The Identity Issue

WHO WE ARE.
WHO ARE WE?

From the cell to the pixel, explore how we understand ourselves in the modern world.
VIET THANH NGUYEN
Associate Professor of English and American Studies and Ethnicity

Viet Thanh Nguyen’s 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction puts him in the illustrious company of such doyens of American literature as John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Saul Bellow and Toni Morrison — all previous recipients. Nguyen won for his first novel, The Sympathizer (Grove Press, 2015), which explores the Vietnam War from multiple perspectives through the lens of his conflicted protagonist, an American-educated spy for the Viet Cong.

“I went into this novel wanting to write without compromise, without worrying about what other people would think. The novel is meant to be provocative and critical of all sides involved in this war, so there is something here for everyone to dislike,” Nguyen said. “It’s also meant to be as honest, truthful and painful a novel as I could write, and there was no way I could do that if I had to worry about what an audience would think.”

Nguyen said winning the Pulitzer felt like a victory.

“I think this award marks the necessity in American literature for paying attention to diverse voices that will illuminate American history in important and challenging ways for American audiences.”

Nguyen hopes readers reflect on the idea that nurturing a single-sided viewpoint is what draws us into conflict and war.
Our Un-labelable Selves

As a linguist, I study the diverse ways that the world's languages mark and identify attributes such as gender and social standing. Categorizing individuals, and the associated labels we assign, is an inevitable part of our cognitive system as humans. But labels do not immutably create, define or cement identity.

In this issue of USC Dornsife Magazine, we consider varied perspectives on identity. It's important to recognize, as a counterpoint to this, that identity is not static. Discovering our myriad identities as our lives unfold is a constant exploration rather than a problem to be solved or a fact to be discerned. I identify as a teacher, a mediator, a mother, a wife, a sports fan…. But more foundational than these multifaceted identities is the anchoring sense of self upon which they are built — an underlying system of core values and ethics. Or what New York Times columnist David Brooks calls "a settled philosophy of fundamental things.” I believe we craft this sense of self through the human connections we forge with parents who profoundly shape our expectations and priorities, professors and mentors who expand our perspective, friends and partners who challenge our beliefs, or even (or perhaps especially) those we encounter through chance interactions.

Young adults leaving home, perhaps attending college, are flooded with opportunities for these defining relationships, many of which are inspiring and even frightening. They contemplate identities they have long carried, or to which they newly aspire. For these defining relationships, many of which are inspiring and even frightening. They contemplate identities they have long carried, or to which they newly aspire. What can carry them through life's momentous events and relationships is their underlying selfhood.

I think that each of us is defined ultimately not by labels, but by this sense of self on which our identities rest. It is that un-labelable "me-ness" that settles on our shoulders as both a privilege and a responsibility, bolstering and sustaining us as our lives evolve.

Dani Byrd
Interim Dean of USC Dornsife
THE IDENTITY ISSUE

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Millennials are stereotyped as lazy, entitled and narcissistic with a thirst for constant validation. Are these characterizations justified, or are millennials just misunderstood? By Susan Bell

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Social media and other digital platforms are enabling anyone’s voice to be heard, providing ample opportunity for each of us to reap the rewards — or consequences — of our online identities. By Darrin S. Joy
11.24.15

“Steven's films are marked most importantly by a faith in our common humanity, the same faith in humanity that led him to create the Shoah Foundation, and lend a voice to the survivors of genocide around the world.”
President Obama on presenting the PREIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM to filmmaker and USC Trustee STEVEN SPIELBERG.

11.30.15-12.4.15

Student tutors from the JOINT EDUCATIONAL PROJECT's Readers’ program distribute 600 books — donated by the Ela Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation — to 300 students in kindergarten through fifth grade at seven of USC’s Family of Schools.

12.4.15

“It's very emotional for me. I was born in California. My place has asked me to serve my art.”
DANA GIOIA, Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture, on his appointment by Gov. Jerry Brown as CALIFORNIA POET LAUREATE.

11.22.16

The USC Dornsife Office of Communication receives seven regional 2016 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE for the team’s work across design, writing and video from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), including its highest honor — a Grand Gold award — for The Bridge@USC brochure.

12.23.16

MARK THOMPSON is installed as the RAY R. IRANI, CHAIRMAN OF OCCIDENTAL PETROLEUM CORPORATION, CHAIR IN CHEMISTRY.
Thompson’s work focuses predominantly on organic light-emitting diode screens, in addition to organic solar cells.

12.29.16

ROBIN COSTE LEWIS, a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. in Creative Writing and Literature program and 2015 recipient of the NATIONAL BOOK AWARD for poetry, reads from her debut book, Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems. More information on page 12.

2.3.16

JACOB BURCH, a senior political science major, wins $100,000 during the JEOPARDY! COLLEGE CHAMPIONSHIP. He is the fifth Trojan to represent USC in the tournament since it began in 1988.

2.12.16

SIR DARREN Dzugic is recognized with the 2016 TYLEY PRIZE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT for outstanding development of economic theory to illuminate the interdependence between human and environmental well-being.

3.4.16

MARK THOMPSON is installed as the RAY R. IRANI, CHAIRMAN OF OCCIDENTAL PETROLEUM CORPORATION, CHAIR IN CHEMISTRY.
Thompson’s work focuses predominantly on organic light-emitting diode screens, in addition to organic solar cells.

3.30.16-4.2.16

The DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH is the premier sponsor of the 2016 Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference & Bookfair at the Los Angeles Convention Center. The event is the largest literary conference in North America.

4.22.16

SIR PARTHA DASGUPTA is recognized with the 2016 TYLEY PRIZE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT for outstanding development of economic theory to illuminate the interdependence between human and environmental well-being.

4.29.16-4.30.16

JACOB SOLL, professor of history and accounting, leads a conference on the European Economic Crisis that includes globally prominent dignitaries and thought leaders.
Twitter

@UnruhInstitute: Congrats to our research interns on a successful partnership w/ @GreenDotSchools @CAParksNow @WeAreRALLY & CalStrat

@JodyAVallejo: So honored to be @USCDornsife #FrontlineScholars Help us advance health, improve communities, & environment

@BedrosianCenter: For #Native American Heritage Month, we read Rez Life by @USCDornsife Prof @DavidTreuer - check out the #podcast!

@ZadoEsq: Just donated to FrontlineScholars @USC #GivingTuesday and #FrontlineScholars

@maxschwartztv: Tonight @BobShrum posted the syllabus for his 2016 in Real Time course. Im very excited for it. #USC @USCDornsife

@DonnaIS14629438: @USCDornsife - Thoughtful articles. Particularly inspired with Sam Fisher’s Fellow Program. Love the action of ‘passing it forward.’

@AmericaFerrera: Super psyched to be receiving the Young Alumni Merit Award from my alma mater! Fight on!

@CSII_USC: ICYMI: @ericgarce tell @Prof_MPastor & local leaders met w/ Obama Admin. Task Force in LA 2 boost #citizenship efforts

@Jeopardy: A big congrats to Sam Deutsch from @USC for winning the #CollegeChampionship and the grand prize of $100,000.

@USCSpeCol: When a professor talks about “pretty sexy vellum”, you know the books in your library are truly appreciated @DebHarkness @USCHistory

@BrutcheyGroup: Congrats to my colleagues Jahan Dawlaty and Brent Melot for both being named 2016 Cottrell Scholars by RCSA! @USCChemistry @USCDornsife

Instagram

PUPPY LOVE
Lisa Collins, assistant professor (teaching) of environmental studies and an animal lover, brought service-dog-in-training Flynn to her ENST 445 class “Earth Climate: Past, Present and Future.” Flynn caught some Zzzs in class before more training as one of Guide Dogs of America’s newest pups.
2.6.16

On Feb. 6, more than 500 first-gen students gathered with faculty, staff and alumni for USC’s inaugural First-Generation College Student Summit: Paths to Success to share experiences and to connect as a community.

14%
of freshmen at USC are the first in their families to attend college.

200+
family members and first-gen USC students gathered in Fall 2015 for the First in the Family program, a welcome reception and workshop with resources and information addressing their needs.

89%
of first-generation students earn their degrees at USC in six years or fewer.

1972
The year USC’s Norman Topping Student Aid Fund was created. The fund offers supplemental scholarships for first-generation students and students from the surrounding USC neighborhood, though the scholarships are not limited to those populations.

Royal Maya Discovery

Anthropologist Thomas Garrison leads exploration of the El Zotz site in Guatemala. By Robert Perkins

Thomas Garrison was four hours away from camp when he got the call from his co-director Edwin Román. “You’ve got to get back here right now.”

Román, calling from El Zotz, a ruined Maya city hidden deep within Guatemala’s Maya Biosphere Reserve, had exciting news. One of Garrison’s archaeological teams working the site had hit pay dirt — a burial chamber that could contain the remains of royalty.

Garrison, assistant professor (teaching) of anthropology and spatial sciences, is the principal investigator for the exploration of El Zotz. Each year, Garrison brings USC undergraduates to explore the Maya ruins as part of his Problems Without Passports courses, “Maya Resilience” and “Field Research in Maya Archaeology.” Through these courses, as well as his classes at USC, he shares with students his love of exploration of the past.

El Zotz spreads out over roughly 2 square kilometers of jungle that encompass a massive royal palace and temple on a hill overlooking the valley below. When the Maya inhabited the valley 1,500 years ago, they deforested the whole region. Today, the jungle has reclaimed the valley, obscuring it with a thick canopy of trees and vines.

In 2010, Garrison and his colleagues brought international attention to El Zotz when they uncovered the intact tomb of a Maya king beneath the Temple of the Night Sun. The tomb was in a pyramid known as El Diablo perched atop the royal hill. National Geographic would later name the find one of the “discoveries of the year.”

Based on the design of other, contemporaneous Maya temples, researchers theorized that there might be a second tomb in front of the original chamber, and Garrison spent the first part of the field season in search of such a tomb. An excavation of its theorized location ultimately found nothing, but the team continued searching the site.

As in 2010, the tomb discovered last year was found when least expected: A Guatemalan archaeologist was cleaning off a low platform when it gave way, opening a small void. Although untouched by humans, its contents had been looted by rats.

The furry intruders consumed and destroyed everything organic, but they left intact four beautiful polychrome bowls. One bore the name of a king: Bakab K’inich, which translates roughly from Maya as “the sun god who is first in the land.”
GAMING CHINESE CAPITALISM

Instructor: Brett Sheehan, professor of history and East Asian languages and cultures, and director of the East Asian Studies Center

Last Fall’s class of first-year students at USC had an opportunity to experience the tumult of the last 200 years of Chinese economic history firsthand — through a new seminar in the general education program. Taught by Brett Sheehan, professor of history and director of the East Asian Studies Center, the course is groundbreaking in its use of a custom-designed online game that lets students put their classroom learning into practice.

“For a long time I had this idea of having a class that was run as a game,” Sheehan said. “I thought this would be a great opportunity to experiment with something new that would help students engage with the material.”

The role-playing game “China Times” spans four historical eras during which the rules of the political economy changed considerably. Players transition through the late Qing Dynasty, the Republican period, the Communist era under Mao Zedong and China’s rising economy in the post-Mao period.

“In the last 200 years China has experienced radical changes in the political economy, ranging from laissez-faire to agricultural economy, from strict socialism to the new millionaires of its current economy,” Sheehan said.

He commissioned “China Times” for this class, selecting two game design majors, Sean Wejebe of USC School of Cinematic Arts and Eric Nelson of USC Viterbi School of Engineering, to help him create the interactive digital game.

“Not only am I learning about modern Chinese history from a refreshing perspective,” said international relations major Jenny Xu, “the gameplay experience has really helped me to understand how people in China had to constantly make choices during these periods of turmoil.” —L.P.

First-year students experience 200 years of Chinese economic and social history through a new course that incorporates an online role-playing game.
In the mid-1960s, whispers of a 7-foot-tall humanoid creature with large wings and red eyes began circulating in the community of Point Pleasant, W.Va. Few residents gave the sightings credence. That was, until the Silver Bridge collapsed.

On Dec. 15, 1967, 31 vehicles and 46 victims plunged into the murky Ohio River. Engineers say the suspension bridge fell due to a 2.5mm defect in a single eyeball; however, some witnesses contend they saw the creature — by then known as “the Mothman” — atop the bridge before it gave way.

Tales of the Mothman have spread widely and the creature is now considered a harbinger of death. Mothman sightings were reported after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, the 1986 meltdown at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and the 2009 Swine Flu outbreak in Chihuahua, Mexico.

In addition to the museum and life-size statue along Point Pleasant’s Main Street, the legend of the Mothman is alive in USC’s Digital Folklore Archives, which support USC Dornsife’s interdisciplinary minor in folklore and popular culture.

“USC showcases an innovative, open-access digital twist on the classic folklore archive,” said USC’s resident folklorist, Tek Thompson, associate professor (teaching) of anthropology and communication. “USC’s folklore archives comprise folklore collected mostly by USC folklore students, and includes examples of multiple genres from all over the world — from Ecuadorian riddles to Taiwanese ghost stories … and even stories and rituals that take place at USC.” — D.K.

According to legend, the Mothman was first spotted in a West Virginia bog in 1966.
Nuclear Repair Agent

Once thought to be only a boundary for the cell’s nucleus, the nuclear membrane actually repairs DNA.

Scientists have found a new function of the nuclear membrane, the envelope that encases and protects DNA in the nucleus of a cell — fixing potentially fatal breaks in DNA strands.

The nuclear membrane previously was thought to be mostly just a protective bubble around the nuclear material, with pores acting as channels to transport molecules in and out. But in a study published in Nature Cell Biology, a research team led by Irene Chiolo, Gabilian Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences, documents how broken strands of a portion of DNA known as heterochromatin are dragged to the nuclear membrane for repair.

DNA exists inside of a cell’s nucleus in two forms: euchromatin and heterochromatin. Euchromatin encodes most of the genome. Heterochromatin, mostly composed of repeated DNA sequences, has long been ignored as “junk DNA.”

“Scientists are now starting to pay a lot of attention to this mysterious component of the genome,” said Chiolo. “Heterochromatin is not only essential for chromosome maintenance during cell division, it also poses specific threats to genome stability. Heterochromatin is potentially one of the most powerful driving forces for cancer formation, but it is the ‘dark matter’ of the genome. We are just beginning to unravel how repair works here.”

The reason why we don’t experience thousands of cancers every day in our body is because we have incredibly efficient molecular mechanisms that repair the frequent damage occurring in our DNA. But, those that work in heterochromatin are quite extraordinary.

“Repeated sequences tend to recombine with each other during DNA repair,” said Taehyun Ryu, USC Dornsife graduate student and first author on the study. “This would lead to chromosome aberrations as frequently observed in cancer cells. What prevents these outcomes in normal cells was unclear.”

As Chiolo explained: “We knew that nuclear membrane dysfunctions are common in cancer cells. Our studies now suggest how these dysfunctions can affect heterochromatin repair and have a causative role in cancer progression.”

This study may help reveal how and why organisms become more predisposed to cancer as they age — the nuclear membrane progressively deteriorates as an organism ages, removing this bulwark against genome instability.

The scientists ultimately hope to understand how this mechanism functions in human cells and identify new strategies to prevent their catastrophic failure and cancer formation. —R.P.

Cool Science for Kids

A workshop helps elementary school students embrace science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Fourth-grader Lea Stevenson was proudly clutching her first flash drive — a gift to each student participating in the computer workshop organized by the Joint Educational Project’s (JEP) Young Scientists Program (YSP).

One of 50 fourth- and fifth-grade students from Lenicia B. Weemes Elementary School who participated in the workshop, Stevenson, who said she’d like to study science at USC when she grows up, was brimming with enthusiasm.

Students learned how to write computer code, design games and control robots through instructions sent wirelessly from a computer. They also listened to a talk by simulation supervisor Claudia Chung Sanii from Walt Disney Animation Studios, who explained how she uses computer science to create realistic clothing and hair movement for animated characters.

Tammara Anderson, executive director of JEP, said YSP’s most important mission is to help kids overcome fear of science or math. “Our job is to make STEM subjects exciting so they want to delve deeper. Then, when they get to college, they’ll be ready to go; they won’t be afraid.” —S.B.

Recognition

Sarah Gualtieri
Fellow, National Endowment for Humanities
Gualtieri, associate professor of American studies and ethnicity, history and Middle East studies, has been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for her research project “Arabness Unbound: Syrian Migrants in Southern California and Their Transnational Imaginaries, 1880-1945.”

Scott Fraser
National Academy of Inventors
Fraser, Elizabeth Garrett Chair in Convergent Bioscience and Provost Professor, has been elected a fellow by the National Academy of Inventors. Fraser was recognized for demonstrating “a highly prolific spirit of innovation in creating or facilitating outstanding inventions that have made a tangible impact on quality of life, economic development and the welfare of society.”

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo
Distinguished Career Award
Hondagneu-Sotelo, professor of sociology and associate director of USC Dornsife’s Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, received the 2015 Distinguished Career Award from the American Sociological Association’s Section on International Migration.
Physics of El Niño

Julien Emile-Geay of earth sciences finds clues for understanding El Niño in ancient corals and clams.

An analysis of fossil corals and mollusk shells from the Pacific Ocean reveals there is no link between the strength of seasonal differences and the climate pattern called El Niño. The finding contradicts the top nine climate models in use today, which associate exceptionally hot summers due to El Niños. The models that came close did so by relying on an earth-sun configuration that ran contrary to observed dued El Niños. The models that came close did so by relying on an earth-sun configuration that ran contrary to observed

The idea behind this link is based on very well-established physics, so it’s appealing to think that nature works that way, said Julien Emile-Geay, assistant professor of earth sciences.

Emile-Geay compared this data set to the predictions of nine state-of-the-art climate models. He found that the models generally fail to simulate lengthy periods of subdued El Niños. The models that came close did so by relying on an earth-sun configuration that ran contrary to observed conditions.

"The causes for prolonged periods of weak El Niño are either beyond the current models, or we’re missing an important piece of the puzzle," Emile-Geay said. "This points to deficiencies in the way these models simulate various aspects of tropical Pacific climate, from average conditions to the march of seasons to El Niño itself."

Emile-Geay hopes his findings will be used to refine climate models further, making them ever more accurate.

"Building climate models is like building a ladder to the moon," he said. "They are not perfect, but they are reaching for the heavens. It’s a long process, and one in which the paleoclimate record can teach us a lot about the inner workings of the climate system." — R.P.
Lauren Santo Domingo’s passion for style and her visual acuity developed at a young age. Her mother, Judy, is an artist. “I never envisioned myself working in fashion, although, I was always attracted to it,” Santo Domingo said. “Growing up, I was surrounded by my mother’s creativity, but I was more attracted to creation then. In theory, modeling was my first step into the fashion world” — she began as a high school sophomore — “but in practice, it was when I started at Vogue.”
FROM THE HEART OF USC

Word

IN THE NEWS QUOTABLES

“If there were financially sound ways to beat the lottery, hedge funds and the rest of Wall Street would have been all over it long ago.”

KEN ALEXANDER, professor of mathematics, in a Jan. 12 Forbes article on the odds of winning the lottery.

“As an economist, my training in how individuals invest during times of uncertainty leads me to a much different prediction: America’s coastal cities are going to adapt, get ahead of climate change and be just fine.”


“Prayer is a ritualized way in which people are able to bring those four elements of religion together [community, rituals of hope, moments of personal transcendence and deeper purpose] and really shape meaning and create community when things feel out of control.”

BRIE LOSKOTA, executive director of the USC Dornsife Center for Religion and Civic Culture, in a Dec. 3 KPCC-FM interview about why people pray following tragedies such as mass shootings.

Literary Triumph

Ph.D. student Robin Coste Lewis garners a National Book Award for her debut book of poems. By Susan Bell

USC Dornsife doctoral candidate Robin Coste Lewis was named winner of the 2015 National Book Award for Poetry — one of the nation’s most prestigious literary prizes. A Provost’s Fellow in the Ph.D. in Creative Writing and Literature program and a teaching assistant in the Thematic Option program, Lewis won the award for her debut book, Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems (Knopf, 2015) — only the third time in the award’s 65-year history that a debut collection has taken the top prize. The last occasion was in 1974.

Lewis said she was stunned and astonished by the award, which was announced on Nov. 18 in New York City.

“As a student of literature, and African American poetry specifically, I understand the historical significance of this award. I understand that it is a very profound honor, and that I stand at the end of a long, long line of a remarkable and rich poetic tradition that reaches back to the 18th century,” Lewis said, adding that personally she was “overwhelmed with joy and incomprehension” at the honor, which has gone to some of the nation’s most celebrated poets.

Lewis’ book is a triptych with the title poem, the 79-page Voyage of the Sable Venus, bookended by two sections of autobiographical and ekphrastic lyrical poems. She edited the book during her first year at USC Dornsife.

“All three sections either address visual culture and various projections onto black female bodies, or they deal with desire and race — how history impacts or ruptures those experiences,” Lewis said.

Her poetry has received widespread critical acclaim, including a glowing review from The New Yorker, which described her “arresting book” as “a many chambered and remarkable collection.” The book also received a coveted starred review from Publishers Weekly.

David St. John, University Professor of English and Comparative Literature and chair of English, said the intellectual edge of Lewis’ book “pares away at our cultural lies and those assumptions that have helped to frame a historical justification and sustained tolerance of racial injustice.”

Currently, Lewis is writing her doctoral dissertation on the visual representations of Oscar Wilde in the United States. She won the 2015 Anne Friedberg Memorial Research Grant from the Visual Studies Research Institute for the most outstanding and interdisciplinary graduate student research proposal. She is also working on a new book on the intersection of the history of black photography and black poetry.
**PHUBBING**

verb 1. The act of snubbing a person in a social setting by looking at one’s mobile phone instead of paying attention to the person.

**Origin:** This modern neologism arose from a publicity campaign by Australia’s Macquarie Dictionary. In 2012, McCann Melbourne, the advertising agency behind the campaign, selected a group of lexicographers, authors and poets to coin a word to describe the behavior of ignoring someone in favor of interacting with a phone. The term, further publicized by the “Stop Phubbing” campaign created by McCann, has since appeared in media around the world.

**Usage:** “The constant need to check our phones is like the 21st-century version of daydreaming. People use it to stave off boredom or to allay anxiety about transient social interactions. In intimate social situations, such as family dinners or dates, ‘phubbing’ can be even more detrimental, sending an implicit message that we are uninterested or emotionally unavailable. I’ve had friends return from a date thrilled, telling me, ‘Wow! He didn’t look at his phone once.’ ”

Karen Sternheimer, associate professor (teaching) of sociology, studies media and social change. Her research focuses on issues related to popular culture and youth, particularly anxiety surrounding both.
EXPERT OPINIONS

“... stereotypes have consequences for the mobility of young Latinos, a growing segment of our population whose integration is critical to the social, political and economic vitality of the United States.”

JODY AGIUS VALLEJO, associate professor of sociology, in an April 26 op-ed posted on The Conversation about the long-term effects of racist rhetoric on Latino Americans.

“We have rituals for birth, puberty, marriage and other important life transitions. Why don’t we have rituals related to retirement that would launch us into what might be the most productive and meaning-filled period of our lives?”

DONALD MILLER, Leonard K. Firestone Professor of Religion, in a March 16 op-ed in Forbes suggesting how one might use the talents cultivated in the decades of a working life to create a meaningful experience in retirement.

“Far from being years of ‘enduring failure,’ the last 150 years have been philosophy’s best.”

SCOTT SOAMES, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and director of the USC Dornsife School of Philosophy, in a March 7 op-ed in The New York Times on how specialization in philosophy makes communication and cooperation among disciplines possible.

See inside back cover for details on the “Viewpoint” opinion series.

Algal Altercations

Scientists find that algal blooms involve microbial skirmishes, with the front lines shifting daily.

An unseen war raging among the ocean’s tiniest organisms has significant implications for understanding the ocean's role in climate change.

Researchers David Needham and Jed Fuhrman sampled water off the coast of Southern California nearly every day for five months after an algal bloom occurred. They found traces of a constant battle among dozens of species of phytoplankton, with the fortunes of war favoring different organisms daily.

“We witnessed a daily boom and bust among the phytoplankton species,” said Fuhrman, McCulloch-Crosby Chair in Marine Biology and professor of biological sciences and senior author of the study.

Scientists concerned with global warming have a vested interest in studying phytoplankton, which perform roughly half of the world's carbon fixation, converting carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into organic compounds that other organisms can then use.

Different phytoplankton manage carbon dioxide to varying degrees, however, making it important for researchers to gain a more nuanced understanding of algal blooms if they hope to measure their role in carbon fixation.

The authors were surprised not only by the sheer diversity of phytoplankton in the bloom they studied, but also by the constant and abrupt shifts in which species dominated.

Also, as the phytoplankton varied, so did the species of other microorganisms that feed on the organic material produced by them. On one of the sample days, the team was shocked to discover that the dominant species were in a group called the *Archaec* — single-celled microorganisms once thought to live only in extreme environments like hot springs.

“Until the 1990s, nobody thought *Archaec* were even present in the sea in appreciable numbers,” said Needham, a postdoctoral fellow and lead author of the study.

Needham and Fuhrman’s findings also have bearing on the causes of algal blooms, which remain shrouded in mystery. Temperature and nutrient content of the ocean have been shown to help trigger the blooms, but they remain unpredictable. —R.P.

China in Miniature

Doctoral student Di Luo is shedding light on mysterious miniatures used to ornament Chinese Buddhist temples.

Di Luo, a Ph.D. student in East Asian languages and cultures, is studying some of the world’s tiniest buildings — the perfectly scaled wooden miniatures that adorn the ceilings and walls of Chinese Buddhist temples and monasteries.

“They are made of wood, but they are not carved,” Luo said. “Instead they were built piece by piece, just like real architecture.”

Measuring about 24 inches tall, the miniatures are as enigmatic as they are beautiful.

“We don't know who made them, or why,” Luo said. “Their makers never left a name.”

Luo came to USC in 2007 to study architecture but was drawn to Chinese architectural history.

In 2014, thanks to a USC Graduate School Research Enhancement Fellowship and a doctoral grant from the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies, Luo spent three months visiting Buddhist temples and monasteries in China to research miniatures.

Luo is aiming for a career in academe.

“One of my future research directions would be to continue with the topic of miniaturization, but concentrating on finding it in non-Chinese art.” —S.B.
Europe’s Refugee Crisis

As Europe struggles to cope with the largest flow of refugees since World War II, USC Dornsife experts explore the issues surrounding this unprecedented migration. By Susan Bell

More than a million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe last year — most from the Middle East, particularly war-torn Syria. They were the lucky ones: More than 3,400 died attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in 2015.

“One thing we know about migrants who make these difficult journeys is that in many cases they simply reach the point where they feel it’s no worse to die than to remain where they were living,” said Laurie Brand, Robert Grandford Wright Professor and professor of international relations and Middle East studies, and director of the Middle East Studies Program.

“The starting point is fragile or failed states,” said Robert English, associate professor of international relations, Slavic languages and literatures, and environmental studies, and interim director of the School of International Relations.

Meanwhile, Europe is struggling to cope.

Images of the continent’s woefully inadequate refugee camps are in brutal contrast with September’s heartwarming footage showing cheering Germans welcoming weary and grateful refugees.

Some European countries offered to absorb limited numbers, while others balked at taking any. Even Germany, alarmed by migrant flow across its borders, made a U-turn last November. And in a move condemned by other European Union members, Hungary erected barbed wire fences along its borders to keep migrants out.

“Ironically, the economies of France, Italy and Germany have long depended on immigrant labor, and their birthrates are so low that their economies will actually shrink and become poorer unless they welcome immigrants,” English said.

“However, when refugees arrive in this fashion — in one sudden surge and especially from an Islamic country — the political pushback becomes intense.”

This need for millions of skilled workers to replace its dwindling population partially explains Germany’s initial enthusiasm.

One worrying reason for Europe’s failure to follow Germany’s lead is the rise of far right, anti-immigrant parties.

“We’re seeing rising intolerance in even the most historically tolerant societies,” said Steven Lamy, professor of international relations and vice dean for academic programs.

If Western European countries are long accustomed to multiculturalism, Eastern European countries like Hungary are not.

“They’re much more conservative and hew to traditional values, and they’re simply baffled and frightened,” English said.

“This surge of ‘alien people’ is a gift to the far right, and the backlash is enormous.”

These feelings are exacerbated by economic inequality. Hungarian and Croatian citizens earn well below a third of the average income of their German EU partners.

“Understandably, leaders don’t want to welcome any new burden,” English said. “And refugees strain these countries’ resources to breaking point.”

Right wing commentators have blamed unwillingness to welcome refugees on fears of terrorist infiltration. Lamy noted that while this is a legitimate concern, it isn’t the main cause of European reluctance. That lies in the competition for scarce — or perceived to be scarce — economic resources.

“The award is an affirmation that the work that I’m doing is resonating with the people who read it. For me, a large part of being a poet is making sure that what I’m trying to say will have a second life outside of myself that blooms to life in the readers.”

Doctoral student Safiya Sinclair won a prestigious 2016 Whiting Award for Poetry, given annually to emerging writers based on early accomplishments and the promise of great work to come. Her poems have appeared in several prominent literary venues, including Poetry, Kenyon Review and Boston Review. Her first full-length poetry collection, Cannibal (University of Nebraska Press), which is due out in September, won a Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry.

For Sinclair, who grew up in Montego Bay, Jamaica, place has always been central to her writing. “Without the landscape and language of my childhood, my poems don’t exist,” she said. “Even if I’m not physically at home, it’s always in the background of whatever I’m writing.”

She is working on a memoir about her childhood growing up in a strict Rastafarian family and her experience of being a woman in a highly patriarchal society.
DEMYSTIFYING SOUR

Of the five basic tastes, sour remains the most mysterious — to the point that the tongue’s sour receptor still has not been identified, and the ways in which it receives sour stimuli remain the object of intense research.

“Before 2006, we didn’t even know definitively which cells detect sour taste,” said Emily Liman, professor of biological sciences, who recently discovered a new way in which taste cells discern sourness.

In 2010, Liman identified one of the molecular pathways by which acidic substances trigger the sour taste sensation. Hydrogen ions released by acids directly enter taste cells on your tongue, triggering an electrical signal to the brain.

MORE THAN PH

If that were the only way that sour taste was produced, then the lower the pH, the more sour something should taste. However, some substances — such as vinegar — taste more sour than one would expect based on their pH.

A substance’s pH is just part of the answer. The concentration of weak acids — such as acetic acid found in vinegar — plays a significant role in how sour they taste, according to a study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* by a research group led by Liman.

Previous studies also showed that the concentration of a weak acid, in addition to its pH, determines its sourness.

By marking sour taste cells with a fluorescent protein, Liman discovered that there’s another way to detect sour tastes. There is a potassium channel that makes sour taste cells extremely sensitive to changes in the cell’s intracellular pH.

THE FIVE BASIC TASTES ARE:

- sweetness
- sourness
- saltiness
- bitterness
- umami

In Japanese, umami translates to “a pleasently savory” taste — such as that of a cheeseburger or cream of mushroom soup.

ALMOST 1/2

Taste perception fades with age; we lose almost half of our taste receptors by the time we turn 20.

80% of what we experience as taste is actually smell.
Three Dimensions of Well-Being

A new interdisciplinary doctoral program addresses modern health-care challenges.

Spatial science has grown rapidly in recent years, becoming crucial to understanding the role and significance of place in human well-being — a major research focus for the next two decades.

To address those issues, the Spatial Sciences Institute (SSI) at USC Dornsife launched an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in population, health and place jointly with the Department of Sociology and Keck School of Medicine of USC’s Department of Preventive Medicine.

“Our primary goal is to position our graduates among the leading scholars and practitioners working to clarify the role and significance of place in shaping future human health and well-being,” said SSI director John Wilson, professor of sociology, civil and environmental engineering, computer science, and architecture.

The new doctoral program is designed to create scientists with deep knowledge and skills in one discipline and excellent working knowledge of the other two.

“The multidisciplinary training and research provided by the program will produce cohorts of scientists ready to … capitalize on the growing field of spatial science as it applies to improving the public’s health,” said Myles Cockburn, professor of preventive medicine and spatial sciences.

The program capitalizes on the variety of world-leading expertise in population, place and health that already exists at USC.

“This interdisciplinary approach provides the much-needed basis for new scholars in sociology and other related social sciences to work collaboratively with other researchers and policy makers grappling with issues in which the life course and place influence human well-being,” said Jennifer Hook, associate professor of sociology, spatial sciences and gender studies.

Cockburn, who also is director of the Division of Disease Prevention and Global Health at Keck School of Medicine, noted that the course’s inclusion of spatial sciences is a unique and vital aspect.

“We need a new generation of scholars who can work seamlessly across the population, spatial and health sciences to improve that understanding.” —S.B.

BUGS Launched

A new program launched through The Bridge@USC aims to train the next generation of scientists.

In Summer 2015, The Bridge@USC initiative launched a program designed to train young students in science. The Bridge UnderGraduate Science Program, or BUGS, welcomed 17 undergraduates and high schoolers to participate in customized research projects in USC laboratories.

BUGS offered opportunities for the students to engage in cross-disciplinary research projects aimed at assembling an atomic-resolution model of man within a dynamic scientific community.

“One of the dreams of The Bridge@USC is to train the next generation of scientists and engineers to think in a more convergent or holistic way,” said Raymond Stevens, Provost Professor of Biological Sciences and Chemistry and director of The Bridge@USC.

BUGS works to instill in students a sense of curiosity and infinite possibilities in school, science and life. Mentors from several research labs at The Bridge@USC guided students through research methods and problem-solving techniques.

The scientists-in-training also participated in lab meetings, read and discussed scientific articles in a journal club, and heard several personal perspectives on the journey into scientific research in a special series of career symposia.

“We’re learning how to work in a lab and the day-to-day life of a scientist,” said biological sciences major David Manahan ‘18.

The summer program culminated in a final symposium where students presented a summary of their efforts to their peers, families and guests, as well as The Bridge@USC faculty, mentors and staff.

Each taste bud has 50 to 100 receptor cells. Sticking out of these receptor cells are tiny taste hairs that assess the food chemicals in your saliva then send a signal to your brain.

Liman’s co-authors include researchers from USC, the University of Colorado Medical School and the University of Vermont. The research was supported by the National Institutes of Health.

The longest human tongue ever to be recorded was 3.97 inches from back to tip. The widest tongue measured 3.4 inches.

Like strong acids, weak acids release hydrogen ions that pass through proteins in the cell membrane, triggering a sour sensation. However, weak acids can go even further, crossing the cell membrane on their own to acidify the fluid inside the cell.

“Taste represents a fairly direct link between sensation and perception, so it’s an interesting window into how our body and mind are connected,” Liman said. “The mechanism that we discovered not only explains why weak acids taste more sour than strong acids, but it may also explain how we can detect relatively low concentrations of protons because it predicts that there would an amplification of the initial signal.”
Passion for Trash

Joshua Goldstein of history and East Asian languages and cultures studies the underground recycling industry in China. By Lizzie Hedrick

A graduate student living in Beijing in 1995, Joshua Goldstein was fascinated by the throngs of people who passed him every day on bicycles piled high with what appeared to be every kind of trash. One afternoon, he hopped on his bike and followed them. The short trip led to an erratically organized garbage heap, where vendors paid a pittance for paint cans and empty bottles sorted according to what they had once contained — soy sauce here, vegetable oil there.

At the time, Goldstein — now an associate professor of history and East Asian languages and cultures — was conducting research for his dissertation on Peking Opera. But he has always been drawn to studying homelessness and poverty, holding hope that he can raise awareness of this intractable worldwide problem. He has published several articles on his research.

“I was interested in the situation of migrant workers who came to cities from the countryside to participate in this recycling process for subsistence,” Goldstein said. “There were lines of stalls going on forever where people purchased different recyclable products, but in the ’90s the conditions were abysmal. It looked as if they lived in giant trash heaps.”

As time passed, Goldstein noticed a peculiar evolution take place.

“The vendors were more and more well-off,” Goldstein recalled. “The Beijing government — wanting to maintain control — kept clamping down on them, but could never stop them.”

According to research, China’s underground recycling business is now among the country’s largest industries.

“I argue that the government should work with the informal sector to help mitigate the health and environmental damage,” Goldstein said. “Because they have the materials and the labor, China is in an ideal position to set the standard for the world on how to create a safe and sustainable recycling industry.”
Gender Inequality in Aging

John Tower of biological sciences finds evidence supporting the theory that the sexes age differently.

What helps her live longer might be harmful to him, according to a study that sheds light on how and why organisms age.

Analyzing years of research involving fruit flies and mice, John Tower, professor of biological sciences, and his colleagues showed that aging interventions can have opposite effects in males versus females. The findings appear consistent with data gathered on humans as well, Tower said.

The researchers found that treating flies with the steroid hormone mifespristone/RU486 decreased egg production in females while increasing longevity. Similar effects were seen by tweaking the diets of flies and mice, but the effects were sometimes opposite in males versus females.

Increasing lifespan also increased the acceleration of the age-dependent mortality rate of the population. In other words, a small number of individuals die here and there when the group is young, typically due to infections and pathogens. That’s non-age-driven mortality. Then, as the population ages, the mortality rate rises exponentially until the last individual dies. This acceleration of mortality is thought to represent true aging — the inexplicable breakdown of the body over time.

“No one has really figured out what the cause of that acceleration is,” Tower said. “Our results show that dietary and genetic interventions sometimes have opposite effects on that acceleration in males versus females.”

Tower says that the findings would also seem to support the antagonistic pleiotropy model for aging. In part, the model tries to explain why our bodies ultimately break down and die, suggesting that natural selection might favor a gene that creates a fatal flaw later in life if it offers some significant benefit earlier. That is, if a gene helps individuals reproduce successfully, it’s beneficial to the species as a whole even if it does ultimately shorten the individuals’ lifespans. Such genes would, against common wisdom, be selected for.

The mifespristone intervention appears to prevent such a trade-off between lifespan and reproductive ability — albeit a sex-dependent one.

Tower’s study supports the idea that sexual antagonistic pleiotropy — where a gene benefits one sex but has a detriment for the other — keeps genes in the genome that shorten the life span of both sexes. —R.P.

Anxiety = Dementia?

Psychology researchers find that anxiety may be a significant factor in memory loss.

People who experienced high anxiety any time in their lives had a 48 percent higher risk of developing dementia compared to those who did not, according to a study led by postdoctoral scholar Andrew Petkus of psychology.

The findings were based on an examination of more than 1,000 twins from the Swedish Adoption Twin Study of Aging, overseen by the Karolinska Institutet of Sweden.

People who have high levels of anxiety tend to have higher levels of stress hormones, including cortisol, which can damage parts of the brain responsible for memory and for high-level thinking, according to Petkus.

The subjects with anxiety who later developed dementia are people who experience more than usual symptoms of anxiety, said study co-author Margaret Gatz, professor of psychology, gerontology and preventive medicine. “They are frantic, frazzled people.”

The researchers also found that the anxiety-dementia relationship was stronger among fraternal twins of whom only one developed dementia than it was among identical twins. They said this finding shows that there may be genetic factors shared by anxiety and dementia that account for the anxiety-dementia risk. —E.G.
Between Coercion and Resistance

Doctoral student Sari Siegel is pioneering research into Jewish prisoner-physicians in Nazi camps.

Deported to Auschwitz, obstetrician and gynecologist Maximilian Samuel was selected to become a prisoner-physician and ordered to participate in barbaric Nazi-directed medical experiments on women. As a result, historians labeled him a “Jewish medical collaborator.”

Doctoral student Sari Siegel argues that Samuel and hundreds of other Jewish physician-prisoners in Nazi camps cannot be characterized so simply.

Named a recipient of a 2015-16 Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies Fellowship for her groundbreaking research, Siegel’s dissertation focuses on Jewish prisoner-physicians and the morally ambiguous position in which they found themselves.

“The key to Samuel’s story is that in the absence of direct supervision it seems quite probable that — at least in a few cases — he did not follow Nazi orders but instead helped fellow inmates and minimized harm,” said Siegel, who spent six months as a junior fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies in Austria.

Superman School. That is the informal name for the rigorous training required to become a pararescueman. These U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command and Air Combat Command operatives undertake the recovery and medical treatment of personnel in humanitarian and combat environments.

The training to become a pararescueman is among the longest special operations courses in the world. USC Dornsife alumnus Jamie Brisbin was up to the challenge.

“I joined the Air Force specifically to be a pararescueman,” said Brisbin, who earned his bachelor’s degree in biological sciences in 2007. Now, he’s part of the 31st Rescue Squadron at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan.

“We are paramedics who are also trained in parachuting, survival, confined space and collapsed structure rescue, swift-water and technical rescue, mountaineering, helicopter operations, and marine rescue and diving.”

Diving was certainly within Brisbin’s comfort zone. Growing up in Hong Kong and traveling up and down the Asian coast with his family, he was never far from the ocean.

It seemed only natural that Brisbin should end up at USC Dornsife, where he devoted his studies to biology, marine science and diving. During his senior year, he spent a semester at the USC Wrigley Marine Science Center on California’s Catalina Island, participating in the Catalina Semester program.

Brisbin said his career was heavily influenced by his experience at the USC Wrigley Marine Science Center and the professors and fellow students he met there.

“The semester I spent at Wrigley has had a huge impact on what I am doing now.”
Defending the Invisible

Human and civil rights lawyer Anna Walther ’04 defends those on the fringes of society who are made more vulnerable by their social invisibility.

Grape pickers in California’s San Joaquin Valley say that for years, they were obliged by their employer to arrive up to 30 minutes before their shift started and work “off the clock.”

Alumna Anna Walther is representing more than 20,000 of these farmworkers in a multimillion dollar class-action lawsuit against their employer for the unpaid work they allege they were required to perform over a four-year period.

A lawyer at Martinez Aguilaresco & Lynch APLC in Bakersfield, Calif., Walther represents agricultural workers in class-action lawsuits and also provides legal counsel to the United Farm Workers of America, the labor union founded by activist César Chávez in 1962.

Even at minimum wage, those grape pickers would have been shorted $3-$4 per day.

“Over years, employers are accumulating all this extra unpaid work, and these very small amounts become huge sums of money they are basically stealing from some of the lowest-paid and hardest-working people in this country,” said Walther, who earned bachelor’s degrees in international relations and German from USC Dornsife.

Walther has now heard from San Joaquin Valley workers that many local employers aren’t requiring off-the-clock work anymore.

“That case is ongoing,” she said, “but the fact that employers have taken note is an improvement that cannot be measured in a damages win on a lawsuit.”
NARCISSISTIC

LAZY

ENTITLED

DISENGAGED

SOCIAL-MEDIA-OBSESSED JOB HOPPERS
The biggest generation since the boomers, U.S. millennials — those born between 1980 and 2000 — are the most technologically advanced and racially and ethnically diverse group in history. They are arguably also the most maligned, frequently depicted by older generations as disengaged, social-media-obsessed job hoppers with an insatiable thirst for constant validation. Are these characterizations justified, or are millennials just misunderstood?

“I think it’s very easy to stereotype and dismiss millennials in this way because so much of their lives are tied to social media, and this is also a trope that popular TV shows generally rely on to characterize the millennial generation,” said Jody Agius Vallejo, associate professor of sociology.

“But it’s also very easy to contradict these stereotypes when you actually stop looking at millennials as a homogeneous or monolithic population and start examining heterogeneity within the millennial population,” she added.

William Deverell, professor and chair of history and director of the USC-Huntington Institute on California and the West, concurs but said generational stereotyping is nothing new.

“We’re familiar with the greatest generation, baby boomers, generation X and now millennials, but generational assumptions probably existed in the broader culture in the 1920s, the Gilded Age and even as far back as the Civil War era,” he said. “Some of these generational definitions speak to a certain nostalgia and incorporate naïve, if understandable, assumptions that the past was simpler than the present. And that’s never true.”
While Deverell agrees that generations can be roughly identified by certain cultural predilections, he suggests that assumptions about generational identity may also reveal a lot about the generations doing the identifying.

“I believe we oftentimes write our greatest fears and ambitions on the lives of those who aren’t us,” he said. “So in some respects we might actually be holding up a mirror.”

So let’s hold up a mirror now to those whom Time magazine dubbed “The Me Me Me Generation” and take a critical look at the various epithets so widely used to describe them. And while we’re at it, let’s get a glimpse of how that criticism sheds light onto their parents — the original “Me Generation” — the baby boomers.

LAZY
In a 1992 study by the nonprofit Families and Work Institute cited by Time, 80 percent of people under 23 wanted one day to have a job with greater responsibility; 10 years later, only 60 percent did.

It’s one of the most persistent criticisms directed at millennials, yet no one could accuse USC Dornsife alumnus and entrepreneur Adam Goldston of being lazy. With his twin brother, Ryan, Goldston worked tirelessly to bring their Athletic Propulsion Labs (APL) high-end sneaker to market after launching the company in their dorm room. This year, the brothers made Forbes “30 under 30” list for their achievements in retail and e-commerce. They now employ 15 people — almost all millennials — while their shoes are sold around the world in upscale retail outlets.

Goldston believes older generations’ perception of millennials as lazy stems from how technology has revolutionized traditional business practices.

“When we started the company, my dad said, ‘Go to the office every single day, from 9 to 5. Get into a routine, you don’t want to be seen as lazy,’” remembered Goldston, now a globetrotting business executive. “Since then the world has changed dramatically. Now I spend more time out of the office than I do in it. The old guard doesn’t necessarily realize that the same thing you can do sitting at a desk, you can achieve anywhere today on a cell phone.”

Goldston notes another reason his generation might be perceived as lazy by older generations is their preferred work environment. The APL office boasts a pingpong table and mini-basketball hoop, and employees pump up their adrenaline or let off steam with Nerf gun battles in the hallways.

“From the outside looking in, older people may not take some of the things we do seriously, but they contribute to the company dynamic,” Goldston said.

“Ryan and I didn’t come up with our initial idea by being constrained to old-guard thinking. We were students who got our big idea playing basketball. So I think a lot of the great ideas we and our employees have come to us when we’re doing fun things.

“When we’re 60, it will probably be hard for us to understand what the 20-year-old culture is like then, too,” Goldston added with a laugh.

USC Dornsife Board of Councilors member and alumnus Martin Irani is chair of USC Dornsife’s Gateway Internship Program, which aims to prepare undergraduates for their careers by offering paid summer internships and mentoring from distinguished professionals. His experience with millennials, both through the program and as vice president of Hancock Park Associates, a private equity firm, has given him insight into another misunderstanding that can lead to misperceptions of millennial laziness — their rejection of traditional business rules in favor of working faster and, in their opinion, smarter and more efficiently.

“Millennials want to do things the way they’re used to doing everything — fast. But, to older generations it makes millennials seem lazy because they don’t want to take the long route,” Irani said.

“Millennials need to slow down,” he added, “be a bit more deliberate and thorough, and be willing to take on any task they are asked to do, even if it’s menial, because they won’t be perceived as team players if they don’t.”

“As millennials, we want to enjoy every aspect of our lives.”

JOB HOPPING
Millennials are often denigrated for being “job hoppers.” The median tenure for millennials is 24 months compared to seven years for a baby boomer. But Irani, who earned his bachelor’s degree in economics in 1987, followed by an MBA from USC Marshall School of Business in 1991, notes that old taboos surrounding the practice are no longer valid.

“The world has changed since I was younger, when changing your job often was seen as a negative,” said Irani, who also serves on the board of the USC Alumni Association. “Now it’s more acceptable and you see millennials switching jobs every two years.”

Goldston believes one reason millennials switch jobs so frequently is because they care so much about their day-to-day work experience. That’s another reason his company fosters a fun work environment. “As millennials, we want to enjoy every aspect of our lives. So when people come to work for us, we want to make it enjoyable, not an arduous task.”

Irani offers this tip to older generations who want to motivate millennial employees to stick around longer. “Millennials need to feel they’re making a difference. Older people need to show them what they’re doing is important to the community. If the company has a purpose, millennials may stay longer.”

To avoid friction with older generations at work, Irani advises millennials to seek their advice, spend time with them, listen to their stories and give them respect. “Don’t dismiss the older generation just because they don’t do Snapchat,” he tells Gateway participants. “They have other gifts to teach you that are just as valuable.”

ENTITLED
Millennials received so many participation trophies growing up that a recent study, cited by Time, showed that 40 percent believe they should be promoted every two years, regardless of performance. Statistics like this feed into the cliché of millennial entitlement.

But one need look no further than USC, and in particular to first-generation students, to explode such stereotypes, noted Vallejo. Her research investigates the mechanisms that facilitate social and economic mobility, and entry into the middle and upper classes, for Latino and Asian American youth. Those mechanisms include policies, access to education, mentors, and family and community wealth.

“Many first-generation students come from low-income or
working-class families and they're anything but entitled — or narcissistic, lazy or self-centered,” she said. “As education costs have increased, not only are they working long hours in addition to their studies and extracurricular activities, they're also taking on a significant amount of debt and working numerous jobs to support their education and themselves and contribute to the family income.”

Adrian Trinidad, who earned his bachelor's degree in sociology in December 2015, was among about 3,500 first-generation students at USC. Growing up in a Los Angeles neighborhood plagued by drugs and gangs, Trinidad, at the age of 10, became the primary caregiver for his father, who was diagnosed then with schizophrenia. His mother began working up to 15 hours a day to support the family.

“Growing up in that environment gave me a vital sense of strength and perspective, and also helped me value every opportunity I get. I know how to be humble, but also validated for my own achievements and those of my family and community,” said Trinidad, who will begin his Ph.D. in urban education policy at USC Rossier School of Education in the Fall.

NARCISISM: THE PROS AND CONS OF THE SELFIE GENERATION

According to the National Institutes of Health, the incidence of narcissistic personality disorder is nearly three times as high for those in their 20s as for the generation that's now 65 or older.

Like many experts and millennials themselves, Morteza Dehghani, assistant professor of psychology and computer science, blames social media for the perceived increase in narcissism and resultant need for validation among millennials.

“We scroll through feeds and click on likes based on how people present themselves. This trains our brains to focus more on surface features rather than judging people on the relationships we have with them. It's very superficial and shallow, and it makes us crave the same sort of constant attention no matter what we're doing. All of us are becoming affected. And millennials, because they grew up with these platforms, are more affected than others.”

Goldston, however, takes issue with how narcissism has been linked with social media.

“Social media didn't exist 15 years ago, so people didn't have to worry about how they were perceived by the world. Now if you post anything online, you know you're going to be viewed and judged. So I don't think it's a narcissistic view; I think it's a conscious view.”

Disney channel actor and musician Laura Marano is a freshman majoring in politics, philosophy and law. As a social media maven who has chalked up more than 7 million likes and followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, she sees the upsides and downsides of these and other social media channels.

She concedes that social media use springs from a desire for attention but says that it is not necessarily linked to narcissism.

“I think it's less about narcissism and more about utter insecurity and trying to convey some sort of image that others will like,” she said. “Social media makes people very vulnerable.”

Arguing that every generation is faced with something the generation before has not seen, Marano said millennials are doing exactly what they need to be doing: reacting to this huge societal and cultural shift that is social media.

“We're finding our identity and how it relates to this new change of social media, and in fact we're not doing as terrible a job as everyone says,” she said. “I think everyone needs to give us a bit of a break here.”

Deverell notes that the degree of connectivity fostered, supported and demanded by social media among millennials not only marks a profound difference from previous generations, but obviously also brings its own burdens.

“It comes with an awareness of the great scale of the global community and the great challenges of a worldwide sensibility of creation, obligation or opportunity, and that's difficult to shoulder when you're a young person emerging from your teens into young adulthood.”

Vallejo also defends millennials' love affair with social media, reminding us that they are the most connected, technologically adept generation yet.

“The stereotype of the selfie generation, the idea that millennials want to be famous, or that they revere reality TV stars, or model those behaviors, is just that — it's a stereotype,” she said. “We have to remember that social media is natural to millennials; they grew up with it. It's something they use not just to create social networks but also as a medium for social justice and civic engagement.”

DISENGAGED SLACKTIVISTS?

Indeed, when millennials engage on social issues they tend to do so principally through the Internet. Social media can effectively spread information and rally followers around a cause, but millennials' reliance on it has given rise to accusations of so-called “slacktivism,” where people share a status or use a hashtag and feel they've done their part.

Marano believes this trend rises from feelings of insignificance in such a vast and heavily populated world.

“Millennials are engaged and love to spread awareness about what's going on, but social media has made them more acutely aware of how small they are in this huge
The selfie generation is accused of narcissism but many millennials defend their social media obsession, arguing that they are the most connected and technologically adept generation yet.

Vallejo agrees, citing USC Dornsife alumna and first-generation student Christina Wilkerson, who graduated with a bachelor’s in sociology in 2012. “She attended Columbia School of Social Work and she uses social media and digital storytelling to create community for black youth,” Vallejo said. “She was a Fulbright finalist for research in the Caribbean who uses social media and digital storytelling to investigate the role of religion in women’s rights.”

Elizabeth Shaeffer, a senior majoring in political science and sociology, admits her generation is constantly on social media but she also defends the practice. “I know a lot of people argue that we’re disengaged with those around us, but I think in fact we’re more engaged.”

Shaeffer recently participated in a research-based internship through USC Dornsife’s Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics with advocacy firm RALLY and its client California Parks Now. Using social media, she and her fellow interns sought to increase funding and encourage activism and awareness among millennials for parks in California.

Of course, not all millennial engagement takes place over social media. Vallejo said her research on middle-class Mexican Americans and Latino elites and her experience mentoring numerous first-generation college students at USC show that many millennials retain an ethos of giving back to family and the community, and to remedying social and economic inequality.

“These cases completely contradict the one-dimensional negative stereotypes about millennials,” she said.

Vallejo points to the Black Lives Matter movement, the DREAMer movement, and the ongoing rebellion on college campuses by many millennials who have been staging sit-ins, protests and walk-outs to champion increased diversity in higher education.

“Let’s not forget that 44 percent of millennials are non-white,” she said, and they’re demanding greater diversity among universities’ faculty and staff.

“We can’t say there isn’t still a sense of fighting for equality and rights in a way that’s been a common thread throughout American history.”

Deverell finds millennials’ regard for egalitarian points of view regarding racial, sexual and gender identity inspiring. “Their vision on this is to be applauded,” he said. “It’s not perfect, but this generation has much to teach us about our visions of one another and how we can, and ought to, build community, regardless of difference.”

But while Culley, who was raised in a moderately affluent family, notes that there are student governments world,” Marano said. “That makes them less inclined to believe that if they donate money or time it’s going to create actual change.”

Culley, however, said he feels the slacktivist label is not representative.

“I know there are lots of hardworking people in my generation who break those stereotypes,” he said.

Vallejo agrees, citing USC Dornsife alumna and first-generation student Christina Wilkerson, who graduated with a bachelor’s in sociology in 2012. “She attended Columbia School of Social Work and she uses social media and digital storytelling to create community for black youth,” Vallejo said. “She was a Fulbright finalist for research in the Caribbean who uses social media and digital storytelling to investigate the role of religion in women’s rights.”

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at every university around the country that are active and involved, he also admitted that he’s familiar with millennials who aren’t politically or civically active.

“I know many people who simply aren’t engaged because they feel they’re not listened to, and I think that’s a perception that’s been propagated by older people in this country,” he said. “It’s a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.”

As for her generation’s alleged unwillingness to rebel, Maria Jose Plascencia, a senior majoring in American studies and ethnicity and the daughter of a single mother who is a restaurant worker in Tijuana, Mexico, put it down to general contentment with the status quo.

“We’re not as brave as previous generations and I think that comes from feeling we don’t have as much to lose because we’re at a privileged point in history,” said Plascencia, who plans to earn a Ph.D. in history.

‘HELIicopter ParentING’

Much of the blame for millennials’ allegedly needy and entitled behavior has been laid at the feet of their baby boomer parents, widely accused of overparenting, over-scheduling and overpraising their offspring.

Vallejo notes that in the last few decades there has been a shift in parenting among middle- and upper-class parents. These so-called “helicopter parents” adopted what celebrated sociologist Annette Lareau termed “concerted cultivation” in an attempt to foster their children’s prospects.

“As a result, many youth today from middle- and upper-class backgrounds have an enormous skill set that allows them theoretically to compete and have an advantage in middle- and upper-class social and economic spaces that some other students haven’t had the opportunity to experience,” said Vallejo. “However, sometimes it can be difficult when they come to college and their parents aren’t there to solve their problems. That’s why college can be an extremely important growth experience for many students.”

Shafeef, who said her middle-class parents consciously chose not to be helicopter parents, has a certain sympathy for those students whose parents opted to follow that child-rearing style.

“If you’ve been in an environment where you’re constantly told where to be and what to do, when you get to college the freedom must be almost overwhelming,” she said. “If this is your first take at deciding whether to go to the movies with friends or study for that exam, then it’s much harder to make the right decision than if you’ve already tested that out in high school and experienced the consequences.”

Vallejo stressed that millennials from less affluent backgrounds are less likely to have been raised by helicopter parents.

“It’s a different parenting model from that occurring in lower-income or working-class families who engage in what Lareau calls ‘natural growth,’” Vallejo said.

“Students who grow up in low-income or working-class families have a very different appreciation for the opportunities they are given or experience because they don’t see them as something that should be automatic. Students from lower-class and disadvantaged families are often more entrepreneurial because they frequently have to figure things out for themselves.

“Those kinds of responsibilities translate into all other aspects of their lives. They don’t have that sense of entitlement, and I think that’s very important for people to understand when thinking about the millennial generation.”

NEW CHALLENGES IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The rise of technology and student debt, and an uncertain economy, mean that millennials have to face additional pressures that their baby boomer parents did not.

“We have to live up to these ideas that we should be millionaires at 18, that we should invent an app and strike it rich, and that puts a lot of unfair pressure on our generation,” Culley said. “These are all pressures that didn’t exist before the Internet, or not to this extent.

“Many millennials feel they were dealt a bad hand. It’s hard to find anyone of my generation who doesn’t believe in climate change and who isn’t scared by it on some level.”

“My suspicion is that they will change that world significantly, and my hope is that it’s for the better.”

Trinidad agreed.

“Millennials are more outspoken than other generations, and they have a right to be because they’re the generation that’s the most educated and the most underpaid,” he said.

“For the previous generation to criticize this generation is fault because they didn’t face the same challenges we do to secure a job and an education. Being outspoken is necessary and justified. I don’t think it should stamp us as a group that’s needy, narcissistic and demanding. That’s unfair.”

Goldston believes much of the criticism of millennials stems from older generations’ resistance to change.

“Change is uncomfortable but it’s a necessity. Whether or not current or older generations like it, things are going to evolve,” he said. “Millennials are setting the tone for what the future’s going to be because we’re going to control it.”

Deverell stressed the importance of looking beyond caricature and name calling in generational conversations.

“Older generations may say, ‘We created this world for you, why are you taking it for granted?’ and millennials may respond, ‘Yes, you created this world for us and it has so many problems.’ Yes, the world that’s being inherited now is utterly described by limits and finite boundaries of opportunity, resources or nature, but that’s true across generations. It’s not simply the generations that are coming of age that are frustrated by that. Those challenges can bind us together, too, out of a need to engage with not just one generation, but two or three or four, in order to solve these problems.

“Let’s not forget that the world millennials are stepping into is not a world they created,” Deverell concluded. “My suspicion is that they will change that world significantly, and my hope is that it’s for the better.”

Vallejo agreed, noting that because they represent so much variety in terms of place, ethnicity and class, millennials bring a multitude of experience and solutions to key issues affecting our society.

“Millennials are civically engaged, optimistic and concerned about social and economic issues,” she said. “Older generations tend to lament changes they see occurring in attitudes and behaviors among the younger generation, but many millennials are striving to change society for the better. Instead of dismissing millennials, that’s something older generations need to validate.”

SO EMOJI-ONAL

So-called “helicopter parenting” has been blamed for producing a generation that is accused of being needy and unable to take criticism.
Already the largest generation in the United States, millennials are poised to reshape the economy and to take over in the workplace and at the ballot box. Tech-savvy, the first inherently digital generation has never known what it is like to live without having the world’s knowledge at their fingertips. Despite widespread criticism, millennials are also considered to be optimistic, motivated, confident and goal-oriented.

**Millennials (also called Generation Y),** the first generation to come of age in the new millennium, were born between 1980 and 2000.

**Baby boomers** were born between 1946 and 1964. Their demography-driven name was derived from the spike in births that followed the end of World War II and ended almost as abruptly in 1964, around the time the birth control pill became available.

**The Greatest Generation,** born between 1913 and 1924, “saved the world” — to use President Ronald Reagan’s memorable phrase — by fighting and winning World War II.

**The silent generation,** born between 1925 and 1945, describes children of the Great Depression and World War II.

**Generation X** was born between 1965 and 1979. Often dubbed the MTV or latchkey generation, Xers are often depicted as savvy, entrepreneurial loners.

**Generation Z** (also called iGen) was born between 2001 and the present. This generation is characterized by its widespread Internet use from a young age and comfort with social media. Growing up during a recession may have made this generation unsettled and insecure.

Although we are all familiar with more recent generational titles such as the baby boomers and Generation X, Professor and Chair of History William Deverell, director of the USC-Huntington Institute on California and the West, reminds us that the attribution of generational assumptions in the U.S. stretches back to the Gilded Age, the Civil War era and probably beyond.
65% of millennials say losing their phone or computer would have a greater negative impact on their daily routine than losing their car.

40% of the electorate will be millennials by 2020.

More than 1 in 3 adult Americans will be millennials by 2020.

40% of millennials have at least one tattoo.

In 2015, millennials’ annual, worldwide purchasing power is expected to be $2.45 trillion. By 2018, they will eclipse boomers in spending power at $3.39 trillion.

83.1 MILLION
Number of millennials in the United States

1.8 BILLION
Number of millennials worldwide

81% percent of millennials have donated money, goods or services.

$1 TRILLION
Millennials account for more than $1 trillion in U.S. consumer spending ...

... but have amassed $1 trillion in student debt.

84% of millennials say that helping to make a positive difference in the world is more important than professional recognition.

83%
Millennials were a major factor in electing our president — 60% voted for Obama in 2012; 66% in 2008.

DON’T PUT A RING ON IT
44% of millennials say that marriage is becoming obsolete, compared with 35% of boomers who feel the same way.

50% of millennials do not believe that Social Security will exist when they reach retirement age.

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In a culture of increasing awareness of — and openness toward — the transgender community, how can we better understand the nuances of gender identity and help to ensure equal rights for all?

By Laura Paisley
It's a moment that most of us experience several times a day. And when we're in public, most of us proceed almost without thinking to the nearest door bearing our corresponding gender signifier, the all-familiar A-line skirt or the pants. Simple, right?

Not necessarily. For transgender individuals — those who identify with or express a gender identity that differs from their sex at birth — the reality of using a public restroom is much more complicated. It can quickly become a minefield.

Chris Cervantes, a senior at USC Dornsife double majoring in gender studies and sociology, knows this firsthand.

“Until recently, USC didn’t have many gender-neutral bathrooms,” said the Los Angeles native. “Often there are none where my classes are located, so when I need to use the bathroom, where am I supposed to go?”

Cervantes identifies as gender nonconforming.

“I feel like the traits I exhibit and the way I carry myself can hold space both for masculinity and femininity without identifying as a man or a woman.”

Cervantes recalled instances of entering the women’s restroom and being questioned or harassed.

“People say things like, ‘You’re in the wrong bathroom,’ or ‘Excuse me, sir, do you know this is the women’s room?’ And I’m thinking, ‘I’m not going to do anything to you or anyone else — I just really need to use the bathroom.’”

These day-to-day challenges are part of a larger struggle for transgender people, one that is not always adequately addressed amid the celebrity-centric representations in today’s media. Legal discrimination and violence remain serious issues for the transgender community, and neither can the impact of race and class on their experience be ignored.

But lately, personalities like Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, Chaz Bono, Janet Mock and teen advocate Jazz Jennings have brought the movement to mainstream public attention like never before. In June 2014, actress and activist Cox became the first transgender person to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine. Popular television shows like *Transparent* and *Orange Is the New Black* have humanized the transgender experience for new audiences.

At times it feels like a breakthrough moment — like we’re at a “tipping point,” as *Time* put it. But how did we get here and what lies ahead? USC Dornsife experts from sociology, political science, history, gender studies and psychology offer a variety of perspectives on the transgender experience, from the belief that the transgender movement is rooted in civil rights to the conundrum of the transgender athlete, how hormones relate to gender and social behavior, and the controversy regarding gender neutrality. Taken together, these perspectives — along with some of Cervantes’ own personal experiences — offer us a deeper understanding of what it means to be transgender.

**A Short History of 20th-Century Gender Movements**

Though much has been done to raise awareness and increase acceptance of the transgender experience in recent years, one thing is clear: The transgender movement is anything but new.

“There was a tremendous amount of groundwork laid before Caitlyn Jenner came on the scene,” said Michael Messner, professor of sociology and gender studies, and chair of sociology. “The women’s and gay and lesbian movements over the past 40 or 50 years — all of that has created a fertile ground for greater acceptance of transgender people today.”

Jack Halberstam, professor of American studies and ethnicity, gender studies, comparative literature and English, agreed with Messner.
“Change is slow,” he said, “but when it happens it feels like it takes place overnight. Of course, the media loves the idea of ‘Once we were intolerant people and now we’re not.’ But in fact, people have been working on issues around gender justice for a very long time. The amount of attention has just reached a critical pitch where people in general are seeing what people used to see only in queer communities — that there are multiple genders across the culture.”

Our contemporary understanding acknowledges that gender identification doesn’t automatically correlate with sexual orientation — gender and sexuality are separate. A hundred years ago, however, same-sex desire and cross-gender identification were thoroughly entwined, said Alice Echols, Barbra Streisand Professor of Contemporary Gender Studies and professor of history and gender studies. Her research expertise encompasses the history of sexuality, second-wave American feminism, and the social and cultural history of the 1960s and ‘70s.

By the advent of the ‘50s, things were beginning to shift. The first gay rights groups began to emerge, and a growing number of gays and lesbians were presenting themselves in a gender-conforming manner. Moreover, 1953 witnessed the emergence of America’s first transgender celebrity, Christine Jorgensen, who in 1952 revealed to the world that she had undergone a “rare sex-conversion” from man to woman.

“What had been happening gradually is becoming more obvious, this disaggregation of same-sex desire from cross-gender identification. By the time we get to the 1970s disco era, this really ramps up,” Echols said.

In the ‘70s, the women’s and gay liberation movements were in full swing, though relations between feminists and trans women were at times contentious. Some feminists were in full swing, though relations between feminists and trans women were at times contentious. Some feminists were in full swing, though relations between feminists and trans women were at times contentious. Some feminists were in full swing, though relations between feminists and trans women were at times contentious. Some feminists were in full swing, though relations between feminists and trans women were at times contentious. Some feminists were in full swing, though relations between feminists and trans women were at times contentious. Some feminists were in full swing, though relations between feminists and trans women were at times contentious.

California is currently working toward providing gender-neutral facilities for public employees, allowing people to choose the bathroom of the gender they identify with rather than their biological sex.

“I think 10 years from now things are going to be quite different” regarding men’s and women’s bathrooms, said Chris Freeman, professor (teaching) of English. He regularly teaches the course “Transgender Studies” at USC Dornsife and believes that having this subject matter in the curriculum is crucial. College is where students really think about and discover these issues.

“Looking at transgender issues through the literary lens removes it from the purely personal,” he said. “It lets you think about how an artist constructs that world, that identity and those challenges.”

Freeman sees an analogy between the push for gender-neutral bathroom access and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, a civil rights law designed to protect against discrimination. It enforced architectural accommodations in public buildings for disabled people, including wheelchair ramps, elevators and reserved parking spaces.

“Those did not exist 40 years ago — it was an architectural accommodation of a law,” he said. “I think the whole concept of connecting gender to where you go to the toilet will soon be a thing of the past.”

Another issue related to civil rights is violence. The transgender community — particularly trans women of color — faces an epidemic of physical and sexual violence. According to transequality.org, more than one in four transgender people has experienced a bias-driven assault, and in the LGBT community the homicide rate is highest among trans women.

Messner’s book Some Men: Feminist Allies and the Movement to End Violence Against Women (Oxford University Press, 2015) discusses how the movement against gender-based violence is now broadening to include transgender activists.

“Ending violence against women remains the centerpiece of the anti-violence movement,” he explained, “but the increasingly popular term ‘gender-based violence’ reflects a growing understanding of the need to recognize and confront LGBT violence.” Ending violence against transgender people is a social justice issue at its core, and the laws must reflect this. But legislative gains are only half the battle.

“It’s not that California doesn’t have strong hate crime laws,” Hancock said, “it’s also about making sure they are enforced equally across different populations.”

**TRANSGENDER LIVES AT THE INTERSECTION**

Intersectionality is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. The subject of Hancock’s newest book, Intersectionality: An Intellectual History (Oxford University Press, 2016), intersectionality is a theoretical framework that views race, gender, class and sexuality as co-constructing agents rather than isolated factors that run on parallel tracks.

“Talking about Caitlyn Jenner or Laverne Cox, there are different combinations of privilege and disadvantage based on how these categories co-construct each other,” Hancock explained. “One of the things intersectionality teaches us is that Caitlyn has a particular combination of privileges and disadvantages. Yes, she is transgender, and this is a new experience she’s navigating. But there’s the additional privilege of being wealthy and white that affords her a certain benefit of the doubt.”

As another example, because trans women were born...

**EQUAL RIGHTS**

Transgender issues are often civil rights issues, as evidenced by the fight for gender-neutral bathrooms and antidiscrimination laws related to work and housing.
While there is increasing awareness of binary transgender identities — trans women or trans men — people who identify as gender non-conforming face a unique set of challenges. The biochemistry of gender and social behavior is a relatively new field, and one that many psychologists find intriguing.

Wendy Wood, Provost Professor of Psychology and Business, researches the origins of gender differences in social behavior. Her work attempts to understand the relationship between three components: hormones, our own understanding of ourselves as men and women, and societal expectations of our behavior.

It is known that gendered behavior — acting in communal, supporting, feminine ways or dominant, assertive, masculine ways — is to some extent tied to hormonal processes, Wood said.

“Some of the most interesting work [in psychology] right now is showing how different social behaviors actually influence hormones. We usually think of hormones as drivers of behavior. In hormonal explanations for men’s greater aggression and dominance, people assume that men have higher levels of testosterone, which facilitate these behaviors. But even the original animal models of testosterone derived from animal husbandry recognized that social behavior influences levels of the hormone.”

For example, if you’re an athlete getting ready for a competition, testosterone levels rise — regardless of sex. And for both new mothers and fathers, levels of the hormone actually decrease when they engage in nurturing, supportive behaviors.

“Biology and the social environment clearly interact in guiding people’s gender identity and their understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman,” Wood said.

**CAN THE GENDERED PLAYING FIELD BE LEVELED?**

In the sports arena, the privilege shared by all athletes is their physical prowess. In competition, differences of race, class and sexuality are in a sense transcended — and yet gender remains all-important.

Gender and sports are a significant focus of Messner’s research, spanning everything from sports media analysis to children’s sports to masculinity and violence in sports.

“The transgender athlete has become a really interesting issue, both politically and in terms of national and international sports organizations,” he said. “Sports is one of a few institutions where you have a clear separation between male and female — one that starts right at the beginning based upon a dichotomous assumption that every individual fits into category A or B.”

Messianer has studied Little League Baseball and the American Youth Soccer Organization. He notes that girls and boys are allowed to play T-ball together, but higher levels are separated, with boys routed into baseball and girls into softball. Some soccer leagues enforce a similar division.

“The transgender athlete — and this is happening in youth sports, high school and elite international competitions — throws a big monkey wrench into that dichotomous organization of gender,” Messner said.

When the United States Tennis Association barred Renée Richards, one of the first openly transsexual athletes, from competing in the 1976 Women’s U.S. Open Tennis Championships, Richards fought the ruling all the way to the New York Supreme Court, which ruled in her favor. Many transgender athletes have followed her, but not without obstacles. The recent controversy around South African Olympic runner Caster Semenya, who is intersex and doesn’t fit the binary definitions of male and female, was highly publicized.

“Organizations like the International Olympic Committee are in a quandary,” Messner said. “For a number of years they tried to enforce so-called sex tests for women athletes, but all that reveals is the huge range of biological difference within the category of what we call women. There are people with chromosomal differences, there are intersex people and you can’t simply measure testosterone because some women’s levels are naturally high. Most organizations have now moved away from that as a standard practice.”

**THE BIOCHEMISTRY OF GENDER AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR**

Hormones are frequently cited as an explanation for physical abilities and social behaviors that are often associated with a particular gender. But what is the interplay between hormones and gender and to what extent is one a function of the other? Endocrinology as applied to human behavior is a relatively new field, and one that many psychologists find intriguing.

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**LET’S CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF: GENDER NEUTRALITY**

If the dichotomous system of gender has the potential to create such inequality and oppression, why not do away with it altogether and embrace gender neutrality? The genderqueer community has long espoused the idea of gender fluidity and exploding conventional gender categories and expectations. Today, Facebook offers 56 custom gender and pronoun selections for its users.

“For a lot of people there’s a sort of comfort in thinking about pink and blue, male and female, yin and yang,” Messner said. “But there’s a growing sentiment, especially among young people, that it’s better not to think of gender as dichotomous.”

Freeman agreed. “People are seeing that the gender binary is an ossified model,” he said. “It’s not accurate or true, and people don’t fit into it. So it’s about getting out of the binary and recognizing that social constructs of masculine and feminine are a fiction, the enforcement of which is very damaging.”

Halberstam is the author of several books about contrary gendering, including the award-winning Female Masculinity (Duke University Press, 1998). His most recent book, Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal (Beacon Press, 2012), is focused on “how everything has changed” in the last 10 years, drastically transforming gender and sexual politics along the way.

“My recent work has been committed to trying to provide an accurate map for where we are now, recognizing that it is an incredibly volatile and shifting terrain.”

People have been arguing for gender neutrality ever since the ’70s and the advent of the radical feminism movement. But since gender is largely attributed, Halberstam said, the notion of absolute gender neutrality is problematic.

“Neutrality isn’t an option in human interaction. We’re
a complex and diverse society, which means that information circulates separately from self-determined declarations. A lot of meaning is produced in society apart from anyone’s agency. “Naming and categorizing is just the tip of the iceberg of a very, very deep set of embedded social structures. We can’t empty out all meaning from the way in which we move through the world.”

Remaining mindful of social and gender categories may also be important to political efficacy. When thinking about the power of collectivities of people versus individuals, there are clearly times when thinking and organizing along group lines is very important.

“One once you start to explode gender categories,” Messner said, “there’s a sort of liberation for individuals, but you also might remove the potential for progressive organizing around those categories.”

Moreover, he added, if gender categories disappear, we lose the ability to clearly see the ways in which certain groups in society retain privilege and others remain subject to economic inequality and physical violence. Effectively addressing these problems then becomes much more difficult.

**TRANSGENDER ON CAMPUS: ONE STUDENT’S EXPERIENCE**

The experience of being transgender and defining one’s identity is, by definition, incredibly personal. As Jenner recently told *The Advocate*, “The media has kind of labeled me as the spokesperson for the trans community. That is not the case. I am only a spokesperson for my own journey.”

Messner puts it another way: “We have this big umbrella we call transgender, but there’s a lot of different stuff going on under that umbrella.”

As a college student, one of Cervantes’ main struggles has been finding a place to fit in. “It’s hard as someone who identifies as gender nonconforming, because that’s not something a lot of people are familiar with. So it’s a matter of balancing how much I’m going to work to take care of myself, and whether that means I’m going to be out to people or I’m going to be misgendered because it’s too difficult to try and educate someone.”

Cervantes gained a better self-understanding after meeting and talking with other transgender people. “I have a friend who graduated from USC a couple of years ago who identifies as a ‘trans boi.’ He’s been a mentor to me, and we have a lot of conversations about gender and masculinity, and what it means to be a masculine-presenting person of color and how that impacts [us] in society.”

Cervantes is deeply committed to gender justice. At USC, the senior has been involved with the Women’s Student Assembly, a student group that sponsors educational and community events while advocating for students around gender issues.

Together with other student leaders on campus, Cervantes formed a coalition called RISE: Reform, Inform, Speak Out and Empower. “Our goal is to communicate with university administrators about the issues we see on campus around sexual violence and gender-based harm, policy reforms, and how resources are allocated and made available to students,” Cervantes said.

For the senior, despite an expanding conversation around transgenderism, certain frustrations still remain. “With the media coverage, people are only thinking about binary trans identities — those who identify as a woman or a man. But to me, gender isn’t that simple.”

At USC and other universities, there’s also the issue of legal nomenclature. Transgender students face the question of what name and gender will appear on their transcripts, their student IDs and the roll-call lists in their classes. These legal identifiers might not correspond to a student’s gender identity.

Ultimately, it will take time for society to adapt to the idea that the existing system, the notion of gender as a binary, has set sail. This may be a “transgender moment,” but there are many moments still to come. At its core, the transgender movement is a social justice movement — and we are playing the long game.”
DNA was first identified in the late 1860s by Swiss chemist Friedrich Miescher, but nearly a century would pass before the famous three-dimensional double-helix structure would come to the fore. Fast forward another six decades to the present day, and science has laid bare the human genome in its entirety, giving researchers, clinicians and each of us extraordinary access to our genetic blueprint — and the promise and problems that come with it. By Darrin S. Joy
Uphrning and circumstance — and the consequences of a lifetime of decisions — all shape us to varying degrees. And the environment undoubtedly plays some role. But, at the core of it all is our genetics, the foundational biologic blueprint of our physical — and psychological — being.

Carried forward through the eons, each person’s DNA, copied from the preceding generations’ template, conveys a host of traits — simple features such as eye and hair color, and complex characteristics ranging from intellectual acuity to predisposition to disease.

And now, aided by unprecedented technology stemming from the Human Genome Project, each of us has access — at least in part — to the living source code behind our identities.

But are we ready to open this Pandora’s box? The mapping of the human genome has raised far more questions than it has answered. And concerns about the uses and utility of a person’s genomic data, along with ethical issues, dull the shiny optimism that once cast a glow on this crowning scientific achievement.

THE CODE WITHIN
In humans, the genome comprises about 3 billion couplets of information called base pairs. Distributed among 46 chromosomes — arranged in 23 pairs — they encode the genes that control our biological processes, from the cells up.

The Human Genome Project, launched in 1990, gave the first complete sequence of those base pairs in 2003. More than a decade later, vast amounts of information — disease markers, common traits, even surprising links between humans and other hominids — have surfaced.

For example a multinational group of researchers published surprising results in 2010 comparing the human genome to that of Neanderthals, and showing the two species interbred. The findings sparked interest among the public and scientists alike, including Michael Waterman, University Professor and USC Associates Chair in Natural Sciences.

“I used to find human evolution really boring,” said Waterman, professor of biological sciences, computer science and mathematics. “I was just totally indifferent to it. But getting the Neanderthal sequence and realizing we had these percentages of it floating around in our genomes, now I’m absolutely fascinated with this.”

A founder and leader in the computational biology field, Waterman co-developed the Smith-Waterman algorithm for sequence comparison and the Lander-Waterman formula for physical mapping, two fundamental algorithms used for the mapping of human sequence information in the Human Genome Project.

Subsequent work suggests humans harbor genetic traces of a second or even third species, and despite striking findings such as these, Waterman believes we are just beginning to touch on the knowledge within our genomes.

“Oh, I think we’re just scratching the surface,” Waterman said. “We’ve learned so much compared to what we knew 20 or even just 10 years ago, but compared to what there is to learn, we are just babes.”

The plummeting cost of sequencing a genome may quicken the pace. An astronomical $10 million in 2006, the price tag is only about $1,000 a decade later. This increased cost-efficiency, driven by evolving technology, is allowing ever-increasing returns on the project's initial investment of $2.7 billion, which was justified by the promise of near-unlimited improvements in human health.

Further, the technology is now within range of many consumers' financial means, allowing them to catch a glimpse of their molecular selves, including their risk of disease. For many, this is the where the real payoff begins.

THE RIGHT TO KNOW — AND HEAL — YOURSELF
Rick White is effusive. His passion for the information held within the human genome — and its potential for saving lives — is nearly palpable. “This is something that we had to do,” he said. “This is something that we’re compelled to get out into the world and champion to make it happen.”

White, who earned his bachelor’s degree in anthropology from USC Dornsife in 1989, is co-founder of SureGenomics, a start-up company launched in 2013 that offers genomic sequencing services. An entrepreneur who found success as an Internet software designer, he saw an opportunity to use his background not only to provide people with information about their genome, but to educate them and give them a useful system for understanding what the information means and how they might use it.

“We run marker analysis, we put it on top of 3-D representations of sections of the body, then as you browse different categories of health and wellness — whether it's kidney and urinary systems, lungs and breathing, immune system, whatever it is — you're able to drill down on that area and create this personalized education platform,” White said. “The whole notion is that you don't need to understand all of the science but you can understand what's relevant to you.”

While this approach seems at face value to be a boon to personal health, providing this kind of information is not without controversy. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has expressed concerns about companies delivering genetic risk information without getting clearance first, even going so far as to ban some firms from doing so, though they have since partially lifted the ban.

White and his business partners remain convinced the information is important for consumers to have — and it's their right to have access.

“If you look in a marketplace of ideas, as Thurgood Marshall put it, and the ideas provided are wholly truthful
“We’ve learned so much compared to what we knew 20 or even just 10 years ago, but compared to what there is to learn, we are just babes.”
“From intelligence and cognitive abilities to personalities and attitudes, and whether or not you’re conservative or liberal in your attitudes, it’s all influenced by genetic factors.”
representations, you can’t disrupt an individual’s ability to look at that information. That’s called censorship. That’s a First Amendment rights violation,” White said. “You heard the same things when WebMD first came out: ‘Oh, people shouldn’t really have this information.’ But they couldn’t stop WebMD from putting that information out because doing so would be a First Amendment rights violation.”

Ralph Wedgwood, professor of philosophy, agrees with White’s position to some extent, but sees both sides of the issue. Though not a medical ethicist, his studies explore ethical theory as well as the implications of making rational decisions.

“Let’s suppose, just for the sake of argument, that this really is pretty useful information that can make a big difference to the kinds of treatments people can be given, to the kinds of plans people can make,” he said. “Then in general it looks like one simple point is just that this information is good; we should get it.”

At the same time, Wedgwood understands that humans are not always prepared to cope with information appropriately. “If they were the fantasy individuals of economics, who are perfectly rational and always judge the information with a cool, dispassionate eye, then it would be fine. But people might be vulnerable because we do panic and get anxious about our health.”

Part of the issue may lie in the inherent uncertainty of most genomic information. The presence or absence of genetic markers might motivate a person to make a medical choice when in fact those markers do not ensure a given outcome — they only speak to a level of risk.

This uncertainty is especially apparent for markers associated with behavioral traits.

**MOLECULES TO MIND**

Laura Baker is professor of psychology and director of the USC Twin Project. She investigates how heredity as well as the environment affect individual differences in human behavior as well as the genetic bases of reading disabilities, attention deficit disorders and conduct behavior problems in childhood and adolescence.

According to Baker, a shift in the 1970s and ’80s turned the psychology community toward recognizing the importance of genetic factors in shaping behavior.

“From intelligence and cognitive abilities to personalities and attitudes, and whether or not you’re conservative or liberal in your attitudes, it’s all influenced by genetic factors,” she said. “In fact, people have been hard-pressed to find any aspect of psychological function that is not influenced by genetics.”

The advent of genomic sequencing technologies has amplified efforts to pinpoint behavioral genes.

“Since the Human Genome Project and advances in molecular techniques, everyone has become focused on trying to discover genes for various traits.”

So far, however, the results have been inconclusive at best, which may reflect the complexity of the genetics that underlie behavior.

“Most of the things that we look at in psychology are what we would call multifactorial,” Baker said. “If there are genetic factors involved, it’s probably many genes acting in concert, maybe sometimes even interacting with each other, maybe even interacting with the environment. So genetic influences are not simple, they’re complex.”

Even so, Baker remains confident that eventually the information will prove highly useful in the field.

“This emphasizes the reality of tailored interventions. We want to find what the genes are and how they work, and maybe there are certain treatments that work better for some than others in the same way that we think of certain drugs that are maybe more efficient or effective for people of a certain genotype. Ultimately, we could think of doing genetic screening and tailoring treatments based upon those results.”

This concept and its promise of better health care is in part what drives White to continue his efforts.

**THE ULTIMATE ANSWER?**

White’s belief that genetic information can improve or even save lives compels him to fight the current model of what he calls “standardized medicine.”

“In standardized medicine, you get sick, you take a drug; you get a cut, we sew it up. It’s a reactive model. We started to think, ‘Hey, if you actually had some of these data points, you could start to re-route yourself around the problems.’”

White in particular emphasizes concerns about adverse drug reactions. For him, it’s personal.

“My mom had an adverse drug reaction, and she passed away. And the thing is, there is knowledge that exists that could allow people to avoid that. There are 2.1 million adverse drug reactions in hospitals alone. It translates to 108,000 deaths every year.

“If we have pharmacogenomic information that allows you to know how you metabolize drugs — data that could protect you — that should be something that everybody has. So when you’re sick, they know what they can give you and what they can’t. It shouldn’t be, ‘Here, take this drug. Oh, it didn’t work? Okay, here, try this one.’”

Waterman agrees. “At some point our genome is just going to be part of our health-care record. It’s inevitable.”

For White, that’s the ultimate power of knowing yourself at the genetic level. “That’s what turns standardized medicine from a money sink into something that’s efficient and personalized and terrific. But you have to start building it, and you have to give people access, and you have to give them tools that allow them to comprehend and learn about genetics.

“Ultimately, genomics saves us.”

**CODED PSYCHE**

Genetics holds sway not just over our bodies, but also our minds. Information revealed through genomic sequencing may soon improve psychological therapies just as it has medical treatment.
THE CRAFTSMAN

For filmmaker Edoardo Ponti, poetry was the key to unlocking his talents as a cinematic storyteller. By Michelle Salzman Boston
Taking a break from his work to talk about filmmaking, Edoardo Ponti’s eyes lit up. He leaned into his seat, a plush booth at the Soho House West Hollywood with a bird’s-eye view of Los Angeles, where he had been typing intently on his laptop moments earlier. Looking out on the city engulfed in a dreamlike haze that unfurled into infinity, Ponti considered his own journey from Geneva, Switzerland, where he grew up, to the heart of the industry, which he now calls home. Ponti, 43, felt Hollywood’s pull as far back as he can remember.

“When I was 4, my brother who is four years older would practice piano in the living room,” Ponti recalled. He shifted in his seat and thoughtfully pulled at his closely trimmed salt-and-pepper beard. “I remember very specifically. I was next to him playing with my cars and little toy ships using his music as the musical score to my scenes. When he played a dramatic piece, I would use that to have my ships sink; when he practiced something more high octane, I switched to a car chase.”

You could say filmmaking is in Ponti’s blood. His family’s influence is most evident in his eyes, the same vivid hazel as those of his mother, Oscar-winning actress Sophia Loren, and in his profile, which echoes that of his late father, prolific movie producer Carlo Ponti. (His brother, Carlo Ponti Jr., whose practice provided the score to Edoardo’s playtime, is now a composer and orchestra conductor.)

However, Ponti, whose films have been shown and honored at the Cannes, Venice, Tribeca and Toronto film festivals, has forged his own path in Hollywood. He has written and directed the feature films Between Strangers (2002) and Coming & Going (2011), and has also written, directed and produced several stage plays, as well as an opera. Most recently, Ponti adapted Jean Cocteau’s 1930 play La Voix Humaine into a short film starring Loren.

When it comes to filmmaking, Ponti considers himself less of an artist and more of a craftsman.

“I’ve always approached film as a craft,” he explained. “That means practice, discipline and not being afraid to take risks.”

Ponti credited his parents for instilling in him a strong work ethic that lends itself to this approach.

“My parents taught me not to take anything for granted, nothing is owed to you. You have to work hard for it,” he said. “You cannot reach your potential unless you work hard to sharpen your craft.”

**THE UNIVERSE OF THE DETAIL**

Like so many other aspiring writers and directors, when he was starting out, Ponti moved to L.A. to follow his dream. At 18, he enrolled in the cinematic arts program at USC, ranked among the top in the nation. Immediately, he felt that he had made a mistake.

“A month in, I realized that studying film so young wasn’t the best way for me to become a filmmaker,” Ponti said. “Film was the tool I’d be using to tell stories, but in order for me to get the emotional and life ammunition to be able to tell stories, I had to study writing and the great authors.”

Ponti switched his major from film to creative writing and made poetry the focus of his studies.

“I’ve always written poetry, so for me it was a very natural mode of expression,” he explained. “Poetry is about getting at the core of things. It’s about the universe of the detail but also about rhythm. And film is also about rhythm, detail and finding the essence in every moment.”

Ponti eventually returned to study film, earning his master’s from the USC School of Cinematic Arts in 1998. But studying poetry helped Ponti to build his toolkit.

“When I write poetry I’m at my freest,” Ponti said. “It has become an amazing way to express anything I want without the confines of a narrative. Whatever I want to say, I can say in poetry.”

Ponti described his earliest poems as incredibly long, and very personal. It was when he began to direct his writing into short, focused narratives that a light bulb went on for him as a storyteller.

“It liberated me,” he said. “I could pack as much meaning into a vehicle that was much shorter. And that really has to do with discipline and rhythm. Finding the right rhythm for the right message was something that I really learned in poetry. And that, in film, is enormously important because that’s one of the ways you start thinking of tone.”

Ponti counts David St. John, University Professor of English and Comparative Literature at USC Dornsife, as one of his most esteemed mentors.

Ponti recalled that in his writing workshops, St. John would be both very objective and sharp in his feedback but, at the same time, very gentle and human about it.

“You would allow yourself to listen to his criticism,” Ponti said. “You were elevated by it. And that was a wonderful way for all of us to come together to share our innermost feelings in a safe, nonjudgmental environment — an environment that really helped us sharpen that skill through intelligent, constructive criticism.

“To this day, when I write a poem, it is David’s voice that I hear,” he said. If it sounds like St. John could read his poem — that the
words fit his vocal pattern — Ponti will keep it. He called St. John his “aural litmus test of whether or not a poem works.”

**THE MAGIC IN THE MUNDANE**

Studying poetry also reinforced for Ponti the fact that discipline is essential for success, especially for someone working in a creative field. That means tapping into inspiration as time allows, not just waiting for the muse to strike.

“That’s what being a professional means. You can switch on inspiration,” Ponti said. “If your schedule only allows you to write between the hours of 1 and 6 p.m., what happens if inspiration strikes at 6:30? You missed that train and that can’t happen, so you have to be able to access inspiration almost at will. It becomes a muscle. The more you write, the more you can access it.”

As an undergraduate, he would “switch on” his inspiration using the commute from USC to his home 40 miles north of Los Angeles to write a poem every day.

“I had this self-imposed exercise in college. It’d take me around one hour to drive back home from USC and I would use that time to compose a poem. I would create it in my mind as I was driving, repeating the lines I liked, and adding to those verses. I never used a Dictaphone. And when I got home, I had a poem that I would transcribe. I wrote countless poems like this, in my head, stuck on the 101 freeway. You could say that the 101 became my muse!”

The time Ponti spent mulling over his words became an important blueprint for his creative process.

“It’s about sharpening your ability to envision something before it exists,” he explained. “That period of gestation is very important because that’s how your inner life and your experiences are allowed to merge.”

“I’VE ALWAYS APPROACHED FILM AS A CRAFT. THAT MEANS PRACTICE, DISCIPLINE AND NOT BEING AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS.”

However, Ponti embraces the moments when his creativity is sparked organically. After all, a storyteller’s antennae are always up, he said.

“If writing or telling stories is your passion, you don’t even do it consciously. That part of you is always on, seeking out the next story or image or moment from the most mundane detail in life. The trick is to uncover the magic in the mundane.”
“Every filmmaker, every writer needs to find that person who speaks to the deepest part of themselves. For me, Kieślowski was the one,” Ponti said. Kieślowski’s ability to shoot a drama with the tension and suspense of a thriller, coupled with his attention to human detail, inspired Ponti.

“When I saw his films — in the humblest of ways — I saw myself in them; they gave me the courage to tell my own stories.”

Ponti has since been exploring the themes that pique his interest as a storyteller. The one theme that he sees recurring throughout his own work is resilience — evident in his most recent film, *Voce Umana (Human Voice)*, which captures a jilted lover’s fight for her unravelling relationship.

“I’m interested in the stories of people fighting their battles against all odds, swimming as hard as they can against the current of things but never losing hope. Faced with a wall of ‘nays,’ they are the only ‘aye,’ ” he said.

Ponti had his adaptation translated from the original French to Neapolitan, the language of Naples, Italy, which he felt accentuated the protagonist’s strengths.

“Translating the text reinforced the female character,” explained Ponti, who is himself a polyglot fluent in English, French and Italian. “French is a very intellectual language, a language of the mind, and Neapolitan is a very visceral language, born in your abdomen — in your gut. So when the character speaks Neapolitan, without changing the words she gains an inner strength that she really didn’t have in French.

“It was quite amazing seeing the transformation of a character just by shifting the language. Languages reside in different parts of you, and a language that resides in your head is very different than a language that resides in your gut. It affects the power and the impact of a character enormously.”

The film ends with the inscription: “per mamma” — “for my mother.” Ponti, who had previously directed his mother in the feature film *Between Strangers*, called working with her on such an intimate project an “amazing process.”

“She was very nervous to do this movie because it’s really a litmus test for all the greatest actresses in the world,” he said. The two rehearsed the piece for six weeks before shooting began.

“It was me and her sitting in a hotel room, face to face going through every line, every nuance, every color of the emotional journey that this woman was going through.”

The piece garnered acclaim, screening at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival, the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival and the 2014 HollyShorts Film Festival. Loren won a 2014 David Di Donatello Award, Italy’s top film honor, for her performance. Last April, *Voce Umana* debuted on Turner Classic Movies as part of a five-movie tribute to the actress.

**FINDING BALANCE**

Film school had another profound impact on Ponti’s life. It’s where he met his wife, actress Sasha Alexander, who plays chief medical examiner Maura Isles on the popular TNT television series *Rizzoli & Isles*. At USC, the two would run into each other in common areas on campus between classes.

“We were just friendly. And then, 10 years later, we bumped into each other and the rest is history.” Ponti smiled. They have now been married for nine years and have two children together.

Ponti is comfortable moving between the different roles he inhabits — writer, father, husband and filmmaker.

“People think, ‘Oh, I haven’t allotted enough time to writing because I was busy being a father.’ But the truth is they’re not mutually exclusive. Being a father enriches you as a writer and vice versa,” he explained. His philosophy is that everything balances out.

“You’re not taking anything away from one part of you when you focus on another facet of your life. Each facet feeds into the other, deepens the whole. You take the lessons from every part of you and apply them to all of you.”

Ponti reached for his computer. After all, it was the middle of the work day. A cool breeze drifted through the open windows nearby. With the laptop open on the table in front of him he leaned back in his seat and paused for a moment, ever the composed wordsmith. He concluded, “If you understand that everything is connected in your life, you’ll be fine.”

**“POETRY IS ABOUT GETTING AT THE CORE OF THINGS. IT’S ABOUT THE UNIVERSE OF THE DETAIL BUT ALSO ABOUT RHYTHM. AND FILM IS ALSO ABOUT RHYTHM, DETAIL AND FINDING THE ESSENCE IN EVERY MOMENT.”**

**VOICE UMANA**

With two staccato peals, a phone rings. A woman’s voice answers urgently: “Pronto? Pronto?”

So begins Ponti’s short film, *Voce Umana*. The story centers on a phone conversation between a widow and her lover, who is leaving her for another woman. Viewers are privy only to the woman’s side of the dialogue as she slowly breaks down while learning of his betrayal.

In Ponti’s adaptation, which was released in 2014, the woman is played by Loren, who effortlessly embodies her character, sliding between anxiety, outrage, strength and desperation.

“The dynamics between men and women have dramatically shifted from the time Cocteau wrote the piece,” Ponti said, “so I had to make sure the piece spoke to a contemporary audience but at the same time stayed true to itself.”

**A LIFELONG PROCESS**

Ponti’s first term at USC’s film school was intense but incredibly fruitful.

He recalled fondly that he focused on “surviving because they throw the camera at you and say, ‘Now, go make a movie.’” The emphasis quickly shifted to developing his voice as a storyteller.

“This is a lifelong process, finding your voice,” Ponti said. “It’s about tone; it’s about the themes that interest you; it’s about where your eye goes in a room; it’s about what life moments touch you, what music makes you cry. Finding your voice is understanding who you are.”

Revelation struck the first time he watched the *Three Colors* trilogy — the films *Blue, White and Red* — by renowned art-house director and screenwriter Krzysztof Kieślowski.

Lights, Camera, Action

Clockwise: Ponti and Loren at an airport in London in 1974; mother and son take a break from filming *Aurora*, a 1984 film the two co-starred in; on the set of *Aurora*; Ponti and his wife, actress Sasha Alexander, share a kiss in Capri, Italy; with his father, film producer Carlo Ponti, at the USC Commencement ceremony in 1994.
Social media and other digital channels are providing platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Snapchat, where nearly anyone can make his or her voice heard. The result is ample opportunity for each of us to reap the rewards — or consequences — of our online identities. *By Darrin S. Joy*

For many parents, the inexorable approach of puberty and those awkward teenage years sends a clear signal that it is time for “the talk.” The conversation in mind, however, has nothing to do with birds or bees.

The discussion centers instead on the dangers their tweens and teens face from a near ubiquitous source; one that they, having first encountered it as adults, are themselves struggling to navigate — the Internet.

Aside from the more obvious sinister threats — bullying and cyber-stalking among them — incautious travelers through the online world face the possibility of damaging their own real-world reputations through missteps in the digital realm.

**FOR THE RECORD**

In 2011, a student attending a public university in California found out just how swiftly a mistake can escalate to character-crushing levels when she posted a racist rant admonishing Asian students for speaking on cell phones in the library. The short and extremely cringeworthy YouTube video quickly went viral, garnering extensive coverage through the news media, as well. The student soon began receiving all manner of hostile messages, including threats against her life.

Despite removing the video from the Web and apologizing, the third-year political science major soon left the university to escape the negative attention. She has remained (wisely, one might agree) absent from the Internet and the public eye ever since.

While her motivations for posting the rant in the first place were never confirmed, it may be that she, like many of her peers, viewed YouTube as a platform for gaining some level of celebrity, even if only among her friends.

“There’s a whole layer of identity that people are encouraged to create online,” said Karen Sternheimer, associate professor (teaching) of sociology. Sternheimer’s research includes studies of the construction of celebrity culture and how celebrity has been manufactured from the early 20th century to the present. Her book *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream: Stardom and Social Mobility* (Routledge, 2011) considers how celebrity culture in the 20th and early 21st centuries reflects and reinforces notions of social mobility.

“I would guess that it’s not the majority of people who are...
really looking for fame,” she said. “I think there’s this instant gratification of posting something and being validated by others. ‘Oh, people are paying attention to what I have to say. People like my picture.’ ”

The student who created the so-called “Asians in the Library” video forgot or failed to realize that the World Wide Web is, by definition, available to a global audience, friendly or otherwise. If she was, in fact, aiming to fashion for herself an online celebrity identity, she would have done well to account for that extreme level of exposure.

“It reminds me of the work of a seminal sociologist, Erving Goffman, who talked about what he called — and this was in the middle of the 20th century, so he obviously was not talking about anything digital — but he talked about ‘frontstage behavior’ and ‘backstage behavior,’” said Sternheimer.

Goffman, considered by many in the field as one of the most important sociologists of the 20th century, argued that all actions are intended to present and maintain certain impressions of one’s self. Humans are actors on a stage performing for an audience, he maintained, and the only time they can be themselves and get rid of their role or identity in society is “backstage,” where no audience is present.

With the advent of the Internet, and social media in particular, backstage can more easily become frontstage rather suddenly — and possibly permanently — according to Sternheimer.

“Your backstage behavior is no longer just a fleeting moment; it can live on forever,” she said. At the same time, she added, it is possible that airing the more personal self may simply evolve to be the norm.

This evolution seems nearly inevitable as we become entwined with our digital personas.

IDENTITY IN CONTEXT

Eric Horowitz is a graduate student working toward his Ph.D. in psychology. His research focuses primarily on how people view the connection between their current and future identities and when, why and how that view influences behavior. Horowitz’s work, guided by Daphna Oyserman, Dean’s Professor of Psychology and co-director of the Mind and Society Center at USC Dornsife, springs from a theory called “identity-based motivation.”

“The key element of [the theory] is that people have all these different identities — you can be a mother and Hispanic and a student — but which identities come to mind and what they imply for action is shaped by the context,” explained Horowitz. This “dynamic construction” of identity determines how people behave.

For instance, if something in a person’s current context cues that person’s school identity, the set of behaviors that feel right will likely be different from a situation in which the context cues a social identity. At the same time, the specific behaviors associated with a given identity are themselves influenced by context.

“For example, a school identity might lead one to view studying as the right behavior when the context cues academic excellence,” Horowitz said, “but if the context cues school spirit or school community, a salient school identity could lead one to feel that the right behavior is attending a basketball game against a rival — a leisure behavior rather than an academic behavior.”

The near-overwhelming opportunities for interaction online weight this process, according to Horowitz. “I think the ubiquity of social media likely shapes both the frequency that your social identity is on your mind and what that social identity implies for behavior.”

But is social media’s influence on identity and behavior bad?

“It depends,” Horowitz said. “Obviously if you’re at work and you glance at your phone and see a Facebook notification, and that makes your work identity less salient, then that can be negative. Similarly, it could be bad if checking Facebook becomes an action that feels fitting for your work identity.”

But the opposite is also true.

“I know for me, I’m on Twitter a lot, but the people I follow tend to be academic, so that can have the opposite effect,” he said. Glancing at Twitter and seeing a post from a social psychologist could spur him from a restful state to working or thinking about his research. It may allow this kind of thinking to feel like a fitting behavior for non-work
identities. “In that sense it would be a good thing.
“It could go either way depending on exactly how you use these social networks and when you’re using them. But they certainly, I think, have the potential to cue different identities and behaviors at different times in ways that may not have happened before they existed.”

Horowitz suggests that some social media tools may actually prime people for success. He points to Facebook’s “On This Day” feature, which prompts users to repost an entry from the past, or the popular “Throwback Thursday” hashtag.
“It creates this greater awareness of the past and that your identity exists over time. It takes you out of the moment,” he said.
“There is research suggesting that seeing yourself existing more across time rather than in the moment is actually beneficial. When kids feel an inner sense of continuity with the future versions of themselves, they’re more likely to study.

And people are more likely to behave ethically when that happens, as well.
“I think in some sense Facebook’s total record of your entire history as a person may give you the sense that you do exist across time and it’s worth investing in your future exactly because you don’t only exist in the moment.”

Ultimately, that insight draws people back to their “real-world” lives.

“Your backstage behavior is no longer just a fleeting moment, it can live on forever.”

MAKING CONNECTIONS
Alumna Erica Berger is a writer, journalist and entrepreneur with extensive expertise in digital media. Named to Forbes magazine’s “30 Under 30” list in 2012, she credits her use of digital platforms for helping to build her career identity, though it was more a natural inclination than a plan of action.
“I worked hard, I used Twitter early and was very strategic about the hashtags I would use, the beats that I would tweet about,” said Berger, who graduated in 2009 with a bachelor’s degree in international relations. “But I never put out a digital ‘Roadmap of Erica’ saying, ‘By this time I would have this many followers; by this time I would like to change this job; by this time I’d like to be here in my career; by this time I’d like to launch a start-up.’ That’s never been the case.”

Berger is clear that the real value of her online presence lies in solidifying in-person connections.
“Of course, I’ve met a lot of the people whom I work with as well as friends online, but then it’s our offline experiences together that create trust,” she said. “Somebody the other day said to me, ‘I don’t see you that often in person but I feel like I know you because of the way that you share online.’ So it’s a blend.”

In the end, she said, “the Internet is more human and face-to-face than a lot of people think or believe it is. There are still so many relationships that are deepened offline.” It may just depend on how much you put yourself out there online.

FEAR OF THE NEW IS NOTHING NEW
So then, are parents, as they prep for “the talk,” justified in their fears about their children’s digital well-being?
Sternheimer sees this as a new spin on an age-old question that, as is usually the case, will take time to answer.
“When we’ve had changes in communication technologies, and there have obviously been a lot in the last several decades, it produces anxiety and fear about what will become of young people today,” she said. “And then eventually this starts to diminish as people become accustomed to it. Seeing that something isn’t a threat takes a little while.”

Sternheimer suggests that perhaps it is the older generation whose identities feel threatened, but that is just an inexorable part of the march of time.
“I think there’s a sense of people feeling obsolete; a time we knew and thought we understood is gone. Things don’t operate in the same way they used to and in a way we felt comfortable with, and maybe we think things were simpler then.”

But as we all know, she added, “things were always simpler in the past — except they weren’t.”

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But as we all know, she added, “things were always simpler in the past — except they weren’t.”
Before joining the USC Dornsife Department of Psychology in 1940, Joy Paul (J.P.) Guilford served as interim director of the psychology clinic at the University of Nebraska. There he administered intelligence tests to children. Having grown up comparing his own brothers’ unique skills and abilities, Guilford was curious about what, exactly, defines intelligence. IQ is determined by a linear model, but how is that accurate when peoples’ intellectual strengths vary so tremendously?

Out of these questions emerged Guilford’s “Structure of Intellect” (SOI) theory, which proposes a three-dimensional model of intelligence. “He had always believed that there are many important and relatively independent mental abilities,” wrote Andrew L. Comrey in his biographical memoir of Guilford (National Academy of Sciences, 1993). “Guilford was particularly aware of the absence of creativity measures in traditional intelligence testing.”

During his tenure at USC Dornsife from 1940-62, Guilford refined the SOI model, which he presented formally in Paris in 1955. The current theory comprises more than 180 intellectual abilities organized along three dimensions — operations, content, and products.

The operations dimension includes cognition, memory retention and evaluation. Content is concerned with semantic and behavioral aptitude, such as one’s facility with language and one’s ability to pick up on behavioral cues. The products dimension contains the results of applying operations to content — such as making predictions or anticipating consequences.

As Guilford and other researchers continued to investigate and uncover distinct mental abilities, he became convinced that children could be trained to be smarter. He coined the phrase “intelligence education is intelligent education.” Guilford’s ideas have been implemented through an education system that emphasizes critical thinking and creativity.

Guilford’s theory has also been applied by the late Mary Meeker, a USC graduate researcher in education who collaborated with Guilford. Even now, SOI learning materials are used in addressing learning disabilities in early childhood education and in screening students for admission to gifted and special education programs.

“When Guilford began his career, intelligence was the IQ, a monolithic table,” wrote Comrey. “Now, in large measure as a result of his research, intelligence has been shown to be incredibly complex. The hereditary limitations placed on human intelligence are seen now to be far less restrictive than previously assumed. Guilford’s concept of intelligence, if adequately heeded, will have a profound impact in the future on public perceptions about individual potential and upon the education of children.”

Joy Paul (J.P.) Guilford’s “Structure of Intellect” theory proposes a three-dimensional model of intelligence, with added emphasis on creativity and critical thinking.

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**Faculty News**

**GIAN MARIA ANNOVI,** assistant professor of French and Italian and gender studies, received a grant from The Creative Capital/Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program.

**ANDREW BACON,** assistant professor of philosophy, won the Sanders Prize in Metaphysics.

Professor Emerita of History **LOIS BANNER** was awarded the Fulbright Distinguished Chair at the University of Uppsala in Sweden.

**LISA BITEL,** professor of history and religion, was elected a fellow of the Medieval Academy of America.

**YAO-YI CHIANG,** assistant professor (research) of spatial sciences, won first place at the Computing Community Consortium-sponsored Blue Sky Ideas Track Competition at the ACM SIGSPATIAL International Conference on Advances in Geographic Information Systems 2015.

**IRENE CHIODO,** Gabilian Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences, was awarded a Mallinckrodt Foundation Grant to investigate the mechanisms of DNA repair in heterochromatin.

**GERALD DAVISON,** professor of psychology and gerontology, received the 2016 Distinguished Scientific Contribution in Psychology award from the California Psychological Association.

**JAHAN DAWLATY,** assistant professor of chemistry, received a Cottrell Scholar Award from the Research Corporation for Scientific Advancement.

**STEVEN FINKLE,** professor of biological sciences, was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology.

**DANA GIOIA,** Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture, was named California poet laureate.

**ANDREW LAKOFF,** associate professor of sociology, was awarded a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) at Stanford University.

**STEVEN LAMY,** professor of international relations and vice dean for academic programs, has been named to the Academic Advisory Board of the Warrior Scholar Project.

**PETER MANCALL,** Andrew W. Mellon Professor of the Humanities, Linda and Harlan Martens Director of the Early Modern Studies Institute, and professor of history and anthropology, and vice dean for the humanities and social sciences, received a Dyson Fellowship from the University of Melbourne in Australia to support a project titled “Culture Clashes in New Worlds: Exploration and Encounters Between Europeans and Indigenous.”

**BRENT MELOT,** assistant professor of chemistry, received a Cottrell Scholar Award from the Research Corporation for Scientific Advancement.

**MICHAEL MESSNER,** professor of sociology and gender studies, and chair of sociology, was honored with the Pacific Sociological Association’s 2016 Distinguished Scholarship Award.

**AMY OGATA,** professor and chair of art history, received the Society of Architectural Historians’ Alice Davis Hitchcock Book Award for Designing the Creative Child: Playthings and Places in Midcentury America (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

**G. K. SURYA PRAKASH,** George A. and Judith A. Olah Nobel Laureate Chair in Hydrocarbon Chemistry and professor of chemistry, received the 2015 Henri Moissan Prize for excellence in fluorine chemistry.

**OLEG PREZHDOD,** professor of chemistry and astronomy and physics, was awarded a Humboldt Research Award.

**REMO ROHS,** associate professor of biological sciences, chemistry, physics and astronomy, and computer science, received the ACS OpenEye Outstanding Junior Faculty Award in computational chemistry.

**NORBERT SCHWARZ,** Provost Professor of Psychology and Marketing and founding co-director of the USC Dornsife Mind and Society Center, has been awarded the 2015 Oswald Külpe Prize by the University of Würzburg in Germany.

**JACOB SOLL,** professor of history and accounting, was named among The Accountant magazine’s Timetric Accountancy Power 50.

**JENNIFER SWIFT,** associate professor (teaching) of spatial sciences, was inducted into the 2015–16 VIP Woman of the Year Circle by the National Association of Professional Women.

**DOUG CAPONE,** William and Julie Wrigley Chair in Environmental Studies, and professor and chair of biological sciences; **JED FUHRMAN,** McCulloch-Crosby Chair in Marine Biology and professor of biological sciences; and **DAVID HUTCHINS,** professors of biological sciences, were named sustaining fellows in the Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography’s inaugural class of fellows.

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**HONORS**

David St. John and Percival Everett are elected into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**David St. John,** University Professor of English and Comparative Literature and chair of English, and **Percival Everett,** Distinguished Professor of English, have been named fellows of the 236-year-old American Academy of Arts and Sciences, bringing the number of USC Dornsife academy fellows to 23.

St. John is the author of 11 collections of poetry. Lauded for writing that is captivating and brutally honest, he has been honored with many of the most significant prizes for poets over the course of his career, including the Rome Fellowship and the Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the O. B. Hardison Prize from The Folger Shakespeare Library and the George Drury Smith Lifetime Achievement Award from Beyond Baroque. His book *Study for the World’s Body* (Perennial, 1994) was nominated for The National Book Award in Poetry. Most recently he published *The Window* (Arctos Press, 2014).

Everett, a former chair of English, has earned acclaim for lyrical prose and for balancing a sharp satirical eye and hyper-literate sensibility with deeply felt exploration of character and a fearless approach to controversial issues related to race, class and sexuality. He has worked in a number of genres including the American western, metafiction, children’s literature and reimagining the Greek myth. He has published 25 books with Graywolf Press including *Wounded* (2005), for which he received the PEN USA 2006 Literary Award. His book *Erasure* (2001) earned the Academy Award for Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters as well as the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. —S.B.
Life at the Intersection

Through an authoritative new book, Ange-Marie Hancock offers a comprehensive intellectual history of intersectionality.

The United States, though led by an African American president, has witnessed the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. In Scandinavia, known worldwide as a progressive, socially oriented and egalitarian region, violence against women still persists. How do we reconcile these types of paradoxes?

Intersectionality, a framework for thinking about the ways in which inequalities related to race, gender, class and sexuality develop, is an excellent place to begin to understand the different factors involved, according to Ange-Marie Hancock, associate professor of political science, gender studies and sociology.

Hancock, who has been exploring the subject for nearly 20 years, provides an in-depth look at the issue in her new book, _Intersectionality: An Intellectual History_ (Oxford University Press, 2016).

“I think one of the reasons intersectionality is compelling is because it gives us a contemporary language to talk about why so many things have changed and yet so many things stay the same,” she said.

In our society, social and political power is conferred through categories of identity. Rather than simply looking at inequality as a relationship between those at the center and those on the margins, Hancock said, intersectionality maps the relative ways in which identity politics creates power.

In most popular usage, intersectionality is equated with a notion of individual identity, but Hancock said it’s also about how people in general interact with others and with institutions and structures. Identity politics is just the beginning.

“I wanted to start a conversation so we could really start to think about putting some boundaries around what is intersectionality and what is not,” she said.

Hancock believes that intersectionality is a hopeful framework that contributes to solidarity among groups.

“When you start looking at combinations of privilege and disadvantage, you start to overcome your own willful blindness that doesn’t see how other people might be in a position to be in solidarity with you. You see that people you never thought you’d have anything in common with are actually suffering substantively from the same kind of issue, and it starts to reveal unlikely allies.”

Hancock’s book is the first in a series of two. The second book, _Scaling up Stories for Justice_, will explore the use of stories and narrative in building social movements for change. —L.P.
From Free Love to Well-Set Table

The unlikely story of a well-known brand’s rise from a 19th-century radical religious sect.

Oneida. For most Americans the name conjures up fine silverware. Few are aware that behind this secular symbol of middle-class respectability lies the story of a 19th-century religious community endowed with radical notions of equality, sex and religion. In Oneida (Picador, 2016), Ellen Wayland-Smith, assistant professor (teaching) of writing, traces this extraordinary history through the community’s founder, John Humphrey Noyes, from whom she is descended.

Amid the fervor of religious revival, Noyes attracted a group of followers seeking an alternative to Puritanism. In 1848, he established a revolutionary community in rural New York that aimed to achieve a sin-free life through God’s grace, while espousing equality of the sexes and encouraging sex with multiple partners via “complex marriage.”

“Oneida tells the story of how a communo-capitalist, free-love religious sect, over the space of a century, transformed into one of the country’s premier silverware manufacturers — Oneida Community Limited — the very picture of middle-class propriety and the white-picket-fence American dream,” Wayland-Smith said. “Oneida was very much a product of its time. In my book, I place the community in the context of the Second Great Awakening and the expansion of American capitalism, while highlighting Noyes’ incorporation of communism, utopianism, eugenics and spiritualism.” —S.E.

Alumni News

1960s

DAVID GARCIA (B.A., international relations, ’68) retired after more than 47 years with the U.S. government including work at the Office of Management & Budget, House Government Operations Committee, Peace Corps, Export-Import Bank of the U.S., and the International Broadcasting Bureau. As his second public-service career, he drives a school bus for Fairfax County Public Schools in VA.

1970s

BEN EUKANKS (B.A., history and social science, ’78) was appointed a 2016 state director for the California Association of REALTORS Board of Directors to serve on the investment housing, legislative and public policy committees. He is a real estate officer and principal of Aloha Royal Hawaiian Realty in Marina del Rey, CA.

In November 2015, DONALD LAPLANTE (B.A., political science and journalism, ’76) was re-elected to his 10th term on the Board of Education of the Downey Unified School District in Downey, CA. First elected in 1979, he is now the longest-serving K-12 district board member in Los Angeles County.

MARTIN MCDERMUT (B.A., economics, ’72) was named vice president and chief financial officer of Applied Micro Circuits Corporation.

JOSEPH MORRIS (B.S., physical sciences, ’79) retired on June 30, 2015, after serving 31 years on active duty in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. He retired as chief of the Department of Medicine as well as chief of Infectious Disease Service at Madigan Army Medical Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, WA. At his retirement ceremony, he received the distinguished Legion of Merit honoring his exceptional career.

1980s

STEPHEN HUBLER (B.A., international relations, ’82; M.A., international relations, ’86) is serving as senior coordinator, Office of Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Affairs, at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. He oversees humanitarian assistance support for 3.2 million internally displaced Iraqis and refugee resettlement operations for Iraqi and Syrian refugees.

Emmy Award-winning journalist PETER MUSURILIAN (B.A., political science and broadcast journalism, ’83) won an RTN Golden Mike award for editing his Armenian genocide documentary entitled The 100-year-old Survivor.

The latest play written by and starring SANDRA TSING LOH (MPW, ’84), The Madwoman in the Volvo, debuted in January at the South Coast Repertory Theater in Costa Mesa, CA. The play was adapted from her memoir of the same title.

1990s

EDWARD CHYUN (B.A., political science, ’99) was selected as co-chair of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association’s Labor and Employment Committee. He was also recently appointed to serve on the Ohio Supreme Court’s Language Services Committee.

LINDA JENKINS (B.A., art history and journalism, ’97) was named editor of NWLawyer Magazine, the official publication of the Washington State Bar Association.

ROBERTO LARIOS (B.A., Spanish literature and linguistics, ’97) was named chief operating officer at the City Employees Club of Los Angeles.

Continued on page 60.
Soul of the Machine

Poet and English alumna Barbara Duffey explores the intersection of literature and science.

Writer Barbara Duffey ’02 has long been mesmerized by machines — both the gears and levers sort as well as the mortal, warm-blooded kind.

Her work explores both the universe of the body and the larger cosmos. Her essays and poetry have been a way both to pose and to explore incisive life questions.

“The things that tend to inspire me often come from science,” she said.

Duffey studied with Professor of English and former California Poet Laureate Carol Muske-Dukes, an experience she characterizes as transformative.

“I learned that poetry can be beautiful at the sonic level. You can use simple words and put them in the right order and it will be beautiful, and people will have a transporting experience.”

Now assistant professor of English at Dakota Wesleyan University, her recent book, Simple Machines (The Word Works, 2016) won the Washington Prize. She earned a National Endowment for the Arts’ Creative Writing Fellowship in 2014.

Duffey plans to use some of the fellowship time to start a new project, one inspired by her struggles to have a child.

“Right now, I imagine that [the book] is going to be called ‘Cultivar.’ A cultivar is a particular species of plant that exists only in cultivation,” Duffey said. “So, I’m using that as a kind of a metaphor for my son. I had this son in cultivation, instead of in the wild. So it’s largely about my imaginations of all the things that can go wrong with my son and trying to control my imagination.”

The first poem will contemplate “all of those many different universes out there — you know, the quantum mechanics idea of the multiverse,” she said. “But that poem is sort of a poem of thanksgiving. I am thankful I lived in this version of the world. The one in which I get the baby.” —L.G.
Thriller King

Alumnus, professor and author discusses how his psychology career helped his success as a writer.

In 1974, Jonathan Kellerman, then a doctoral student in psychology at USC Dornsife, had an epiphany. Driving to his internship at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, he passed an antique store advertising cheap books.

“For a dime, he bought a used copy of Ross Macdonald’s The Underground Man. “I thought, ‘This is what I want to do, write crime novels,’ ” said Kellerman, clinical professor of psychology.

In February, Kellerman, who earned his Ph.D. in 1974, published Breakdown (Ballantine Books, 2016), the latest installment in his best-selling series featuring Alex Delaware, a child psychologist who helps police solve crimes.

Kellerman, who also trained as a child psychologist, published the first in the series in 1985. It became a best-seller. Since then he’s written 47 books and says he has ideas for 60 more.

Kellerman never intended for fiction to be his career. It wasn’t until 1990, with five best-sellers under his belt, that he decided to give up his successful psychology practice and concentrate on writing.

“As a psychologist, I was interested in developing predictive rules about human behavior. As a crime novelist I'm interested in people who transgress those rules.”

Kellerman’s novels mostly take place in L.A. — some scenes are even set at USC.

“People come to L.A. to reinvent themselves, making it a fascinating place to be a novelist,” he said.

One reason the city is the setting for so many iconic crime novels, Kellerman argues, is its legendary climate. “Even criminals stay indoors when it’s cold outside,” he said. “In L.A., you can get into trouble 365 days a year.” —S.B.
Activist Actress

Alumna Denise Nicholas’ involvement in the civil rights movement led to a career as an actress and writer.

Denise Nicholas was 19 years old when she interrupted her studies at the University of Michigan to travel to the Deep South to join the civil rights movement.

The year was 1964 — Freedom Summer — and she joined the fledgling Free Southern Theater to act with the company as it performed all over Mississippi and Louisiana.

Her experiences gave rise, years later, to her novel Freshwater Road (Agate Publishing, 2005), which tells of a young woman who volunteers to register voters in the 1960s South.

“The idea to write something focused on the civil rights period started a long time ago,” Nicholas said. “I was so branded by my experiences and all I learned while living down there.”

Nicholas had previously enjoyed a decades-long career in television, theater and film, including roles on the popular TV shows Room 222 and In the Heat of the Night.

Despite these achievements, Nicholas was committed to finishing the college degree she had started two decades earlier.

In 1985, she enrolled at USC Dornsife, earning a degree in humanities with an emphasis in drama two years later. “One day in class the Free Southern Theater was mentioned in our textbook, so I got to stand up and talk about it. The students’ jaws were dropping — I was the oldest person in the class!” — L.P.

ANN LEBEDEFF (Ph.D., physical education, ’90) a professor of physical education and athletics and women’s tennis head coach at Pomona-Pitzer Colleges, was honored with the 2013 Intercolligate Tennis Association Meritorious Service Award, presented by Conant Leadership.

SILVIA MAIER (M.A., political science, ’99; Ph.D., political science, ’01) clinical assistant professor at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University, co-launched Women Across Frontiers, a quarterly digital magazine dedicated to furthering gender equality around the globe.

Kindergarten teacher FRANCEIL MASI (B.A., English and creative writing, ’97) partnered with a student’s parents to form a business called Indy Plush, which designs and creates stuffed animals and donates a portion of the profit to wildlife advocacy groups.

The American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering will induct MICHAEL REGNIER (Ph.D., biology, ’91) Washingtion Research Foundation Endowed Professor of Bioengineering at the University of Washington, to its College of Fellows.

STACIE STRONG (MPW, ’90) was named the Manley O. Hudson Professor of Law at the University of Missouri. Strong specializes in international and comparative law, with a particular focus on international arbitration.

BICH NGOC CAO (B.A., political science and print journalism, ’04) was elected president of the Board of Library Commissioners for the city of Los Angeles.

EMMANUEL CAUDILLO (B.A., political science, ’06) was named a 2015 40 Under 40 honoree by Leadership Arlington. 40 Under 40 recognizes emerging leaders who demonstrate impact personally and/or professionally through their exceptional leadership in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region.

Afghanistan combat veteran NIC DANNA (B.A., political science, ’02), 65th Regional Support Group deputy command judge advocate, was named director of the Office of Military Legal Assistance for the Nevada Attorney General’s Office.

Youth on the Move International Educators inducted ALTHEA IBERRALL (MPW, ’01) and five other members of her family into its Hall of Fame.

ISAIAH LESLIE (B.A., political science, ’02) was recently appointed chairman of the Irvine Chamber of Commerce.

The National Association of Professional Women inducted JESSIE MAHN (B.A., history, ’03) into its VIP Professional Woman of the Year Circle.

TYLER MAINS (B.A., biological sciences, ’09), a fourth-year medical student at Johns Hopkins University, was recognized by the Baltimore Ravens football team for his work as founding director of Medical Education Resources Initiative for Teens, which provides courses, medical student mentorships and paid summer internships to sophomores in city high schools.

VICTORIA SANCHEZ (B.A., political science and broadcast journalism, ’07) joined the KUSA 9NEWS team in Denver, CO, as a reporter. She is a four-time Radio and Television News Association Golden Mike winner and a three-time Emmy-nominated journalist.

DALLAS WOODBURN (B.A., creative writing, ’09) had her one-act play, Woman, Running Late, in a Dress, selected as a winner of the inaugural Word-Wave Playwriting Competition. It was performed at the Boathouse Theater in South Lake Tahoe, CA, in October 2015.

2010s

CRISTINA GROSSU (B.A., sociology, ’11) was recognized as one of Charlotte, NC’s “rising stars for real estate brokers.”

DIEUWERTJE “D.J.” KAST (B.S., biological sciences, ’11; M.S., marine environmental biology, ’11; M.A., teaching, ’14) was selected for the 2016 Forbes “30 Under 30 in Science” list honoring her STEM education career at USC Dornsife’s Joint Educational Project. She was also accepted to the PolarTREC program, through which she will travel to the Arctic to conduct research on the microbial ecology of the tundra.

GREG WOODBURN (B.A., history, ’12; MBA, ’15) became a Clinton-Orfaile-Brittening Fellow at the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI), serving as a Working Group Manager with CGI America. He works to empower youth through education, athletics and access to opportunity.
A Sousa-phony Exposed

Alumnus Dave Detwiler ‘84 solves a century-old debate about who created the first sousaphone.

Vacationing at the Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan, tuba player Dave Detwiler noticed that the music school claimed to have the original sousaphone, made by C.G. Conn.

Through curiosity-driven research, Detwiler — who earned a bachelor’s degree in social sciences and communications — found another sousaphone believed to be the first. Made by J.W. Pepper, a bitter rival of Conn’s, the new contender was housed in California — not Michigan.

So, which came first? Detwiler discovered two pieces of evidence pointing to Pepper’s horn.

The first: A Pepper Journal from 1895 referenced the sousaphone built by Pepper — years before Conn’s instrument existed. The other was a quote from John Phillip Sousa saying the sousaphone received its name through a suggestion made by J.W. Pepper.


“My whole life is devoted to leading people to truth,” said Detwiler, who is now a pastor. “I’m thrilled to have helped clarify the truth about this often-maligned member of the tuba family.” —L.H.
**Visionary Leader**

**USC President Emeritus Steven B. Sample helped place USC among the nation’s elite institutions.**

Steven Browning Sample, who served as USC’s 10th president, died on March 29, 2016. He was 75.

During Sample’s tenure from 1991 to 2010, USC became a highly selective undergraduate university, recruited many prominent faculty, completed what was at the time the largest fundraising campaign ever in higher education and built partnerships in local communities.

“So many of USC’s successes, so much of our university’s current stature, can be traced back to Dr. Sample’s dynamic leadership, keen foresight and extraordinary prudence,” said USC President C. L. Max Nikias. “Dr. Sample stood over our university — and led our Trojan Family — as it began its singular transformation, and for this we should all be grateful.”

John Mork, chair of the USC Board of Trustees, noted Sample’s visionary drive. “If there were a tag line for his leadership style, it would be ‘Never let up.’ And the results were nothing short of spectacular.”

After he retired as president, Sample and his wife, Kathryn, remained active in the university’s life.

“For Kathryn and me, the presidency of USC has been far more than just a job,” Sample said when announcing his retirement in 2009. “It has been a calling, an all-consuming passion to move this university ahead further and faster than any other university in the United States.”

Associate Emeritus Professor of English **ROBERT DILLIGAN**, died on Jan. 11, 2016. He was 75.

An expert on Victorian poetry, Dilligan helped pioneer the application of technology to literary research. He taught classes in science fiction and seminars on Keats and Tennyson, while spearheading the university’s expansion into digital humanities.

“His love of science manifested itself in the pioneering role he played in connecting the study of literature with computers to analyze writers and texts,” said Leo Braudy, University Professor and Leo S. Bing Chair in English and American Literature.

“Bob saw the potential of computers to do things that in the past had been done by hand. What was remarkable was that he did this at a time when most of us had rudimentary or nonexistent computer skills.”

**ROBERT GUY DOUGLAS.**

Professor Emeritus of Earth Sciences, died on Jan. 26, 2016. He was 78.

Dean of natural sciences and mathematics at USC Dornsife from 1986-94, Douglas was chair of the Earth Sciences Department from 1981-85. Douglas’ research focused on marine paleoenvironments, paleoclimates, ocean history, biostratigraphy and micropaleontology.

“Bob was ahead of his time as a ‘quantitative’ paleoceanographer and is recognized as someone who helped the field expand and thrive,” said Chair and Professor of Earth Sciences and Environmental Studies William Berelson.

Douglas made a positive impact on his colleagues and the lives of many students and collaborators. “Bob provided an outstanding example of how excellence can be accomplished at a university,” said David Bottjer, professor of earth sciences, biological sciences and environmental studies.

**PHYLIS FRANZKE.**

associate professor (teaching) of writing, died on Jan. 3, 2016. She was 65.

Franzek joined the USC Dornsife Writing Program in 1997 and was instrumental in developing its curriculum. She also coordinated orientation sessions for new teaching faculty members and mentored and advised continuing faculty.

Writing Professor William Feuer, met Franzek in 1988.

“From the outset she possessed in abundance qualities that academics and teachers usually take years to develop,” he said. “She was fiercely intelligent, uncommonly articulate, hard-working, brave and kind.”

Added Writing Program Director John Holland: “Phyllis was a remarkable teacher, colleague and friend.”

**ELIZABETH GARRETT.**

provost and senior vice president of USC from 2010-15, died on March 6, 2016. She was 52.

Garrett joined USC in 2003 as vice provost and Frances R. and John J. Duggan Professor of Law.

As provost, Garrett recruited transformative faculty members in fields such as neuroscience, the humanities and the social sciences. The USC Strategic Vision, “Matching Deeds to Ambitions,” was developed under her leadership.

Most recently, Garrett served as the first woman president of Cornell University.

“Beth served on my senior leadership team for over a decade and proved herself to be a remarkably dynamic leader with a singular gift for inspired, innovative thinking,” said USC President C. L. Max Nikias.

“So many of us recall her remarkable energy, her tenacious commitment to her work and her deep passion for our community.”

**MARK KANN.**

Professor Emeritus of Political Science and History and Associates Chair Emeritus in Social Science, died on Jan. 5, 2015. He was 68.

Kann was a political theorist.
specializing in early American political thought and gender studies who joined USC Dornsife in 1975. A recognized expert in the field, he consulted with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and was a monthly columnist for the Los Angeles Herald Examiner in the mid-1980s.

Revered as an instructor, Kann received several of USC’s most prestigious teaching honors during his 38 years at the university. He was deeply involved in the Thematic Option and Gender Studies programs, and he founded the Center for Excellence in Teaching, serving as its director for three years. He also established an academic culture initiative aimed at showing students and faculty that “learning has no boundaries.”

Said his son, Simon Kann ‘75, “My father started something that will continue to expand and assist people well beyond his time.”

Professor Emeritus of International Relations ARTHUR “ROGER” SWEARINGEN died on Aug. 27, 2015. He was 92.

Sweeringen founded a USC institute devoted to research on communist strategy and propaganda and brought his expertise to national television during the Cold War, moderating the documentary series, Communism: Myth vs. Reality.

A former World War II intelligence corps officer and top aide to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Sweeringen held the rank of captain and served as an interrogator of prisoners of war. Steven Lamy, vice dean for academic programs and professor of international relations, said, “Rodger was an expert on the Soviet Union and was part of a community of scholars that included the likes of Henry Kissinger who watched every Soviet move, wrote thoughtful analysis and made recommendations to United States leaders.”

After reading Swearingen’s book The Soviet Union and Postwar Japan (Hoover Institution Press, 1978), President Nixon praised it as “an indispensable analysis for policy makers.” Nixon bought copies for every member of Congress to read.

STEPHEN MADIGAN, associate professor of psychology, died on Oct. 13, 2015. He was 73.

Throughout his 46-year career at USC Dornsife, Madigan was an avid scholar in the areas of cognition and memory and in the study of human intelligence. He is remembered for his fierce dedication, critical mind and dry wit.

Madigan helped revitalize the field of verbal learning and memory. His recent research on deficits in visual memory storage in individuals who later developed Alzheimer’s disease, reported in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, could lead to diagnostic tests to indicate who is at risk and in need of preventive treatment.

“Stephen was one of the most knowledgeable and serious scholars on human memory in America,” said David Walsh, associate professor of psychology. Emphasizing Madigan’s delight in teaching, Walsh added, “Stephen worked harder than anyone I know to provide students with cutting-edge courses on whatever topic he covered. He made a significant contribution to the education of many of USC’s smartest students.”

ZDENEK VOREL, professor of mathematics, died on March 3, 2016. He was 86.

Vorel began teaching at USC Dornsife in 1969 as a visiting associate professor of mathematics. He joined the faculty full time in 1972 and was promoted to professor in 1985. He retired in 2014.

“He was an excellent colleague, with a particularly gentle personality,” said Francis Bonahon, professor of mathematics. Vorel’s research focus lay in mathematical theory of electric circuits, nonlinear ordinary differential equations, control theory, differential equations in Banach spaces, functional differential equations and continuous dependence of fixed points of nonlinear operations.

“USC gave him a professional home wherein he could share and grow his work in mathematics, which he found to be a beautiful and challenging language,” said his daughter, Veronika Vorel.

Professor of Mathematics Robert Sacker knew Vorel for 48 years. “He will be remembered as a true old-world gentleman, polite and charming and always there when needed.”

Larger than Life

Sinologist Eugene Cooper inspired students with his fierce intellect and outspoken personality.

Eugene “Gene” Cooper, professor of anthropology, died on Oct. 18, 2015. He was 68.

In a career at USC Dornsife that spanned 35 years, “Coops,” as he was affectionately known, won the respect and affection of numerous students to whom he generously devoted his time, vast knowledge and unrelenting honesty.

A sinologist who specialized in Chinese folk custom, he was also an expert on Chinese civilization; the Chinese diaspora; economic anthropology/political economy; marriage, family and kinship; peasant society; popular culture; and American folklore. He consulted with businesses, industry leaders and legal professionals on Chinese rural industrial production, the import/export sector, and Chinese habit and custom.

Cooper spoke fluent Mandarin and Cantonese and was among the first foreigners to enter China after the Cultural Revolution.

Gary Seaman, associate professor and chair of anthropology, described Cooper as the lodestone of USC Dornsife’s Department of Anthropology for 35 years.

“As the poster tacked up outside his office door with the triumvirate of Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund founding fathers proclaimed: ‘Everyone talks about the weather: NOT US.’ Cooper never talked about the weather. He was a serious man and a serious thinker. Our deliberations in the department will be less profound without him.”
IN MY OPINION

Never Too Late

Alfonso Gonzales reflects on being a member of the Class of 2016 and becoming USC’s oldest graduate.

Here he tells his story to Susan Bell.

My first memory is of my grandmother. I’m 4 years old and she’s wearing a long dress and cooking tortillas in the boarding house she ran in the Lompoc, Calif., mining camp where I was born.

Now, I am four years shy of my 100th birthday.

But — unexpectedly — I’m a student again. I thought I graduated in 1953, but when I recently discovered I was one unit short of my degree I was excited. Learning has always been important to me, and this meant I could return to USC.

I’m what they called a “Depression Kid” — I grew up during the Great Depression. My parents had fled the Mexican Revolution for California. My father worked on the railroads before joining the mining camp. We lived there until I was 8, then moved to Boyle Heights. That’s where I first tasted spaghetti and saw the first talking picture in East Los Angeles. Then we lived in Redondo Beach, and when I was 10, we moved into a cottage in Hermosa Beach. I’ve lived there, in the same house, for the last 86 years. At night, I lie in bed and reminisce about my life.

Growing up, because of racism, I suffered a persecution complex. That’s very injurious to a human being so I overcame it. Thankfully we’re making progress on racism. I look at my own descendants, who are American, Spanish, Mexican American, German, Irish, Salvadoran, Native American and indigenous. It’s a wonderful mix.

I was 12 when I got my first summertime job picking strawberries grown by Japanese gardeners in Torrance. I saw the gardeners taken away to internment camps after Pearl Harbor. Some were my friends. All that land is built over now.

I joined the U.S. Navy in 1942 and trained as a medic, serving at Okinawa in 1945. After the war, I attended evening classes at USC. I was the first in my family to go to college. The old Red Car line ran along Vermont, and when we came to campus we wore suits and neckties.

During the day I worked in my brothers’ excavation business, but then I had the idea of preparing soils for nurseries and landscapers. Where did I get the knowledge? At USC. I took courses in chemistry, physics, botany and bacteriology because initially I wanted to be a doctor. Instead, I built a successful business supplying soil throughout the South Bay. I could’ve gone into construction, but I never wanted lots of money, just enough to support my mother and for my old age.

Returning to USC makes me feel good. Seeing young students from different countries has changed me from being a pessimist about the state of the world to being an optimist. There weren’t many Latinos when I first came to USC. But now there are lots, and many foreign students, too. That makes me happy.

Universities are about leadership, and USC students will become the leaders, not only of the United States, but of the world.

I’ve seen many changes in my lifetime, the biggest being the advent of computers. We didn’t have them when I was a student the first time around. We had to take notes and use a dictionary. When I first saw cell phones, I said, “This isn’t going to last, it’s a fad.” But it wasn’t a fad. I made a big mistake. Now you kids have the world’s knowledge at your fingertips. The technological revolution is amazing. And it’s just beginning. I’m excited to be here to witness this.

I hope seeing me at 96 years old trying to complete my “elusive college degree” will inspire younger students to keep on learning; it’s never too late. If you have knowledge, no one can take it away from you. That’s worth more than money.

Youngsters are optimistic, but older folks sometimes aren’t. We grew up in a different time when there was always an enemy. The only real enemy is ignorance. But thanks to USC students, I’m optimistic about the world. I know it’s in good hands.

A firm believer in lifelong learning, Alfonso Gonzales completed his degree in zoology by taking a specially crafted one-unit elective: a guided autobiography in which he explored self-identity while writing his personal story.
New Perspectives

Launched in Spring 2016, the “Viewpoint” opinion series both supports and showcases USC Dornsife faculty members’ insights and expertise. Explore the opinions and personal observations of these frontline scholars as they consider some of the pressing and complex issues facing our communities, nation and world. New columns are posted regularly on the USC Dornsife website and have garnered placement in such major news outlets as the San Francisco Chronicle, The New York Times and Forbes.

Read the columns at dornsife.usc.edu/viewpoint
Life Moment

LAUREN SANTO DOMINGO '98 (SEE PAGE 10)