

Issue 18

HARVARD

April 8, 2022

# independent

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



# MASTHEAD

April 8, 2022

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*of 277 responses...*

**GRADUATION YEAR:**

2025: 49.1%  
2024: 28.9%  
2023: 14.4%  
2022: 7.6%

**GENDER:**

55.2% Female  
42.6% Male  
1.8% Non Binary/Non Conforming  
0.4% Transgender

**SEXUAL**

**ORIENTATION:**

74.4% Straight  
16.6% Bi  
6.5% Gay  
1.4% Queer  
0.7% Pan  
0.4% Other

**FOR THOSE WHO'VE HAD SEX, HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FIRST DID IT?**

28.3% at 18  
22.5% at 17  
24.4% at 16  
10.9% at 15  
6.6% at 19  
3.1% at 13  
1.2% at 20  
0.4% at 21  
0.4% at 22  
0.4% younger than 13

**HAVE YOU EVER HAD SEX?**

92.4% YES  
7.6% NO

**HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU HAVE SEX?**

1-4x per week: 33.1%  
Every few weeks: 31.9%  
5-9x per week: 15%  
Every few months: 5.5%  
10x per week: 3.5%

**EVER HAD A THREE-SOME (OR MORE)?**

13.8% YES  
52.4% NO  
31.6% NO, & I don't want to

**WHO'S BETTER AT MAKING YOU ORGASM: YOUR SEXUAL PARTNERS OR YOURSELF?**

Myself: 56.3%  
Sexual partner: 31%  
Neither: 8.8%

# THE SEX SURVEY

...  
**BY YOU**

**WAS YOUR FIRST TIME AT HARVARD?**

76.2% YES  
23.8% NO

**DO YOU BELIEVE IN SOULMATES?**

39.6% YES  
26.7% NO  
32.2% MAYBE

**FAVORITE SEX POSITION?**

34% said missionary  
31% said doggy  
20% said cowgirl  
7% said missionary with legs up  
4% said reverse cowgirl  
2.5% said prone bone

**HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU MASTURBATE?**

1-4x per week: 50.4%  
Every few weeks: 19.6%  
5-9x per week: 14.4%  
Never masturbated: 7%  
10x per week: 3.3%

**FOR THOSE IN RELATIONSHIPS: DO YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE CURRENTLY WITH YOUR SOULMATE?**

24.8% YES  
27% NO  
20.9% MAYBE  
7.3% Misc.

**DO YOU WATCH PORN?**

50.6% YES, sometimes  
20.1% NO, & I don't plan to  
15.6% YES, often  
7.1% YES, but only when not in a relationship

**DO YOU LIKE TO TALK DIRTY DURING SEX?**

60.3% YES  
21.4% NO, but I'd like to try  
7.3% UNSURE  
5.3% NO, & I don't want to try  
5.7% Misc.

**THOUGHTS ON CHOKING?**

41.2% Love it  
41.6% Down for it sometimes  
6.7% Haven't tried, don't want to  
4.1% Tried, didn't like it  
4.1% Never tried, but interested

**THOUGHTS ON DOMINATION + SUBMISSION?**

38.7% Love it  
35.7% Down for it sometimes  
12% Never tried, but interested  
10.9% Never tried, don't want to  
1.5% Tried, wasn't into it

# HARVARD HARASSMENT ON TRIAL

*Harvard's harassment investigative process is under scrutiny in a recent lawsuit*

BY RYAN GOLEMME '23

For most students at Harvard, Title IX is just a brief part of a semesterly online training module. However, the truth is that Title IX has been a core component in the background of university life since its 1972 inception. The law prohibits sex-based discrimination in schools that receive federal funding, encompassing sports, harassment, legal procedures, and more. In recent months, a lawsuit against Harvard has renewed scrutiny of these sexual harassment policies. On February 9th 2022, three female graduate students – Margaret G. Czerwienski, Lilia M. Kilburn, and Amulya Mandava – sued the University, alleging that the Title IX office and the school had neglected and mishandled her sexual harassment complaints against Professor John Comaroff over multiple years.

The following day, Nicole Merhill, the University Title IX Coordinator and the Director of the Office for Gender Equity (OGE), released a statement criticizing unfair representations that “may have a potential chilling effect on our community members’ confidence in the investigatory process and their ability to access counseling and other resources.” The OGE did not comment on the ongoing lawsuit. Merhill later apologized for potentially undermining students’ trust in the office with her statement.

The lawsuit *Czerwienski et al. v. Harvard* contends that Harvard’s Title IX process was broken and discriminatory. The graduate students involved in the case allege three counts of violation of the Title IX federal law and seven counts of violations of Massachusetts state and common law. According to Carolin Guentert, the Senior Litigation Counsel of the firm representing the students, “Harvard’s Title IX process is a labyrinth of arcane rules that make it exceedingly difficult for students who have experienced harassment to be heard and get the help they need.”

In 2021, in part due to mishandled allegations against a different professor, Harvard merged its Title IX office and its Office for Sexual Assault Prevention and Response under the new OGE. One common misconception is that Title IX Coordinators conduct investigations themselves. In reality, this responsibility falls on the Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR). After the OGE receives an initial disclosure and provides support, they then provide the accuser the option of filing a formal complaint, either by emailing the Coordinator or submitting an online form. The OGE then reviews the filed complaint while providing the student with more support services in the interim. Ultimately, a student is given the chance to file the complaint with the ODR. If the student chooses to do so, an investigation begins.

The complexity of this process is one of the lawsuit’s major critiques of Harvard’s Title IX. They argue that requiring students to file a complaint with the ODR places an additional burden on students. “Harvard does not investigate credible

reports of sexual harassment unless a student is willing to file a formal complaint with the ODR herself,” Guentert said. “And then when the student does file a formal complaint, in practice, Harvard wants her to offer independent written corroboration of what happened. This process deters survivors and protects faculty; that was the experience of our clients.”

The lawsuit alleges that Harvard’s Title IX office took little action on its own when multiple complaints were brought to the office. The plaintiffs and other students reported incidents to Seth Avakian, a Title IX Coordinator for the FAS, whom they allege took no action in reporting their complaints to the University Title IX Coordinator or investigating them on his own. Avakian is also alleged to have discouraged filing an ODR report because, in his opinion, it would be futile.

Another point of contention in the lawsuit is faculty preparedness. The OGE holds 90-minute meetings every month with a mix of Coordinators, staffers, faculty, and anyone whose work intersects with Title IX. During these meetings, the OGE discusses offices, resources, and pertinent recent events. In theory, faculty and staff are properly trained to handle any disclosures from students.

The suit alleges that the plaintiffs had reached out to multiple professors with concerns about Comaroff’s behavior, but that none of these faculty ever raised the complaints to a Title IX Coordinator or the ODR, either due to improper training or a misunderstanding of their role. These allegations of improper training were made in 2017, and Harvard instituted a new mandatory training for faculty in 2018.

At one point, the suit even alleges that Avakian, Anthropology Department Chair Ajantha Subramanian, and Dean Nina Zipser told the plaintiffs to report their allegations to news outlets rather than go through the ODR process. After *The Crimson* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported the allegations in 2020, Avakian allegedly said he had filed a complaint himself, then later said he had not and asked the plaintiffs to file complaints themselves.

The ODR does not usually search for new leads on its own. Instead, it gathers the impacted parties and collaborates with them, using any information and contacts provided. After interviewing contacts provided by both parties, the ODR issues a draft report that both parties can respond to and

eventually a final report that they can each appeal. Discipline falls on offices outside of the ODR.

Guentert states that the ODR consulted the plaintiffs during the investigation and provided them with draft reports. However, the lawsuit claims that the ODR also allowed Comaroff to tamper with evidence and retaliate during the investigation. The primary allegation is that the ODR let Comaroff call in three professors from one of the plaintiffs’ academic departments as witnesses, along with one of her dissertation committee members. These individuals had no direct knowledge or information regarding the incidents. The ODR also allegedly ignored two-thirds of interviewees that the plaintiffs suggested.

The lawsuit also alleges that the ODR obtained a plaintiff’s private psychotherapy notes without her consent, shared them with Comaroff, and then published them in the final report. Merhill’s initial statement said the ODR “does not contact a party’s medical care provider except when a party has indicated that the provider has relevant information that the party wants ODR to consider.” The statement also said, “HIPAA privacy obligations apply to medical care providers, not the ODR.” The suit alleges that the ODR then presented the plaintiff with a redacted version of her own records, but then questioned her about the information that had been redacted.

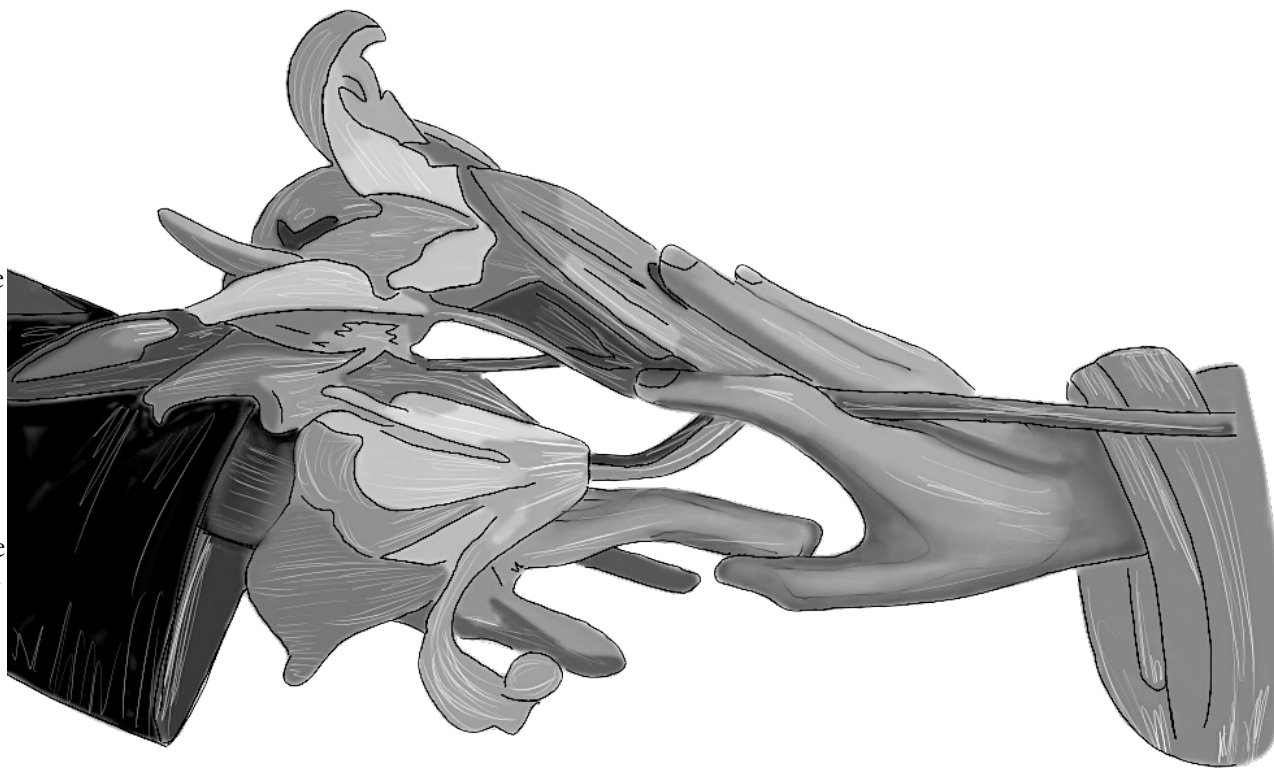
The process following the initial complaints took over a year, and it is at the center of many counts in the lawsuit. “The ODR process places inordinate demands on students. Our clients had to delay their degrees by at least a year,” Guentert said. “And in the end, Harvard’s ODR made only one finding against Professor Comaroff, and ignored clear evidence that he harassed and retaliated against students.”

The lawsuit has progressed through the Massachusetts

District Court. The most recent update from April 4th states that Harvard has named three defense lawyers and that both parties have consented to the jurisdiction of a magistrate judge for the case. While Harvard’s Title IX and ODR are receiving heightened scrutiny now, Guentert pointed to a similar lawsuit *Rapuano et al v. Trustees of Dartmouth College* that alleged a similar unwillingness to protect students and investigate claims. She remarks, “In our experience, Title IX offices at universities unfortunately often fall short of their duty to protect students and effectively and promptly investigate allegations of gender discrimination.”

**Ryan Golemme '23 (ryangolemme@college.harvard.edu), who was surprised at the lack of legalese, writes for the Independent.**

**Graphic by Piper Tingleaf '24**



# PRIVATE MATTERS

*The scarcity of privacy and plentitude of solitude on campus*

BY MICHAEL KIELSTRA '22

Privacy is hard to come by on campus. The Dean of Students Office warns first-years that “Very few singles are available” in the Yard.

In some houses, even seniors might have to share a bedroom. Outside of residential life, students share classes in lecture halls, meals in dining halls, and parties in the rarefied halls of final clubs. Even in libraries, bastions of silent personal study, patrons sit at communal tables in large reading rooms. At Harvard, lack of privacy is simply a fact of life.

Students employ a number of strategies to combat the scarcity of privacy, from shamelessly hogging rooms in Cabot or the SEC to setting strict boundaries with roommates. Sadly, these tactics do not always work, and their failure can create more stress. Roommate arguments are common enough that first-year proctors require written agreements from suites. We have all experienced the exasperation of walking down a row of private cubicles only to find them all occupied.

As is often seen when demand exceeds supply, some turn to crime. We laugh at the idea of being sexiled, even though it is essentially the theft of privacy. Sexile translates to “I want to get laid more than I want to respect your right to your space, so I will take your portion of our shared space for myself.”

Increasing supply is one option to deal with scarcity. A friend of mine wanted her own kitchen, so she rented an off-campus apartment. This option might make sense for introverts, but it involves a disconnect from campus culture that some consider unacceptable. Plus, living off campus requires time, work, and money that not every student has. Even so, there is precedent for this choice: in earlier times, wealthier students lived in privately-run halls, while only the poorest students had rooms in Harvard Yard.

Many of these halls became part of Adams House as part of a greater shift towards making house life a quintessential part of the Harvard experience. For those who refuse to leave campus, the only remaining solution to the dearth of privacy is to reduce the demand for it in the first place. This op-

tion is much more controversial than increasing supply, but it may be a necessary compromise.

We put up with sexile theft because it is better than the alternative: walking in on your roommate and their paramour (or, worse, paramours).

Sexile aside, much of what we appreciate about privacy is not the lack of other bodies, but rather what Judge Raymond Kethledge, a lecturer at Harvard Law

School and author of *Lead Yourself*

*First*, calls “a lack of input from other minds.”

We aren't opposed to seeing people; we just don't want to interact with them.

In fact, Kethledge argues that

privacy and solitude are completely unrelated concepts. Privacy, he says, is being physically alone; solitude is feeling mentally alone. He is vocal about his dislike of smartphones, going so far as to say that they are the primary enemy of those who seek solitude. Going on Facebook—or, this issue being what it is, Tinder—can turn a private retreat into full-on public engagement rather than focused self-reflection.

On the other hand, it is possible to be alone even in the midst of a crowd. Kethledge mentions a time when, on a visit to Harvard, he found himself having to walk across a large chunk of campus. He took this not as an annoyance, but as an opportunity. Personally, I often do Bible study and similar solitary activities on the T. The presence of other people doesn't bother me because they aren't providing input. I may not be alone, but

I have solitude.

Confusing privacy and solitude can make both less effective. For instance, those of us who isolate ourselves during personal struggles are ignoring that it's possible to reject solitude while maintaining privacy. Talking to a friend whom they can trust to preserve the privacy of their concerns might be a healthier way of dealing with personal challenges. Once we can view “being alone” and “feeling alone” on two separate axes, we can be mindful about which one we need.

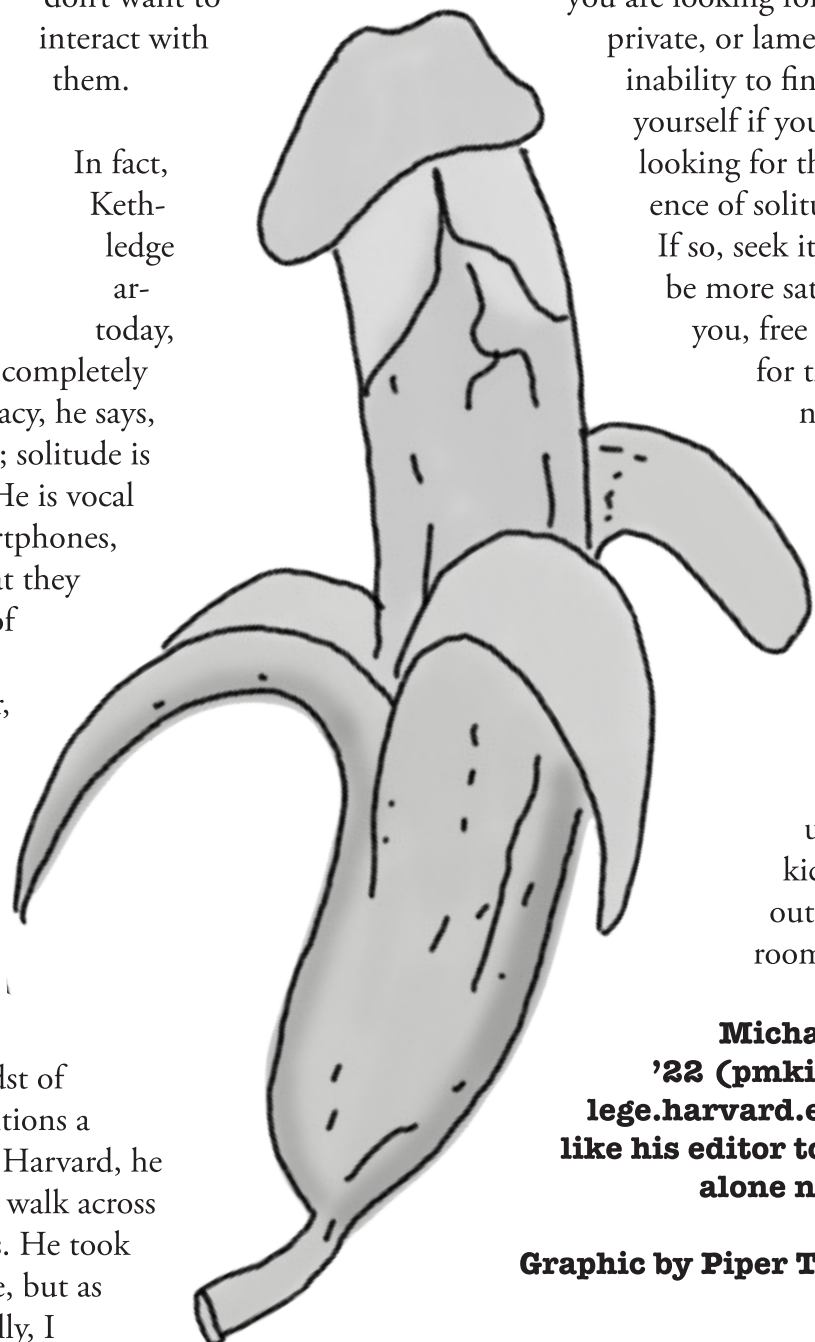
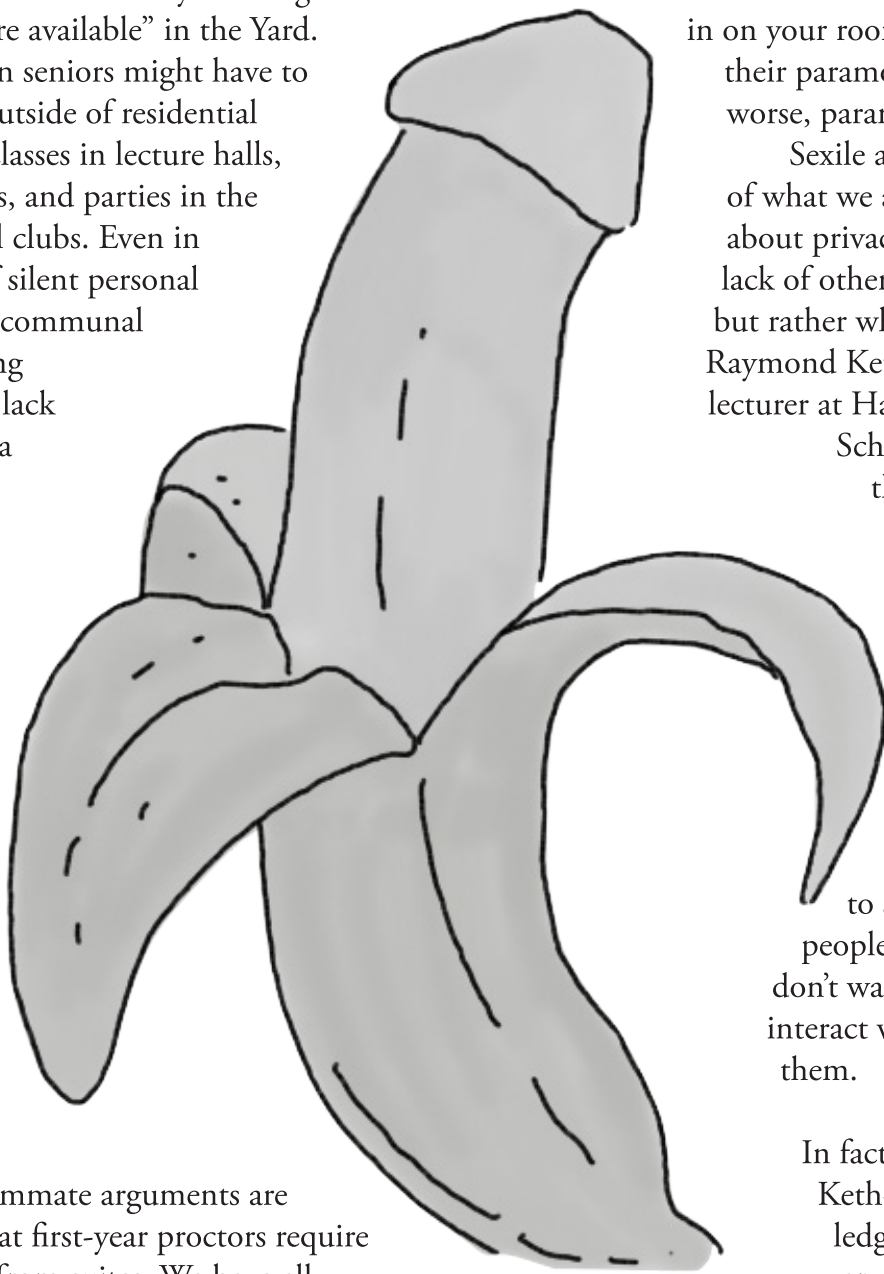
Thinking this way requires a certain amount of self-confidence. It's difficult to feel alone in public if you are worried about what strangers are thinking about you. They might not be talking, but you are still focused on the imagined input of their minds. The only solution I have found for this is to notice how engrossed other people are in their own inner lives, in their phones, or in their own practice of solitude. It's liberating to realize that you have the privacy to think and feel whatever you want.

While privacy is certainly a scarce resource on Harvard's campus, that might not be such a bad thing. The next time you are looking for somewhere private, or lamenting your inability to find one, ask yourself if you are actually looking for the experience of solitude instead. If so, seek it out. It will be more satisfying for you, free up privacy for those who

need it at that moment, and build up more goodwill for when you inevitably end up needing to kick someone out of a study room.

**Michael Kielstra '22 (pmkielstra@college.harvard.edu) would like his editor to leave him alone now, please.**

**Graphic by Piper Tingleaf '24**



# PRUDISH OR PROGRESSIVE?

*How abstinence empowered me*

BY SOPHIE GOCHMAN '25

In the 2010s, the discourse around slut shaming shifted in American culture. Through girl boss propaganda and BuzzFeed articles, feminists went from advocating for women's sexual expression without societal punishment to pushing the idea that having sex with many men is a form of empowerment that should be celebrated. Women who questioned such advocacy were often viewed by its proponents as puritanical misogynists, traitors to their gender. In the 2015 *Vogue* article, *Breathless: In Defense of Hookup Culture*, Karley Sciortino accuses Nancy Jo Sales of perpetuating gender stereotypes after Jo addressed the dangers of rampant casual sex in her *Vanity Fair* article, *Tinder and the Dawn of the "Dating Apocalypse."* Rhetoric such as Sciortino's led me to believe that having meaningless sex with meaningless men was a necessary form of feminist protest. But is it?

In the summer before college, I began to question the personal effects of this attitude toward sex. Several mentally and physically dangerous sexual encounters left me scared, disturbed, and embarrassed about my willingness to engage in hookup culture. Over months of difficult reflection, I realized that casual sex was no longer for me. Even when it pleased me physically, hooking up with near-strangers or emotionally unavailable men left me feeling empty and used. I made a pact that I would remain celibate in college unless I felt a genuine, mutually respected connection with another individual. I entered freshmen year nervous that this decision would exclude me from a pillar of the college experience—its social life.

But through intimate, late-night dorm chats with my new girl friends, I soon realized that others on campus felt the same. One such girl disclosed to me: "I guess I've just never felt comfortable doing super intimate things with people I'm not comfortable with." Another friend corroborated this sentiment: "I think that if it was someone that I trusted and felt no judgment from or felt comfortable with and felt invested in, that's probably when I would break my celibacy."

A social divide exists, however, between those who choose to participate in hookup culture and those who abstain. One female student who is waiting for marriage to have sex told me she feels left out of certain events, like Sex Week and Sex Weekend. These initiatives are led by Sexual Health Education & Advocacy throughout Harvard College, "a student organization dedicated to empowering members of the Harvard community to explore their experiences with love and sex," according to their website. But this pro-sex narrative can alienate those who don't want to "explore their experiences with love and sex."

The student adds that the *Independent's* survey "normalized sexually active. It's just normal-

ized, just



though, in the sense that everyone *expects* that everyone's sexually active."

Perhaps feelings of exclusivity could be credited to celibate individuals' privacy about their sex life, or lack thereof. When asked if she felt any social stigma for remaining celibate, one student said, "Not necessarily. I just think that a lot of people feel social pressure to engage in hookup culture so they don't talk about being celibate. But I think a lot of people on campus are [celibate], they're just not vocal about it."

Another student said: "If people are like judging me for not having sex, that's more like a *them* problem. I guess I'm not embarrassed about it at all, so like, if people are judging me for it, then I am embarrassed for them for seeing that much value in having sex. But I don't feel judged probably because I choose not to feel judged."

All of these statements ring true for me. Celibacy is both an act of isolation and an act of self-love. Even though I find myself sidelined in giggly conversations with friends recounting their Saturday night sex sprees, I have a newfound sense of ownership of my body that is not weighed down by feelings of violation or vulnerability.

When I asked female students how celibacy affected their self-esteem, several said they were unsure or that the effect was neutral. One student said it probably improved their mental health: "A lot of girls who have sex end up the next morning feeling really uncomfortable about it, especially in these hookup situations, and they feel uncomfortable or upset about it and chasing it just to have it."

Promoting celibacy is not equivalent to slut shaming or judging others for sexual promiscuity. Women should be liberated to make their own choices regarding their sexual expression. However, we must offer young women an alternative path to the hookup culture promoted in feminist literature.

It's not easy to not have sex. But it can be a beautiful, empowering choice, and it shouldn't be overlooked any longer.

**Sophie Gochman '25 (sgochman@college.harvard.edu) is happily leaving guys with blue balls.**

**Graphic by Piper Tingleaf '24**



**WITH GREAT SEX**

**COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY...**

*...only if you have a uterus, it seems*

**BY LAUREN MURPHY '25**

**N**one of us want to get pregnant, but a lot of us want to have sex. This is the age-old catch-22 for a college student with a uterus. The solution? Birth control—the miracle pill. Take it once a day, and all of your fears will be resolved, they say. But at what cost?

Sophie O'Melia '25 says that on her old birth control pill, she “felt mentally heavy and emotional all the time.” It took multiple rounds of trial and error to find a form of birth control that worked well for her body. Julia O'Donnell '25 says, “Whenever I forget to take [my pill], the next day I'm super nauseous all day or I have a really bad headache. It just throws off my week.” O'Donnell notes that many of her friends have experienced symptoms, particularly depression and weight gain. Despite these self-reported side effects, studies show that those who hope to avoid an unintended pregnancy are willing to take their chances.

According to the CDC, 64.9% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 are currently using some form of contraception. With over 72.2 million individuals pursuing options to avoid pregnancy, one would hope the science and resources available were informative and conclusive. Unfortunately, most perceived side effects of contraception are strictly anecdotal, regardless of how widely they are experienced. Research on the effects of hormonal contraception is sparse and contradictory. One study on the population of Denmark concluded that the use of hormonal contraception was linked to future use of antidepressants, while another study from Northwestern found the exact opposite. Regarding these discrepancies, O'Melia says, “everyone has a different experience [with birth control], so I don't so much believe the research online because everyone is going to react differently.”

Dr. Huma Farid, Harvard Medical School affiliate and Associate Program Director of OB/GYN Residency at Beth Israel Hospital, delineated the facts and fictions of hormonal contraceptives. Farid says the most common side effects of hormonal birth control are “headaches, some bloating, [and] some nausea,” but notes these symptoms “tend to go away after the first couple of months of use.” One of the most common questions she receives from patients is, “is my birth control going to make me

fat?” Farid reports that aside from slight weight gain associated with the shot, “there have been multiple studies showing that no birth control causes weight gain, with the exception of some water weight that will go away after about three months.”

Regarding the association between anxiety and depression and hormonal contraception, Farid says the research is conflicting. “There are some studies that suggest that adolescents... being prescribed birth control for the first time may experience more depression or have higher risks of depression,” she explains. “But you also have to wonder, when is depression normally diagnosed? As a teenager, right? So it's hard to tease out.”

The National Institute of Health pours \$42.2 billion dollars into medical research per year. Despite women making up over 50% of the population, only \$5 billion of this sum is directed towards women's health. This lack of funding prevents widespread, conclusive research from being conducted and shared, which compounds the confusion and fear toward the impact of different medicines on women's bodies, beyond just birth control.

Pregnant women are deemed a vulnerable patient population and are thus excluded from many research trials. This impedes the data available on the effects of medications on pregnancy. For example, when the COVID-19 vaccine became available, it was not approved to be tested on pregnant women. Many of Farid's patients refused to be vaccinated without such research. “COVID-19 has really highlighted all the ways in which not incorporating women and not incorporating pregnant patients into trials has impacted science and our ability as physicians to advocate for what we think is the right thing,” Farid says. This exclusion “really does hurt women, because now I'm trying to convince my patients to get the vaccine, but people don't really trust their physicians, then there's no data, so people are really reluctant.”

The lack of information about types of birth control, and the plethora of knowledge about their widely experienced side effects, make women across the country reluctant to try it. Farid notes that 50% of pregnancies in the US are unintended. “I think that in the public perception, patients don't like to use birth control, and feel that there are a lot of side effects they cannot tolerate.” For example, Niara Botchway '23 says she has “met so many people

that have had bad experiences,” that she chooses not to use hormonal contraception. “There are no good options for me,” she says.

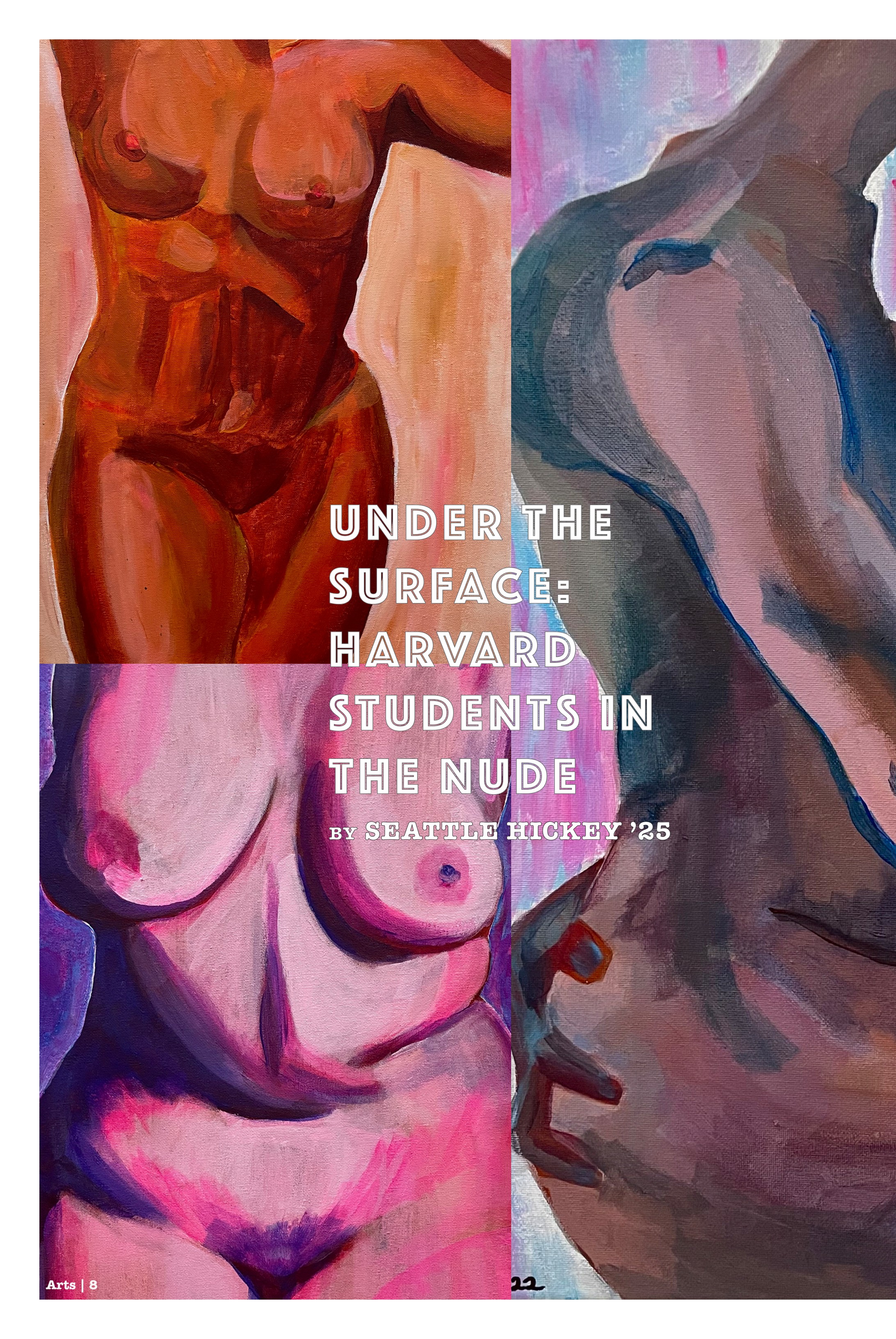
To rectify this distrust and protect from unwanted pregnancies, “men should have a role to play in this as well,” says Farid. A new non-hormonal male birth control pill is soon to begin human trials. If this form of contraception enters the market, will it lighten the burden of responsibility that falls upon women in preventing pregnancy?

According to Matthew Nekritz '25, “I think it is going to be really hard to break that expectation down because of men's perceived threat of birth control, such as, ‘Will this mess with my hormones? Will this affect my mood?’—everything that women constantly have to deal with being on birth control.” O'Melia agrees: “I think [men] would still believe it's more the girl's responsibility. They'd think, ‘Oh, it's so new. We don't have enough research.’ Even though, in reality, there's not that much research on female birth control as well.” The perceived responsibility of preventing pregnancy continues to fall mainly on those who stand the risk of getting pregnant.

When choosing the right form of contraception, it is important for students to research their options and consult a medical professional. For information on how to find resources for contraception here at Harvard, contact Harvard University Health Services.

**Lauren Murphy '25 (lvmurphy@college.harvard.edu) is researching the copper IUD.**

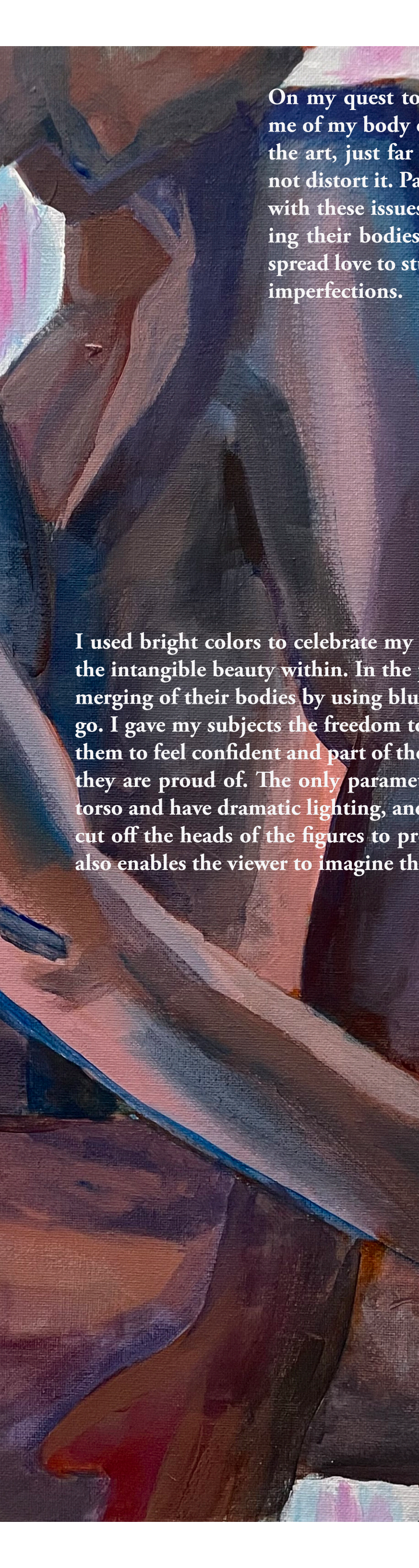
**Graphic by Piper Tingleaf '24**



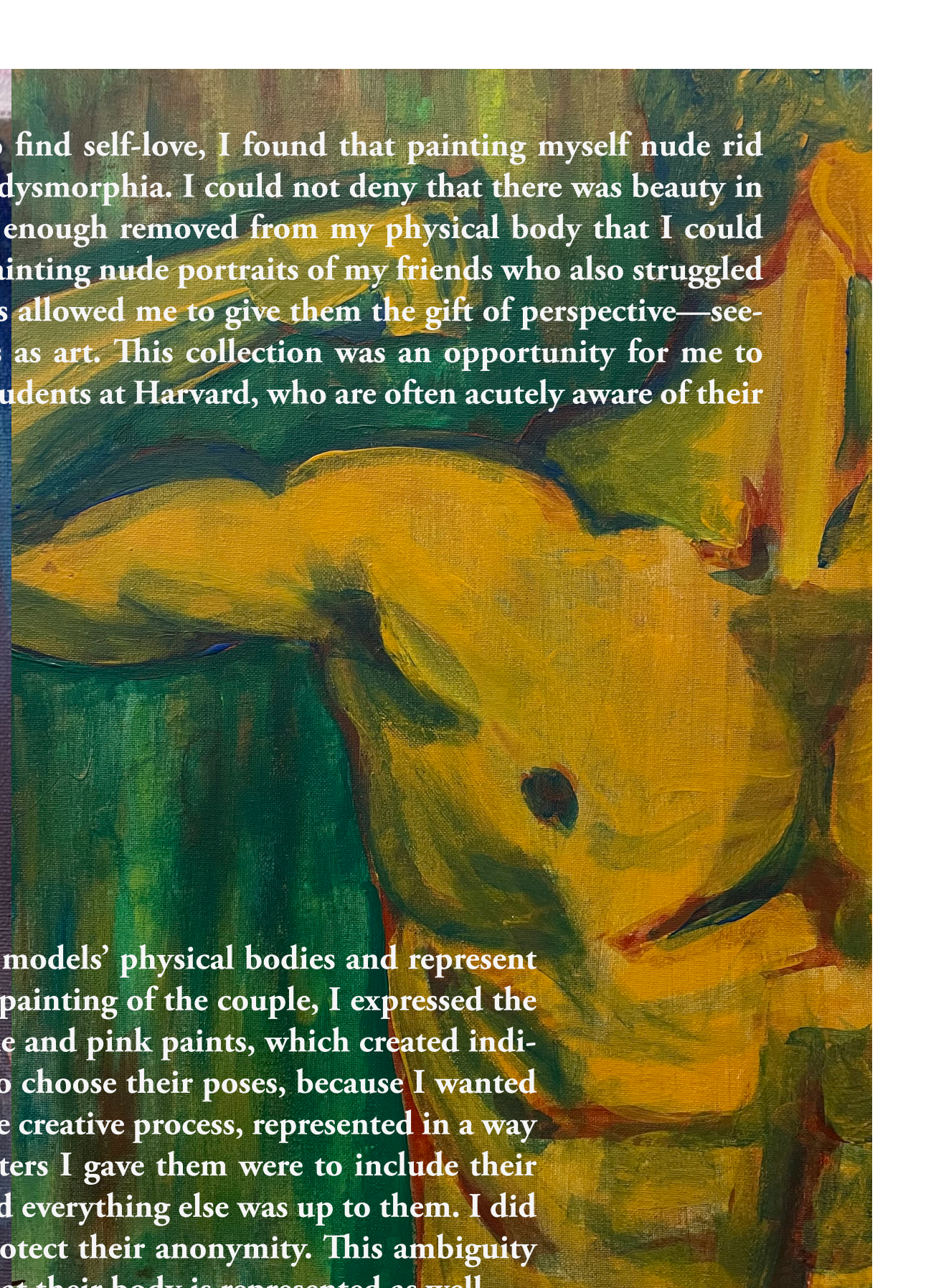
**UNDER THE  
SURFACE:  
HARVARD  
STUDENTS IN  
THE NUDE**

**BY SEATTLE HICKEY '25**

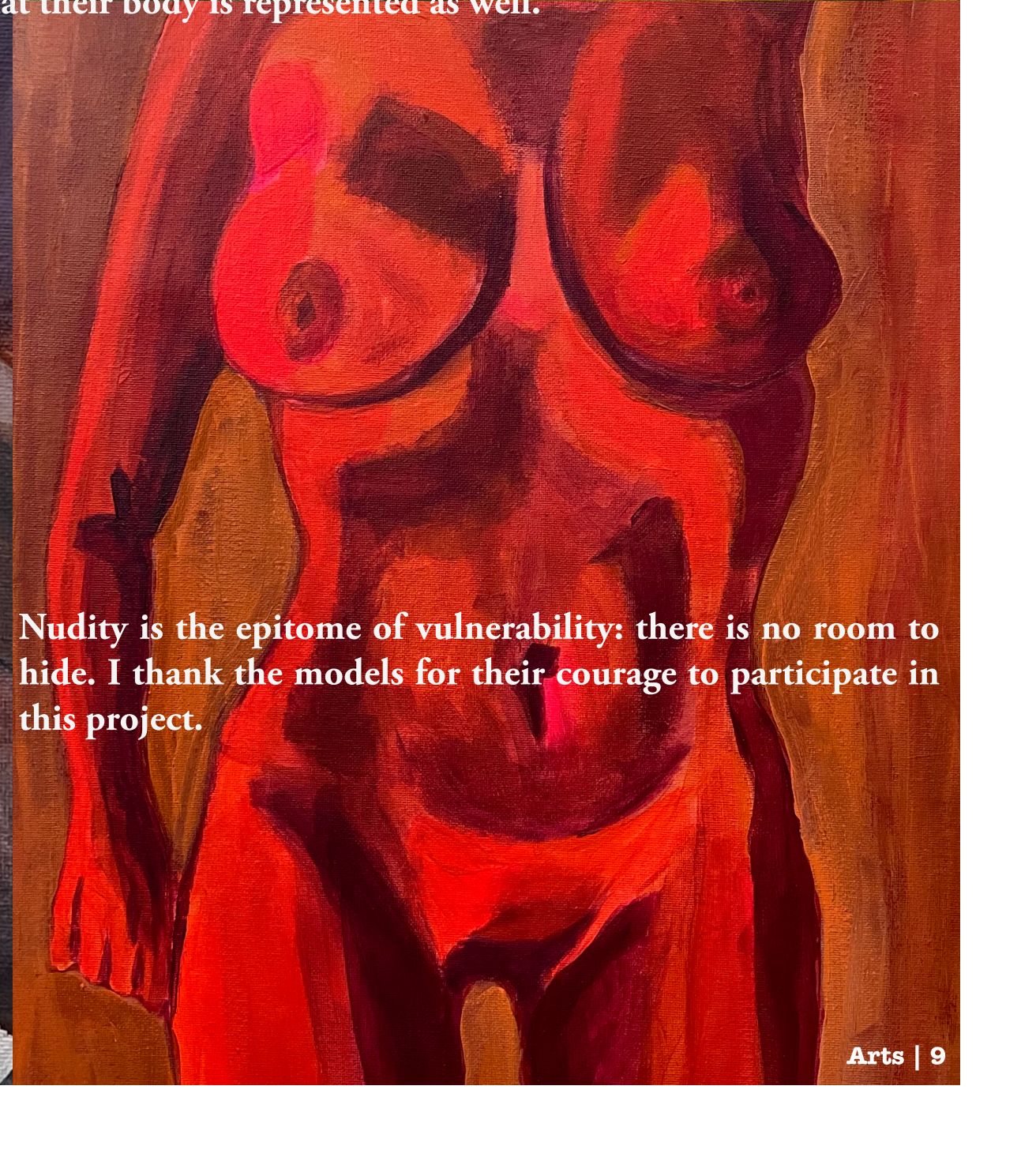




On my quest to find self-love, I found that painting myself nude rid me of my body dysmorphia. I could not deny that there was beauty in the art, just far enough removed from my physical body that I could not distort it. Painting nude portraits of my friends who also struggled with these issues allowed me to give them the gift of perspective—seeing their bodies as art. This collection was an opportunity for me to spread love to students at Harvard, who are often acutely aware of their imperfections.



I used bright colors to celebrate my models' physical bodies and represent the intangible beauty within. In the painting of the couple, I expressed the merging of their bodies by using blue and pink paints, which created indigo. I gave my subjects the freedom to choose their poses, because I wanted them to feel confident and part of the creative process, represented in a way they are proud of. The only parameters I gave them were to include their torso and have dramatic lighting, and everything else was up to them. I did cut off the heads of the figures to protect their anonymity. This ambiguity also enables the viewer to imagine that their body is represented as well.



Nudity is the epitome of vulnerability: there is no room to hide. I thank the models for their courage to participate in this project.

# FAKE IT 'TIL YOU MAKE IT

## *The fake orgasm phenomenon*

BY ELIZA KIMBALL '25

“We are on the hunt to find the clit.” This popular phrase from straight men reveals that their communal quest to pleasure their female counterparts is, well, still ongoing. It can be challenging for these men to succeed, and, at times, awkward for the women to watch them try, often fumbling in vain. How much dedication are these men putting towards the clitoris hunt? And, once they’ve located it, are they handling it correctly? Sometimes their efforts, whether authentic or tepid, are followed by women’s Oscar-worthy performances of pretend pleasure. After a period of patience, women may become exasperated, and decide a quicker way to the finish line would be to fake an orgasm. The question remains: is faking it always a bad thing?

Women may be tempted towards the easy out of faking an orgasm, but they must consider the implications they create for the entire gender. Take the Orgasm Industrial Complex: Desiring a woman has become about stroking the man’s own ego, but if a woman can’t orgasm in sex, she often feels it’s her own fault. Female pleasure has become a prop for masculinity.

“Harvard men think they are more likely to make women cum because they are Harvard men,” shared Thea Tjolle ’25. “I like to think I’m better at faking orgasms because I’m a Harvard woman.”

Some students described the option of a fake orgasm as a privilege women have over men, while others argue its temptations decrease the possibility of equality in the bedroom. A Harvard man told me, “The nature of feminism is that women have complete sexual agency over their bodies. For the women to have the freedom to fake or not to fake an orgasm is an expression of sexual feminism.” Many would not agree; many would.

While I focus on a woman’s fake orgasm, one Harvard man stunted the myth that this fallacy is limited to one sex. “What you have to do is wait until you are shooting blanks,” he advises. “As a man, you cannot fake an orgasm while you are with the full artillery. Where do you store your weaponry? Your ball sack. The quartermaster who runs the ball sack starts shooting blanks, and now it’s time to fake an orgasm because you can make that shit up easily.”

Following an Irish exit from Tasty Burger Basement, two strangers find themselves mangled together in a twin XL bed. Fast forward to the impersonal, uncomfortable sex and the moment she realizes this man with the slutty reputation has never thought about how to pleasure a woman. She methodically swivels her hips in the direction of pleasure and moans in sync with the rhythm of each thrust, mirroring the latest porn episode still open on this man’s computer.

Like many Harvard women, this hypothetical one has accepted the truth of her sexual esca-

pade and put on her best orgasmic performance. Afterwards, she will conduct her own Irish exit towards the vibrator waiting on her bedside table.

The fallacy of her climax relieves her from sexual awkwardness. Many agree it is acceptable for a woman to fake an orgasm for her own expediency or to hasten her desire to get out the door. However, she shouldn’t fake it just for a man’s sake. “In the aspect of feminism and women doing things for themselves, if you are going to fake an orgasm, it should be for your own personal reasons and not to please

an internalized feeling that it is a problem with her if she is not having an orgasm. Faking orgasms can come from panic,” he said.

There is an obsession with climax in and out of the bedroom, but sexual pleasure can be achieved in the absence of an orgasm. For people able to produce pleasure for their partner but not always a climax, do not fret. “Sometimes I can’t make myself cum even though I know what the fuck I’m doing. It’s my body. Sometimes it’s just not going to happen,” Ackerman said. “Orgasming is obviously really nice and I think people want to do it, but maybe your sex drive is down, you are not in the mood, or maybe you want more of the intimacy of the hookup rather than just orgasmic pleasure.”

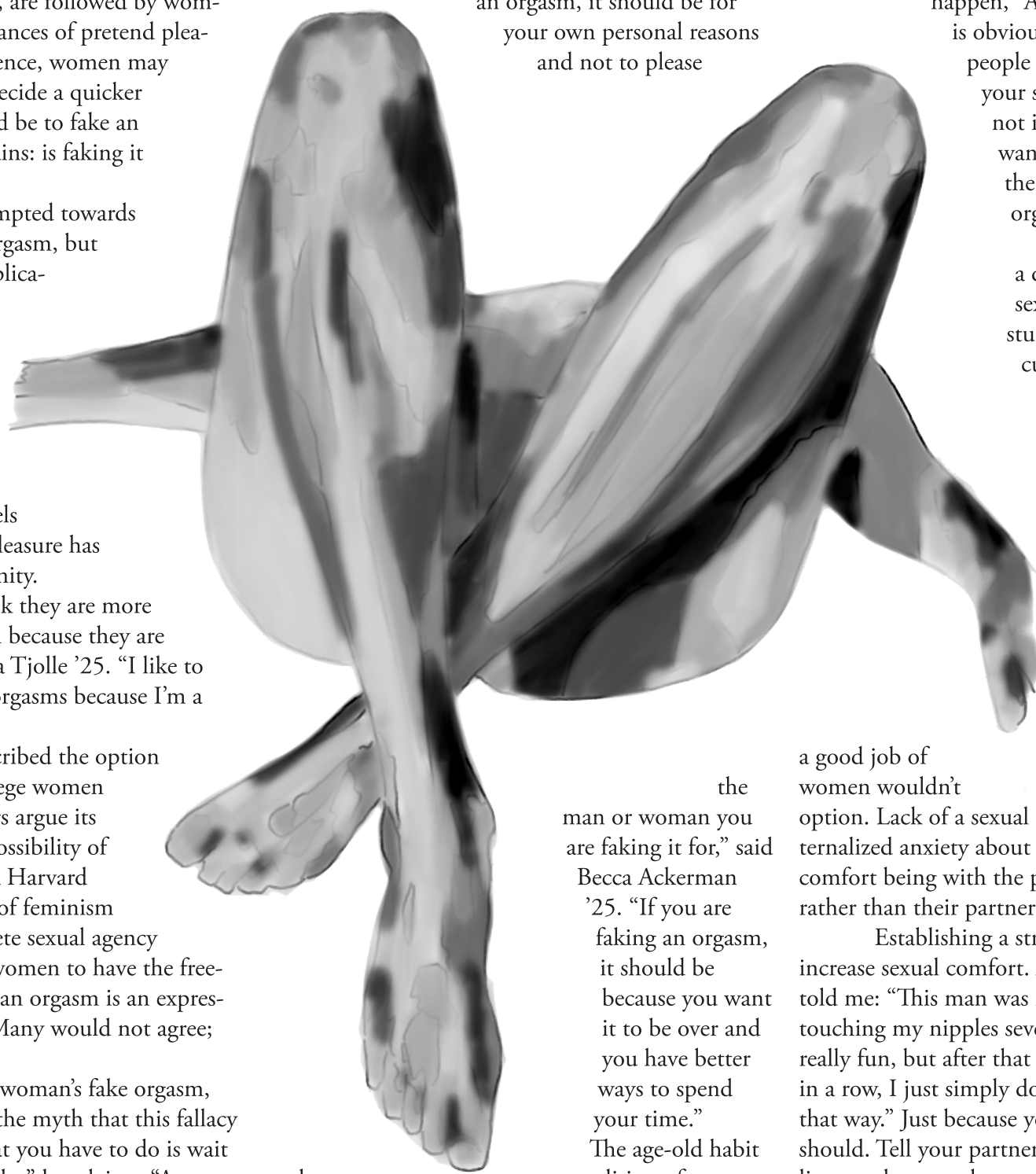
Social pressure and a desire to avoid awkward sex motivates many Harvard students to add to the general culture-wide fallacy of sexual climaxes. How authentic are our true body responses, and how theatrical are our fake performances? The problem revolves around the fact that we share lofty and unrealistic expectations of porn-like sex. If women in porn didn’t do such faking it, maybe real

a good job of women wouldn’t even consider it an option. Lack of a sexual climax can be a sign of internalized anxiety about their performance or even comfort being with the person in the first place, rather than their partner’s failures in the bedroom.

Establishing a strong sexual rapport can increase sexual comfort. A Harvard sophomore told me: “This man was making me come by just touching my nipples several times in a row. It was really fun, but after that has happened four times in a row, I just simply don’t want to be cumming that way.” Just because you can, doesn’t mean you should. Tell your partner how to pleasure you, and listen to how to pleasure them. That’s the point of sex anyway, isn’t it? So why is that so damn difficult to do?

**Eliza Kimball ’25 (elizakimball@college.harvard.edu) brainstormed this article concept with her mother.**

**Graphic by Piper Tingleaf ’24**



and taking care of men before themselves needs not only to end, but to evolve; fake orgasms should not be happening to save the man’s flustered incompetence.

Homosexual couples and their sex are relieved of gender imbalances. Ellen Mollerus ’25 told me: “sex is awkward and silly and sometimes hard to figure out, especially when you aren’t given a guide like heterosexual couples. I do think [fake orgasms] are probably less prevalent in same sex relationships because those people know that kind of body better and in my opinion queer sex is \*generally\* more equal between partners.”

An anonymous Harvard freshman I interviewed accepted the probability that a woman had faked an orgasm with him. “When the man is making it very clear they are waiting for [the woman] to cum, she feels pressure to do so because of

# NAILING IT: IS SEX A PERFORMANCE?

*Students face performance anxiety from the theater to the bedroom*

BY KAYLA REIFEL '25

The Harvard student is forged under the pressure to perform. The admission process requires that students thrive off their ability to succeed—academically, socially, and athletically. Yet while students can excel in performance contexts, they might falter in more freeform environments. The act of sex falls somewhere in between premeditated performance and spontaneous expression. Amid a student culture created by the critique and evaluation of an individual's abilities, the treatment of sex as a performance is an epidemic.

Students often worry about getting bad sexual reviews. "I feel like Harvard has more of a hookup culture, and if you're not performing well, you can get branded pretty easily as someone who is not good at sex," one male first-year student says. "I do get worried that I'm connotated as this or that at sex. And I think that usually ends up with me just trying very hard."

Grace Allen '24 feels a significant difference in the level of performance between sex with men and sex with women. "Of course I've felt pressure to perform with sex in the past. Especially with men... I think there is sort of like a script that tends to be followed," she says, explaining that the man's pleasure often takes priority. "In sex with women, the script isn't as clearly defined. While you are still performing for your partner, a lot of it is kind of for yourself."

Constantly worrying about sexual performance negatively affects student wellbeing. The performance anxiety stemming from hookup culture "depersonalizes the experience of sex," Allen says. "I do think that there is a part of sex that can and should be kept private, so those reviews that are given really open it up to the public." The aforementioned first-year student echoes this idea of depersonalization. He has felt socially pressured to find hookups during nights out, even with people with whom he would not normally desire sexual intimacy. "I actually do think it's stressful," he says. "It feels like a rat race sometimes."

Media also plays a significant role in creating a performative sex culture, with the porn industry acting as an authority on what to do and what not to do. Students agree that the consumption of porn, while not inherently bad, tends to increase performance anxiety during sex.

One female first-year student describes her experience using the internet to teach herself how to perform in the

bedroom. She cites mainstream porn and the podcast *Call Her Daddy*, which provides instructions on how to give oral sex. As a result of this media consumption, "for a while, a lot of my sexual experiences felt like memorized routines," she says. "I think sex definitely can feel like I'm trying to emulate what I've seen correct sex being... I feel like [in porn] women are almost presented as sexual caricatures, which for me set really unrealistic ex-

the idea that sexual intercourse can and should be studied, rehearsed, and performed.

Allen draws parallels between her experiences performing on a theatre stage to performing in the bedroom. "I definitely get performance anxiety in both," she says. "I would say they mirror each other in the 'first time' sense of it. The first performance you have for a show and the first time you hookup with somebody—very similar feelings of excitement and fear and anxiety."

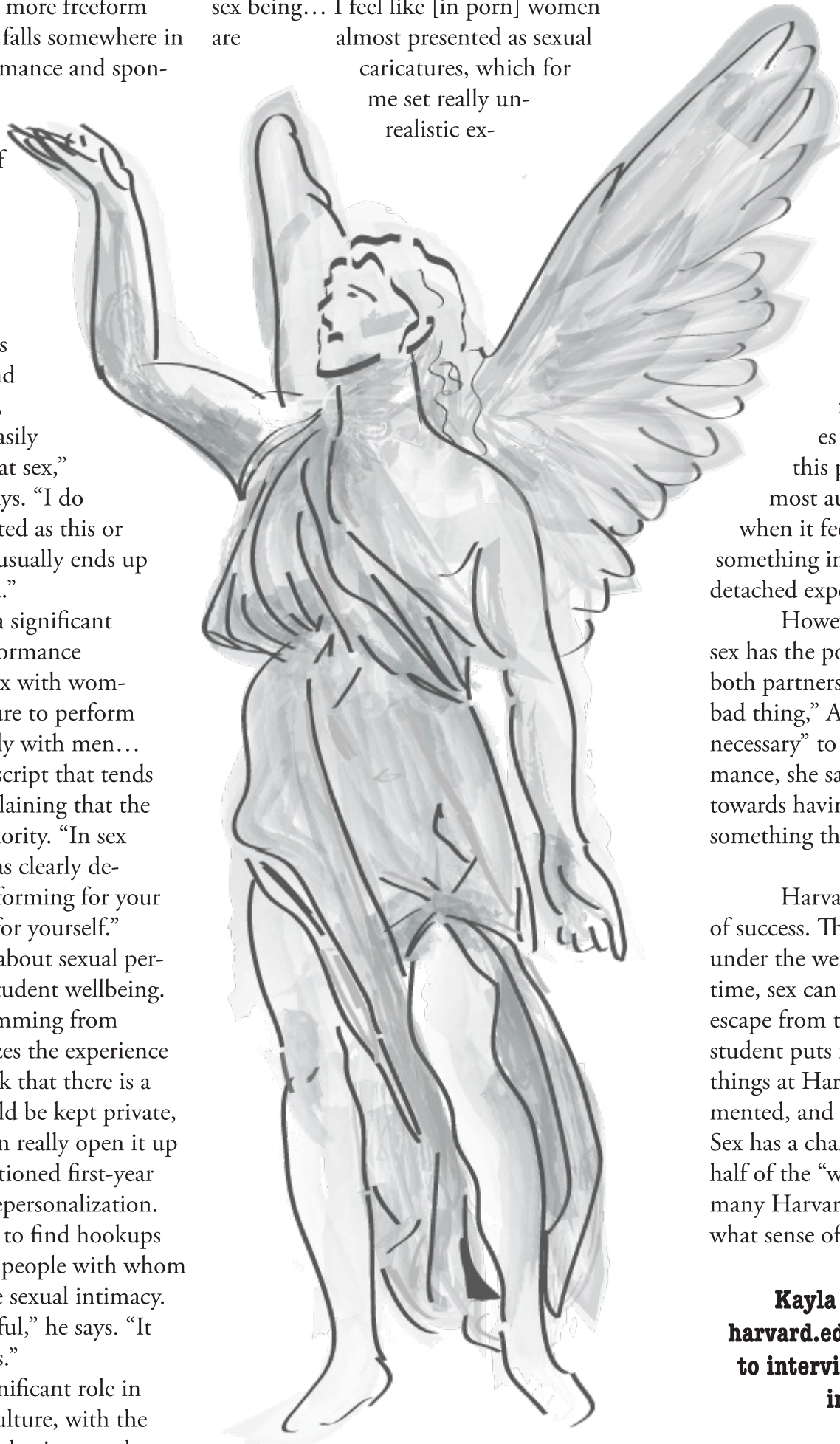
Another female first-year student has been involved in theater since she was young and shares that "when I feel nervous about a performance in theater it's usually a worry of, 'Can I fully channel my own experiences and thoughts and feelings into this performance so that it can be the most authentic?' Whereas in sex, that's when it feels the least authentic. Channeling something into a character makes it a really detached experience."

However, a level of performance during sex has the potential to improve pleasure for both partners. "I don't think it is inherently a bad thing," Allen says. "I don't think it's 100% necessary" to stop thinking of sex as a performance, she says. Indeed, "it's better to work towards having the performativity of sex be something that enhances the experience."

Harvard students tend to relish the thrill of success. They can survive, and even thrive, under the weight of performance. At the same time, sex can be a meaningful opportunity to escape from this pressure. As a male first-year student puts it, "sex should be one of the only things at Harvard that's not scheduled, regimented, and marked by performance results." Sex has a chance to fit perfectly into the 'play' half of the "work hard, play hard" motto that many Harvard students cling to. But *play* in what sense of the word?

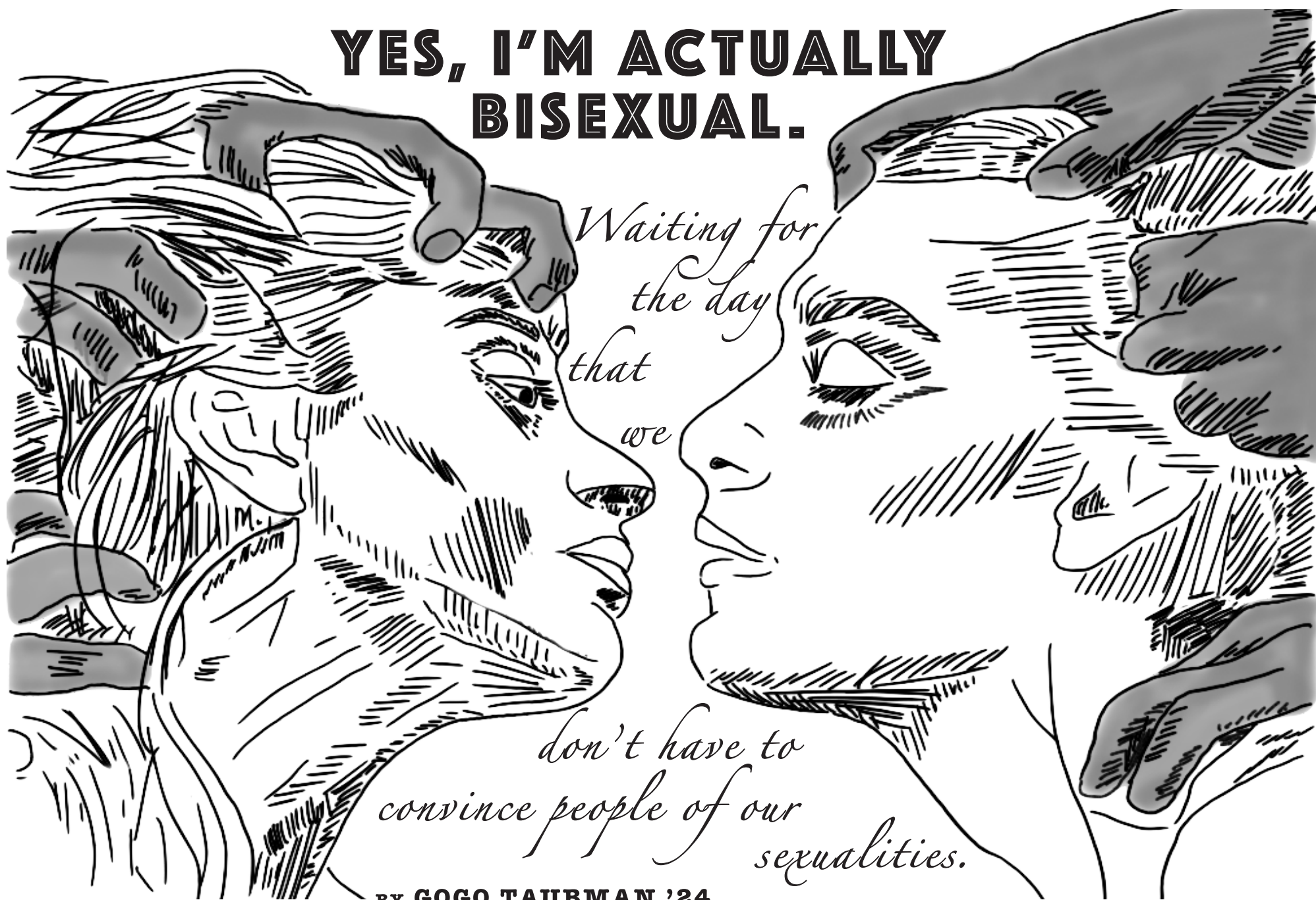
**Kayla Reifel '25 (kaylareifel@college.harvard.edu) had trouble finding students to interview for this article that are both involved in theater and have sex.**

**Graphic by Kate Tunnell '24**



pectations for how I'm supposed to act during sex." According to a sophomore student, sex is "being framed in such a way where it's supposed to look perfect, not feel perfect. Porn is the very extreme end of performative sex." The use of porn as an instructional guide only perpetuates

# YES, I'M ACTUALLY BISEXUAL.



BY GOGO TAUBMAN '24

I will never forget the day I figured out what lesbians were. At eight-years-old, I raced to my mother's room after school, cuddling up next to her to join her in watching *Modern Family*. Two of the characters were discussing their friends who were lesbians, a word I had heard before but whose meaning I couldn't decipher.

"Mom, what's a lesbian?" I asked. My mom replied, "lesbians are gay women who like and want to be in relationships with other women." "Oh, so am I a lesbian?" "Gogo, you are definitely not a lesbian," she affirmed.

Intuitively, I perceived this word as forbidden. Nonetheless, I formed an acute attachment to it which would remain hidden for many years.

Growing up in a midwestern suburb in a conservative family, I learned about the LGBTQ+ community as one I was meant to accept but never be a part of myself. In middle and high school, I internalized being gay as a burden that made life more difficult, despite the fact that I, as well as my parents and siblings, had close gay friends. Assuming that my peers would feel uncomfortable at sleepovers or my extended family would look at me as the odd one out, I made a subconscious choice to never be gay.

When I started to experience sexual attraction and romance as a teenager, I exclusively pursued men. I was mostly satisfied, as my attraction to men was and continues to be extremely real. Yet I endured high school with a suppressed secret I thought I would carry with me for the rest of my life: I was more than likely attracted to women.

In the fall of my freshman year of college, I met someone that

changed my perspective. A new environment where I felt I could be accepted and my first realized attraction to a woman resulted in an openly acknowledged hookup with a woman. I didn't see it as a classic college experiment or a "phase" of exploration. But the day after it happened, I told a friend, who then shut down my excitement: according to her, I was "obviously" just experimenting and that there was no way I could actually be bisexual. Subsequently, many of the closest people in my life, including my family, forced me to question myself. For almost a year after this novel experience, I continued to hook up exclusively with men and alternated between the labels of straight and bisexual. Even in the generally liberal social culture of Harvard, I found myself suppressing my sexuality once again, conforming to the person everyone else thought I was.

Everything changed this school year. I joined new clubs and made new friends, many of whom are also a part of the LGBTQ+ community. After growing up with and starting college with mostly straight friends, having friends that made being gay feel normal transformed how I viewed my own sexuality: I could now confidently identify as bisexual. Still, only after I started openly hooking up with more women did the people in my life genuinely believe in my sexual identity.

Unfortunately, bisexual people commonly experience skepticism from others. Of students who answered the *Independent's* 2022 sex survey and identify as bisexual, 65.5% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the following statement: "I feel like people take my sexuality as seriously as other sexualities." Only 18.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

In the progressive community that Har-

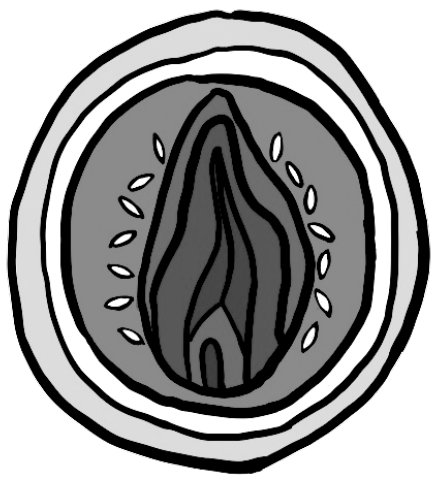
vard is supposed to be, why did it take physical evidence to prove my sexuality? Many of the same people who discounted my own bisexuality even agree that sexual preferences exist on a spectrum. Why do people accept bisexuality only in theory?

Internalized homophobia lives within each of us to a certain extent, and we must do better. In the case of bisexual people, we are likely to experience discrimination from both straight and gay monosexual people. Many view bisexuality as a quirky kink or a desperate search for attention, adhering to the stereotypical perception that a bisexual person's "real sexuality" only comes out when they are married. Even more than facing alienation, bisexual women face greater sexual violence and are more likely to engage in substance abuse than straight or lesbian women, according to Dr. Nicole Johnson's study in the *Journal of Bisexuality*. Biphobia is a serious problem with serious consequences.

Blatant and internalized disregard of LGBTQ+ individuals will remain a problem until we continue to see more research, better media representation, and more genuine acceptance of all sexualities. For my fellow bisexual people: it's time to be taken seriously. It's time to stop having to convince people that our sexuality isn't just a label.

**Gogo Taubman '24 (gtaubman@college.harvard.edu)'s favorite characters on *Modern Family* are Mitch and Cam.**

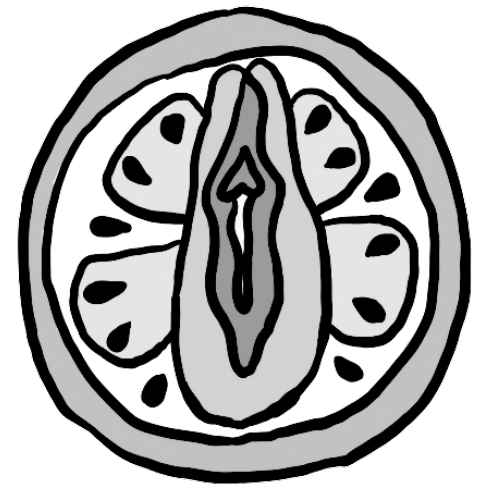
**Graphic by Piper Tingleaf '24**



# HOW TO GET DOWN AND DIRTY AT HARVARD

*The ultimate guide*

BY BECCA ACKERMAN '25



Over half of respondents to the *Independent's* sex survey said they masturbate one to four times a week. 20% masturbate every few weeks, and 14% masturbate five to nine times a week. But how can you sexually treat yourself while living with a roommate?

## Part 1: How to Masturbate in Your Double

### 1. Establish a rapport with your roommate.

You shouldn't be embarrassed to express your needs—you're not alone.

a. If this conversation goes well, determine how you will each ask for the room to do the deed.

b. On the off chance you cannot express your sexual needs to your roommate, get creative. Figure out their routine, their sched-

ule, and always be on the lookout for opportunities.

### 2. Write it in the roommate agreement.

a. Assuming you followed your professor's instructions, and created a series of deeply self explanatory rules for your room, have fun with this agreement: "3 hours a week reserved room alone time"—or maybe more?

b. Are you a rebel and don't have one yet? Consider referring to step 3. As they say: well behaved women seldom make history.

### 3. Make sure you are prepared and ready to roll when the opportunity strikes.

a. If you prefer a vibrator, have it charged. Nothing worse than it dying mid-go.

### 4. Make sure you are ready to abort mission.

Keep a blanket nearby in case of mayday.

5. Curate a playlist of your songs that get you going; the sweet, sweet notes of Teyana Taylor can drown out the background noise of your

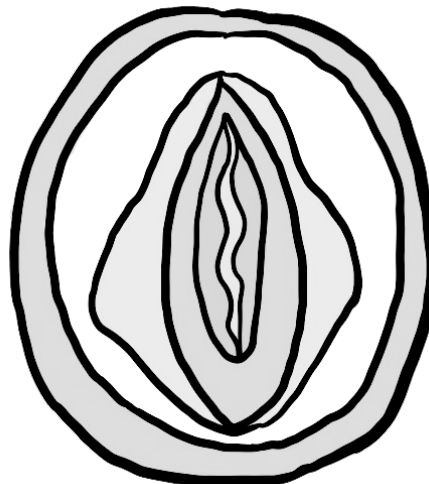
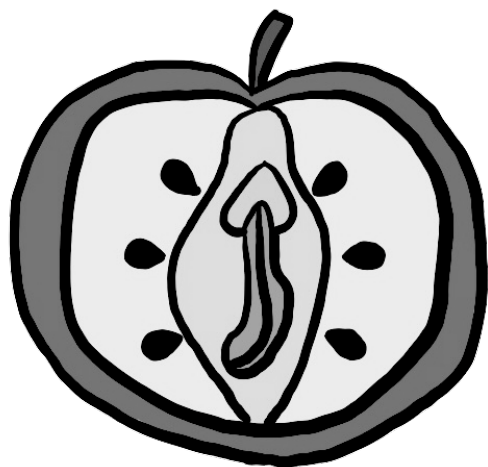
other roommate crying in the common room because a 5-foot 7 Hockey benchwarmer didn't call her back after he sucked her face on the Fenway Johnnie's dance floor.

### 6. Consider an alibi to why you are spread eagle on a Tuesday at 2:45 PM blasting *The Weeknd*.

a. Some suggestions: you are working on your hip mobility, on a quest to pin-point the clit, or simply be honest: "hard week, needed some sexual healing."

### 7. Remember, masturbation is not taboo. Maybe you and your roomie can do it together for bonding purposes!

Now, how can you take it one step further and have sex in your double? 33% of survey respondents said they have sex one to four times a week, while 31% have sex every few weeks and 15% have sex five to nine times a week. How can you get it on without your roommate getting in the way?



## Part 2: How to Sexile

1. *Sexile (verb): to banish someone, usually ones roommate, from the room for the privacy to have sex.*

2. *Again, communication is key:* sexual needs need to be met, and in this case, it's with a partner, or maybe multiple. Develop covert signals to let your roommate know not to enter. A sock on the door is a classic. A text is a more modern approach. A carrier pigeon is deeply industrial.

3. *If you get home late, need a midday pick*

me up, or your roommate never leaves the room in general, ask politely to have the room to yourself for a respectable amount of time.

a. Kick them out to the common room, the library, or maybe suggest they go get a meal.

b. While asking subtly may be less awkward, asking directly might be more effective.

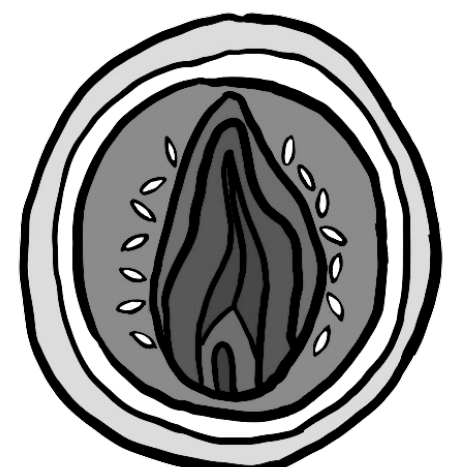
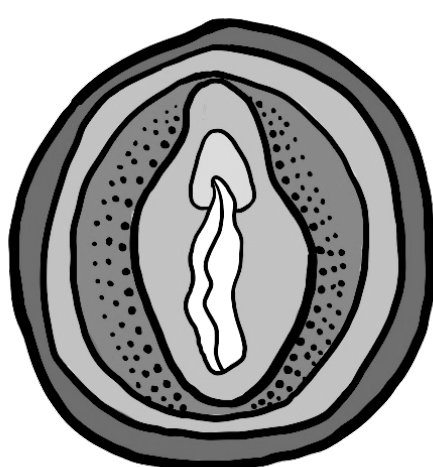
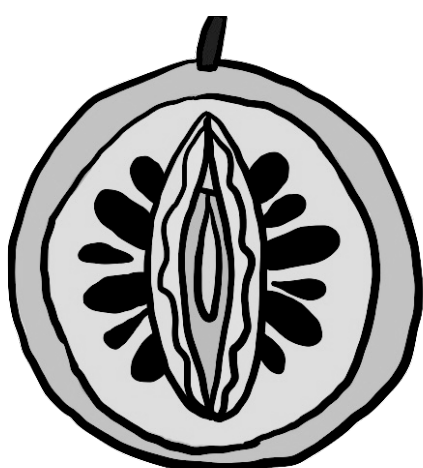
c. If all else fails, a white lie never hurts. "I have therapy," "I have a growth on my toe and need to puncture it with a needle," or "you know the thing where to alleviate stress you tie yourself into a sweat-shirt and lightly sing Frank Sinatra's greatest

hits?" Get creative here.

4. *There is little to no privacy in college.* Dorm room walls are thin, but you might as well embrace it. Maybe your noises will inspire others!

**Becca Ackerman '25 (rackerman@college.harvard.edu) was recently moved into the common room of her suite and has yet to figure out her roommate's schedule.**

**Graphic by Alma Russell '25**



# THE INDY'S DTF PLAYLIST

*Tunes to turn you on*

BY **ANDREW SPIELMANN '25** AND **PROOF SCHUBERT REED '25**

“It’s like bread and butter, like ham and eggs,” says David Ritz, ghost-writer of Marvin Gaye’s “Sexual Healing.” He isn’t talking about breakfast foods. He’s talking about music and sex.

Making music is an act of bringing people together, just like having sex, Ritz claims. “Yearning for union is what I think underlies the sexiest songs of all.”

According to *The Independent’s* 2022 sex survey, many Harvard students agree. 44.2% of respondents said they like to listen to music during sex. 26% were either “unsure” or responded “other.” Out of the 29.5% of respondents who opposed listening to music during sex, some said it said distracted or detracted from the experience. One student said that he is a “fan of the silence,” with another describing it as “more intimate.” Some expressed indifference, but stated they would not go out of their way to turn music on.

However, Ritz argues that music can act as something of a “lubricant” (though he cringed at this term), particularly in young relationships. “We’re all awkward, we’re scared, we’re confused—we don’t know what the dance is. We haven’t done that sort of dance before, and to have a musical backdrop to the dance is instructive,” he said.

Sex is indeed a dance is fitting: it is learned over time, a dialogue between people, and inherently rhythmic. Music helps establish this atmosphere, or the literal tempo of the

dance. “It just makes it better, gives you lots of rhythm, lots of heat, lots of passion,” one student said.

Music can also reduce any awkwardness during sex, especially for new partners. Just like watching TV or Netflix, listening to music has the function of background noise. It also mitigates the risk of being heard by roommates: “I have sex with music more in college because the walls are thin,” one student said.

For Azim Raheem '25, the value of listening to music is “all about the person you’re with. To listen to music with someone that you’re just hooking up with is the equivalent of being in an elevator and listening to elevator music.” Another student concurred: “I feel like playing music during sex is something you would do with a significant other—I can’t imagine playing music with a hookup.”

“What’s a good song to play during sex?” the *Independent* asked students in its survey. Responses ranged from the highly popular choice of pop artist The Weeknd to the genre of Jazz. According to Ritz, jazz was first played in brothels in New Orleans: “it had the full flavor of rhythmic screwing,” he said, just as “intercourse has a rhythm to it.”

Students also showed a preference for slower R&B and Soul, with the likes of Frank Ocean and Daniel Caesar, which would offer a more sensual experience. Suggestions of “WAP” and other rap songs, as well as some classic rock, would offer a faster pace. One respondent even suggested Beetho-

ven’s 5th Symphony, echoing Ritz’s sentiment: “Mozart is sexy to me, Maller is sexy to me, Bach is sexy.”

Here is *The Harvard Independent’s* 2022 sex playlist, a combination of students’ preferences and our own selections to set the mood. It includes a variety of genres and moods, so you may need to skip around for your desired effect.

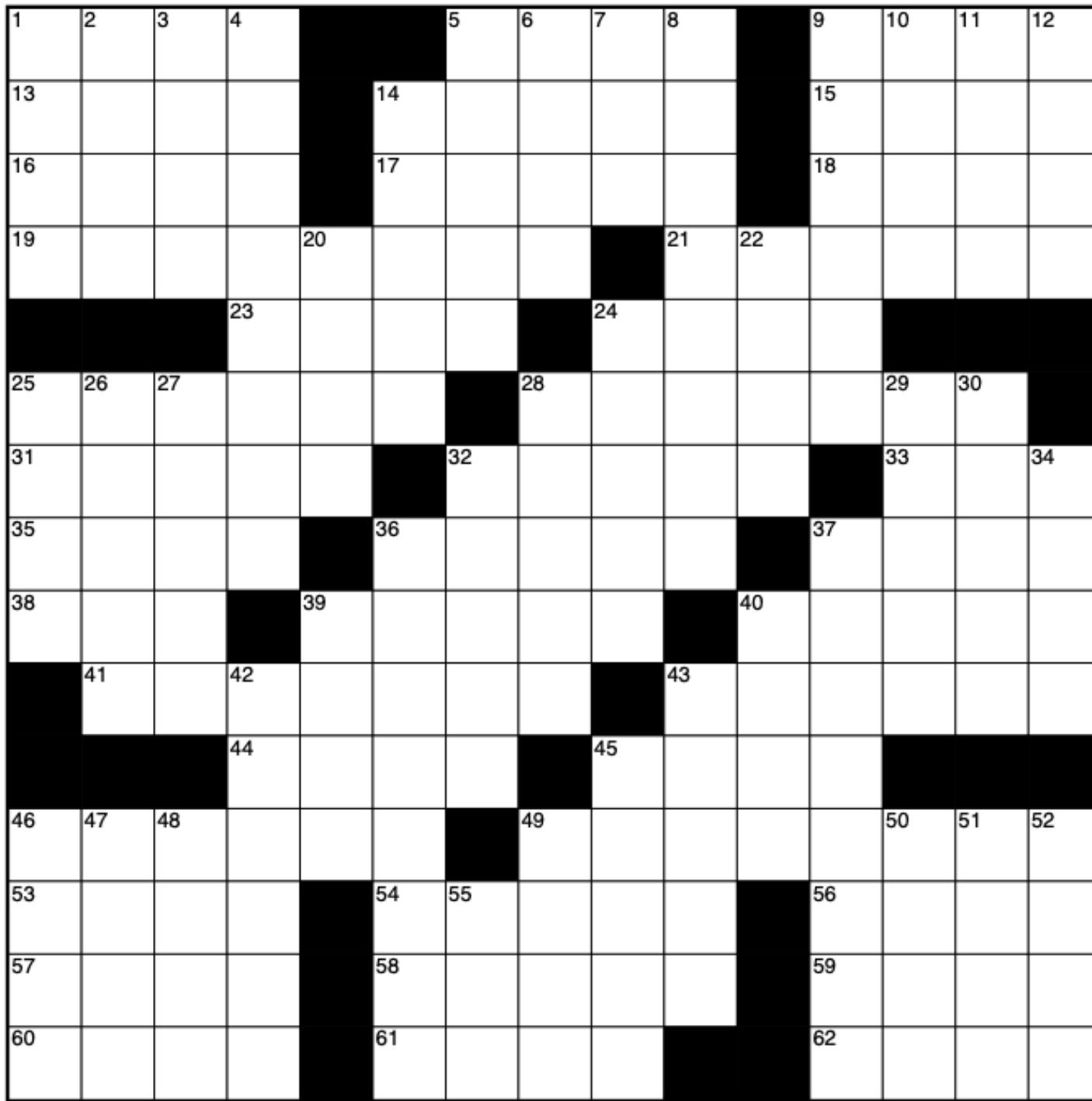
1. Call Out My Name – The Weeknd
2. Fue Mejó – Kali Uchis feat. SZA
3. Electric – Alina Baraz feat. Khalid
4. P\*\$\$Y Fairy (OTW) – Jhené Aiko
5. Redbone – Childish Gambino
6. Arabella – The Arctic Monkeys
7. Woman – Harry Styles
8. Movement – Hozier
9. Invincible – Omar Apollo feat. Daniel Caesar
10. Sweater Weather – The Neighbourhood
11. Thinking Bout You – Frank Ocean
12. Japanese Denim – Daniel Caesar
13. Sex n’ Drugs – Abhi The Nomad, Harrison Sands, Copper King
14. The Love Club – Lorde
15. Love on the Brain – Rihanna
16. Habit – Still Woozy
17. Touch – Kehlani
18. Peach – Kevin Abstract
19. Midnight Love – girl in red
20. Past Lives – BØRNS
21. Pussy is God – King Princess
22. Pynk – Janelle Monae, Grimes
23. Wurlí – Dominic Fike
24. I Don’t Wanna Live Forever – Taylor Swift, ZAYN
25. Something Special – Pop Smoke
26. Flashing Lights – Kanye West, Dwele
27. Sex – The 1975
28. The Man in the Barbershop – Mykal Kilgore
29. Let’s Get It On – Marvin Gaye

**Andrew Spielmann '25** (andrewspielmann@college.harvard.edu) and **Proof Schubert Reed '25** (proofschubertreed@college.harvard.edu) hate The Weeknd.



# PUT IT IN

BY **PETER LASKIN '23** AND **CALVIN OSBORNE '25**



- 9 Take down again, as a flag
- 10 Follow orders
- 11 Bag at a farmer's market
- 12 Ink-y blue
- 14 With 51-Down, add zest to something
- 20 Seasoning on a chemist's table
- 22 Chatters
- 24 Silver-tongued quality
- 25 Places to look for beavers
- 26 Key to sending a text?
- 27 Application for funds
- 28 Beastly person
- 29 Pole position?
- 30 One peering in a window, in a meme
- 32 Footwear that some find sexy (probably)
- 34 NCAA, e.g.
- 36 Suggestive statement... formed by rearranging the inserted letters in 20-, 26-, 44-, and 50-Across
- 37 Hearty meat dish
- 39 Strapped undergarment
- 40 Sierra Club founder John
- 42 Turned from stone to magma, say
- 43 Eddie of apparel
- 45 Hot girl symptom?
- 46 Open wide
- 47 Sashes for kimonos
- 48 Isn't another way?
- 49 "I Got it Bad" singer Simone
- 50 Drug you might need after 37-Down
- 51 See 14-Down
- 52 Portable beds
- 55 Sharpshooter's asset

## ACROSS

- 1 "Mommy? Sorry, mommy?" type
- 5 Reason to take ritalin, for short
- 9 Campus grp. of midshipmen and cadets
- 13 Like the president's office
- 14 Scrub with some elbow grease
- 15 One who might wear chains and black eyeliner
- 16 Prefix between pico- and micro-
- 17 "You've Got Male" or "Ocean's 11 Inches"
- 18 Classic sheep's milk cheese
- 19 It'd be a shame to have to fake it (5, 6)
- 21 Most common surname in Vietnam
- 23 Diplomat's skill
- 24 PRNDL selection
- 25 It drops your Rice Purity Score (1, 2)

- 28 Things one can blow
- 31 "Slippery as \_\_\_"
- 32 Acts like a fictional boy, vis-a-vis a wolf
- 33 Narrow inlet
- 35 Fuji and Denali, e.g.
- 36 Rhyme for "you drool"
- 37 Pushup muscles
- 38 Academic year div.
- 39 What a D on the soprano sax and an A on the baritone both sound like
- 40 Says "na-na na-na boo-boo" to, perhaps
- 41 Quality not sought on Grindr
- 43 Full moon that doesn't wane (5, 6)
- 44 Cassowaries' cousins
- 45 "All's \_\_\_ in love and war"
- 46 One interested in net savings?
- 49 Like some works by Goya, Titian, and Botticelli (1, 3)
- 53 Slightly
- 54 Easily led astray

- 56 Lead-in to show or parts
- 57 Conifer with red and white varieties
- 58 Establishment Guy Fieri might visit
- 59 AO3 material
- 60 Incorporated: Abbr.
- 61 Congresswoman Ilhan
- 62 Units equivalent to 16 pinches, 32 smidgens, or 64 drops: Abbr.

## DOWN

- 1 Kissing disease, for short
- 2 Ikea shelf named after a "boneless" Viking king
- 3 AP class for future English majors
- 4 Ducks in a pond, maybe
- 5 "It comes at \_\_\_"
- 6 Place where singles have more sex
- 7 Boo
- 8 Queen's consort



COVER ARTWORK & DESIGN

BY PIPER TINGLEAF '24



WE BELONG  
TO NO ONE  
BUT  
OURSELVES

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*Ash Chellon  
Mary Julia Koch*