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STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



MAN-MADE?

A series on the intersection of age & conventional "femininity" and "masculinity"

PLUS!

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All the gossip behind blocking groups,
& an exclusive first-look at revelatory rap music*

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March 18, 2021

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MEET MCDERMOTT

The AD launching Harvard Athletics into the next decade

by OLIVER ADLER '24

Erin McDermott had big shoes to fill when she took the position as the John D. Nichols '53 Director of Athletics in May 2020. She replaced Robert L. Scalise, who had held the position since 2001. But the Hofstra University basketball star was unfazed. For the nine years before stepping into her Harvard role, McDermott served as the leader of the University of Chicago Athletics Department, which, under her tenure, proved extremely successful. Her success did not go unnoticed, as she was the winner of the 2019 National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics' Assistant Director of the Year Award. Assuming her position at Harvard, McDermott is not only the College's first new Athletic Director in 20 years, but also the first-ever female director of Harvard Athletics.

Despite her vast experience in the field of athletic administration, McDermott wasn't exactly stepping in at the easiest moment—most athletic administrators don't have to wrestle with a pandemic on their first day. "We are operating so differently than any of us are used to," she admits. "We have to do this in a very challenging environment with disappointment and confusion." McDermott's basketball days have prepared her for challenges, and taught her how to overcome them. She knows that each day isn't easy, having come to understand that "we're not going to succeed every time we try to do everything," and that adaptation is key to long-term success.

In a position and career that revolves around cooperation, precision, and coordination, playing basketball taught McDermott another skill that has proved extremely valuable: balance. "I've been intentional with how I've used my time" to connect with faculty and students throughout the period, the Athletic Director says about trying to "build relationships, trust, and credibility" in a new environment. Spending many of her hours on Zoom each day, McDermott admits she shares the pandemic frustration felt by many people whose lives and work typically depend on in-person contact and communication. But to form crucial relationships between athletes and administrators during this time, Zoom is the necessary medium.

With her newcomer status and desire to establish these connections, McDermott is determined in her goals for Harvard Athletics. "We want to honor that [athletes] are not just athletes," she says, but "full people who come to [Harvard] in many different forms and fashions." McDermott wants athletic policies and initiatives to recognize the diversity of student-athletes, and she plans to "work with our spaces" so that athletes can "feel proud of where [they] train and compete." The Athletic Director has big plans for Harvard's facilities in the next few years—plans she hopes will ultimate-

ly elevate Harvard's involvement in conference championships and its teams' national placements from recent years.

Just as she is committed to her ambitions for Harvard Athletics, McDermott is also committed to the impact she might already be having on its athletes. Since her hiring, the Ivy League has reached the milestone of half of its Athletic Directors being women. "I take these facts very seriously. I consider it a great responsibility that I hold," she says. "There are a lot of great women in the Ivy League and beyond who recognize this responsibility." In contemplating what it means for her to enter this role, she looks to the generation that came before her, expressing "gratitude to the women who paved the way"—the trailblazers that came after Title IX and proved that women belong in and around sports.

"We want to represent excellence in how we compete and represent ourselves.

Success is something we should aspire for, and it isn't mutually exclusive from excelling in every other aspect of life at Harvard."

Paralleling her predecessors, McDermott hopes to inspire women in Harvard Athletics. "I hope that I am actually a role model in how I behave and serve student-athletes and that they can see me and understand that they can pursue the paths that call to them, even if women aren't currently in those positions," she shares. While motivating women to pursue their dreams, McDermott wants to be "a model for leadership, regardless of a similarity or not in leadership, and regardless of gender."

Sofia Castore '24, a member of the Field Hockey team, feels this motivation. "It's just nice to see representation in high-up positions that have confronted and had to deal with similar problems [as] female athletes." Castore hopes that McDermott will bring with her "more hype around women's sports," increasing the attendance at competitions and encouraging women at Harvard to feel comfortable in the athletic arena.

Eleanor Wikstrom '24 from the Cross-Country and Track & Field teams, has



similar desires out of athletic leadership. "I'm excited to see Director McDermott increase not only the visibility of women in sports but also our tangible decision-making power in a field that has historically been neglectful, if not openly hostile, towards women," says Wilkstrom. Her excitement comes with a level of caution: "I am hopeful that Director McDermott will be judged by her work not as a female Director of Athletics—or any other mode of framing that attaches her impact to a limiting qualifier word or phrase—but as a Director of Athletics, period."

McDermott expects nothing less than that. "Harvard Athletics will continue to live in the values of education through athletics," she anticipates. "We want to represent excellence in how we compete and represent ourselves. Success is something we should aspire for, and it isn't mutually exclusive from excelling in every other aspect of life at Harvard." For McDermott, excellence is the standard: in scholarship, in athletics, in character, and in leadership. And why shouldn't it be? That's the standard at which she has worked and will continue to work.

Oliver Adler '24 (oliveradler@college.harvard.edu) is excited for the future of Harvard Athletics.

Illustration by Yasmine Bazos '24

A BLOCKADE IN BLOCKING

Forming friendships amidst the pandemic

by **MARBELLA MARLO '24**

On Friday, March 12th, at approximately 11:15 AM EST, the Harvard College Class of 2024 logged on to Zoom to discover, either to their chagrin or pleasant surprise, what building and community they will live in for the next three years. First-years gathered—whether virtually on FaceTime with their soon-to-be blockmates or illicitly indoors in each other's physical presence—to watch Harvard's attempt at making the century-old tradition of Housing Day something that students could enjoy in the era of COVID-19.

Traditionally, Housing Day starts early in the morning, as students from each House gather in the Yard to dance, sing, and flaunt their House pride. Classes are canceled for the entire University, and the whole day is spent celebrating the distinct culture of each of Harvard's 12 upperclassmen Houses. This year looked a little bit different. Unaltered class schedules and campus-wide radio silence replaced the conventional excitement that usually comes with this celebration. For students who did tune in to the virtual announcement, their results were released in House-specific breakout rooms; for students in different time zones or who could not be online at that time, their results were in an email.

The selection of each student's House assignments was an outcome of a previous dreaded requirement: finding a blocking group. Unlike Housing Day, this process barely adjusted to the pandemic-friendly school year. First-year students are traditionally expected to self-select themselves into groups capped at eight people to determine who they would be living with for the rest of their time at Harvard. This year, the expectation persisted just the same.

For some students, the process was seamless: blocking groups formed naturally from teammates or first-semester roommates. Typically, Harvard athletes spend a substantial amount of time with their teammates, and this year, the trend of settling with the friendships provided by sports didn't shift. Athletes had the chance to meet new people through their weekly lift and practice sessions that were held in-person, which students cherished after long days of taking class alone in their bedrooms.

Ryan Tierney '24 on the Varsity Men's Swimming Team recognizes the blessings of this opportunity. "I will admit that I was very fortunate to not only be on campus this semester but also have a built-in friend group through the swim team," Tierney said. "I do wonder if I would have chosen to block with someone else if we were given more opportunities to actually interact outside of Zoom and the pool."

Several first-years also found valuable friend-

ships in their roommates. Since on-campus students lived in single dorm rooms to limit their face-to-face exposure, opportunities for roommate bonding were limited. Sean McCabe '24, however, essentially won the lottery in finding close friendships with the individuals that Harvard randomly assigned him at the beginning of the year.

"Last semester I formed meaningful relationships with whom I lived. And those were the only really close friends I made, but they are now my blocking group," McCabe reflected. Though "there was not a whole lot in place last semester for me to meet people," his experience of choosing roommates was relatively simple: Quincy House, where he and five of the six members of his blocking group lived last semester, was conducive to cultivating friendships due to its layout of three students

"Unless students challenged Harvard's COVID-19 guidelines to meet with others in-person, their only exposure to students who weren't in their dorm or on their sports team was through Zoom."

per suite. McCabe is thankful for the friends he was able to find: "At the end of the day, I know I have good friends, and wherever we are, we are going to do our thing and have fun together."

For Madison Pankey '24, the search for promising blockmates was a lot more challenging. "I definitely had to go out of my way to find people that I thought would be good blockmates," says Pankey. "I wish Harvard had put more effort into giving kids on campus more opportunities to meet people besides their suitemates or entryway. Nobody wants to spend more time on Zoom than they have to, which is what Harvard expected us to do by only providing virtual platforms to socialize."

A semester of social distancing and virtual learning resulted in few opportunities to meet like-minded classmates. Unless students challenged Harvard's COVID-19 guidelines to meet with others in-person, their only exposure to students who weren't in their dorm or on their sports team was through Zoom. Though the pandemic has normalized meeting people and forming relationships in virtual settings, this task was difficult, especially for



international students.

Evan Macrae '24 from Niagara Falls, Ontario, described how miles of distance and differing time zones strained students' ability to make friendships. "As an international student, I can really feel for the other kids who are already on flipped sleep schedules. I can't see them making much of an effort to log onto Zoom for an event happening at 3 AM," Macrae said. He represents an entire subset of first-years who didn't have the opportunity to live on campus in the fall and subsequently had to choose between blocking by themselves or with individuals they had only met virtually. "It would be difficult to form a blocking group mate in a breakout room," Macrae admits. "Now put the breakout room weeks before blocking is due: it is an impossible task to create a group."

Regardless of the students' first-semester housing arrangements or whether they were a part of a team, all of them agreed that making friends was incredibly difficult in the fall and that Harvard did very little to aid this process. Luckily, some students were successful in their independent attempts to meet blockmates. William Lybrook '24 ended up blocking with a student he met in Florida, far from Harvard's campus. "We really like him, but it wasn't something that Harvard helped to cultivate," Lybrook shared. "It was something that we had to find on our own."

Whether by meeting in a different state or in the room next door, first-years found that random circumstances—rather than Harvard's active intent—shaped their friend groups and, ultimately, their future living situations. Though the pandemic has challenged the organic formation of friendships, many Harvard students still found each other this year, united by the promise of camaraderie and the sense of home that blocking groups and House culture provide.

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Photo by Carli Cooperstein '24

MUTED FANFARE

How Housing Day differs during a pandemic

by CARLI COOPERSTEIN '24

Harvard Housing Day is notoriously loud. As members of each House storm the Yard, first-years' excitement of finding out where they will live for the next three years bubbles up into a conglomeration of chanting, screaming, and celebrating. After all, there's seldom a more unique time in your Harvard experience than discovering one's next point of introduction after name, concentration, and class year. With the definition of the upperclassman experience on the line, it's no wonder Housing Day is a combination of both thrill and anxiety as shouts fill the air between Holworthy and Grays.

The festivities get so rowdy that from an outside perspective, it's hard to tell if the shouts are of joy, fear, or something else entirely. In 2003, upperclassmen were so emphatically loud when welcoming first-year students into their Houses that a local news station thought they were staging an anti-war protest against the attacks on Iraq. In a sense, Housing Day quite literally screams Harvard; the sounds of this tradition reflect the overall culture of anticipation that defines this momentous turning point in one's Harvard career.

Along with the sheer volume of the event, there's a certain quality of Housing Day that lies external to the sensory overload of that spring morning. Matt Thomas '21 reflects on traditional Housing Days, which, unlike this year and last, actually took place in the Yard. For him, the most memorable aspect of the experience was always "the energy." He recalls "just how excited everyone was and how on edge we were, and how much we were anticipating what was coming next," speaking to a sense of eagerness that underscores the endless shouts of joy.

Yet for the past two years, Housing Day has been eerily quiet. Last spring, first-year students received their housing assignments a month after being kicked off campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On Housing Day 2020, in the height of quarantine, the Yard was silent—a Harvard first. Amidst growing uncertainty due to the pandemic, Housing Day 2020 acted simultaneously as a pillar of light and a reminder of missed traditions. For many, the positives outweighed the negatives as Housing Day unfolded remotely for the first time. PJ Clark '23 recalls discovering he was in Cabot House last year: "upperclassmen were shouting into their mics and lighting up the chat and sporting their Cabot merchandise." Like Thomas, he describes "the energy" that stood out in his memory of virtual Housing Day, a testament to how the spirit of Housing Day doesn't fade when the volume does.

While the energy of anticipation remains, Housing Day loses something in isolation. Despite efforts to make the best of it last year, the shortcomings of the virtual experience were felt as deeply as the Yard is sparse. Prior to evacuating campus, first-

year students developed connections with upperclassmen and heard their stories worshipping the traditional Housing Day experience, which made it hard for first-years to fully embrace the online alternative. Betsey Bennett '24, who is taking a gap year after having completed her first year at Harvard last spring, experiences this pseudo-nostalgia for the lost tradition: "Since the moment that I toured Harvard, I had heard about Housing Day as one of Harvard's best traditions. The fact that I will never experience being dorm-stormed with my friends makes me sad." Missing out on a moment that both defines one's Harvard identity and shapes their immediate community naturally results in discontentment. There's no Zoom-equivalent to getting megaphoned and champagne-sprayed. During a pandemic, Housing Day is just a whisper of what it once was.

A year later in 2021, Housing Day was once again virtual. The coveted envelopes bearing House assignments were replaced with Zoom links. All

"Missing out on a moment that both defines one's Harvard identity and shapes their immediate community naturally results in discontentment. There's no Zoom equivalent to getting megaphoned and champagne-sprayed. During a pandemic, Housing Day is just a whisper of what it once was."

typical fanfare was condensed into muted microphones. The sheer format of the event made it less of a celebration and more reminiscent of a class or another obligation adding to our Zoom fatigue. Despite the presence of some first-year students living on campus, the Yard was silent for its second year in running.

This year the stakes were even lower. Most first-year students in the class of 2024 will never even live in the Yard, let alone be able to picture it as full of life as it would be on a traditional Housing Day. Since there were very few upperclassmen on campus during the fall semester, most underclassmen have not yet had the chance to hear stories of Housing Day from people in the grades ahead of them. Thomas recalls that when he was a first-year, "there were other upperclassmen who helped me along the way," a luxury not afforded to the class of 2024. Without rumors to paint a picture, first-years have no tangible baseline to which they can

compare virtual Housing Day.

However, it seems this year's housing reveal was more successful than last year's, as this spring has been characterized by more optimism for the future. Vaccine rollout and hope for a return to normal this fall semester lightened the context of the 2021 Housing Day experience, as first-year students can picture themselves enjoying House life soon. In addition, certain first-years had the chance to be in the Yard or at least with their blockmates as they discovered their housing assignments, though international students and most remote-from-home first-years still had to fly solo from their computer screens.

The big reveal itself was somewhat more promising this year as well. Audrey Vanderslice '24 concedes that "the Zoom reveal was actually pretty exciting," offering a more optimistic stance on the process. "I'm sure it's even better in person when you can be around everyone," says Vanderslice, "but I know I'll get to experience it as a part of Housing Days for future freshmen."

After that piercing moment of truth, what happens next? Without the big Annenberg breakfast or the rest of the day devoted to reveling in House life, it seems the big welcome was artificially cut short. Housing Day often provides an initial point of connection for first-years to feel like a part of their new community, but without the typical series of events, students are left lost and disconnected. Bennett mentions she wishes she had the opportunity to bond more with her housemates: "I would feel more integrated into my house had it been a normal Housing Day and rest of year," she shares.

So how can students feel connected to their House when they are not even living in it? For now, virtual programming can help build community during a time of physical separation. When asked if the feeling of being welcomed into House life subsided after virtual Housing Day, Clark replied, "not in the slightest." He elaborates, "I think the prevalence of House events and how they are widely publicized reflects our efforts to constantly provide opportunities for Cabotians to connect with their Cabot community, especially during these times of virtual learning." For Clark and others, the remote nature of this year still yields a sense of connectedness—albeit limited—to the House community. Though the Housing Day videos and virtual events can give us a glimpse into House life, the only way to truly return is to experience it, in full volume, next fall.

Carli Cooperstein '24 (carlicooperstein@college.harvard.edu) lost her voice after screaming "MATHER!!!"

Photos by Marbella Marlo '24

REVELATORY RAP

Subverting Western, oppressive power structures through rap music

by NOAH TAVARES '24

History months in the U.S. separate Americans' obligation to jump into the struggles of those who face oppression, preventing us from experiencing and learning about the similarities and differences in their fights against systemic oppression. In February, Americans listened to protest music last month to learn about the Civil Rights Movement, but switched the dial to punk this month, embracing the white "feminist" movement of the Riot Grrrls. What goes ignored is the music that fluidly moves across the boundaries of genre/social issues, celebrating and universalizing the artists' personal experiences, because it doesn't shy away from the complexities of intersecting identities.

Labelled as crass, misogynistic, classist, and reverse racist, rap is actually the kind of boundary-defying music we ignore and demonize. A melodic form of poetry, it subverts the normalized power structures that enforce oppression, giving the American public an unheard of form of expression.

Rap as Opera & Tragedy

German aestheticians put opera and tragedy on opposite poles and rap acts as an intermediary. The canonical Italian opera romantically engages our senses to create artistic value: words are meaningless but the melody itself captures the truth. Oppositely, Greek tragedies, like Oedipus Tyrannus, transform the words themselves into beauty. Rap expresses the artist's truth through both melody and verbally dense lyrics.

With mumble rap becoming mainstream, a common complaint is this type of rap is too difficult to understand. However, that's precisely the point: the U.S. government systematically denies the necessary resources to properly educate inner-city American youth, who are disproportionately Black and brown. In a way to claim and form their own voices, mumble rap emerged, and revered music critics do not hail it as "great art" because it completely subverts Western genre and poetic form. Just because one cannot hear what is said, doesn't mean there is nothing being said as mumble rappers craft abstraction with their tongues.

Music critics widely panned "Gucci Gang" by Lil Pump for its repetition and mumbling. However, operatically, the rap song crafts a simultaneously joyous and somber musicality. It replicates the uncertainty of newfound success, capturing the feeling of that gray state. Moreover, separately, the words and melody themselves are simple, but overlaid together, they take on a new complexity.

Lil Pump constantly repeats "Gucci" and "Gang," but those words are rhymed with "chain", "cocaine", "name" and "Balmain." Each rhyme focuses on the superficiality of wealth, forming a poignant indictment of growing credit coinciding with growing consumption of popularized luxury brands. "Name" or individual identity is paradoxically combined with "Gang" to describe the presumptive loss of personal identity and the gaining of a new one as the artist enters the public eye. "Gucci Gang" protests nominal capital accumulation and advocates for collective action. "Gucci Gang" envisions the collective fight against capital-

ism whilst still under a capitalist system. Whatever the merits of the proposed argument, Lil Pump still has something to say, and people have heard, *felt* his voice, five-times certifying "Gucci Gang" as a platinum record.

Any Word Can Rhyme

Slurs and words like ni**a, b**ch, h*e, etc. carry historically charged weights and for good reason too as they have been used to dehumanize BI-POC. Rappers deconstruct the letters of these words themselves to create new meanings. Yet, rappers are always berated for doing so even though Emily Dickinson, the famous poet, is lauded for rhyming "boot" with "antelope", through an (arguably) literally meaningless line: "And a Chamois' Silver Boot\ and a stirrup of an antelope." Why is it that Blueface is not celebrated for rhyming "enough" with "dead-locks," (a word, like Shakespeare, Blueface invented)?

One may walk into a gallery, look at a photograph of a bleeding, naked womxn, and immediately endow it with the idea that the photographer intended to comment on rape and the male gaze. The barrier in understanding is simply one of *privilege*. The photographer had a three-thousand dollar camera and a modern art gallery as their platform. Similarly, while American society ignored Dickinson during her time, she was a good poet born into wealth who had the time and resources not only to write but also to immortalize her writings. She was bound to be found. Yet Blueface is a former gang-banger and high school dropout who, unlike Dickinson, tattooed Benjamin Franklin on his face. Our socially, economically, and politically oppressive systems have conditioned us to believe that only white, comfortably wealthy, and supported artists can conceptualize beyond the literal.

"gang." To hear the merits of "Thotiana," one only needs to believe in the invention of new words and meaning. These inventions are useful alternatives to the English language, which is constructed out of (like everything else) oppressive power structures. They pour water on The Wicked Wizard of the West, eroding the rigid spellbook of the patriarchy through a destruction of cultural hegemony.

Reappropriating Cis Men's Sexualization of Power

Rap has been converging towards a framework that advocates for the use of sexual power to reappropriate capital. Rappers like Lil Kim, Missy Elliot, Lauryn Hill, and more recently, Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion have pioneered a new kind of rap that prioritizes the experiences of Black womxn, the group that American society has historically, disproportionately fetishized.

However, cis men still dominate rap, and they have created an intriguing dialogue with today's Black female rappers. An example is Kanye West's song with Lil Pump, "I Love It." Highly controversial, this song was so blatantly combative and prescriptive it was like radio stations were blasting Bob Dylan's "Blowing in the Wind" without knowing it was criticizing their bosses. The premise of "I Love It" is that someone "is such a f**king ho, [Kanye] loves it." People didn't like that Kanye said he "liked hos." However, taking what he said for its literal meaning dismisses the nuance present in the entire song.

At the beginning of the song, Adele Givens, a comedian, says, "Cause you know in the old days they couldn't say the sh*t they wanted to say/ They had to fake orgasms and sh*t/ We can tell n**as today, 'Hey, I wanna cum, mothaf**ka.' Like Givens, Kanye, in this song, satirizes the sexual domicile and shows the new power womxn may wield. He explains he's a "sick f**k" who is in only relationships for a "quick f**k" but he buys partners "sick truck[s]," "new tits," and "that nip-tuck." Womxn may deploy their sexualities as their weapons of power, to take back the capital they're owed, to accumulate wealth by turning an oppressive construct on its head and dumping it straight into a bucket of water.

Noah Tavares '24 (noahtavares@college.harvard.edu) would like to surf on the Third Wave.

Illustration by Ellie Hamilton '23

Listen:
"Bounce Back," Big Sean
"Daddy," Blueface
"I Do," Cardi B ft. SZA
"WAP," Cardi B ft. Megan Thee Stallion
"I Love It," Kanye West & Lil Pump
"Took her to the O," King Von
The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill, Lauryn Hill
"Addicted to My Ex," M City Jr
"Hot Girl Summer," Megan Thee Stallion ft. Nicki Minaj
"Savage Remix," Megan Thee Stallion ft. Beyoncé
"Fight Night," Migos
"NICE," The Carters

However, all great artists can go beyond the conventions of their mediums. A unique product of Black culture, the word thotiana, popularized by Blueface's "Thotiana," stands for That Ho Over There, and its first recorded use was in 2014 by Jokanojoke. In other words, "thotiana," a word that defies the categories of Western English grammar (noun, adjective, verb, etc.), emerged independently of the white patriarchy. In his song, Blueface used it to describe a Black womxn who wields her power over the word Thotiana in order to influence the

BARBARIC BARBIES

A series exploring the fine line between childhood and adulthood

by GOGO TAUBMAN '24

In the blink of an eye, I am nineteen years old. But before that, my infant legs wobbled past wired windows in a federal prison at the age of one. At four, I played with barbies and danced in princess dresses while the world around me continued to change. When I was ten years old, I refused to wear a training bra, despite my probable c-cups that were no sight for sore eyes, not wanting to wear garments that were different from my peers. But at thirteen, I was a full-fledged Jewish adult, secretly opening my mother's phone only to discover her text to a friend: "I have cancer."

I took on this feat wholly by myself, never revealing to my mother that I already knew about her condition when she told us about it ten days later with a newly minted flat chest. At fifteen, I was forced to cope. I traveled to New York City every month, becoming twenty-one to every bouncer, times where my adult body finally came in handy.

But at sixteen, I found myself on a bimah, sharing



I tended to fall back on my unadulterated memories of youth. I perpetually teetered between having to be an adult and being a kid. Yet, my safest place was reliving the memories where I truly felt my own age. Fundamentally, at four, when I played with barbies, at least I felt four. It has now been over a decade since I played with barbies. However, a couple of months ago, I discovered the same barbies that I used to play



a letter I had written about my mother who had passed away a few days prior. I was surrounded by a thousand people, most of whom were middle-aged adults, and as I struggled to even bat an eye, the far majority were crying. I did not want to grow up, but then I did—much too fast.

My struggle is unique, but not completely unlike the toils of many other young adults. In an ever-changing society where adult media breathes down the necks of the world's youth, it is hard to escape the constant pressure to grow up, a pressure that I have approached both willingly and unwillingly in various contexts. Growing up, as adult issues converged on my childhood conscious,



with, tucked away in the aft of a dark closet, a place where my mother likely hoped to revisit when I was an adult with my children of my own. With a couple of hours on my hands, I brought the barbies out of their beaten-up brown box, seeing them in a disparate context than I did over a decade ago. Issues converged on my childhood conscious, I tended to fall back on my unadulterated memories of youth.



I perpetually teetered between having to be an adult and being a kid, a disparate context than I did over a decade ago. Bringing them back to my room to examine, while I reminisced on my best childhood memories, I began to peer at my camera out of the corner of my eye.



My teacher told me to draw what I dream of...

Devoid of any inspiration, it had been months since I picked up my camera to shoot. But, I finally had an idea.

As my nineteen-year-old self blooms into adulthood, I look back to when I was a mere dormant bulb. Yet, as I think of my childhood, memories blur when I look back at the times where all I want-



I just wanted a quick fuck, but then I got all tied up...

ed was to be an adult. I used to think that maybe if I were an adult, I could have the facilities to handle my troubles. In my habitual nature of vacillating between childhood and adulthood, I choose to skew the fine line between the two through photography.

I chalked up outlandish scenarios in my mind where childish Barbies would play out adult actions. While the actions depicted in my photography are different from my own behavior as a young adult, I decided to dramatize these scenarios in order to further explore the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, how childhood toys can portray impure adulating. I took on the notion of how children strive to be adults in this polarizing series of photos, as I contrasted innocent childhood toys with actions that are a far cry from chastity. Whether it be drug doing or partaking in toxic pursuits and relationships, I characterized the actions portrayed in the pink Barbie themed text beneath the photos as opposite to the intended nature of Barbies. Through this series, I felt like I was able to portray my own struggle of stumbling between being a child and an adult.

Further, through this series I was able to grapple with the idea of how my own conception of femininity and masculinity has changed. As aforementioned, when I was ten-years-old my childhood was bombarded by a new “adult-ish” body. While my peers were struggling to reach much over four-feet-tall, I was both five-foot and strapped with larger breasts than the average adult. Catcallers went wild as I was learning simple multiplication. My internal conflict be-

tween wanting to be an adult and remaining a child was besieged by my early plight towards adulthood. The decision was almost made for me. While I went through pre-mature puberty, I continued to move forward with no direction, unsure whether or not to squeeze into the few childlike confines I had left or to embrace my adultlike femininity.

In the end, I decided to remain somewhere in between, unfit to adopt conventional feminine adulthood while also unfit to remain a child. My first kiss was far into the future but playing with Barbies was also out of the question. As I reflected on this this time in my life, I aimed to capture the gray area where the conventional ideas of femininity meet childhood and adulthood. In the way that there is a fine line between childhood and adulthood, I believe that this converges upon another line: one where young women and men discover what the confines of conventional gender norms truly mean.



I'm only working out so he'll want me more...

For me, growing into my own femininity as I approached real adulthood meant that I was able to finally mingle with the idea that there is no such thing as conventionality when it comes to gender and maturity.

Through this series of photos—one that I call “Barbaric Barbies”—I apprehended this idea, contrasting femininity with childhood toys that possess adult bodies. As for the Barbies’ depicted actions, I hope to make the onlooker uncomfortable enough to rethink their own perceptions of childhood, adulthood, femininity and masculinity. Ergo, I hope that the reader questions how the fine lines between these ideas interact.



I can't wait to see Brittni make a fool out of herself in front of MG man because of those drugs I put in her margarita...

Gogo Taubman '24 (gtaubman@college.harvard.edu) sends in her art for the Independent.

PHOTOGRAPHS AS TEACHING OBJECTS

A conversation with Makeda Best about her work to reframe photographic histories at the Harvard Art Museum

by GRACE VON OISTE '24

Where does this object start? What makes this object appropriate for a teaching museum? How has its function as a teaching object changed over time?

On Tuesday, March 9th, Dr. Makeda Best, the Richard L. Menschel Curator of Art at the Harvard Art Museums, opened her talk with these questions. In a teaching museum, art doesn't just look nice; it conveys a message. In the Harvard Art Museums, photographs serve as teaching objects—pieces of art that ask questions of their audience, causing it to reflect on the world and learn

something new. Dr. Best's talk, entitled *Art Talk Live: Reframing Photographic Histories at the Harvard Art Museums*, highlights the importance of this teaching. Her discussion was part of a series of talks in the museum-wide initiative, *ReFrame*, which is "an effort to make our thinking and our grappling with images very transparent and engage our public and the University community in that thinking," Dr. Best told the *Independent*.

Dr. Best has always been passionate about photography as a means to conduct research and tell stories. As a teenager, she

was captivated by the exhibition *I Dream a World* at the Oakland Museum and by *Eyes on the Prize*, a television show that used images to chronicle the Civil Rights Movement. Despite these interests, photography was never a clear path for Dr. Best as she grew up. Rather, she envisioned herself taking a more traditional route and becoming a lawyer or studying history after earning her B.A. from Barnard College. But instead, Dr. Best subsequently returned to school and earned both an M.F.A and B.F.A from the California Institute of the Arts. After earn-



Cashiers Paying Off Cotton Pickers, Marcella Plantation, Mileston, Mississippi, 1939.

Marion Post Wolcott (American, 1910–1990)

Image: Courtesy of Harvard Art Museums

ing these degrees, she recounts realizing that she was "more interested in thinking than making" when it came to photography. Dr. Best went on to earn her Ph.D. at Harvard, and in 2017, she took her current position as the curator of photography at the Harvard Art Museums.

Dr. Best lends a unique and crucial perspective to curation. "Photography, for me, is a way of organizing and understanding the world," she said. She describes photography as a conducive medium in understanding her own African American identity and its experience throughout history. "How can I tell stories that change narratives and

shed light on new experiences?" Dr. Best asks herself when curating artwork.

In her talk, Dr. Best displayed a photograph taken by Marion Post Wolcott, *Cashiers Paying Off Cotton Pickers, Marcella Plantation, Mileston, Mississippi*, which arrived at Harvard in the early 1970s to serve as a teaching object. The image displays two clerks dispensing vouchers for the plantation store to cotton pickers. The viewer's perspective is of the person whose hand is coming through the small opening in the window, taking their voucher. As Dr. Best explained, this person, a cotton picker with a low level of literacy, faces a room full of stacks of pa-

per, unable to read any of them. The voucher is for the cotton picker to spend at the store of their employer. But their inability to read precludes them from knowing if this amount of money accurately reflects the work they have done, said Dr. Best. She also pointed out the bar in the image covering the eyes of cotton pickers transacting with the clerks.

"This image, to me, is inspiring not because it is necessarily the most famous image that [Wolcott] made in our collection, but it is the only one like it in our collection. So all of the sudden, you pay attention to it," Dr. Best said. "That's how the University collection is. There are odd objects that aren't

necessarily the most well-known, but they are teaching objects. They invite this kind of conversation. They invite this kind of reflection.”

The same type of troubling reflection persists in another image that Dr. Best showed her audience: *Devin in Red Socks* by Eliot Jerome Brown Jr. In this photograph, an African American man stands, facing away from the camera, holding a towel to cover every part of his body besides his red socks. By covering the man's face, Brown refuses the viewer's access to the image and highlights a narrative where African Americans lack agency, explained Dr. Best. The red socks reveal that the person depicted is an individual—but a hidden one. This speaks to the history of African Americans' representation in our society: “they are not the makers,” said Dr. Best. However, Brown's image re-

claims society's gaze in a powerful statement that counters the ways African Americans have been documented throughout history. Before this photograph entered the Harvard Art Museums, the photography collection did not contain many images of people of African descent, Dr. Best noted. “Every curator brings a different perspective, and this is the perspective that I am bringing,” she said.

And what can a woman's perspective lend to photography? “I don't know if it is necessarily a women's eye, but there is such a thing as a perspective that is marginalized,” Dr. Best articulated in response to this question. “That's what I bring to my work—an awareness of what it's like to be marginalized.” As an African American woman, Dr. Best identifies a marginalized perspective and curates photographs that ignite conversations about hidden histories. “Am I saying

that someone who is marginalized can't understand? No, I am saying that my way into the image comes from a subject position in society. Whether it is a woman or African American, we bring our place in society into the image,” she reflected.

In her conversation with the *Independent*, Dr. Best referenced an image she showed in the symposium *Troubling Images: Curating Collections of Historical Photographs* on February 26th. The image depicts cafeteria workers here at Harvard in Memorial Hall. All of the people in the image are African American, revealing deep-rooted issues with class and marginalization in our country. As Dr. Best suggested, the way we interact with and perceive photographs is dynamic and ever-changing as time passes. If a similar image was taken today, what would it look like? How much has truly changed?



Grace von Oiste '24 (gvo-noiste@college.harvard.edu) hopes to eventually take Dr. Best's Photography & Ecology class at the college.

Devin in Red Socks, 2016.

Eliot Jerome Brown Jr. (American, b. 1993)

Image: Courtesy of Harvard Art Museums

“BAR HARBOR”

An excerpt from the short fiction story

by LILY DAVIS '23

Jack arrived this morning. He showed up earlier than I expected him to. I was eating a late breakfast and reading the *The Castine Patriot*, which feels more like a scrapbook than a newspaper in a way I'd never appreciated more.

The last time I saw Jack was over Christmas. I flew out to L.A. to see Aaron's new film, to be supportive and because it was even colder than usual here. I stayed for a few days to go to his annual Christmas party in the Palisades that shouldn't have been a Christmas party because it was all Jews anyway. I had celebrated the first night of Chanukah with Anne because she thinks the candles are pretty, but we skipped the next seven nights.

I barely spoke to Aaron at the party; he seemed anxious. I assumed it had to do with the film's rightfully tepid reviews. Now I know that wasn't all of it.

At the party I tried to talk to Jack—he introduced me to Callie, not his girlfriend, not his friend, something, I don't know. I asked him about college, because he had just gotten in early to NYU. He didn't seem particularly to care, which made me angry.

When he showed up at my home, Jack was too nice. He wouldn't let me help carry his bags up the stairs to the room where he stayed the last time he was here. That was the summer when Aaron got divorced, a few years ago. It would be funny to me that Jack is only ever here when my brother has found himself in a wreck of his own creation—it would be funny to me if it didn't make me cry.

I hadn't planned out what to say to Jack. I put faith in my age-old ability to bullsh*t, to spin. Aaron has the same ability. He must hate that it doesn't work anymore.

“How was your flight?”

“Good, yeah. It's a lot warmer here than I expected.”

“July is usually pretty warm.” The hollowness, the pointlessness of what I had said hung in the air.

“Yeah, true.” Jack turned around, away from me.

I followed Jack up the stairs and sat down on the bed in the cramped guest room. I noticed dust in the corner that I must have missed when I last cleaned this room. Which, now that I think about it, could have been the last time Jack was here.

“Have you had anything to eat?”

Jack was typing something on his phone.

“Yeah, I had a bagel.”

“Oh.” Was the bagel breakfast or lunch? A snack? I wanted him to read my thoughts, to speak for me. I could barely bring myself to say anything more.

“I'm gonna take a nap now.”

“How well could I possibly know my brother, when the only times we'd spoken in the past few years--really, truly spoken to each other--had been prompted by crises, never out of any affection or curiosity in the other's life?”

He looked in my general direction. I was still sitting on the bed.

“Flying always makes me so tired. I'll be downstairs if you need anything.”

“Sweet.”

I closed the door on my way out.

The best I can say is that no one really knows around here. My town is cozy and arthritic in a way that I will never take for granted again. The residents of Bar Harbor, Maine are not aware that my brother sexually harassed five different women who worked for him in the nineties, before his son was born, as if that makes any difference. He wasn't a father. He wasn't married. That's his latest spin. Even worse than the I respect wom-

en, I have daughters one. What happened in the past wasn't me; I wasn't a father yet.

Aaron is a coward.

Anne told me to watch myself, to make sure I didn't say anything I couldn't take back. Ironic, of course, considering what Aaron did.

I washed the dishes and then went to the living room to sit down. I thought about taking Maggie for a walk but instead I just let her outside to run around. Jack came downstairs after about two hours. I always forget the time difference, but I guess for him it was still the early morning.

“You here?” he called.

“I'm in the living room.”

“Sweet.”

He was carrying a copy of Bernie Sanders' *Our Revolution*. The summer of the divorce, it was *Marx and Engels*. He had his glasses on, those horrible glasses that made him almost handsome, and a white t-shirt and jeans. I could barely believe the way he moved through my home—so at ease.

“These past couple of weeks must have been tough.” I heard myself say it but wasn't sure I really had, until he sat down next to me on the sofa.

“F**king brutal.” Jack looked right at me. “You probably know my dad better than I do.”

How well could I possibly know my brother, when the only times we'd spoken in the past few years—really, truly spoken to each other—had been prompted by crises, never out of any affection or curiosity in the other's life?

“I don't know about that. I guess we each have our own. . .” What? What exactly was I going to say in reference to Aaron?

Jack looked at me. “What?”

“You must be hungry. Let's go to Blue Hill.”

We decided without speaking to drive separately. As I walked to my car, because my brain has nowhere else to go these days, I thought about Aaron.

Read Davis's full story on the *Independent's* website: <https://harvardindependent.com/>

Photo by Lily Davis '23

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