INSPIRING STORIES BEGIN HERE
My mind is consumed with moodboards full of fashion icons, trends, designs, and runway moments. My room is filled with my favorite fashion books and magazines stashed next to my bed, while pictures hang above my desk flooding the place with inspiration. My closet showcases a spectrum of self-expression with every garment that it holds. Every day is a new opportunity to express yourself in whatever form that might look like and MODE 17 showcases that diversity by celebrating self-identity and inclusivity through FIDM’s student perspectives. Students prove that self-expression sees no limit: we celebrate difference and advocate for positive change, pushing for inclusivity. FIDM has given me a creative outlet that helped and challenged me as a young fashion student, and being Editor-In-Chief was no exception. As Editor-In-Chief, I grasped the importance of bringing social and cultural conversations to light, giving people a voice, and creating community.

Kierra Stanek
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
CONTRIBUTORS

MODE BOARD

A LENS INTO SELF-IDENTITY

UNIFYING BEAUTY

HIDDEN PEARL

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

INSTRUCTOR SPOTLIGHTS

PERSPECTIVES IN DIVERSITY

*FIDM MODE is written, photographed, styled, modeled, and designed by current FIDM students for FIDM students. For more information, please contact FIDM Student Activities.
Although 7 billion people inhabit the world, social conventions dictate only two acceptable sexes, two narrowly defined gender identities, and one appropriate sexuality. These norms instruct that each of us is born with a biologically predetermined identity that fits into one of two boxes: male or female. Each category comes with its own set of cultural standards to uphold and expectations to meet, reinforced by the gender binary.

Whatever its personal meaning, self-identity is an evolving exploration, a journey toward understanding. People who challenge everyday norms reshape social molds. Those who identify as gender-neutral argue that they should express their self-identity without restriction, because people are more than a pronoun. Three FIDM students share their stories about finding themselves and the challenges they faced.
“I struggled to accept more pressure to look...
I am a Mexican non-binary individual who goes by the pronouns she/they/them. In my culture, being a hyper-feminine girly-girl was the ideal role for women. Girls were expected to look and act perfect, to have long pretty hair, and to wear bright colors. I never fit that mold. I struggled to accept myself for most of my life, feeling even more pressure to look and act a certain way as I got older. I never felt like a girl, but I didn’t want to be or feel like a boy either. The best way to describe my experience is like being in a state of discomforting limbo because I was forcing myself into a box I knew I did not fit.

Although I do have a feminine side, I did not fully resonate with identifying only as she/her. Today, gender norms seem to be going out the window, and I finally realized that I didn’t have to be subjected to a certain gender—to be masculine or feminine. With the help of counselors, I came to terms with my being non-binary. It was not an easy journey, but once I did I felt like I could finally breathe. A weight was lifted off of my shoulders.

But I was terrified and felt like I was ruining the picture-perfect family that my dad had always dreamt of. I came to learn that this is my life and that my happiness matters too. Little by little, I came out to some friends and family members, and they accepted me for who I am. I started dressing in what made me comfortable and living life as the real me. I decided not to let my gender assigned at birth determine my life or put me in a box where I didn’t belong. To me, being non-binary means living beyond the binary by rejecting the idea that I fall into categories of woman or man. Realizing I am non-binary has allowed me to live my life authentically.
There’s a lot to unpack when talking about self-identity. Most might say, “I’m proud of my identity,” but that wasn’t always the case for me. I’m gay, pangender, and Sri Lankan. My pronouns are they/he/she. How I express my gender is something that many queer people like me find to be a daily burden. As someone assigned male at birth, most of my life was spent fitting the mold of a “man,” but as I’ve grown, I have reshaped that mold. The Sri Lankan part of my identity contradicts queerness almost perfectly, yet these two opposing forces combine to form who I am today.

Growing up, I never really stood out as queer. It wasn’t until high school that I began to dive deeper into my feelings and acknowledge a part of myself I was suppressing. I experimented with makeup and fashion but all in secret from my family and friends. Keeping this secret eventually led me down a path of self-hatred and dysphoria. Even now some of my self-described progressive Sri Lankan cousins express a constant underlying tone of transphobia that continues to fuel my dysphoria. One part of my life couldn’t exist without getting rid of another, and that idea absolutely killed me. But I learned to embrace both sides together, including the Sri Lankan child who was told to work hard for my happiness.

Being persistent became part of my personality and work ethic, even if it meant dealing with transphobia from those I loved. Just like all of us, my identity is ever-changing. The only thing that really matters is that we take pride in ourselves, whether that means our gender, race, age, size, or anything else that others choose to judge.

Kevin Lenora
but that wasn’t always the case for me.”
“I was often bullied as a child just for being myself.”
I grew up in a South Asian culture where no one I knew was gay. As a child, I felt the need to conform to preconceived social norms by pursuing a career in STEM, although I was always more interested in the arts and fashion. I have many memories of going into my mother’s closet and styling clothes for her, always imagining the designs that I hoped to showcase. When I told my family I wanted to pursue a career in fashion, they were supportive, but the idea crawled away with increased social pressure as I got older.

I was often bullied as a child just for being myself. While other boys were playing basketball and video games, I would draw, dress up, and decorate anything that intrigued me. In high school, my classmates regularly questioned my sexuality, and it sent shivers down my spine to deny I was gay. I reached the lowest point in my life and felt sadness without end for months. It took days just to get the words out in front of the mirror, but once I did, I started a journey of self-love. It was the most courageous thing I had ever done.

I learned to accept myself and, when I was ready, came out to my closest friends, all of whom were supportive. Then I gained the confidence to come out to my family who found it surprising at first but accepted me wholeheartedly. Coming out taught me that others are not paying my bills—let them talk while I am happy and doing what I want. The people who love me will accept me no matter what. Adopting this attitude helped me escape the pressure to pick a traditional career. Some people within the South Asian LGBTQ+ community assume it’s impossible to come out to their families, but I want them to never lose hope.

Rahul Wadhwani
FIDM introduced a new class to the Spring 2021 course selection: Perspectives in Diversity. Dr. Monica Carbajal and Dr. Gwenael Matos developed the course to uncover the history of discrimination, discuss marginalization in contemporary society, and foster positive change.

A triple-major during undergraduate studies, and with master’s and doctoral degrees in organizational psychology, Dr. Carbajal has taught and developed curriculum for the Bachelor of Science in Business Management program for over a decade. For Dr. Matos, teaching general studies courses at FIDM feels like home, since over twenty years ago she went here as a fashion design major. Following FIDM, earned a bachelor’s degree in art history, a master’s in marriage, family, and child counseling, and a doctorate in mythological studies.
Dr. Monica Carbajal

“My teaching philosophy reflects my personal mission statement: to inspire and to be inspired.”

Do you have a particular teaching philosophy?
My teaching philosophy reflects my personal mission statement: to inspire and to be inspired. I love when I can feel and see my students discovering their limitless potential. The other day, one of my students shared this with me: “You have challenged my way of thinking so many times that I feel my brain stretch.” The environment is dynamic and motivating, and the infinite level of creativity that students possess is awesome!

What inspires you?
Students and fellow educators at FIDM inspire me. I’m inspired by my husband’s belief in me, and I have always been inspired by my mom’s support of every dream and goal that I endeavored to pursue.

Tell us about your new class that starts this Spring. What values do you hope to teach students?
Our new class, Perspectives in Diversity, comes amidst a time when people need to greatly understand each other, respect each other, and learn from each other’s differences. And these are the very same values we wish to instill in our students: respect, integrity, fairness, and inclusiveness.
Carbajal
Do you have a particular teaching philosophy?
My philosophy involves soul-centered learning, where students become so engulfed in the experience of learning that they forget about grades and the clock. It occurs in both physical and virtual classrooms. As a class, students learn individually as one unit, like a flock of birds in flight, catching the wind and moving together. In an organic flow, course content fills with stories and images as waves of teaching and learning undulate inside and around students. That’s when learning has an energy—a pulse and a presence. We can feel it, and the more we give in to it, the more learning happens beyond the curriculum and is as alive as we are!

What inspires you?
Inspiration comes from people, water, experiences, and images. My mind is constantly analyzing. Inspiration is when my mind rests, and my imagination takes over.

Tell us about your new class that starts this Spring. What values do you hope to teach students?
Perspectives in Diversity was created as a journey. It starts with a background—the map of the terrain. Then, it moves into the rough waters of history, perception, and power as we navigate through discrimination, racism, and oppression. But it ends on the gentle shores of breakthrough, change, and hope as students process how they can be instruments of diversity and inclusiveness throughout their lives. It’s about “adulting”—learning how to analyze, question, listen when it’s hard, and take responsibility for one’s own thoughts and actions.
The contemporary beauty industry has been dominated by products marketed to women for generations, but a new movement is forcing its way in. Conventional American beauty standards are slowly reshaping as people of all genders express individuality through makeup and beauty products. This transformation is led by Millennials and Generation Z who are moving away from traditional gender identities in increasing numbers.

This shift defies social norms, breaks gender stereotypes, and redefines the acceptable. A rising tide of male celebrities and social media influencers who experiment with beauty trends and cosmetics on a regular—or even daily—basis has helped create a more gender-neutral environment of acceptance within the beauty industry. Breaking long-held social standards creates a safer space for future young men and gender-fluid youth to follow in their footsteps.

To meet the growing prominence of men and non-binary people, beauty brands are quickly changing marketing strategies. Newer brands go further by celebrating the individual without defining gender.

Despite these changes, men's beauty products are still a niche market albeit with unifying aesthetic trends. With dozens of new and emerging skincare brands, men can finally find comfort in using products specifically formulated to suit the male skin structure and fit their specific needs.

The beauty industry is in the middle of a radical shift as demand for genderless products increases, and the rest of the world is soon to follow this evolution. Celebrating individual beauty free from narrow gender definitions can make everyone feel more comfortable in their skin.

---

Words: Shannon Curley
Stylists: Claudia Cohen, Sydney Patitucci
Models: Cyncir Pollard, Julius Miller, Sovann Biard, Jeremy Kay
Photo Direction: Ana Carolina Leisner, Heather Harpole, Hanna Grohmann, Shuihan Ding, Jisoo Oh
Layout: Shuihan Ding, Jazmyn Gonzalez
“I’ve been wearing makeup since I was 15 years old, at a time when I didn’t want anyone to know but I still wanted to feel pretty.”

—Cyncir Pollard
“There is an unspoken understanding that one certainly feels better when their skin is looking better.”
—Julius Miller
“One thing that inspired my skincare journey was when I went to Korea. Every person I saw had amazing skin, which lead me to invest more into a Korean skin-care routine.”

–Jeremy Kay
“Having a skincare routine or wearing makeup does not make a person less masculine than those who don’t.”

—Sovann Biard
2020 caused perhaps the most significant change to the fashion world in a generation. The time people spent with themselves prompted introspection about life and the clothes we wear. Expression has seen no limit, and gender-fluid fashion emerged as one result.

“People have begun to wear both ‘masculine-‘ and ‘feminine-looking’ clothes on the regular,” says first-year Merchandise Product Development student Garrison Goode. “I definitely did that too. At the beginning of quarantine, I lightly upcycled some of my grandmother’s clothes and went ahead and did my own at-home quarantine fashion show.”

Though mass-market garments remain gendered, progressive gender-fluid fashion seeks to disrupt the norm. Once the terms menswear and womenswear are erased from the picture, individuals are allowed fuller range of expression. The newest generation of designers seek to create a fashion world that doesn’t gender color or fit.

Words: Julius Miller, Kierra Stanek
Stylists: Doria Day, Esther Benchetrit, Scarlett Dyer
Models: Kierra Stanek, Yung (Tiffany) Chan, Garrison Goode, Jennifer Ryf, Jasmine White
Photo Direction: Shuihan Ding, Jisoo Oh, Hanna Grohmann
Layout: Shuihan Ding
Much like a writer staring at a blank page or a painter in front of an empty canvas, a person standing in front of their wardrobe has a decisive moment: how will they reveal their truest emotions to the world today? Yet stereotypical ideas of hyper-masculinity remain deeply ingrained in American culture. More specifically, negative connotations are attached to gender fluidity in men, clouding this sacred moment with considerations of conformity.
“There is still such a stigma around ‘men’ having this slimmer athletic figure,” Goode noted. “Over the years, the fashion industry has embraced the fact that individuals with ‘feminine’ features have various body types. Why has that not changed for individuals who have ‘masculine’ features?”

Addressing the question that Goode and many others pose is no longer a choice but a necessity. Fashion is an ever-changing world. As traditional pillars of society falter, shifting attitudes can inspire new approaches within established industries.
Words: Donna Schriemer, Jasmine White
Photographs courtesy of: Evyn Greene (photo by Alyssa Smith), Shannon Curley, Sonja Parvizmoradi, Junrong (Maggie) Wu
Layout: Shuihan Ding, Ayaka Otaki
From a young age, I found myself in leadership positions in every activity that I joined. As I got older, I realized that I can use my abilities to make a positive impact on people under my leadership. Once I got to college, I knew that I wanted to accomplish something and make an impact.

I started Black Student Union to provide a safe space for the Black students at FIDM to speak their frustrations, opinions, and thoughts without judgment. The validity of someone’s existence, along with many other major issues, are not easy topics to address but are necessary when one’s humanity is not always fully seen. The ultimate purpose and drive behind the development of the Black Student Union is to promote a sense of unity among Black students.

The transition of the Black Student Union from idea to established club within a short period of time is proof that anything is possible when you put your mind to it. The best part of this club is that we can unapologetically be ourselves. The connection between a group of young, motivated, and goal-driven Black creatives is more powerful than words can describe, and because of this connection, we became one of the biggest clubs at FIDM. More than a social organization, by hosting a toy drive for the holidays in the midst of this pandemic we engaged with FIDM students and faculty for the betterment of the LA community.

When writing the mission statement, I had to decide what Black Student Union would represent and what it would bring to FIDM. Our mission is to promote strength, power, and bold change by providing a space to voice our opinions and concerns, build a community, and promote an understanding of the ever-changing perspectives of Black students in an environment free from judgment. I will forever be grateful for this opportunity, and I look forward to the continued growth of this organization.

“The validity of someone’s existence, along with many other major issues, are not easy topics to address but are necessary when one’s humanity is not always fully seen.”
In 2012, I would have considered myself a normal kid. That was until December 24th, when I was diagnosed with acute bilineal leukemia and was immediately admitted to Boston Children’s Hospital. I quickly realized that spending day after day in a hospital bed gets old fast. I knew that in order to get through this disease, I needed to find new hobbies. That was the day I discovered my love of makeup.

When I lost my hair, I swore to never let anyone see me without my wig. Then I came across a young girl’s beauty page on YouTube. We were both undergoing cancer treatment. She embraced her bald head and accepted it for what it was. For the next few weeks I was glued to my iPad with eyeshadow brush in hand, watching makeup tutorials trying to recreate each look. I would experiment with different colors and pigments to create new, bold makeup looks.

Every day I would dread going to school since chemotherapy and radiation caused brain damage that permanently affected my learning. I had to drop certain classes and was forced onto an individualized education plan. After my one-year recovery period, I was still intellectually behind the rest of my classmates and had to work twice as hard.

As years passed, I never lost my love of beauty. When it came time to look for colleges, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career where I could creatively express myself. I searched fashion schools on the West Coast, ultimately leading me to FIDM, and without surprise, the career survey pointed me to the Beauty Marketing & Product Development program.

Although my illness never defined me, whenever I feel lost or sad, I can always turn to makeup to make me feel better. Makeup reminds me of that little girl applying her lip gloss and mascara in her hospital bed. It is her creativity and positivity that continue to inspire me every day.

“As years passed, I never lost my love for beauty. When it came time to look for colleges, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career where I could creatively express myself.”
The past two years studying at FIDM have been an interesting and eye-opening experience. I was born and raised in Sweden and am currently in my last quarter of the Beauty Marketing & Product Development major. I remember being really nervous when I first moved to Los Angeles. I was mostly worried about speaking English fluently, especially since I only spoke Swedish at home. In March 2020, COVID forced colleges around the world to restrict campus access, including FIDM. This change prompted me to move back to my home country, Sweden, just as I was getting adjusted to American cultural norms. Having been unable to return to America, I now attend FIDM classes remotely.

I am a student who likes to complete tasks early in the morning, so a big challenge was the time difference. I created a schedule to help me manage time and finish assignments before deadlines. I also have great classmates who think about me, and I have learned to compromise. We hold group meetings around 8 a.m. or 9 a.m. Pacific — 4 p.m. or 5 p.m. for me—since this time was most convenient to meet with my peers.

American student life had always been something I wanted to experience. Yet even while taking remote classes, I have met wonderful friends and instructors. And since I’m living at home, I can visit with my family and friends. Sometimes, I really missed them when I was in America. Another bonus: I regularly eat my mom’s wonderful cooking.

After graduation, I hope to return to LA, experience the sunset again, the fantastic beach and city lifestyle, and the culture that contrasts so dramatically with Sweden’s.
As an international student from China, I completed my Associate of the Arts in Fashion Design and am currently working on a Bachelor of Science in Business Management degree. It is impossible to ignore how different things are now because of COVID-19.

Before the global pandemic hit, I had been considering a trip back to China to visit family and friends. As the first quarantines began in March 2020, I was still finishing up fashion design classes and discovered that if I went to China, there would be no guarantee that I could renew the visa needed for international travel. I made the executive decision to continue living in Los Angeles.

This transition has been very challenging, and I miss my family and friends more than ever. As I see friends going home, I get a bitter feeling because I wish that I could do the same. Luckily, video chat and phone calls make us feel a little closer together.

I miss working together on group projects in person the most. Switching to online classes has been difficult because I miss the connection with other students and my teachers. I found it easier to communicate with others in person, and staring at a screen can get old quickly. But I still love fashion design and can see myself working in that field. For now, I am focused on a six-month plan: continuing online courses and looking for an industry internship. Despite it all, I remain optimistic about the good things the future holds.

“As I see friends going home, I get a bitter feeling because I wish that I could do the same. Luckily, video chat and phone calls make us feel a little closer together.”

MAGGIE WU
INSPIRING STORIES BEGIN HERE

FIDM.EDU