

More Than A

Menace

Never underestimate the power of a

dyke

Especially in numbers...

Like a swarm...

IMAGINE...

a place where loving women is the norm.



Sapphic Students detail their experience starting student organization, Lavender Menace

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Lavender Menace, an organization for all women-loving-women and women-loving-people, was brought to fruition this year by co-creators Chanise Kimbley and Emily Moores.

The organization meets bi-weekly on Thursdays to connect by playing games, watching movies and studying. Lavender Menace was created with the intention of providing sapphics with a place to exist, free from the expectations of a culture that normalizes heterosexuality and excludes queerness.

The president of Lavender Menace, Kimbley, is a transfer student and sophomore at Ohio University studying psychology. Kimbley said they got the idea from their old college, Northern Kentucky University, where there was a similar group to Lavender Menace.

"It was a group for sapphics to hang out," Kimbley says. "And I was really excited about it, and I loved that group a lot so when I transferred, I was a little disheartened to find out there were no sapphic groups on campus at OU."

The turnout for the first meeting on Sep. 1 was overwhelming. Alesha Davis, a junior studying journalism and English and the treasurer of Lavender Menace, expected a slow start to the new club but was greeted by more than 30 new members.

The response from members has been fiercely positive. Adelle Stratton, a sophomore studying history, joined at the beginning of the year and likens the organization to lesbian spaces in past decades.

"It reminds me of lesbian clubs in the 80s," Stratton says. "[And] things like that, where that was the only place that lesbians could really meet at; it feels more like a university version of that, especially with them falling out nowadays."

The denial of safe space for lesbians is seen throughout history, and it was the basis of the Lavender Menace protest in 1970.

““ It feels safest and most comfortable for folks who are still navigating their identity...”

MICAH MCCAREY
DIRECTOR OF LGBTQ CENTER

Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, made homophobic comments about queer women in a *New York Times* interview. Friedan preached that lesbianism posed a threat to feminism.

Friedan referred to lesbianism as a lavender menace. In response, women from Radicalesbians, Gay Liberation Front and other intersectional feminist groups banded together to protest the National Organization for Women (NOW). This protest and the reclaiming of the label Lavender Menace is the inspiration for OU's new group.



Emily Moores is the vice president of the new organization on campus, Lavender Menace.

Ariel Williams, a sophomore studying plant biology and the assistant social media manager of Lavender Menace, says that as a queer woman, she observes a detachment of lesbians from the queer community.

"There is a bit of separation in the LGBTQ community when it comes to sapphic identifying and the rest of the community," Williams says. "It's not as noticeable, but it's definitely there."

Micah McCarey, the director of the LGBTQ Center since 2019, says he is excited to welcome Lavender Menace at OU. The LGBTQ Center is an inclusive space for all queer students; however, McCarey agrees that a dedicated safe space for sapphic people is important.

"It feels safest and most comfortable for folks who are still navigating their identity to be in a space that's free of folks who might be perceived as potentially oppressive or representative of oppressive groups," McCarey says.

Lavender Menace is not the first lesbian club on OU's campus, but the Swarm of Dykes (SOD) might have been. Created in 1997, SOD chose a shocking name to garner attention to help humanize the queer community. According to advertisements for the club, "SOD is a group that works to challenge injustices in the system through creative resistance."

Without losing its social aspect, Lavender Menace acknowledges the politics involved with LGBTQ identities by having open space and discussion for them.

"There's more of a focus on you know, women's issues and transgender issues, really specific on the gender portion because what I find in bigger LGBTQ spaces, a lot of it is still centered on masculine ideals," Davis says.

Moores, the vice president of Lavender Menace and a junior studying film, says that "queerness is inherently political." And that the organization seeks to educate others in its own way.

Moore says that while they would be interested in including more political action into the organization, there is more emphasis on creating a social atmosphere. This is the key difference between the SOD and Lavender Menace. The purpose of SOD was to create controversy and to bring attention to taboo subjects. However, SOD started to decrease in membership as gay rights issues on campus started to lose relevance.

Since the 1970s lesbians have watched their spaces dwindle. “I remember looking at this statistic recently, where for every 10 gay bars, there’s like one sapphic bar,” Davis says.

According to data collected in a 2019 report by Greggor Mattson, an associate sociology professor at Oberlin College, out of over 60,000 bars in the United States, only 21 of those are designed for sapphics.

Though being unapologetically queer is becoming more common, young queer people at OU still enjoy a space where they can escape judgments, even if those judgments are not as apparent to those outside of the community.

“Having a space for specifically sapphic identities, it’s monumental,” Stratton says. “Because we don’t have those. We don’t have those spaces normally in everyday life. And when we do have those spaces, they’re normally invaded.”

Stratton is referring to straight people occupying queer spaces. Their presence, no matter the intention, inherently makes the space no longer safe for queer people. Lavender Menace is unique in the way it is inclusive, while also providing a sanctuary for the historically oppressed.

Even though lesbian spaces tend to disappear, the need for them does not. Without a place to be open and safe, there is loneliness associated with not having easy access to others with similar experiences.

Stratton’s first year at OU was isolating, they said, because the way to connect with other queer people was through symbols such as flags or apps.

“That’s the easiest way to specifically find other people,” Stratton says. “We didn’t have a space or things like that until this year.”

The executive members of Lavender Menace also describe difficulties connecting with others on campus, as well as incidents of hate. Moore says there are situations where they had been verbally attacked for being queer.

“I was simply sitting and eating pizza once and someone called me a dyke,” Moore says. “I was like, I don’t know you, I’m just eating my pizza.”

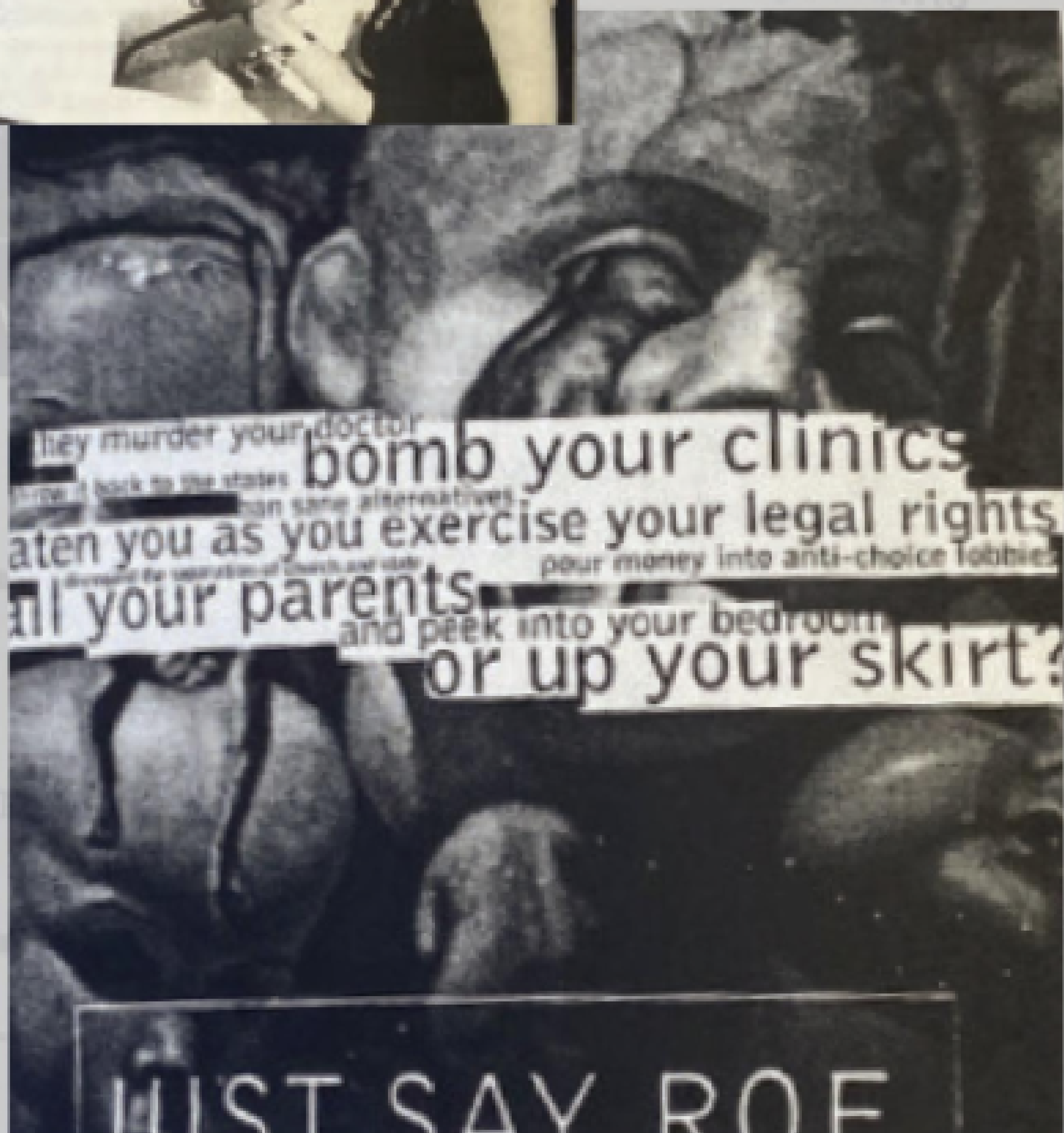
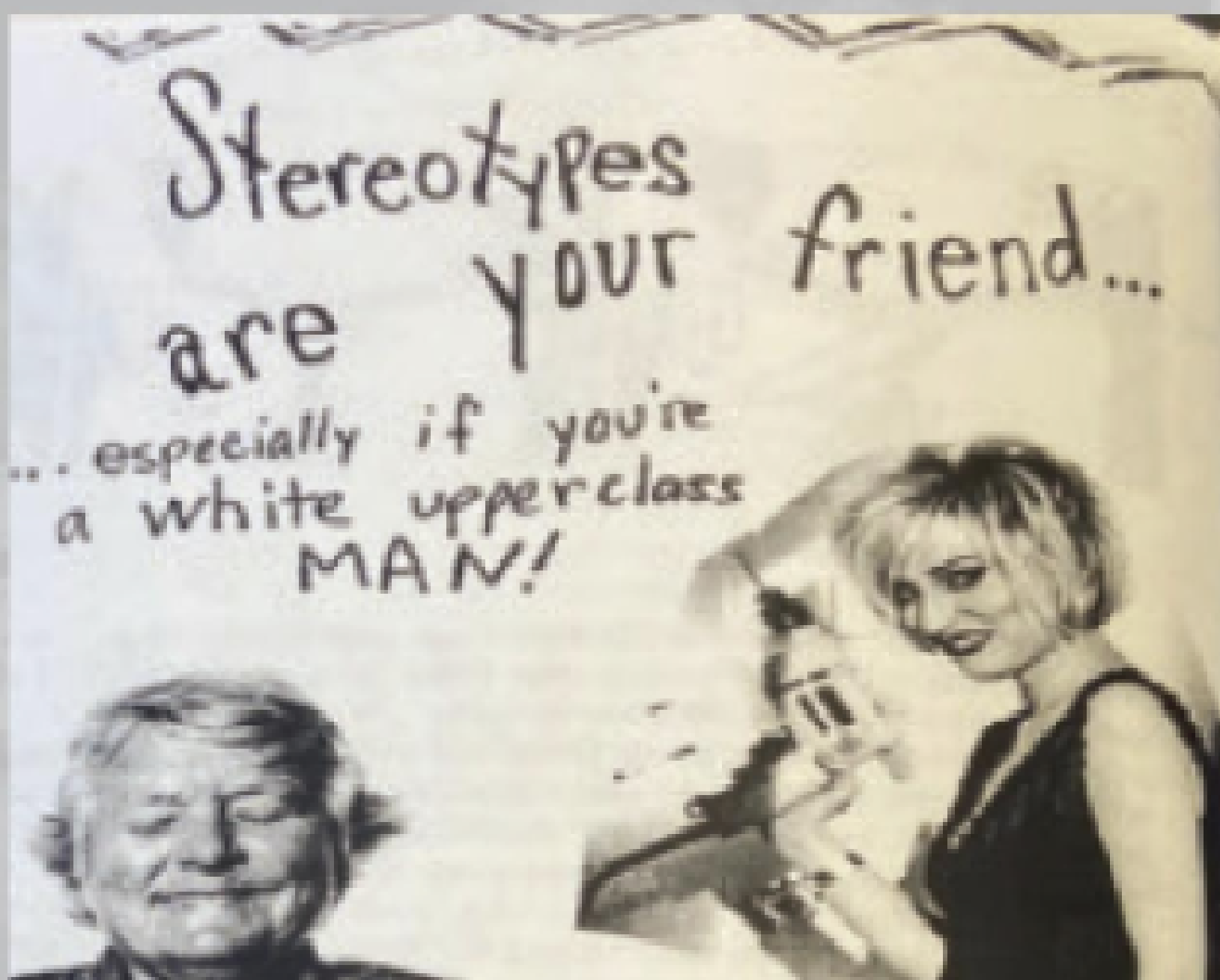
Davis says her experience on campus has been “bizarre” and provided an anecdote about a man whom she rejected.

“He said, and I quote, ‘lesbian? I thought you were a woman,’”

Davis says.

Lesbianism does not erase someone’s womanhood. And while womanhood doesn’t equate to lesbianism, the ideology that women and lesbians are completely unrelated identities has haunted lesbians like a proverbial poltergeist.

This type of ignorance can be experienced or observed every day by queer people. Debilitating circumstances, such as growing up in a homophobic household, are not uncommon for young queer people. Williams says before coming to OU,



"I just wasn't really surrounded by other LGBTQ people," Williams says. "So, coming to campus and meeting Chan and starting Lavender [Menace] and meeting other women loving women, it's definitely helped with finding my people, and my chosen family."

OU students fight for even more identity-specific safe spaces to assure all students feel safe and understood away from any toxic forces at home.

There's a fundamental difference between general queer spaces and ones designated for distinct identity. There are experiences that can only be attributed to a certain identity or label. Lavender Menace distinguishes these unique perspectives as a motivation for the club.

It is a space made by sapphics, for sapphics, and the members can unashamedly speak about their identities.

"Lavender Menace has become a space where you just meet people like you," Stratton says. "And it's nice to have that community because a lot of like straight girls, they have those sororities where they have that sisterhood."

The opportunity, Stratton also says, allows for members of Lavender Menace to realize they are not alone in their experiences.

Lavender Menace is a place for sapphics to be unapologetic for their struggles because for many this extends further than just a club.

"That's what I want it to be," Davis says. "To be a space where we feel safe, where people can meet other people and take that safety outside." **b**

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ADELLE STRATTON
LAVENDER MENACE CLUB MEMBER

