN THOMAS '26 CW: Implied violence



i think a lot about love as metamorphosis; there is a desire to view love as hurt in tandem, but a willing sort of infliction. format inspired by A Softer World, poetry/photography webcomic of all time.

Remembering How to Love Me

DANNY MATHEWS, STAFF



As queer people, we must do so much healing of our inner child. When I was making this piece and saw the young me, it hit me that there was never anything wrong with that lil effeminate gay boy. He was beautiful and just right. Now I have to take that with me as an adult and remember to love that little boy and the person he's become today.



L is for LOVE

ART ONWUMERE '24









L is for LOVE is a collection of the various Queer and BIPOC couples on campus, highlighting the importance of not just representation in Queer couples but the value of love and how loving one in a Queer relationship is different from what is portrayed in media. Growing up I cannot remember seeing many queer couples in media let alone queer couples of color.

I asked two questions to each couple: What does representation mean to you (in your relationship or individually) and if they could talk to their younger self about love what would you say? Love is Love. Happy Pride.

Entropy is not Conserved

AUTUMN GROSS '26

my home is not stuck

my home sleeps on a twin-sized mattress
surrounded by trees
screaming to find where together is

my home picks me up off the frozen plain
answered my torn plea
shivering across the ice to metal drapery

my home lies on the floor until the stars emerge
embraced in warmth
murmuring dear drivel and tenderness

my home is not six cold hours away
moved beyond the cement
contributing to the entropy of the universe



I have been struggling with the idea of home and the feeling of displacement. I find that my home is not a place at all, but several people that I have a difficult time expressing love to.



El Cuarto de mis Abuelitos

DANI PEREZ, STAFF



Before I came out to my grandparents, I felt like I had to censor out most of my life in our conversations. In spite of being two of the people I love the most, and who love me the most, I felt they couldn't know who I really was.

While rummaging through my grandparents' stuff one day, I found a book called "Amor y Sexualidad," or "Love and Sexuality," which had a chapter called "Who are Homosexuals?", a question which made me snicker.

Reading this in their bedroom felt vulnerable. Like I was somehow sharing my whole self with them for once, even though it was a private moment. This work reminds me of a time in my life when I realized that I could allow myself to experience my grandparents' love even if I didn't yet feel comfortable coming out to them. That even if my queerness felt separate from our relationship, there were small ways I could reconcile the two, even by myself.

Letter to a Baby Queer

DANI PEREZ, STAFF

Queride Dani,
At 12 or 13 years old,

I thought of you today. I think of you often, actually.
Almost every day, even.

I think of your silhouette in that dark blue room, sitting
on the left side of your bed, under the same comforter
as always, and that blanket your mom got you,
washed too many times over.

A book in your hands, resting on your stomach like a
refuge. One knee bent upwards, one leg triangled to
the side, a foot lightly touching an ankle.

I remember you looking at the shadow on your wall,
lying in that stance. Knowing this was how you would
see yourself over and over throughout the years, on
different walls, under different blankets, with or
without shadows, and it would always feel just as true.

You dwell deep within me still. We *are* each other,
deeply. Still. Even as I am far from anywhere you could
have imagined yourself.

Yet, looking back, I'm really just on the other side of
you.

You are ravenously reading the kinds of books that are
stacked, sprawled, strewn throughout my classroom,
most of which I'll never touch, but which other, smaller
hands will.

You would love the books we have. Books you would've
had to wait patiently for. Wait until you drove to the
Cities with your mom, a six-hour journey. Wait while
she and your abuelo drank their cafecitos together,
paging through magazines they wouldn't buy in that
Barnesandnoblestarbucks. Wait
until you could walk straight to the youth section to
pick a book you'd buy with your allowance money, and
no one would ask any questions about it.

Disappearing into fiction was one way we survived.
Those unspoken, invisible books embraced those
unspoken, notquiteinvisible parts of you.

Books prosed in languages you couldn't yet share with anyone.

The kinds of books that would've changed your life if they had been sitting plainly in your classroom.

I, an English teacher now, try really hard to remember that.

I have to go get groceries soon, to bring back to your first real apartment. An apartment where your best friend can come over anytime. You'll meet them soon.

Here, I leave this journal on my headboard, openly.

The person I love can come visit me here—we buy plane tickets to see each other, and she is as welcome here as she is at your mom's. And your abuelitos'. We danced together in your dining room on your birthday.

But, quickly, what I want to tell you right now is this: I have students who would have been your best friends.

Students who make me feel so fully seen—because I know that you would have seen yourself reflected in them. And maybe, if that had been the case, you would have learned to see yourself with the same level of awe I see them with.

I'm learning, though, that it's not too late for this. And they teach me new things every day.

In our classroom, in our shared laughter, in such tender moments, they pull me closer to you.

I wrote this piece while I was teaching 7th grade for a year. Teaching 12- and 13-year-olds (especially a bunch of queer Latinx babies) constantly pulled me towards my inner tween—a frazzled Venezuelan kid growing in a 900-person town in rural MN. I used to wish I could open up some kind of portal and deliver a letter to my past self, but I've started trying to tell myself these things now, knowing it will reach the little me in there somewhere.

i'm a motherf*cking

racecar

ANONYMOUS

I am in love with myself. I know who I am very well. I can look at all my little quirky behaviors and say I love them. I can look at myself in the mirror picking out every imperfection face and say I love them. I look into my past and all the awful mistakes that used to keep me up at night and still say I love myself. I love myself, and the parts that make up.

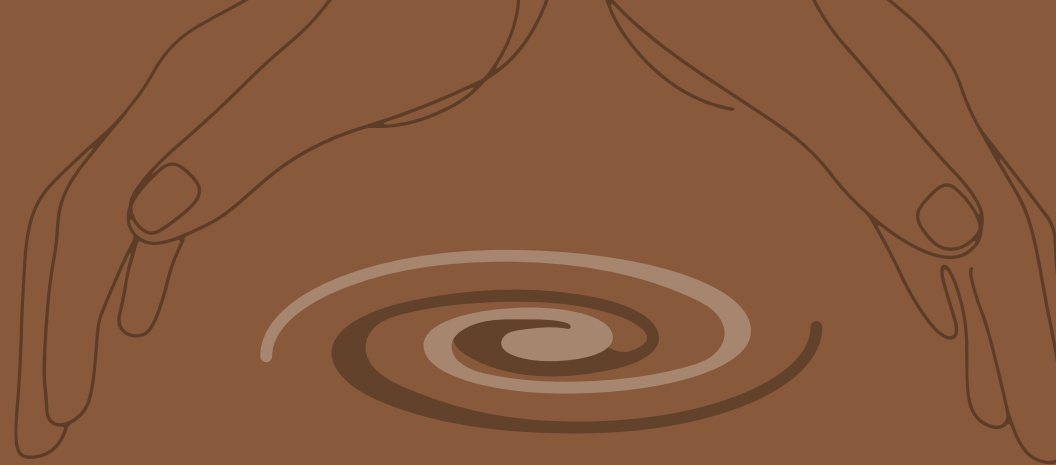
When I talk about my gender it's an incredibly tangible thing. Despite gender not being something you can touch, I could still look into "the void", reach out, and point at which blob of human energy and ideas my exact gender is. When I say I'm nonbinary, I enjoy knowing exactly what that label means to me and exactly who I am.

I'm not sure when I left my body. I'm not sure if I was ever in there to begin with. I use makeup and fashion to express my gender and feel more comfortable in my body, but sometimes I feel like I'm just dressing up a doll. When I look in the mirror I'm not sure if I'm looking at myself. It's almost like I'm expecting something different than what's there. And it's not that I hate what's there. In fact, I'm the best at complimenting myself because I know all what my insecurities are. I like the way that I look, but sometimes I just don't look like me.

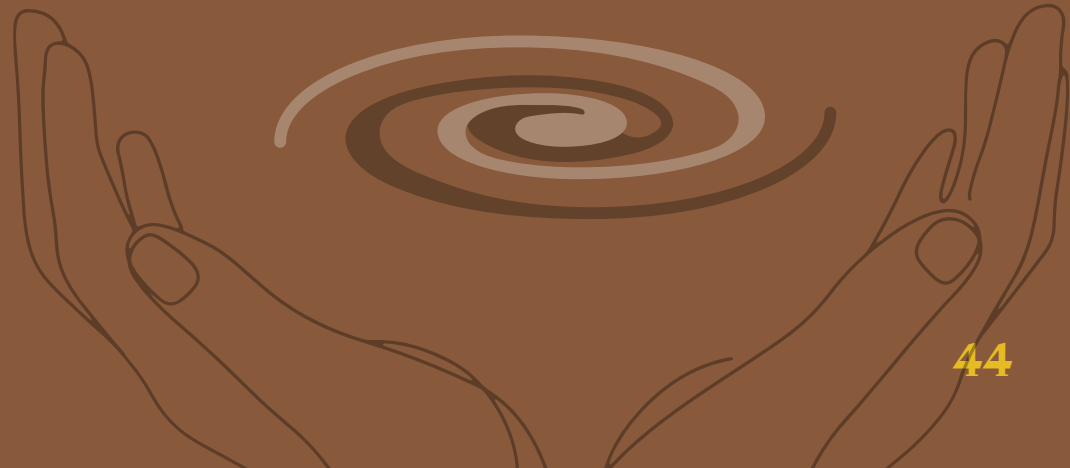
I think I'm getting better at it though, being in my body, listening to what it tells me and changing behaviors so that I feel more present. A lot of my fear came from not trusting myself. I know what I look like. I know what I want to look like. I'm excited for the future and I'm settled with the now. My body is mine whether I'm there a whole lot or rarely ever. I think I'll always be able to smile at it. And I'll always be able to recognize it as a part of me to love.

Not sure what the original metaphor was but someone (on the internet) once described their relationship to their body as a trans person as a car going in for a repaint. The metaphor was purposefully simple, so it could easily be understood. It's obviously an incomplete metaphor and there are many differences between humans and cars, but what they did so right was emphasizing that they'd make these changes for themselves.

So if I was a car I'd be a refurbished 1973 Ford Mustang painted deep purple with bright orange polka dots driven in street races. I'd be a motherfucking race car.



My piece is a personal essay that admittedly only scratches the surface of self love in relation to one's body. It talks a little about my personal experience and doesn't really provide anyone with instruction on how to exist. It really is just about my personal process and how I do my best to enjoy being.



Intergalactic Love

ART ONWUMERE '24



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Reflection Space

As you read, you might feel compelled to reflect on what love means, or doesn't mean, to you.

Feel free to use the following prompts to spark your reflection, or simply use this space to respond as you wish.



Have you ever felt love that felt infinite and boundless?

Write about a time you felt secure and loved in your queerness.

If you could spend time with your younger self, how would you make them feel loved?

What's the nicest thing anyone has ever done for you?

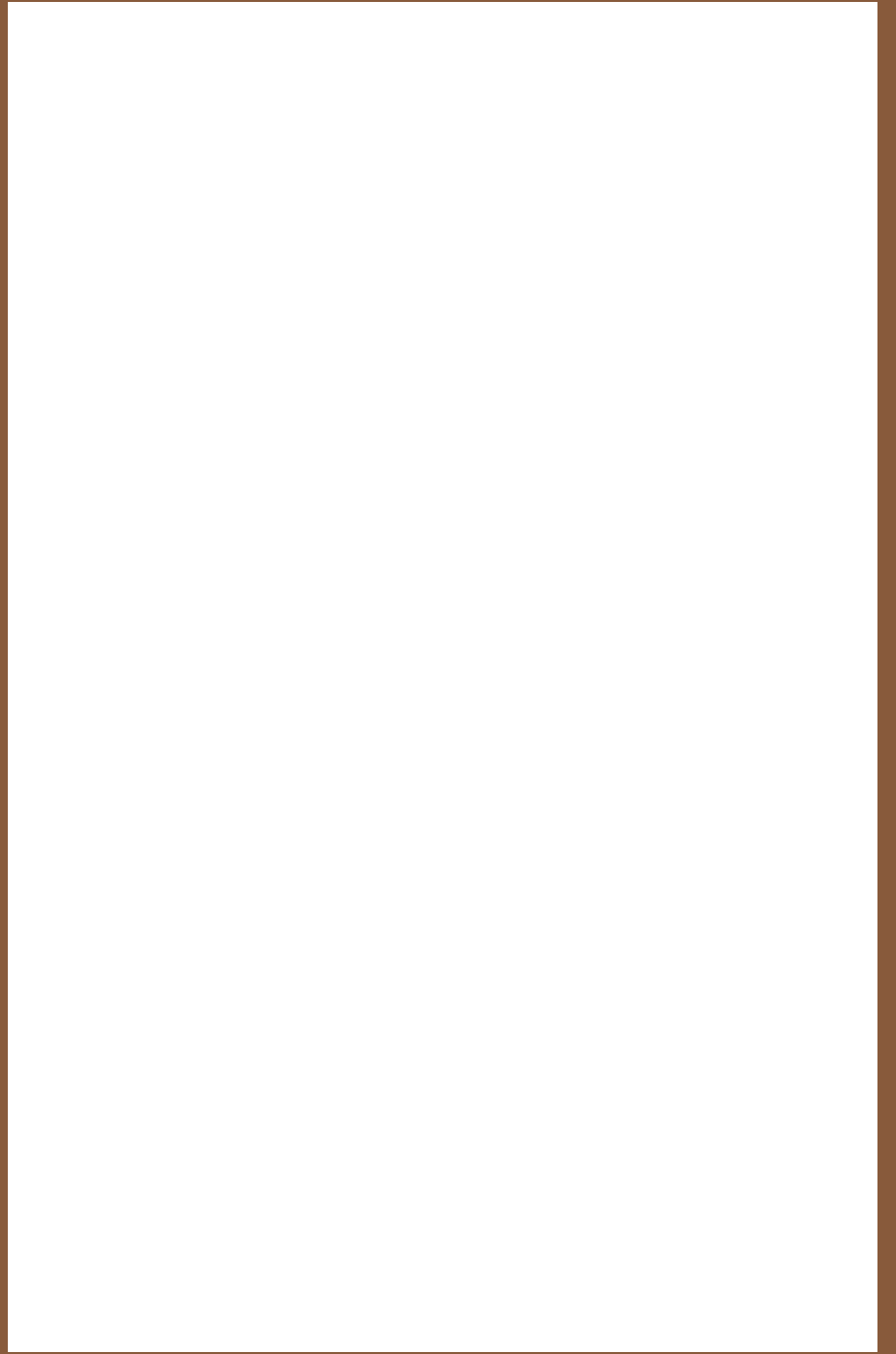
Which songs fill you with love?

If you could live in a memory, what would it be? How does that memory make you feel?

If you could spend time with your younger self, how would you make them feel?

Talk about a best friend. Was there a moment where your relationship became deeper?

What do you want "home" to feel like when you leave college?



and now....

**Think about the lessons & reflections
you are taking away from these works.**

**How are your mind and body
responding?**

**How can you sit with these responses in
stillness? How can you let them spur
you into action?**

**Now think about how we can foster
discussions on love as a wider Carleton
Community, and, in the process, show
up for each other as we share our
stories.**

...exhale

Special Thanks

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Winter 2023 edition of Exhale! We deeply appreciate your openness and artistry, and we celebrate each version of love that's been shared in this issue.

An extra special thank you to Art Onwumere '24 for visualizing this year's theme and bringing it to life. We applaud you for your intentionality, care, and loving work.

We thank this year's amazing GSC Office Assistants for playing a key role in getting the word out, contributing to Exhale, and spearheading this year's Exhale events.

Lastly, thank you to our partner offices who helped us promote Exhale.

May the rest of your year be filled with infinite forms of love—whatever that means for you.

**With love,
GSC Professional Staff**