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HARVARD

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INDEPENDENT

The student weekly since 1969

The
Love
Issue



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About the "Independent"

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, the Harvard "Independent" provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The "Independent" has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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How Students Navigate Dating, Commitment, and Ambiguity

An analysis of the 2026 Love Survey Results.

BY COURTNEY HINES '28

The “Harvard Independent” 2026 Love Survey offers insight into the common romantic dynamics, or lack thereof, on Harvard College’s campus. The survey points to a campus that doesn’t reject intimacy, but approaches it cautiously and strategically.

Respondent Demographics

The “Independent” collected 107 responses across all four undergraduate class years and residential houses. Of all respondents, 44.2% were from the Class of 2028, followed by 20.9% from 2029, 19.8% from 2026, and 15.1% from 2027. In addition, 76.5% identified as women, 21.2% as men, and 2.3% identified as nonbinary or another gender identity. While the sample size skews toward sophomores and females, the results, nonetheless, provide a diverse analysis of how students navigate dating, commitment, and ambiguity.

Single, Dating, and Undefined

To gauge the campus romantic landscape, students were asked to identify their current dating status. Of all respondents, 40% reported being single and not dating, 9.4% reported being single but casually dating, and another 9.4% described themselves as being in a “situationship.” Meanwhile, 37.6% of undergraduates reported being in a committed relationship. Of the undergraduates in relationships, 62.5% live near their partners, and 37.5% are long-distance.

The survey then turned to students’ broader romantic histories, asking whether they had been in a relationship at any point during their time at Harvard. Although 59.3% said they had been in a romantic relationship at Harvard at some point, only 23.5% reported currently being in one. Half of the participating students have never had a long-term relationship while attending Harvard, 36% have been in one, 11.6% have been in two, and 2.2% have been in three or more. Of those who have been in a long-term relationship, the average disclosed duration was nine months.

Short-Term Relationships: Present, but Limited

The questionnaire turned to casual encounters, asking students about short-term sexual relationships on campus. Of all participants, 34.9% claimed to have had at least one short-term sexual relationship at Harvard, while 65.1% had none.

Among those who have had at least one short-term sexual relationship, 76.6% reported having had between one and three, 20% reported four to seven, 0% reported seven to 10, and 3.4% 11 or more. Even within the subgroup that engages in short-term sexual relationships, repetition is limited.

Students described these encounters as unpredictable and often mortifying. “Halfway through, I realized he looked like my brother and had to kick him out,” one student said.

“I once hooked up with someone with green face paint on for Halloween. You can imagine how that went,” another wrote.

Some hookups were messier, literally. “Got my period in their bed, looked down and there was a massive pool of blood,” an undergraduate commented.

Another student had to push their partner away. “Some girl had me lie down and pulled a razor out and started shaving my pubes,” they explained.

Situationships Rarely Convert

The “Independent” turned to one of the most elusive categories in modern dating: the situationship. Of all respondents, 47% claimed to have been in a situationship at Harvard. Only 9.5% said that their most recent situation became a committed relationship. Meanwhile, 38.1% said it ended on bad terms, 28.6% said it ended on good terms, and 23.8% said it is still ongoing.

Students often describe these arrangements as emotionally ambiguous and structurally convenient. One undergraduate characterized Harvard’s dating scene as “hookup-centered and frustrating,” while another wrote that “people are usually too busy to be committed.”

At the same time, not all students agree with the dominant narrative. “I disagree with the idea that Harvard has a hookup culture,” one respondent noted. “I think it totally depends on what you’re looking for.”

Where Relationships Begin

Despite national trends toward app-based dating, Harvard’s dating culture remains more focused on natural connections. When asked about their app usage, 60.7% of students claimed to have never used a dating app while at Harvard, 17.9% said they currently use at least one, and 21.4% said they have used apps in the past.

Among app users, 77.8% reported using Hinge. No other platform exceeds 6%.

In response to a question of where students meet potential partners, 35.1% of students claimed that they don’t date or have sexual relationships at all. Among those who do date, 32.5% met partners through friends of friends, 14.3% at parties, and 9.1% through student organizations. Only 7.8% cited dating apps directly.

If currently in a relationship, 21.7% reported meeting their partner through friends, 9.6% through student organizations, and 10.8% outside Harvard.

Pressure Without Pursuit

When asked about Harvard dating culture’s influence on students, 13% said they consistently felt pressure to be in a relationship at Harvard, and 27.3% sometimes felt this pressure. Meanwhile, 59.7% reported feeling none.

However, when asked whether Harvard’s academic culture affects their dating life, only 1.3% of Harvard students said positively; 51.9% said negatively, 27.8% said both positively and negatively, and 19% said not at all.

The distinction is subtle but telling. Most students didn’t report feeling overt social pressure to be in a relationship at Harvard. Yet more than half believe the academic environment makes dating more difficult; the absence of explicit expectation does not translate into ease. Instead, students describe an institutional culture that deprioritizes intimacy, not by discouraging it

outright, but by crowding it out.

Students repeatedly point to time scarcity and ambition as structural barriers. “Everyone is either busy, non-committal, or long-distance,” one respondent said.

Another described Harvard’s superficial culture. “People treat relationships like another form of networking,” the student lamented.

Ghosting and Emotional Avoidance

The survey turned to the increasingly normalized phenomenon of ghosting: 25.3% reported having been ghosted by someone they met at Harvard, and 41% said they ghosted someone themselves. More students are admitting to ghosting rather than being ghosted.

Students describe their worst dates less in terms of dramatic incompatibility and more in terms of disengagement. “Everyone is too busy with some sort of commitment,” one respondent wrote. Another observed that “most people are looking for something short-term or are just unavailable.”

For some, the frustration feels more structural than personal. “No one is open to a genuine, caring relationship,” a student lamented. “As a girl, I feel a lot of pressure to look gorgeous whenever I’m hooking up or meeting a guy, and that I have to meet incredibly high expectations.”

The recurring complaint is indifference.

Valentine’s Day as Amplifier

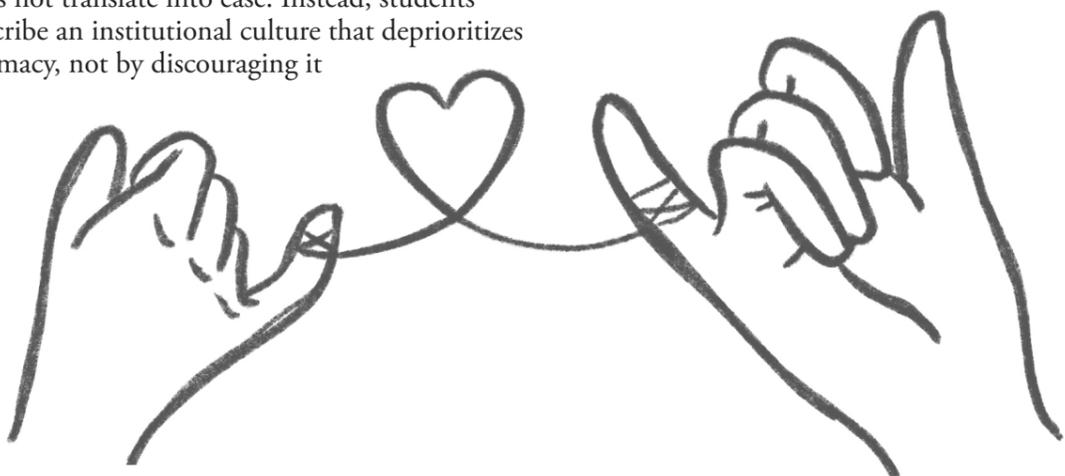
Students’ feelings around Valentine’s Day widely vary, often revealing more about campus culture than the holiday itself. Some undergraduates responded to a prompt asking how they typically felt around Feb. 14.

“I’m never going to have a boyfriend, and I’m unc, and I’m chopped, and I want to cry,” one respondent complained. Others approach the day more defensively. “I try not to think about it. Or I’m usually out of the country,” a student admitted. For some, the holiday becomes observational rather than emotional: “Excited to see who is still a couple on Instagram,” a student said.

Some students describe genuine excitement or quiet happiness. Others describe anxiety or loneliness. For many, the day passes without significance.

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WITH THE “INDEPENDENT.”**

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27



Harvard Grading Policy Proposal and Students' Responses

Students express their anxiety about the Harvard administration's academic crackdown.

BY COURTNEY HINES '28 AND JULIA BOUCHUT '29

Last Friday, on Jan. 6, Dean of Undergraduate Education Amanda Claybaugh shared an email with Harvard College students and faculty titled "Grading Policy Proposal." In the email, she suggested a new grading policy that will be implemented with the College faculty's approval. The plan suggests a 20% cap on A-grades given, with the instructor's discretion to add up to four additional students to receive As. Furthermore, the policy encourages shifting to the average percentile rank over GPA as an internal metric to compare students' performance.

According to the proposal, these recommendations hope to "address the external and internal challenges of grade compression." In spite of their goal, a Harvard Undergraduate Association survey of over 800 students at the College found that nearly 85% of students opposed the new policy.

"In a community that already takes the top 2% of its applicants, excellence should be demonstrated through work, not by some predetermined number," Camren Ware '28 said.

The proposal came as a response to a memo Claybaugh released in October 2025, where she pointed out that As accounted for 60.2% of grades awarded in 2025, up from 40.3% in 2015 and 24% in 2005. In addition, the 2025 GPA cutoff for summa cum laude was 3.989, and 251 students finished their first year with a 4.0.

The memo addressed concerns over a lack of genuine motivation stipulated by the limited information conveyed by grades, and a difficulty in distinguishing between students. The proposition argued that these issues undermined the principal functions of grades. The memo further explained that academic culture is damaged by the pressure to achieve. Given the prevalence of As, Claybaugh's proposal expresses that this discourages students from taking harder, more interesting courses.

She continued, explaining that the current grading policy increases stress by pushing students to distinguish themselves through non-academic outlets, and diminishes the accomplishment of receiving an A. "We owe our students a functioning grading system. Specifically, we owe them grades that send clear signals, that give them a good sense of their strengths and weaknesses, and that communicate their areas of distinction to employers and admissions committees," the report concluded.

Through the new proposal, the Subcommittee on Grading of the Undergraduate Educational Policy Committee made five recommendations:

A shift towards APR instead of GPA to compare student performance internally. The submission of course scores or rankings consistent with letter grades to calculate APR. A 20% + 4 student limit on As assigned with this policy made known on transcripts.

The option for courses to opt out of this cap through a petition to the Office of Undergraduate Education before registration period. These courses will be graded on a SAT/UNSAT scale and will not be considered in internal or external metrics of student performance.

Two-course instructors may transfer their A-grade cap from one course to another if they receive approval from their department chairs before the opt-out deadline.

As the administration's evaluation seems to rely on imperial assessment, some students believe that mental health should be an important

consideration in revising the grading policy.

According to Allison McGourty '29, the 20% cap will increase competition among students, thereby worsening relationships and leading to



greater social isolation. For example, many students look to Ivy League colleges Cornell and Princeton, whose students face mental health crises due to their intensive and competitive environment, McGourty explained. "By putting more restraints and pushing the finish line so much further, it's going to impact mental health in horrible ways," she continued.

Like Harvard, Princeton sought to change its grading policy to combat grade inflation. From 2004 to 2014, the University's undergraduate faculty adopted a new set of guidelines in a two-thirds majority vote. They recommended, though did not strictly enforce, that A-range grades (A+, A, A-) be awarded to 35% of students in each class, down from 47% averaged across all departments between 2001 and 2004.

In a 2011 article for Princeton Alumni Weekly, former President of Princeton University Shirley M. Tilghman explained that faculty specifically wanted to address the grade inflation that had affected departments unequally, with the percentage range of A-grades given by department spanning from 35% to 67%. By 2011, the average number of A-range grades dropped to 40%. In addition, GPA had not substantially changed, with the average GPA for the classes of 2008 and 2009 dropping from a 3.42 compared to a 3.45 for the classes of 2003 and 2004, she wrote. "The impact has not been to radically lower grades or GPAs; rather, grades are now fairly awarded throughout the University, and we know that at least some companies and professional schools appreciate the fact that an 'A' at Princeton is really an 'A.'"

However, in 2014, President of Princeton University Christopher L. Eisgruber appointed a committee to investigate whether the policy met Princeton's stated goals while minimizing adverse effects. In their report, the group identified the goal of standardizing grades across departments to be "not appropriate" since standards should be "course- and discipline-specific."

This same anxiety that manifested at Princeton is now at the forefront of many students' minds. Similar to the Princeton investigation's findings, Laura Cleves '28 felt that the cap defeated the proposal's purpose of decreasing academic pressure. "When I was thinking about what the policy outline and what the proposal were really saying, the first thing I felt was really confusion," Cleves said.

As a Social Studies concentrator, Cleves considered the specific impact the proposal would have on humanities students. "For a lot of the classes that my friends are in—a lot of classes that I'm in—grading-wise, it's very open-ended, where 50% of your grade comes from participation, 50% comes from the final essays that [are] written at the end of the term. It really doesn't make sense to me how those classes will be impacted by this new

proposal."

This class structure is common within the humanities and social sciences. Classes like Gov 1090 "Biotech Ethics," taught by Professor Sergio Imparato, place emphasis on the leisure of learning rather than busy work, McGourty explained. This mindset allows students to fully engage with ethical arguments through exploration, testing out viewpoints instead of chasing the correct answer, she said. "It's going to take away from some of the components that make that class such a distinct cult classic of Harvard."

Princeton's internal review of its grading policy also discovered that, according to students, the 35% cap increased their stress by promoting the notion of grades as "a zero-sum game." Students noted how the cap created a potential "fatalism," since their grades did not match the effort of their work. Finally, Princeton's yield was likely decreased, though the numbers in their matriculation into top jobs and access to prestigious scholarships likely stayed consistent. In response, Princeton eventually revoked its policy changes.

Students fear that these same issues will arise with Harvard's proposal. "It creates a curve, which is kind of what we wanted to avoid in the first place," Cleves continued. "I think that the proposal, although well-intentioned, is more likely than not to fail in achieving its purported mission." By the nature of Harvard's rigorous admissions process, the College admits students who have strong work ethics; a characteristic they are likely to carry into college, McGourty pointed out.

"What did they expect? They admitted some of the hardest-working, intelligent students to this institution that prioritizes hard work, ethics, and intelligence, and then they're surprised when we continue to bring that strong work ethic and intelligence to our classes, which [results] in many of us getting As," she said.

Ware, a wide receiver on the Harvard men's football team, questioned whether the proposal allowed for merit to be measured fairly. "As a student athlete, I am taught to compete against the standard, not the field. I think academics should treat [things] the same way," Ware said.

Cleves reflected on conversations with friends about the grading policy proposal, noting their existing commitment to their classes in spite of the college administration's concerns. "We're here at Harvard to learn. Our education should mean something."

Claybaugh offered to host two town halls for faculty and students to express opinions on the proposed changes. The first meeting is Feb. 12, from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in Cambridge Queen's Head. The second meeting is Feb. 24 from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in the Thompson Room of the Barker Center.

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"INDEPENDENT."**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA
RYMAN '28**

On the Word “Partner”

Is it a transgression to use nonbinary labels to describe binary relationships?

BY SARA KUMAR '27 AND RANIA JONES '27

“Thank you to my partner of three years. Thank you for our foundation. I love you.”

Celebrity Timothée Chalamet captivated the star-studded crowd of the 2026 Critics’ Choice Awards with these words on Jan. 4. Accepting the award for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Motion Picture: Musical or Comedy for his role in the late-2025 release “Marty Supreme,” Chalamet expressed his gratitude to producers, actors, and family. But it was his heartfelt tribute to his long-time girlfriend, Kylie Jenner, that garnered particular attention.

A week later, at the Golden Globe Awards, Chalamet again referred to Jenner as his “partner.”

Fans quickly took to social media to debate Chalamet’s word choice. “Need to know who was in the focus group chosen by the top consultants money can buy that decided that [Timothée] would refer to Kylie as ‘his partner’ for the duration of awards season,” one X user wrote.

“Who says ‘my partner’... That was such a random way to address her,” another individual commented on an Entertainment Tonight TikTok.

Of course, these comments do not tell the whole story. And at the root of this Chalamet-Jenner online discourse lies a broader question: What is the significance of straight couples adopting a term more commonly associated with LGBTQIA+ relationships? Is this linguistic shift an intrusion into language carved out for queer individuals—or is it part of a well-intentioned cultural move away from sexual dichotomies?

Language reform is hardly new. In the 1970s, second-wave feminism ushered in significant changes to gendered job titles. Airline “stewardess” became “flight attendant,” and “mailman” shifted to “mail carrier.” Suffixes like “-ete” or “-ess” were challenged by feminists who argued that these seemingly minor strings of letters reinforced a male-dominated society.

Similarly, the word “queer” underwent a drastic transformation. Though regarded as a derogatory term in the late 19th century, the 1960s and 1970s represented a new era for LGBTQIA+. Gay liberationists reclaimed queer from its stigmatized past, promoting the term as preferable to “homosexual.”

Slogans like “We’re here because we’re queer” were found in everything from LGBTQIA+ organization newsletters to street protests. By the early 1990s, queer had been cemented as not just a synonym for “gay,” but rather as a sexual identity applying to those who go against the grain of normative displays of sex and gender.

The progression of romantic terminology, however, followed a less linear path.

Questions over how individuals—cis or not—should refer to their significant others have interested cultural debate for the past century, as the once harsh lines governing male-female relationships began to blur. The traditional husband/wife dichotomy or boyfriend/girlfriend terms gave way to nomenclature like friends-with-benefits or casual lovers in mainstream discourse. And in the midst of this changing vernacular words was “partner.”

Expert on LGBTQIA+ history and Harvard University Professor of the Practice in Media and Activism, Michael Bronski, explained to the “Independent” how decades ago, same-sex couples typically used “boyfriend,” “girlfriend,” or “lover.” “Partner” seemed too professional. “That sounds like I’m in a law firm,” Bronski laughed as he recalled hearing the word at a party in the 1980s. “To the ear, [partner] didn’t make sense.”

But this narrative shifted as legal battles over same-sex marriage in the United States intensified in the 1990s to early-2000s. What “partner” provided in the courtroom was a gender-neutral term that conveyed a romantic legitimacy without recognizing “husband” or “wife.”

This distinct relational meaning inherent to “partner” gradually permeated even cis couples. As marriage rates steadily declined in the early 21st century, and more romantic pairings turned to prolonged dating over legally confirmed monogamy, “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” started to erroneously suggest youthfulness or impermanence. “Partner,” however, occupied a middle group that was seen as stable, but not explicitly marital.

“Partner seems more serious. Partner seems more permanent,” Bronski said.

Bronski is not alone in this opinion. A 2024 article from “CNN” explained how younger generations are starting to move away from traditional relationship structures, now opting for more fluid engagements where marriage is not the ultimate objective. “Boyfriend gives a sense of it being short-term and still trying to figure things out with,” sex and relationship coach Leah Carey said in the article. “I’ve been with my ‘boyfriend’ for 10 years, and it no longer feels like that’s a solid enough term for a person who is a long-term partner.”

It seems Chalamet agrees with this line of thinking. Fans have speculated whether he and Jenner plan to tie the knot any time soon. Though the pair keep the details of their relationship fairly private, the fact that they have been dating for three

years suggests that the terms boyfriend/girlfriend no longer encapsulate their dynamic.

“I’m not sure Timothée is saying it because it is ‘woke’... I think it’s more accepted now,” Bronski said.

Some still remain staunchly against this shift. For instance, in a 2018 article by “VICE” author Sadie Graham protested heterosexuals popularizing “partner.” “But at some point, it’s like: Can we have anything?” she wrote. “To be a woman who loves other women is to be wholly unruly, in that sense. And since the coherence of straightness as default and matter-of-fact can only exist if queerness is not allowed the same stability, queer women must be obscured.”

Others hear Graham’s point: “Co-opting queer-coded language can seem a little like taking a bit of what LGBTQ+ identity has to offer without signing on for the rest,” Emma Specter of “Vogue” added in 2023. But at the same time, Specter appreciates the widespread acceptance of “partner”—it is less ostracizing when more than just a minority community employs certain terms in their vernacular. “No longer am I pushed into the lonely position of either reflexively outing myself to potentially unaccepting strangers or straight-up lying about a huge part of my life and identity,” Specter continued.

For both Specter and Bronski, it is permissible for people like Chalamet to thus use the term even on a global stage. “If the straight people who use partner are really just wannabe do-gooders looking to the oft-imitated, rarely credited queer community to tell them what to do, well, I’ll accept the challenge,” Specter wrote.

“Language changes slowly,” Bronski added. “Things catch on slowly, and I think saying partner has really caught on.”

RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND SARA KUMAR '27 (SJKUMAR@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITE NEWS FOR THE “INDEPENDENT.”

GRAPHIC BY SARA KUMAR '27



Dear Harvard Administration,

An open letter on the college's new grading policy proposal.

BY HAYDEN BRACKEEN '27

My name is Hayden Brackeen. I am a junior at Harvard College writing to register my staunch opposition to the new grading policies as proposed in Dean of Undergraduate Education Amanda Claybaugh's recent email.

I will not mince words in the interest of brevity.

It is ridiculous for a school that primarily admits undergraduates based on academic performance to be appalled that its students continue to excel. Is it true that the proportion of A-range grades has been rising over the past twenty years? Yes—we've all seen the report. But what has been ignored is that, as A-grades have increased more or less linearly, our admissions rate has decreased linearly.

The only time that the frequency of A-grades broke this pattern and exceeded what we might expect from increasingly impressive graduating classes was during the early pandemic, when Harvard adopted policies such as test-optional admissions and virtual courses; after these policies were reversed, the frequency of A-grades decreased to almost the same line of best fit they had previously followed.

In my time at Harvard, I have been both a STEM and a humanities concentrator. I have taken courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. My grades are a product of my own hard work and dedication. My transcript serves as a compelling case study against this so-called "grade inflation." My freshman year transcript reflected the initial difficulty I had in adjusting to Harvard's rigor. My sophomore year grades dramatically improved, and now, in my junior year, I have been earning the very A-grades crusaded against in this report.

My trajectory is not a result of mindless grade inflation, but of academic evolution. It is personally insulting to me and to hundreds, if not thousands, of undergraduates to insinuate that our achievements are somehow invalid simply because other highly qualified, intelligent peers have attained them.

It is worth noting that grades have never driven my intellectual or professional development, even when I was measurably outperforming my peers in high school. For me, and I suspect for many fellow students, a quantitative metric of alleged academic superiority has never been a source of particular pride, nor has it compelled me to engage more with my coursework. What has motivated me is personalized feedback from my professors, something provided even for papers that earn As.

My most recent essays reveal massive improvement from just last spring, even across classes in which I had already received As. This is because grading is entirely secondary to the learning process; a preponderance of high grades doesn't cause students, especially high-performing students like those here, to stagnate in their academic pursuits. Conversely, I fear that mandating harsher grading would deter students from taking risks or seeking personal growth.

Building an academic community—an academic culture—requires nurturing our

students' scholarly interests. The current system assures students that their hard work will be rewarded, even in fields in which they may lack expertise. I would never have pivoted toward the humanities and found my true passion if I hadn't felt secure in taking that chance. Under Harvard's proposed new system, not only would I still be stuck in departments I don't enjoy, but my mental health would suffer far more than it would have even if I had remained a STEM concentrator under the current system.

To speak of "blame" for something which no other institution would consider a problem is absurd, but if the administration must blame somebody for "burdening" them with such a bright student body, they ought to cast their finger towards admissions rather than faculty (and certainly, rather than students). We cannot chance transforming generations of our best and brightest students into incurious cogs in the machine, terrified of taking risks and paralyzed by uncertainty. I worry that this new grading policy would do exactly that.

In the following paragraphs, I will digress into the specific shortcomings of this plan, its likely negative consequences that I feel have been callously ignored, and precisely how insensitive it is to suggest such a plan in light of Harvard's own institutional issues.

Why This Won't Fix Anything (and, indeed, Why It Will Make Things Worse)

In her memo, "Re-Centering Academics at Harvard College," Dean Claybaugh rightly notes that students are not sufficiently engaged with their academic coursework. However, she ascribes this to grading rather than the more substantial issues at the root of the Harvard experience. I mostly take small and mid-size seminar classes, most of which are only really known to those passionate about their niche subject matters.

On the few occasions that I felt my classes lacked a sufficiently "academic" character, it was typically because people with no interest in the material were joining to fulfill a degree requirement. The courses were not less engaging because of the content, nor the faculty, nor the supposed ease of getting a good grade. Rather, they suffered because most of the room was only there out of necessity and because of a broader trend toward the belittling of humanities coursework as "easy."

While a high frequency of A-grades doesn't solve these problems, it is irrational to conclude from this that it must cause them instead.

The problem is exacerbated vis-à-vis the College's general education and skill-based requirements, which only a select few courses satisfy. It is not unfair that students' hard work is rewarded with the appropriate grades; what is unfair is forcing students into courses they have zero interest in, and forcing faculty to teach to rooms where 80% of those present would rather be anywhere else. Making it harder to get an A in these courses will not address the issue; rather, it will make these already unfulfilling courses miserable.

In my case, I still have to complete three general education courses along with my Quantitative Reasoning and Data requirement

next year. Having to navigate an actively adversarial (and I would argue malicious) grading scheme on top of feigning interest in subjects that contribute neither to my intellectual nor professional development would be untenable.

A much better solution would be eliminating restrictive requirements like general education coursework, instead emphasizing divisional distribution courses; this way, students can explore new disciplines while still tailoring their schedule towards their own interests and personal development, and faculty will have some assurance that most people in their classes are enrolled out of genuine interest.

My own experience is, again, instructive here. Despite taking Math 55 "Studies in Algebra and Group Theory / Real and Complex Analysis" and other technically advanced science courses like Chem 20 "Organic Chemistry," I still haven't fulfilled my QRD requirement because these courses didn't technically use real-world data points. Any hiring or admissions committee would look at my transcript and clearly see that I can work with issues relating to quantitative reasoning, and yet Harvard's administration would seem to think that I'm numerically illiterate, simply because I haven't taken a course from a restrictive list of pre-approved offerings. Additionally, nearly every course I take deals with questions of history, society, aesthetics, and culture; am I to believe that none have been sufficient for either my Aesthetics & Culture or Histories, Societies, & Individuals general education requirements?

Beyond its impacts on students, this plan will cause tremendous headaches for faculty. The report specifically acknowledges that many professors' classes have pedagogical approaches that make this grading scheme untenable. But rather than addressing this concern, the proposed "solution" is to force these courses onto the SAT/UNSAT system and thus nullify their ability to meaningfully indicate a student's mastery of a subject internally, to employers, or to admissions boards.

Even using the new grading scheme, the simple truth is that a meritocratic system assesses students' work in its own right: what is a professor to do if more than 20% of students—of Harvard students—show extraordinary distinction in their work? The proposal's solution to this is incredibly childish, recommending that professors transfer some of their possible A-grades to faculty teaching harder versions of the same class. How does forcing the world's leading scholars to play inane games such as this further academic engagement among our student body? In reality, students could be inclined to take harder courses they aren't qualified for in pursuit of a higher proportion of As. Not only would this impede instruction in difficult classes through inflating enrollment, but these higher class sizes themselves would make earning an A harder and heap more stress on students.

I must also ask about enforcement. Administrative bloat is already a problem at this school, one that has inhibited many of my professors' abilities to support their students. A plan this demanding would require even more administration and micromanagement of our already-overburdened faculty. And where is that funding coming from? Certainly not the endowment, which the administration has proven itself to be incredibly miserly with. I strongly suspect that in funding this oversight (intended in both senses of the word), we'll see further cuts to student life and academic programming, as has been a consistent theme in the past.

Before proceeding to the final part of my argument, I would like to address one other claim in Dean Claybaugh's report. In the section entitled "The external role of grades," we are told that higher grades cause employers to "rely on informal networks of information that advantage students with better networking connections." Make no mistake, what is being described here is simply a holistic hiring process.

What is far more troubling to me is the insinuation by the memo's author that the only qualitative benefit a Harvard student might have is their network, when we know that employers and hiring committees look at far more than just GPAs and recommendations. The omission of extracurriculars, work experience, publications, etc., from the discussion is at best ignorant and at worst a malicious attempt to reframe the relationship between grading and employment.

The nicest word to describe the suggestion that frequent A-grades directly cause this particular brand of hiring inequity is "idiotic": one of the most frequent and salient critiques of the American job market, even among alumni of schools with more stratified grading scales, is that more qualified, higher-GPA candidates are passed over for those with more connections. It is insulting to the intelligence of Harvard students and faculty alike to pretend that this is an issue peculiar to Harvard when we are more insulated from this problem than students graduating from schools with less name recognition.

**Has Anybody Thought This Through?
(Or: Please, for the Love of God, Get Your
Priorities Straight)**

I have resisted comparison with schools like Princeton and Cornell, from which we've seen numerous reports from current and former students concerning academic sabotage. These are schools, importantly, which

currently (and historically) have more stringent grading policies than those proposed in Dean Claybaugh's report. Princeton, in particular, tried capping A-grades at 35%. In 2014, Princeton moved away from this because it had measurably increased competition among students, lowered morale, and, per Princeton president and former supporter of the plan Christopher Eisgruber, it was "a considerable source of stress for many students, parents, alumni, and faculty members."

These two schools are, by all accounts, the most successful among our institutional peers at combating the grade inflation that supposedly causes so many problems here, having the lowest average GPAs of the entire Ivy League.

Cornell also notoriously installed nets under its bridges to prevent more of its students from committing suicide and taking their own lives.

That's worth sitting with for a moment. Has anybody stopped to think about what we're doing here? Adopting a worse version of a policy proven to fail, in response to a so-called "problem" that is the obvious result of admitting a high-achieving student body?

From a student perspective, this smacks of little more than a performative attempt to bolster the resumes of several administrators, coupled with a reckless disregard for our well-being. What role should hordes of faceless administrators have in dictating the lives of countless students whom they've seldom made efforts to engage with in the past? The fact that both town halls are being held in small, cramped spaces for only an hour apiece is itself a laughably transparent attempt to shield the administration from the horrors of being held accountable to the students they ostensibly work on behalf of.

In the past week alone, the administration has pushed dozens of student groups out of the SOCH to "save money," placing these groups' members and property in flux. This was not a sudden financial hardship that justified unprecedented action. This is a pattern of behavior wherein administrators actively make life here worse to benefit themselves, all while putting out messaging that suggests their actions were unavoidable or even beneficent.

I think particularly of Harvard's recent announcement that families making less than \$200k a year would have free tuition, while conspicuously omitting the caveat that families like my own—previously on full financial aid—would actually see a higher total cost of attendance due to reductions in aid in other areas.

Harvard's ailing reputation is not an indictment of its students and their high performance, but rather its leadership and their actions. We already have more administrators than undergraduate students, a level of administrative bloat utterly laughable among other top institutions.

On the rare occasion that these administrators don't make a point of being anonymous and unaccountable, they demonstrate open contempt for their students: infamously, hot breakfast programs were slashed in 2008 under the guise of tightening the belt due to the recession, and have only returned to one house in the following two decades. This saved an estimated \$900,000 a year for Harvard. They could have saved

an equivalent amount by letting go of just nine administrators, but decided instead to materially worsen the student experience for decades' worth of graduating classes.

If you want to make students care more about their academics, you have to improve student life and wellbeing, not worsen it. Find the funds in our \$60 billion endowment—a figure greater than the GDPs of most countries—or lay off the thousands of redundant administrators who cause so many of our problems in the first place.

Pump the millions of dollars you save into better ingredients and restoring hot breakfast for HUDS, better compensation for dining hall and custodial staff whom we actually see every day, better funding for undervalued programs (including my own academic homes of Folklore & Mythology and the department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations); don't make a school such as Harvard, where we already have to compete to join clubs, even more competitive. Don't keep passing off administrative failings as if the students are responsible for them.

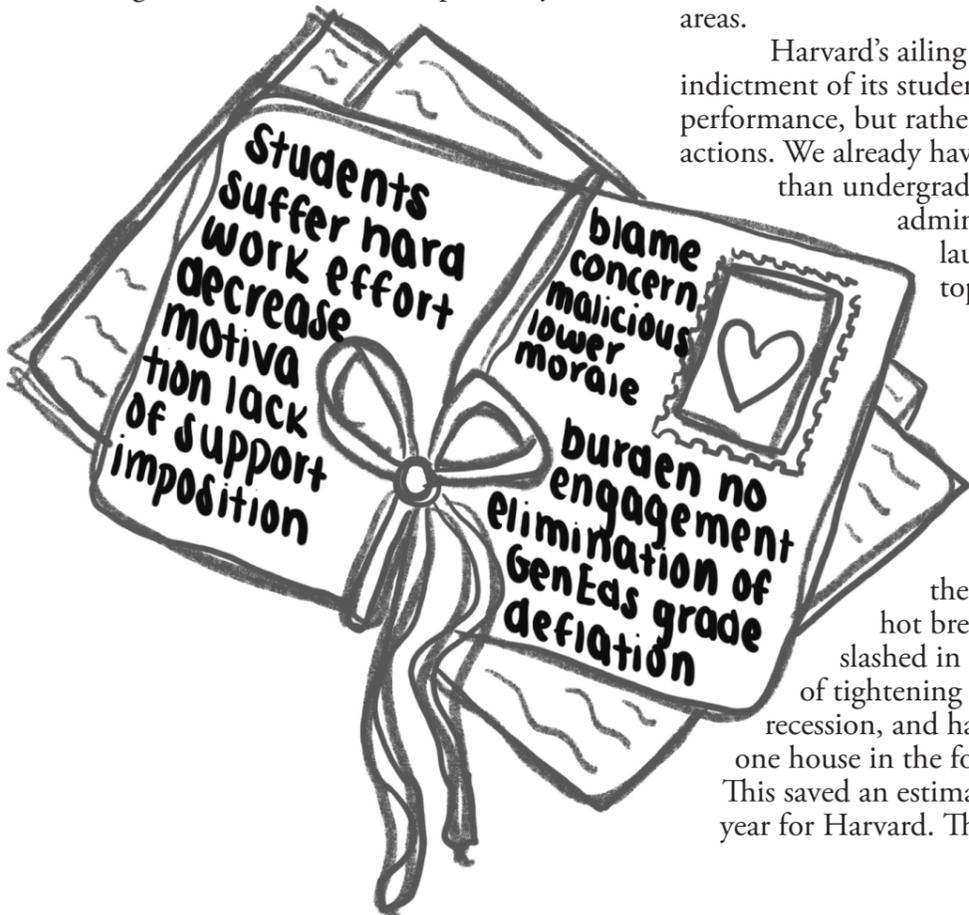
To cause such stress among our students in times like these, with Harvard being both as privileged and as problematic as it is, is beneath contempt. We live in times when violent political injustices are being perpetrated against millions by our own government, domestically and abroad. Many of our own students will be impacted by the Trump administration's actions and rhetoric.

Even beyond these political forces outside of Harvard's control, we are talking about a school that has practically waged war against its time-capped faculty, even after all its virtue signaling about ending time caps last spring. We are talking about a school whose most vulnerable employees make so little that they have to commute from an hour away. We are talking about a school that, even now, hasn't taken action against numerous faculty credibly accused of sexual misconduct—about a school where three of its currently employed faculty are extensively named in the Epstein files!

And yet the biggest problem facing the brightest minds in charge of the most lauded academic institution in the world is that its students are competent? That, God forbid, they might enjoy their education? This is what is at the forefront of your minds? Well, I'm sorry, but in 2026, that should not be headline news.

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**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA
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What HKS Students Lose by Not Having Physical Newspapers and Magazines

Having such extensive digital access is lovely, but it cannot match the experience of reading in print.

BY JONAH SHROCK

Walk into any public library in Boston, Cambridge, or Somerville—or in most cities across the country—and you will find physical copies of the “New York Times,” “Washington Post,” and “Wall Street Journal,” alongside a few magazines. But walk into the Harvard Kennedy School of Government library, and you will not find any print periodicals—to access those publications, you need to go online or across the river to the Business School.

With reading online being the default mode of news consumption for an overwhelming majority of Americans, I am confident that few of us have noticed this absence. For a group of students that cares so deeply about understanding the world’s problems and their manifold complexities, this is a pity. To truly engage with the news we consume, we need print newspapers and magazines, and we should care about having easy, convenient access to them in our own library.

I am grateful to have free digital access to the best English-language publications through HKS, but reading on a screen is simply a different experience from reading print media. If you read the “Boston Globe,” for example, on your computer or a mobile app, you are attempting to perform a cognitively demanding task on two of the most distracting technologies ever invented. You may receive a text and feel compelled to respond. Or, you may click on a hyperlink attached to the op-ed you are reading. Next thing you know, you have spent 10 minutes on Emmanuel Macron’s Wikipedia page, ordered a blender and two new pairs of pants, but have not read past the first paragraph.

Research shows that if you shift your attention from one cognitive task to another, it will take 23 minutes to fully reestablish the deepest level of attention and focus. In other words, if you read online and regularly divert your attention, you are limiting the depth of your engagement with the piece.

Even if you turn notifications off, you know that a whole world of distraction is just a click of the mouse away; avoiding the temptation becomes an active effort.

But it is not just the potential for distraction; it is the screen itself. Studies have demonstrated that when people read on screens, they scan and scroll. They read the headlines and their eyes dart around looking for the most important information. This makes it much harder for the brain to deeply engage with complex details and nuances the way we do when we have nothing but pieces of paper in front of us.

There is nothing inherently wrong with skimming. Sometimes it is necessary and practical. If there were a breaking news story, I would likely go online just to skim the most

pertinent details. Not all reading has to be deep reading, and casual reading is perfectly fine to do online. But we should be honest in recognizing that these are two entirely different activities.

Granted, there is some phenomenal content on news publications’ websites, like interactive data visualizations or op-docs, that cannot be reproduced on paper. In many cases, newspapers will let you know in the print edition when they have published such content online, so there is no reason as to why our default mode of news consumption should be digital.

We need to be sure we are taking the time to deeply engage with analysis of current affairs, which includes the focused reading of longer pieces. If we get our news primarily from the internet, we will likely be more up to date on the latest remark Trump made during an Oval Office meeting with a world leader. But if we rely primarily on print publications, we would gain a deeper understanding of the underlying forces behind the headlines.

There are few better ways to educate oneself than to grab a physical copy of “The Economist” and read it for an hour uninterrupted. Our library should ideally be facilitating this deep-learning experience. Yet with so little interest in print media in general, it is understandable that the library has deprioritized it.

Most students likely have never noticed the lack of print publications. When I have brought it up to friends and members of the student government, most respond that they never really thought about it and do not seem too bothered. HKS students are perfectly content to read online.

When I asked HKS Manager of Collections & Library Services, Keely Wilczek, about this absence, she explained that the school used to have physical publications. They did not abandon them because the library decided they were not worth having. Rather, HKS is a smaller library than, say, Widener Library; with increasing requests for online access, they allocated the budget away from print publications to address this need.

“We were really seeing, as far as we could tell, very little use of print,” Wilczek said.

“Having budgets, you have to look at, ‘What are people asking for?’ ... ‘What’s actually getting used?’”

According to Wilczek, once they were gone, no one requested to bring print

editions back. This is precisely the problem.

The lack of physical news and magazines at the HKS library is a result of a broader reading culture that has shifted online. I cannot fault our library for taking away print publications that students do not value. The library ultimately serves the HKS community, and its offerings simply reflect students’ own choices and the decline of deep reading across America, even at the highest levels of education.

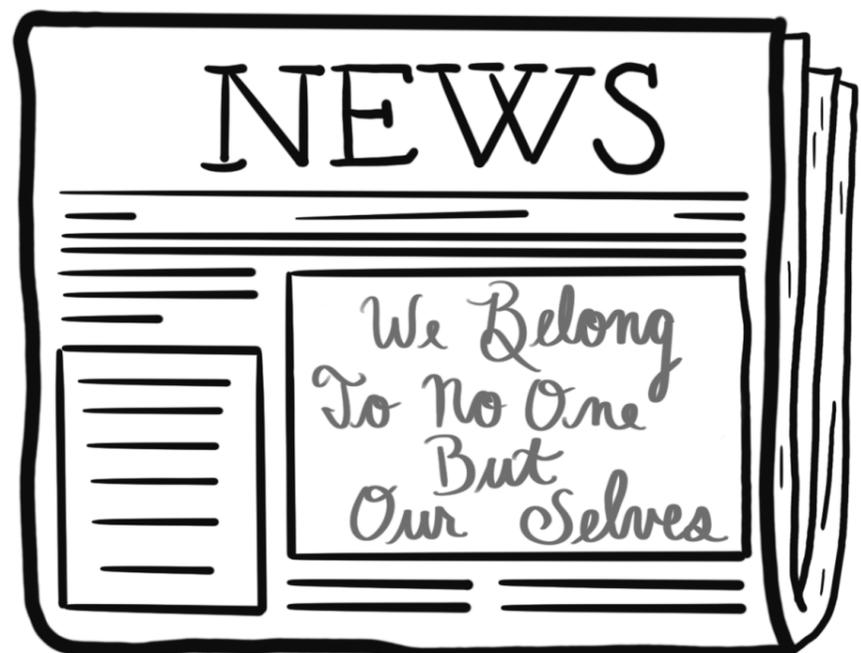
Yet, the library considers every request to acquire a publication that comes in. If enough people request a certain publication, the library will likely acquire it.

I hope I have convinced at least a handful of HKS students to join me in requesting physical copies of newspapers and magazines. You can find a form to petition by Googling “Purchase Request Form Harvard Library” and clicking on the first link. To request the “Financial Times,” for example, put “Financial Times (print edition)” under “Title and Edition,” and select Harvard Kennedy School Library under “Optional: direct your request to a specific library.”

As policy students, we need to be deliberate about our reading diets. Bringing back physical publications to the HKS library would be a meaningful step toward deeper engagement with the events that shape the world.

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**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA
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“What Punishments of God Are Not Gifts?”

An exploration of the painful intersection of love and grief.

BY NOAH BASDEN '29

In a 2019 interview, Anderson Cooper asked Stephen Colbert if he really believed a statement he had previously quoted from a letter by J.R.R. Tolkien: “What punishments of God are not gifts?” Colbert, after a brief pause, replied “Yes” with a smile on his face.

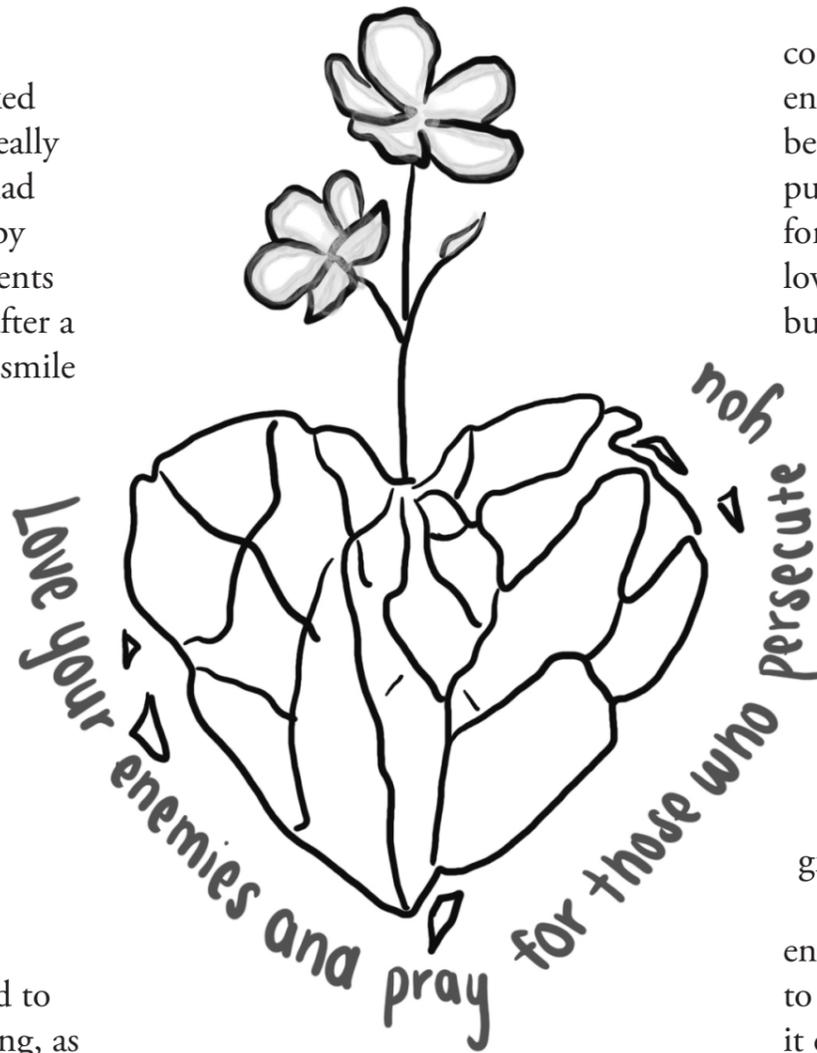
The interview between the two is heartbreaking, wholesome, and everything in between—particularly as the conversation is centred around the two’s personal experience with loss—but it is Colbert’s question, “What punishments of God are not gifts?” that I find myself always coming back to.

Grief is not a dirty word, but we, as a society, have decided to treat it as such. Grief and suffering, as Colbert discussed in the interview, are the inevitable byproducts of the gift of existence, even when it is hard to see them as anything more than unbearable.

We often look at grief in isolation, but, like hopes and joys, grief is shared. In his sermon at Memorial Church on Feb. 1, the Reverend Matthew Ichihashi Potts spoke to this notion. “Sharing our joys and sharing our griefs, and our hopes, and sharing this bread and this wine. This is what love looks like,” Potts said, in reference to communion. Grief and love are inextricably linked.

Having recently lost a close relative and contending with grief myself, this idea of love coming from mourning struck a chord. I have reflected upon speaking at my late aunt’s funeral and remember looking out at the congregation and thinking I saw a wave of sadness in front of my eyes. In reality, hidden behind those tears was love.

Even in writing this piece, I do not feel sadness, nor do tears well up in my eyes; however, just like Colbert, a smile has crept across my face. I smile because I know what love looks like now more than ever. It looks like many hands on shaking shoulders and silent dinners where the only conversation is between knife and fork—yet there is the understanding that I am here, and so are you.



I know what love is, but I still struggle. I wonder if the punishments, whatever they may be, that people endure throughout their lives are always worth the gift. I look out at the world and see widespread pain and unimaginable suffering. We bear witness to crimes so heinous that they would make the devil weep, day after day after day—and often wonder where the reward is. Is the punishment always worth the gift?

What gift of God will heal the heart of Mohammed Mahdi Abu Al-Qumsan, who, on his way to pick up the birth certificates for his newborn twins on Aug. 14, 2024, was informed that the boys Aysal and Ayser, along with their mother, Jumana, were killed in an Israeli strike? In a devastating parallel image, what gift of God will heal the hearts of Yarden Bibas, whose wife and two infant children were kidnapped and killed in Hamas captivity in Nov. 2023? Perhaps Colbert’s view holds for some types of loss, but not for losses like these. Not all griefs, shared or unshared, can yield a gift.

That is precisely why we must lead our lives with love. Standing at my aunt’s funeral, I saw love hidden behind the puffy eyes and the sniffing noses, but for Mohammed and Yarden, and for

countless others, that love may never be enough. Nevertheless, we must offer it because we owe it to each other. If some punishments are senseless and exist just for the sake of punishment alone, then love is not the reward for suffering well, but simply what we owe one another despite it all.

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” Matthew 5:43-48 reads. This instruction acknowledges that compassion and care exist outside of fairness, politics, and violence. It suggests that, intrinsically, Mohammed and Yarden, victims of opposing forces, are equally deserving of our collective grief.

God does not ask us to love our enemies because it is easy; God asks us to love our enemies precisely because it demands something of us. Loving in this way means sharing in grief, refusing to let hatred define us, and choosing humanity over conflict. If love were only contingent on love returned, it would be transactional and fit neatly into boxes that do not exist.

Potts spoke of communion as a ritual that speaks to deeper themes, but I see it more as a reality. Mohammed’s and Yarden’s losses—though both heartbreaking in their own right—do not exist in isolation. Like grief, they are intertwined, bound by the sometimes unbearable fabric of human existence.

The people we love shape us in life and in death; we honour them by carrying forward the love they instilled in us, not by collapsing under the weight of their loss. With that thought, I return to the image of Stephen Colbert, smiling despite his great bereavements: not because the punishment was worth it, but because he chose to let love be louder than loss.

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LOVE.**

**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA
'27**

We Should Love, Even When the World is Decaying.

Why love itself is an act of rebellion.

BY LAURA CREMER '29

"We accept the love we think we deserve."
I vividly remember the moment I heard those words while watching the television screen. I hated Stephen Chbosky's "The Perks of Being a Wallflower," but that sentence stuck, even more than a big spoonful of honey when sick: slow, heavy, impossible to swallow. Those words dwelled because, at that time, I believed with a quiet certainty that I was not entitled to be loved.

Love was tailored for a body that was not mine. Love was the warm colors of dusk, the pinks melting into burnt orange, warming the pale blue sky. I could view that painterly sky from a distance, almost touch it; lift my arm, my cold fingertips brushing the syrupy warmth of the paint. But then I would look back at my hands.

Empty.

I was still standing far away. Love was a horizon I could not step into.

The genesis of this rejection of love was the rejection of the world I hoped to live in. The world, as I saw it then, was rotting both slowly and all at once. The false promises of international institutions were collapsing.

Governments and people were renegeing on their duties. My hope curdled against bureaucracy. Wealthy nations fed on systems that starved others and called it inevitability.

Climate policies were dying. Our Earth, burning. Global warming turned into global boiling. Our hope for the Paris Agreement was collapsing. Power imbalances and dependency relationships hardened. Donors shaped the agenda, overreporting adaptation finance.



They didn't care about who they hurt. They didn't care about droughts, losses in gross domestic product, rising sea levels, or the 80 million people displaced. They didn't care about food insecurity, economic devastation, and health crises. No, they profited from this vicious cycle.

Injustices became structural, permanent, almost decorative. Humanitarian crisis after crisis. War after war. Death after death. All were advertised in the news as though they were entertainment. But those images flickering on the television screen were images of blood still flowing.

It was not only the institutions, but also the people. Populism, far-right backlash, classmates calling me "feminazi" for standing for equality. Hate, because for some, you should only love who you desire if your heart obeys societal binaries. Overconsumption, because who cares if someone's fifty \$10 dresses from Shein were made by an exploited six-year-old. In Spain, we say, "Ojos que no ven, corazón que no siente."

And so the world burned, just out of reach, like the twilight I could not touch. In such a world, love felt obscene, frivolous. A betrayal. How could I crave tenderness when the world itself was suffering? How could I justify joy when so many were denied dignity?

Perhaps this crisis was an idiosyncratic gift, if you could name it that: the inability to feel deserving of love in a world that seemed so relentlessly unloving. I sabotaged relationships, withdrew entirely from meeting new people, hid myself in the corners of my mind, and never left what I thought could only hurt me. I controlled what only I could: my body, my mind, and food.

But controlling my body didn't stop the world from hurting. Withholding love from myself did not shield anyone from injustice. My shrunken self was not saving the world. My insistence that wretchedness was the only morally acceptable response stopped making sense. I was too tired, my eyes too swollen and hollow.

I noticed the crack. In hearing my mum laugh, watching my dog's zoomies, and feeling the sunlight spill across my face, I felt a flicker of something I had long forbidden. Care. Care for myself. Care for others. A tender defiance against the world I was living in. I began to notice that love was not only the grand gestures in the dusk I could not reach. It was in the brush of a hand, words bathed in joy, the stubborn

persistence of a leaf in a windy fall afternoon. Those small resistances to despair became my proof that the world, even burning, still held fragments of comfortable warmth.

It was not easy. Old habits clung like ivy around my ribs. But I learned that desire itself could be an act of rebellion. To want connection, to allow tenderness, was not frivolous, but survival.

Love is not an indulgence, but resistance.

And so I began to reach—not for the entire horizon, for that was still distant, but for the edges of it. I lifted my arms toward its warmth, and for once, the warm paint stayed, rivulets of crimson and orange dripping down my cold fingertips. And I let love fill my hands.

I began to nurture my family, my friends, my body, and my mind. I left control and sought discomfort. I helped with what I could. I supported what I could. In rooms heavy with unspoken words, I helped kids discover their laughter, and watched it carry them beyond their families' thorny shadows. I stayed with grandmothers whose families had forgotten them once they became burdens. I clung to music, words, and art, for it was the only thing that kept me sane. It was the only way that I could touch the human heart without saying too much—where I could advocate, rebel, and roar without screaming.

Love remains an unresolved question in my mind. It is messy and complicated, and I still find it easy to retreat to the familiar contours of myself at the first hint of disappointment. Yet now I know love can be part of my life too. I, as much as anyone, deserve to slide my fingers across that painterly sky.

They still don't care; all could die, but if they've got money in their pocket, they aren't afraid to lie. But oh, love is such a powerful force. We are all amateurs of love, tumbling through this vast, uncharted dusk. Still, we are here for the brief, fragile span of time that we have. We owe it to ourselves and to a world we cannot fully change, to love fiercely and tenderly, stubbornly and loudly.

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MISANTHROPIC.**

**GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO
'28**

10 Things I “Love” About Harvard

My toxic situationship with our school.

BY HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26

Dear Harvard,
Given that it's Valentine's Day and all, and we have this entire season devoted to love, I figured it was an appropriate time to write this letter to you. Others are writing love letters to crushes and situationships, but you—arguably my most intense relationship—deserve one too. After all, I've given you more time, sleep, and formative years of my life than any other relationship. It would be rude not to acknowledge such a serious commitment. And like most serious commitments, this one too requires honesty, even if it isn't always flattering.

So here it is. My ode, my ballad, my love letter to you: Harvard.

I love the way you never let me feel too comfortable. From the moment I arrived, you made it clear that belonging here is not a permanent state, but rather a daily negotiation. Surrounded by geniuses who treat changing the world like just another extracurricular, I feel constant imposter syndrome—and it pushes me to do more. I feel like I'm never the only one—there's always competition. Comfort is fleeting, and confidence feels provisional, both things easily revoked by the next class, room, or reminder that someone else is doing just a little bit more. Thank you for that. Nothing says love like a constant, subtle fear of not being enough.

I love the way every conversation here turns into a networking opportunity. Five minutes into what I think is a casual chat—scratch that, two minutes—I realize all we've talked about are things covered by our resumes. It's nice knowing no interaction will ever be wasted; every coffee, section, and new introduction is a potential new LinkedIn connection. I've learned how to speak more fluently about myself, whether I'm ready to or not. Somewhere along the way, curiosity started to feel strategic, and small talk became a necessary skill rather than a pleasant pause. “To be loved is to be changed,” or so they say.

I love the way you show me things I didn't even know I wanted. I arrived with vague notions: curiosity, learning, happiness. I'm leaving with clear ideas, knowing much more about the ideal

career paths of consulting, investment banking, tech sales, and other jobs I couldn't have explained at eighteen. You have a talent for clarifying ambition and making certain paths feel inevitable. It's efficient. Persuasive. Hard to resist, in the way any good attraction is.

I love how indefatigable you make me. My calendar must be full for me to feel fulfilled, and space is suspicious—something to be filled, optimized, improved. Exhaustion becomes proof of commitment, and being busy turns into a moral virtue instead of simply a condition. You've taught me that relaxation is indulgent and rest is earned. I'm undeniably more productive now. We should always push each other to achieve more.

I love the way you make me appreciate my home so much more. I despise your weather, and how it consumes me for half of the school year. The cold that seemingly cuts through you on the way to class, the way the sun sets at 4 p.m. when the grayness settles for weeks at a time. It builds character, I think. Or at least it makes me appreciate the warmth of California. I wasn't grateful enough while I had all of that sunshine. So thank you for reminding me not to take it all for granted.

I love the way time moves so quickly here. Weeks disappear within seconds into p-sets, meetings, and deadlines, while individual moments—bad grades, rejection emails, long walks back to the Quad—stretch endlessly. To hate you is to always be aware that this is temporary, that semesters are counting down, that one day this relationship will end, whether I'm ready or not, and that that day is coming sooner rather than later.

Perhaps what I hate about you is that I can never truly hate you—maybe a little, but not entirely.

Sometimes I wonder who I would be if I didn't love you. If I had chosen somewhere calmer, kinder. I imagine a version of myself who sleeps more, worries less, and compares herself less to others. But then I remember: this is what love is supposed to do. Challenge you. Push you. Make you better. Isn't it? Nothing good comes easy, right?

I love how much I complain about

you—practically my love language. In good company, I criticize you constantly, loudly, and creatively. This works as long as the frustration stays internal. The moment someone else steps up to bat, I rush to your defense. Only I get to be frustrated with you, because no one else cares about you as much as I do.

Mostly, I hate the way that despite all of this, I truly do love you. I love the way you've taught me that exhaustion can be worth it, pressure is purposeful, and becoming someone new is better than never changing at all. I love the way you frustrate me, challenge me, and most of all, help me grow. In the end, that's the feeling I will carry with me.

Love,

HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26
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GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE
AFIHENE '27



Point/Counterpoint: Club-cest

Two friends debate the pros and cons of club-cest.

BY HOMIE HOPPER AND RETIRED RIZZLER

* *Both of the long-term club-cest relationships referred to throughout the piece have (sort of) ended at the time of this publication.*

Homie Hopper: I'm a firm believer in club-cest. I've dabbled across most of my clubs, but one of the most egregious of my club-cest violations occurred within this very organization.

Retired Rizzler: Unfortunately, Homie Hopper and I shat where we ate (at the same dinner table). I am no longer a proponent of club-cest.

The Club-cest We Engaged With.

RR: First, I feel like it's important to establish that both of our club-cests were technically with our seniors. This created an unequal power dynamic from the start, especially since I believe the man inevitably holds more cards by societal standards. When he undertook a more executive role halfway through our...relationship? That really changed how we interacted.

HH: In my situation, even though she was my senior, she wasn't ever my direct manager, or even on the same board as me. We ended up non-exclusively hooking up for the better part of a year.

Let's Talk Sex.

RR: "I wish you were riding me. I want you to wrap your legs around me as I finish." Most girls who get these texts would be ready to turn off the lights and slip under the covers with some SKYN. For a while, I was her. But by the end of this harrowing relationship, these texts softened my boner so fast he might as well have said, "I'm not like the other guys."

HH: Honestly, I miss the days of invisible ink and cheeky glances across the room. Club-cest has all the trappings of a normal college hook-up, but a touch more illicit. I thrive on that adrenaline. "I want food and then to fuck"—like yeah. DND and low brightness during meetings with an open laptop were a must. Showing up to Monday storyboards without a bra on was too.

RR: A few of our in-office routines changed once we started

getting down and dirty. And after eight months, I realized that the unbalanced power dynamic that existed both professionally and personally affected how I thought about the sex. I always felt like I had to perform flawlessly—one, because I think that is the eternal female crisis, and two, because his opinion of me determined my future in the organization. When I look back on this, I was way overthinking everything—more so than I ever had with past sexual partners. That is why club-cest was just never a good idea for me. And in retrospect, this was evident from the start.

Blacking out and waking up in his room? Not a great way to start a stable relationship.

HH: Blacking out and waking up dazed, confused, and naked is undeniably relatable. Yet on my end, uhm... no, we just, like, had great sex. That's it. That's all there is to say. I'd say more if I remembered more. I can't say that I ever remember being sober when we dabbled in copulation. I can say that most of the professional club dynamics didn't carry over into the bedroom. Especially because there had never been much of a power dynamic, although I do think I was sometimes expected to initiate, given my position as a younger member of the organization. As they say, "you can't fuck a comper, but the comper can fuck you."

It's not like I wasn't receiving heavy hints. I remember the first time we hooked up, I literally had walked into the party that night thinking in my head, there is no way we don't fuck tonight. Luckily, I was right. So right, in fact, that a certain former member's picture frame was slightly damaged after being banged off the bathroom wall.

RR: Speaking of bathrooms, my roommate did, in fact, walk in on us in the Dunster single-user restroom one time. Not our finest moment. Though I would argue that being horizontal in the office was worse...

We're Passionate About Our Club.

HH: Club-cest undeniably made me much more involved in the organization. You know the saying, "having a class crush will ensure your attendance will be

100%"—that definitely applied here. When we were just starting, I would go out of my way to do things for the club just to impress and get closer to her. In that sense, club-cest felt really beneficial to me; it motivated me to invest and advance in the organization. In fact, I've actually joined more than one club just because I thought someone was hot. Hot people motivate me; that motivation drives my success, and I think that's a good thing. Find what pushes you and take advantage of that—for me, it was as simple as club-cest.

RR: Club-cest definitely had me banging on the office doors, eager to be present at every work time, board meeting, and social. Sometimes I'd even spring for the see-through Skims shirt and matching bra. I wanted to make sure he was thinking, "Wow, what a babe." But I soon began struggling to distinguish between what I was doing for the relationship and what I was doing for the club's genuine success and development.

HH: That's a really good point. I do think that's why having boundaries within the organization, like being on different boards, is super helpful.

So, Should You Mix Business With Pleasure?

RR: This was my first club-cest infraction. In my mind, since I was easily able to maintain intra-organization friendships, such affection shouldn't have been much harder to replicate romantically. But I quickly learned this was not the case. Considering our roles operated so incredibly close in the organization, the lines between flirting and focusing often blurred.

HH: I felt that too. It definitely became harder to separate critiques of my work from critiques of who I was in the relationship. There was also definitely a period where flirting would happen through the work—I would intentionally pick up certain assignments as a show of, "Hey, I'm into you." In response, I'd consistently get priority for the assignments I really wanted. It was fun like a game, but when you do get negative feedback, it's much harder to process.

RR: I also struggled with the professional versus friend versus club-cest dynamic. We, of course, have close friends in the organization, and I sometimes found myself in situations where I had to choose between backing him or a good friend. It is always a hard conversation when you have to pick your friend or your “boss”—I would argue you ultimately must side with your boss to retain employment. However, when your boss is also your side piece, this really complicates things. Your friend now sees your choice as you picking a man over them, rather than simply a professionally necessary outcome.

HH: Yeah, it is super easy for club-cest to turn into a professional nightmare. I’ve always been very comfortable with codeswitching and shifting personal dynamics dependent on the environment. In terms of how I wanted to be perceived, I think we both kept it strictly professional until we were out of the club space. It did, however, get harder once we started working together. We were just incapable of getting anything done—there was no world in which we were spending our time together writing an article rather than fucking or goofing around.

I will say, one of the really positive aspects of club-cest is that it is actually really nice to have someone you can lean on within the club. The club is such a big part of my life, so it was fantastic to have a partner who deeply understood me by my side. My friends in the club, the work I do for the club, the drama in the club, all consume mental space, and being able to share that with someone who completely understands it is beautiful and unique to club-cest.

We were able to relate to each other over something we both really loved and were seriously involved in. The club became a bridge between our passions.

RR: That is something I also appreciated. We all spend considerable time and energy on this organization. Inevitably, there were tough moments in the space, and he noticed. If I left the room to recuperate, he would follow me out, listen to my concerns, and offer affectionate gestures before we rejoined the group. This went both ways.

Are Secrets Really That Sexy?

RR: I think visibility matters. Though many of our publication peers had a hunch we hooked up once, most people didn’t know we continued to see each other. Had more people been privy to the inner workings of our sex lives, all of our interactions would have inevitably been psychoanalyzed—a dilemma for two creatives in the same section wanting to be known for their work products, not their interpersonal dynamics.

HH: I unfortunately can’t say the same about my relationship in terms of secrecy. We hooked up for the first time at a pretty public club event. I was never shy about my long-standing crush on her, even when she had a girlfriend. We also have definitely been caught dfmo-ing at a variety of high-profile campus events, so it wasn’t exactly a secret. Everyone knew, but I don’t think many people knew what the actual status of our relationship ever was (myself included). I think that made it easier—the lack of secrecy and labels eliminated a lot of what could’ve been negative external pressure on our relationship.

Simultaneously, it was definitely weird to know that people in the club felt like they were privy to the intimacy of our relationship. We weren’t subtle, but club members also definitely took certain liberties with respect to how she and I were grouped at events or on projects.

Ending the Relationship.

HH: Let’s be honest. It is really fucking hard to stop hooking up with someone that you are required to see multiple times a week. I know you’ve said you and your

partner were on and off, and I’d say the same. There were definitely points during the relationship where we would be on a break, but then suddenly texting each other during a club meeting and giggling. That often quickly spiraled—the next day we’d be grabbing drinks and sleeping over. I think in both of our situations, things have only really been able to hard-stop because one of the parties got cuffed.

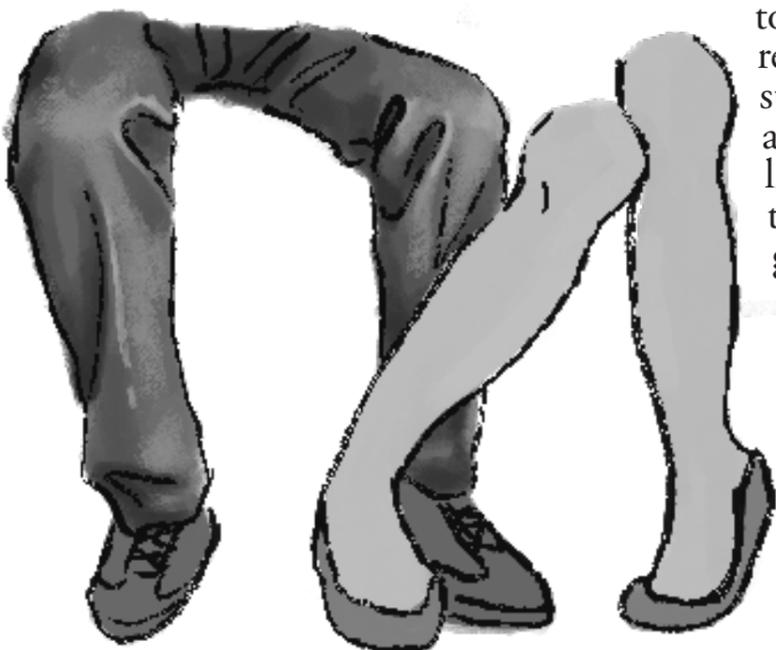
RR: Yeah. Our relationship became something toxic yet comforting to return to—especially because he once said he wanted to buy a house with me. I was trapped in the schoolgirl crush naiveté. But once he started seeing someone else (though can anyone tell?), I knew it was officially over.

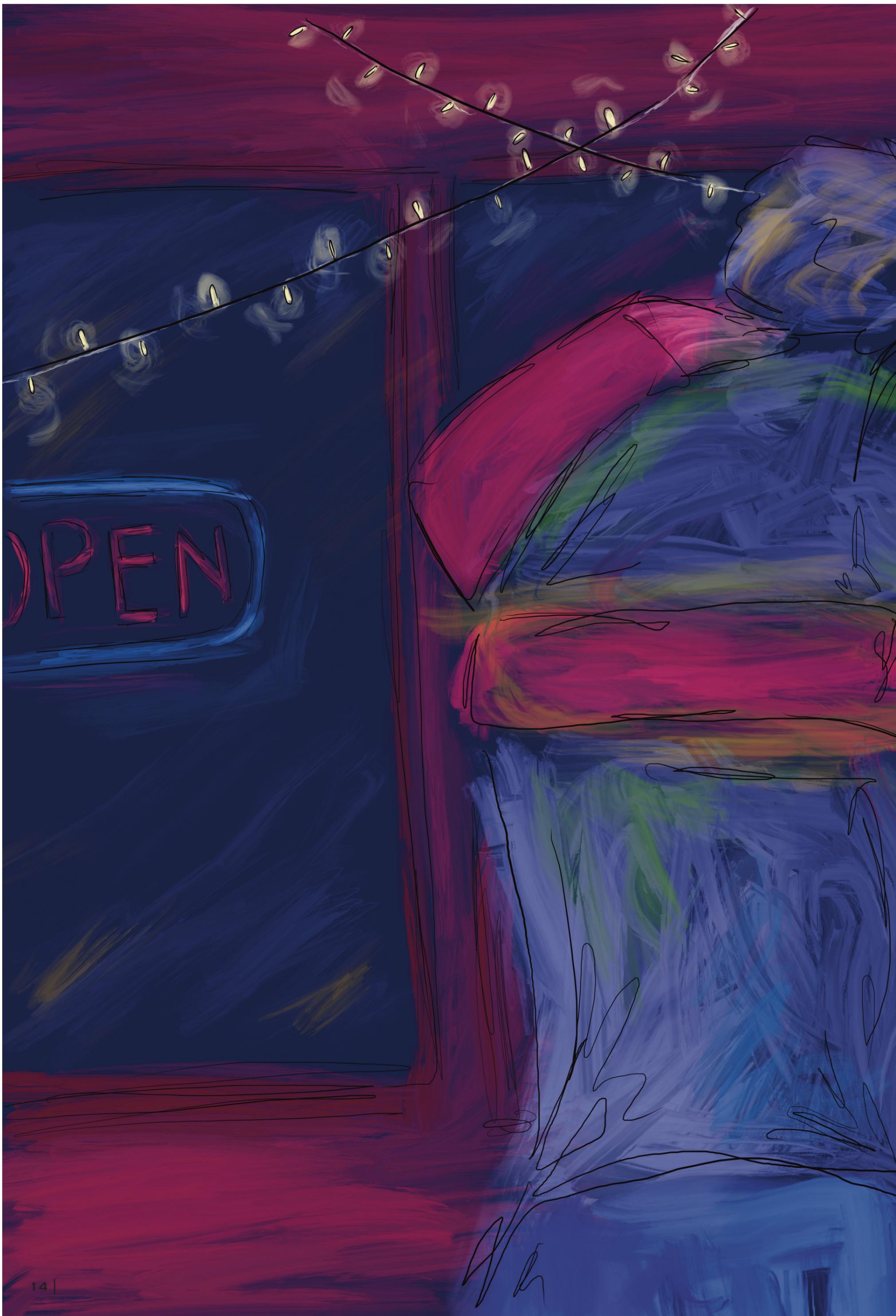
At the end of the day, club-cest can really go either way. You have to be wary of boundaries and decide for yourself whether you’ll be able to separate your work and personal lives. The clear divide between our experiences was the power dynamic that carried over from the club to the relationship. It can be dangerous to hook up with your senior and someone who is directly associated with you and your work product.

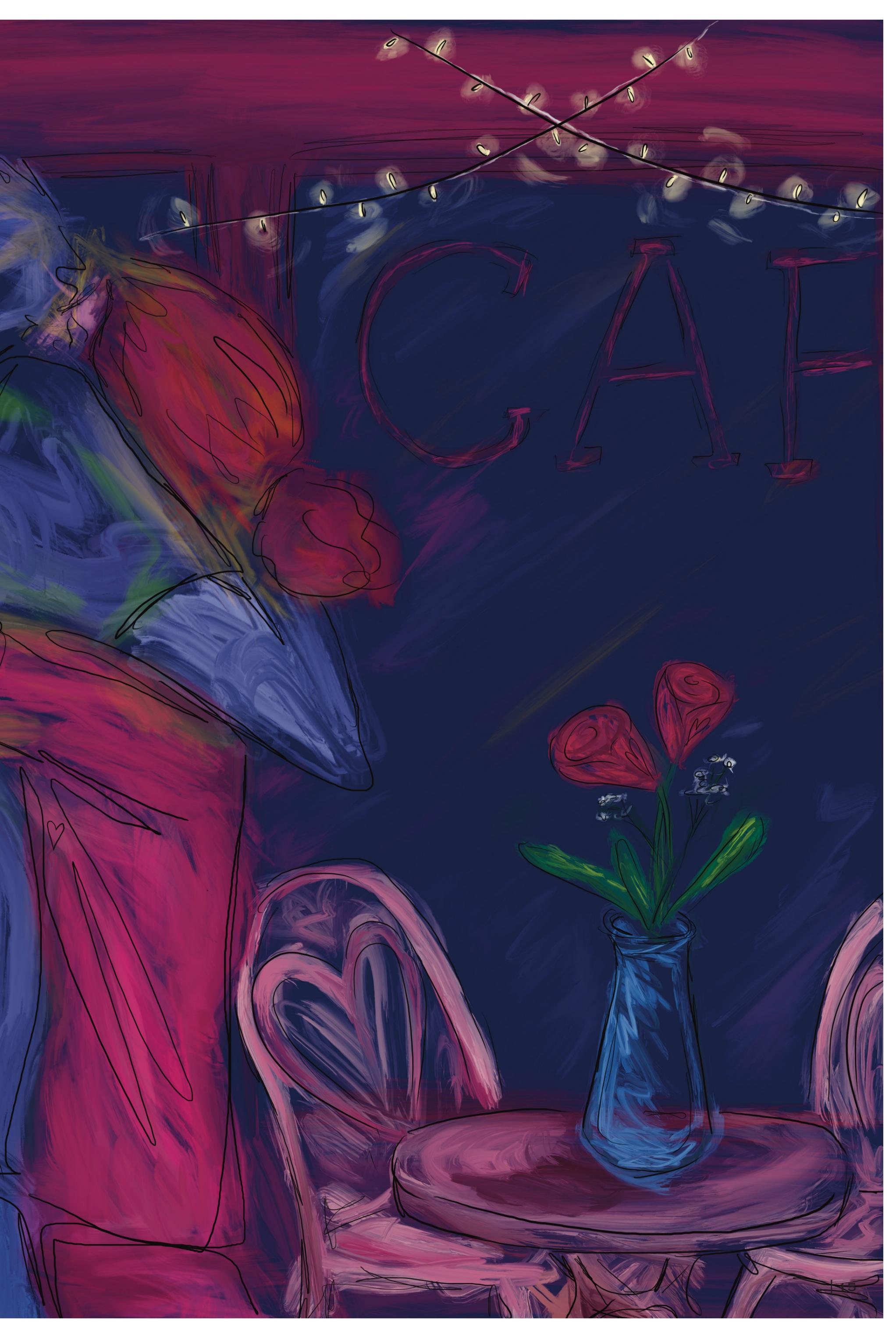
For RR, the unequal authority and professional difficulties damaged her perception of club-cest. For HH, she found that club-cest brought her and her partner closer together through shared passions, more frequent interactions, and projects. We both agree that neither of our relationships would’ve happened without the club. So at least we have the “Harvard Independent” to thank for that.

HOMIE HOPPER WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO HAVE CLASS CRUSHES, CLUB CRUSHES, AND WORK CRUSHES UNTIL SHE’S MENOPAUSAL. RETIRED RIZZLER WOULD CHOOSE CELIBACY OVER ANOTHER CLUB CRUSH.

GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27







Boyfriend or Foe?

This piece will answer this question and more.

BY AUDREY WU '29

Some love it; some hate it. Either way, this time of year is unavoidable: shop windows become crowded with roses and chocolates, reservations are made in the blink of an eye, and couples and singles alike begin to prepare for the fated holiday of Valentine's Day. As Feb. 14 creeps closer, the question on my mind is: are boyfriends our friends or our enemies?

Published on Oct. 29, 2025, a "Vogue" article titled, "Is Having a Boyfriend Embarrassing Now?" marked what I understood to be the genesis of this now-popular debate. Author Chanté Joseph's article focused on the recent shift in women's attitudes towards having a boyfriend; while women used to center their identities around their partners, the concept of having a male partner has become less mainstream. Moreover, audiences have gradually become more annoyed at seeing couples post their relationships on social media (I'm mentally preparing for numerous Valentine's Day posts to come).

Joseph's narrative went viral across social media platforms such as TikTok, and her theory was met with resistance—many insisted the article did not apply to their boyfriends.

Having been raised on romantic comedies from "When Harry Met Sally" to "10 Things I Hate About You," I have always loved Valentine's Day—boyfriend or not. But when discussing the holiday with my friends, my mind kept returning to the "Vogue" article. Although the holiday focuses on aspects of romantic love, the article points to Generation Z's increasing idealization of being single.

A recent study conducted by Match Group and the Kinsey Institute, surveying singles ages 18-29, reveals that only 55%

of Gen Z feel prepared for a romantic relationship. Additionally, 75% reported being in no rush to find a partner, with women less likely than men to feel that dating is an important part of their social life.

Though these statistics support the notion that women are placing less of their social and personal value on boyfriends, in my opinion, having a boyfriend isn't, by itself, embarrassing; it's only when having a boyfriend takes priority over other important aspects of your life that it should become something to reconsider.

Boyfriends should be accessories to your life, not your personality; however, it can be hard to internalize this, especially for less experienced women in the early stages of a relationship—the time when a girl often starts to neglect her relationships with other people in her life for a guy she met a few months ago.

This can present in many small ways at first: canceling plans for him, having to beg for the bare minimum, or constantly texting him (we've all been there). Eventually, this may build up, and it becomes difficult for someone to maintain a relationship with a friend whose main priority is a boy whose frontal lobe has not fully developed.

As someone who has fallen victim to this dilemma before, I wish the "Vogue" article had come out in time to teach me to recognize that my value isn't dependent on having a boyfriend and that it's not my job to teach him how to be one. This isn't to say that spending time with your boyfriend is bad, just a friendly reminder to learn to balance and fit him into your life, rather than reshaping yours to accommodate him.

Joseph also discusses how women often want to have the benefits of having a boyfriend without appearing as if they are boyfriend-obsessed. To avoid seeming boyfriend-crazy, soft launching has become increasingly popular. Essentially, they want the perks of going on dates, romantic treatment, and physical benefits while trying to resist seeming like their lives revolve around their boyfriends.

Looking back, I don't regret having boyfriends, although I do regret making my world smaller to make room for them. In my past relationships, I've never regretted the time and love I've given them, but I have let them go each time I've started to lose myself. I am grateful for the ways that I've grown as a result, and grateful that I was able to walk away in order to rediscover myself.

Relationships are about finding a careful balance and learning to let another person into your life while making sure that they don't consume it.

At its core, Valentine's Day doesn't need to be about choosing between independence and romance. It's about first choosing yourself, learning to love your own identity, and letting romantic love find you as a result. So, on Feb. 14, whether you're posting pictures of Valentine's Day dinner with your boyfriend or deleting Instagram to avoid these stories, just remember that the day doesn't just need to be about finding love but about letting it find you when you're ready. At the end of the day, embarrassing or not, boyfriends aren't everything. When done right, having a boyfriend should be an addition to your life, not a subtraction from other parts of it.

AUDREY WU '29 (AUDREYWU@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS EMBRACING HER INNER CARRIE BRADSHAW.

GRAPHIC BY KERRIE ZHU '28



Writing Love Poems

My struggle with a beloved genre.

BY CLORIS SHI '29

Staring at a blank page this week with Valentine's Day fast approaching, I find myself drafting a love poem. This is hard work for me; I actually tend to avoid it. I can't recall the last love poem I wrote that had not left me embarrassed by how quickly my words curdled into cliché metaphors. Although I felt compelled to put down the pen and although the poem is addressed to no one in particular (but maybe that one party crush), I feel motivated—as a newly minted college student—to think more seriously about love.

I adore poetry, frankly, because of love poetry. It was the first genre that taught me how deeply words could penetrate, how language could reel me in and alter the way I move through the world. This leaves me now with a persistent question: how can I write a good love poem too?

I have primarily written like a “lovesick teenager fumbling with scansion and sentiment,” a description bemoaned by The Poetry Foundation when reflecting on the difficulty of this genre. In truth, being in love has often been detrimental to my poetry—a fish in water does not know much about water, let alone how to describe it. Whether I was writing about infatuation or heartbreak, the results were lackluster at best, ruinous at worst. My chosen metaphors felt too canonized, everything too pithy. I convinced myself that it was simply embarrassing to share my innermost thoughts, much less record them in indelible ink.

History suggests that this problem is not new. Love poetry, after all, has never been marginal to literary history. The oldest known love poem, the “Love Song of Shu-Sin,” composed in ancient Mesopotamia, celebrates a marriage using an incantatory refrain: “Bridegroom, dear to my heart / Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet. Lion, dear to my heart, Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet.”

Across centuries, the genre endures defiantly. We see it in the fragments of Sappho, which collapse the boundary between the personal and the universal (“soft as she is / [Aphrodite] has almost / killed me with / love for that boy”) and in the medieval troubadours, describing a love that “pricks [Lanval] and ... blazes in the dark.” From the mischievous conceits of John Donne (“The Flea”) and the “Roses are red” poem from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, to the poems of modern-day, the form has evolved.

Amid dynasty changes and world wars, in peace and in war, love remains our most persistent subject. Perhaps a good romance

poem is but a structure capable of holding a feeling without dissolving into it, holding it while the world and time rush by.

My mother always told me that poetry was supposed to be beautiful—love poetry undeniably so. Chinese poetry is scattered with motifs of natural landscapes in harmony, from streams and valleys to wild geese and plum blossoms. When I was in elementary school, she enrolled in an online course on Chinese literature and attended lectures while cooking dinner—I was inevitably a student too. As I sounded out phonemes at the kitchen island, her professors expounded on regulated verse and tonal restraint.

In that classical tradition, desire is rarely a declaration; it is a displacement. Emotion is cast onto the landscape until the scenery itself begins to ache. Love drifts through the weather; intimacy is found only in the negative space of images. I think of Su Shi's “Song of River City,” mourning an unreachable bond; Qin Guan's “Meeting Across the Milky Way,” which imagines spiritual union against cosmic distance; and the “Guan Ju” from the *Shijing*, where young desire is infused into ospreys and river reeds.

For a long time, my own writing felt like a repudiation of that inheritance. My language tended toward the blunt and the profane—abrasive, always prosaic, and deliberately unromantic. When I was an eighth-grader in quarantine, my first poems dealt with racism, specifically anti-Asian hate, and loneliness. In a world that felt insistently brutal, tenderness seemed beside the point. I avoided love poems and wrote instead about violence, body horror, and politics, perhaps because it felt safer to be angry than to be wanting.

It was not until high school that I encountered poets who opened me to this romantic genre.

I started studying in workshops with various poets, encountering works that were unabashed in their full-throated cry for love. I was struck by the humor and vulnerability in Jordan Hamel's poem “DJ Got Us Fallin in Love by Usher plays in the club as the world burns” and the empowering boldness in Danielle DeTiberis's “In a Black Tank Top.” I read about queer longing in Chen Chen's “i love you to the moon &”; I learned from Margaret Atwood's “Variation on the Word Sleep” that desire could be both haunting and precise.

My favorite poems are romance poems—lines written by Rumi, Shakespeare, and Li-Young Lee. These poems about love and intimacy are my heartstones, trinkets I return

to for warmth, sympathy, and connection. They speak to a tipsy, throbbing, persistent feeling, so unique to us yet so universal among our species.



These poems did not apologize for their emotions. They operated on the trust that vulnerability, however awkward or unpolished, was a risk worth taking. They suggest that writing love requires a certain frustrating patience—a distance great enough to see, with a clarity both relieving and terrifying, precisely what is at stake.

On Valentine's Day, when poetry briefly enters our public sphere—cards, text messages, confessions—people risk saying something earnest, knowing it will likely sound foolish. But that risk is the point. Perhaps a good love poem does not avoid embarrassment, but one that leans so deeply into it that it becomes beside the point.

Maybe this year, I will even give the “roses are red” poem a pass. I have come to realize that although not all poems are romantic, nearly all are about love. They are desperate acts of paying attention to a world that will eventually leave us.

Love poetry, then, is not so much a genre as a poetic state of mind—the way language behaves when something matters enough to risk being ruined by it.

CLORIS SHI '29 (CLORISSHI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES TO RECEIVE A LOVE POEM THIS YEAR.

GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28

Silly Love Songs

An apologia for a misunderstood genre.

BY ELLIE GUO '29

Legend has it that John Lennon accused his former bandmate Paul McCartney of only writing “silly love songs” shortly after the embittered breakup of the Beatles in the early 1970s. Allegedly, McCartney released “Silly Love Songs” as a single in 1976 in direct response.

As the title suggests, the song is a parody of itself and a backhanded response to Lennon’s criticism. With a funky and lively bassline that invites the audience to dance, it sounds light-hearted and silly. But the tune’s opening verse asks: “Some people want to fill the world with silly love songs, and what’s wrong with that?”

McCartney doubles down in response to his critics and proceeds to boldly sing to us, “Here I go again!” The following chorus is simply “I love you” four consecutive times. Using the trope of how love songs are intentionally vague and generic, McCartney tells the listener, “I can’t explain, the feeling’s plain to me.” Throughout the nearly six-minute song, the lyrics offer no descriptions or metaphors, instead repeating simple declarations of love in counterpoint.

Probably to Lennon’s chagrin, the song reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1976. Over the next few decades, McCartney’s tune became a pop music staple, being covered by various artists and even appearing in the jukebox musicals “Moulin Rouge!” and “Glee.”

Clearly, audiences appreciated a “silly love song,” even one that openly parodied its own genre. Ironically, by mocking clichés, “Silly Love Songs” had the optimal conditions for popularity—catchy, light-hearted, and just ambiguous enough for lovers everywhere to let listeners project their own stories onto.

Time after time, people fall for this genre. Take the tune that launched the Beatles to global fame, for example. “Love Me Do” may be the “silliest” love song of them all, with approximately four unique lines and a title that is a barely grammatical inversion of the words “(please) do love me.”

Moreover, the most popular music today also revolves around love—being in it, being without it, losing it. In fact, pop music phenomenon Taylor Swift had an

entire album, “*Lover*,” dedicated to it.

Why do we love silly love songs? Is it an easy, relatable topic that lyricists exploit to capitalize on their fans? Are we vicariously fulfilling our desires to be wanted?

To answer these questions and to evaluate Lennon’s criticism, perhaps we should take a look at what Lennon would consider a “serious” love song. His own song, “I Want You (She’s So Heavy),” is avant-garde and experimental in such a way that we might consider it a sophisticated, serious art piece. He screams the 13 unique words of the song, adds a three-minute instrumental coda with white noise of increasing volume, and ends the eight-minute song abruptly. The effect is compelling, and music critics have frequently analyzed and praised it as revolutionary to rock music.

In structure, “I Want You (She’s So Heavy)” is not much different from “Silly Love Songs,” with its limited lyrics, repetition, and prominent electric bass parts. However, Lennon’s melody is intense and menacing, portraying love as suffocating and almost grotesque; audiences can’t mistake it as “silly.”

It seems that the distinguishing factor between a “silly” and a “serious” love song is its light-heartedness—being head-over-heels to the point where nothing you say will be profound. Admitting love is thus a moment of great vulnerability, and so perhaps “silly” is synonymous with “embarrassing.”

“The point [of the song] is that most people don’t tend to show their emotions unless they are in private, but deep down, people are emotional,” McCartney wrote in his 2021 book, “*The Lyrics*.”

In the midst of his tongue-in-cheek parody, McCartney alludes to the notion that love is not a singular emotion. Rather, it is an amalgamation of relief, resignation, overwhelming intensity, vulnerability, loneliness (“it’s just us against the world”), and many other subtle, ineffable feelings. In the only non-repeating lyric, he muses, “Love doesn’t come in a minute, sometimes it doesn’t come at all. I only know that when I’m in it... Love isn’t silly at all.”

McCartney seems to yield to the force of love with an “it is what it is” mindset,

leaning into it rather than fighting it, which is exactly how he responded to his critics. He acknowledges the fickle nature of love; whether or not it comes is largely reliant on chance and circumstance, but there is something undeniably powerful and serious about it.



McCartney is right—love is not silly, but it is easy to dismiss it as such when we perceive it as unilateral. Indeed, popular media have not depicted love with much nuance. We watch the same plots in romantic movies, read the same regurgitated pulp fiction plots, and listen to the same vague love songs, of which Paul McCartney was no small contributor.

Love songs often appear simple to write and to listen to. They are vague, not always because the writer wants to appeal to the masses, but because love is vague, abstract, ineffable.

While love is universal, it is felt differently by all and is impossible to specify. It is central to the human condition; as social creatures, humans find love in community, whether in family, friends, or romantic partners. In the attempt to portray love holistically and accurately, artists of all media and eras have converged on clichés that are deemed “silly.” But we keep coming back to these portrayals because they contain just enough of the essence of love to resonate with our humanity.

Love is a serious business, and the world is an infinite vessel for our love songs.

ELLIE GUO '29 (EGUO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS PROBABLY LISTENING TO A SILLY LOVE SONG.

GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE '29

I'm Batman.

Michael Keaton is the Hasty Pudding Theatricals' 59th Man of the Year.

BY KALVIN FRANK '28 AND ELLIE GUO '29

On Friday, Feb. 6, Harvard's Hasty Pudding Theatricals hosted their annual global premiere of their new, entirely student-written and produced show, "Saloonie Tunes." Preceding the performance, "Batman" and "Beetlejuice" star Michael Keaton was welcomed to the stage to be honored as HPT's 59th Man of the Year—a ceremony which included a celebrity roast, press conference, and the awarding of the illustrious "Pudding Pot."

"This award-winning actor's career has spanned over 40 years, marking him as one of the most prolific performers of our generation. When we found out he was our honoree, we were over the moon—but then Jeff Goldblum decided to cancel last minute," Cate Schwarz '27 quipped during the roast.

After an extensive 50-year career, the 74-year-old renowned actor spent his hour of "Harvard fame" fielding jests from HPT—laughing with them, but also being laughed at.

HPT's roast is a classic segment of the MOY award—producers Ellie Tunnell '27 and Schwarz, alongside other members of the production's cast, band, tech, and business team, joined the actor on stage for some light-hearted embarrassment.

Festivities started, of course, with an homage to Keaton's most famous role. "You'll be facing your greatest opponent, yet it's a villain you've never been able to capture," Schwarz said as the classic Bat-Signal flashed over the stage and HPT members helped Keaton into his Batsuit. A life-sized Oscar trophy suddenly ran onto the stage and battled the actor with a prop sword. Now, HPT is nothing if not a testament to good sportsmanship—ultimately, Keaton defeated the Academy Award, despite having never secured an Oscar for himself during his nonetheless decorated career.

Keaton then returned to his seat as Tunnell and Schwarz began to take amicable jabs at the honoree's beginnings as a stand-up comedian. Claiming to have one of his notebooks from his early days, the "incredible Hasty Pudding historians" brought the producers a bright pink, sparkly journal. Schwarz took the book and began to tease him for having "Sigourney Weaver and Meryl Streep" on his list of secret crushes.

Asked to read from the notebook, Keaton was then brought back to the stage front and immediately began to list complaints about Boston. The audience—a majority of which presumably was from the local area—was already laughing as the dramatic irony built up.

"The worst part—the people. Boy, oh boy, do Boston people suck," Keaton

read. He could not help but add a sarcastic "Really?" while delivering this line. He continued to read more specifically about Harvard. "I will continue with this, that those privileged Harvard kids really grind my gears thinking they're going to invent Facebook or something," he said.

The producers also made sure to poke fun at his acting career. They began with his recent appearance as Batman in the 2023 adaptation of "The Flash," quickly moving to Keaton's lesser-known films which were subject to such witty remarks, with "Much Ado About Nothing" being referred to as his "acting career at large," and "White Noise" as "Michael Keaton talking." However, these jests turned positive as they drew attention to Keaton's wide range and ability as an actor.

The sheer diversity of films Keaton has starred in was made clear throughout the jovial proceedings of the evening. "The Founder," one of the actor's most notable films, is based on the true story of McDonald's roots. Keaton plays the role of Ray Kroc, who turned the family-run Southern California business into a national (and later international) powerhouse. In the movie, Keaton acts as the corporate franchising agent, so what better way to humble him than to teach him the challenges faced by everyday McDonald's workers in front of hundreds of his fans?

Kroc's famous quote, "Look after the customer and the business will take care of itself," may have inspired the producers' challenge for Keaton. "Michael, you really can't refuse a customer," Tunnell and Schwarz repeatedly stated. Played by a member of HPT, a pseudo-McDonald's customer requested an increasingly absurd amount of extra hamburger meat. Keaton had no choice but to oblige, piling patties until the result was an eight-stack burger. Only then did the customer ask, "Do you think you could take a bite for me?" And the customer's request was not refused—with some struggle, Keaton took a large bite out of the eight-stacker.

As the 20-minute roast came to a close, the producers decided to pay tribute to Keaton's hobby of fly fishing. After bringing out what Keaton noted was "not a fly rod," the trio cast their reels into the pit of the stage. "We don't have a lake or an ocean here, but the amount of sweat that the Hasty Pudding band generates should do," Tunnell joked. The producers pulled up a pair of tighty-whitey boxers and a Batman-bejeweled bra, which they both declared to belonging to Keaton. And for the finishing touch, Tunnell reeled in the iconic golden Pudding Pot and awarded it to Keaton, concluding the roast section of the night.



At the press conference following the roast, Keaton was joined by HPT members Crystal Manyloun '26 and Julia Kim '26, dressed in colorful costumes from previous shows, and Press and Publicity Manager Chaelon Simpson '26. "I did ask for someone with ridiculously fluorescent hair," Keaton commented on Manyloun's neon pink wig.

While reflecting on his thoughts on the roast, Keaton joked, "I didn't get the Nikki Glaser treatment," referencing the comedian's brutal roasts while hosting the 2026 Golden Globes.

He also reflected on his friendship with the recently passed Catherine O'Hara, whom he honored in an article for Time Magazine.

Keaton additionally provided insight into his acting process for "The Founder," sharing: "The thing about Kroc, though, was for his faults—which we all have them—he worked his ass off. He was an unbelievably hard worker. And so that's the thing I launched, that determination."

Though the night was full of jokes and roasts, Keaton still took a moment to be serious during his closing speech in the ceremony.

"Man, I'm encouraged as hell. If this is any indication of [the future based on the] people I hung out with here the last day or so, these women and men have just been great."

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IMAGE COURTESY OF JAY CONNOR

Love in Greece

A retelling of my grandparents' love story.

BY TAYLOR THORNE '28

In Jewish culture, זיבאשערט bashert, is the idea of finding your destined soul mate. Similar to the invisible string theory, meeting the love of your life is attributed to fate. People across time abandon mere coincidence as an explanation.

My grandparents, Dena and Leon Hilfstein, met in the summer of 1971, far from their hometowns. Originally from California and New York, the pair crossed paths in the beauty of Athens, Greece. And the rest was history.

Here is their story.

My grandmother, born Dena Foreman, grew up in San Diego, California, with her parents and one brother. When she was 19 and had completed her first year of community college, she decided to take a gap year. During this time, she travelled to Israel to work on a kibbutz for six months—a communal settlement founded on the principles of collective ownership that often produces specific foods and agricultural products. At the time, it was quite popular for college-aged Jews to travel to Israel for short-term stays to experience this way of life.

When the time finally came to leave Israel, Dena faced a choice: return straight to the comforts of home, or pick a place for an extended layover—little would she know it would change the course of her life. Because she had visited Greece as a young girl, she decided to head to Athens, accompanied by her friend Barb. Barb had planned to meet up with her boyfriend, Ray, when they arrived, so the three decided to spend time together.

Since Ray owned a motorcycle, the plan was for Dena and Barb to fly, while he travelled to Greece by ferry. Once the ship docked in Athens, Ray went to retrieve his motorcycle from the cargo hold and struck up a conversation with a man who was doing the same. The two began talking, and the man mentioned he was looking for someone to explore Greece with. Ray told him he was meeting his girlfriend and her friend at a youth hostel and gave him the address. They agreed to meet the next day.

That man was Leon.

Leon had grown up in the Bronx, a borough in New York City, and had recently graduated from the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied piano performance. Jewish and 24, it is not too surprising that he also spent a year in Israel living on a kibbutz. Having purchased a motorcycle during the trip, he planned to take a boat to Greece before making his way to Switzerland, where he would eventually fly home. This sequence of events brought Leon and Ray on the same boat for this fortuitous interaction.

When Ray arrived at the youth hostel, he approached Dena with the idea of travelling with this newfound acquaintance. More specifically, he asked her if she would be interested in a group

motorcycle trip around Greece. Although hesitant, Dena agreed. She had never met Leon before, but ultimately trusted Ray's judgement and gave in to the allure of spontaneity.

The next day, on May 5, 1971, Leon met Dena. When she saw him for the first time, he had long hair, motorcycle boots, and emerald green eyes. Later, she would discover that it was the boots that made him appear taller than her. Their introduction began with a single word, "Shalom."

"I thought I died and went to heaven," Leon recounted when he first saw Dena.

And so, their great motorcycle adventure through Greece began. For the next five weeks, the group did what any young adults would. In every city they visited, they enjoyed the beautiful scenery and the magnetism of each other's company. They stayed in Santorini for a week, skinny-dipping in the water and cooking their own food on the beach with a camping stove. At night, since they didn't have tents, they would sneak into unfinished houses to sleep before they were eventually caught by local authorities and kicked out. This left them sleeping underneath the stars instead.

As their tans deepened, so did their feelings for each other. Dena had never been in a relationship before, but she knew that she had begun to like Leon's charisma and respectful manners. Leon, on the other hand, seemed pretty enamoured from the very first meeting. They never spent a moment apart during this trip, starting as mere strangers and slowly becoming much more than that.

Then they travelled through the mountains of Northern Greece, sampling different Greek liquors along the way. The group agreed that the Retsina wine possessed too much of a woody flavor, but the Ouzo spirit became a favorite (and bonus points—it was cheap too). They spent several days at the archaeological site of Delphi, which Greek mythology identifies as the home of the famed oracle that would tell prophecies from Apollo.

Later in the trip, the group crossed the border into Yugoslavia for lunch and almost became stranded in the country—they were denied at the border when trying to re-enter Greece because they were all missing several vaccines. Thankfully, Greek officials were able to immediately administer the shots at the border. A couple of hours later, they successfully re-entered the country.

Soon enough, it was time for Dena to fly back to the United States, and the group made their way back to Athens. Before everyone went their separate ways, Leon told her that he wanted to travel out to California to see her again and meet her parents. Dena was slightly skeptical that he would keep his word, but she hoped it would be more than just a vacation fling.



Fast forward to Aug. 1971. Leon travelled from New York to San Diego to stay with Dena and her family for two weeks.

"Will you marry me someday?" Leon asked Dena at the end of the trip.

"Sure. One day," she replied.

This unofficial engagement marked the start of their long-distance relationship. Dena went back to community college, and Leon moved to Tallahassee, Florida, to begin his Master's at Florida State University. For the next two years, they regularly wrote romantic love letters to each other. Finally, three years later, on July 3, 1974, Dena and Leon got married. Dena wore a crown of daisies, her favorite flower, and Leon had the traditional Jewish kippah on his head. Surrounded by friends and family, they professed their love and began the rest of their lives together. This July marks their 52-year anniversary.

My grandparents' story demonstrates the special nature of bashert and the unyielding strength of love. Finding your soul mate is discovering the other half of yourself that you never knew was missing. When I think about my own future, I hope to have the chance to experience a love story as exceptional as theirs.

**TAYLOR THORNE '28
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**PHOTO COURTESY OF TAYLOR
THORNE '28**

Jeff Buckley and the Art of Yearning

On young love and old songs.

BY SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28

Listening to Jeff Buckley feels like being trapped in purgatory, suspended between heaven and hell. Waiting defines his album “Grace,” lingering in the space after love ends but before the ache fades.

More than 30 years after its 1994 release, “Lover, You Should’ve Come Over” has surpassed 440 million Spotify streams. In 2026, it entered the Billboard Hot 100 for the first time, climbing the charts decades after Buckley’s death.

Written in his mid-20s, “Lover, You Should’ve Come Over” speaks to a stage of life that isn’t romanticized like the puppy-love summer romances of youth or the quiet, coffee-filled mornings of midlife. Instead, Buckley lingers on the raw ache of early adulthood, the wistful longing of “what ifs,” and the self-condemnation following youthful arrogance.

“Oh, but maybe I’m just too young to keep good love from going wrong,” Buckley sings.

The emotional confusion of youth intensifies today’s dating limbo. While modern terms like “simp” and “talking stage” were not present in the 90s, the uncertainty of young adulthood has always lingered. Heartbreak clings to Buckley’s music and continues to resonate with his audience long after love’s elation fades.

In the minute-long harmonium opening, Buckley forces the listener to be patient—something our culture resists. It recalls a time before iPhones, Wi-Fi, and social media reshaped how we communicate, desire, and connect.

Its restraint feels almost defiant in a world that rewards immediacy over intimacy.

“So I’ll wait for you, love
And I’ll burn
Will I ever see your sweet return?
Oh, will I ever learn?”

Now there are hundreds of potential sweethearts just a swipe away. With an ocean of options at your fingertips, finding the right catch can feel strangely impossible—and increasingly impersonal. The promise of storybook romance begins to lose its shine.

Handwritten letters have been replaced with fleeting texts, meet-cutes with hookups, and intentional courtship with indefinite situationships. While flings are nothing new, they once grew from tangible chemistry, not from someone you stumbled upon on an app. Connection now feels impersonal and far too convenient.

Buckley’s resurgence speaks not only to individual heartbreak but to a shared language of longing that binds listeners through romantic grief. That nostalgia often surfaces in revisiting old romances, from films like “The Notebook” to classics such as “Pride and Prejudice.” Yet when Noah feels too good to be true and Mr. Darcy feels like a relic, unrequited love, without tidy resolution, can feel like a mirror, catching the parts of ourselves left obscure.

“Lover, You Should’ve Come Over” creates a quiet sense of communion; though many may listen alone, they don’t feel alone. The verses and chords carry with them a quiet assurance that the soft throbbing of your heart has been felt and recognized by another.

Buckley repeats “It’s never over,” relentlessly returning to the same ache over and over:

“It’s never over
My kingdom for a kiss
upon her
shoulder
It’s never over.”

“Poetry, beauty,
romance, love, these are
what we stay alive for,”

John Keating
famously said in
“Dead Poets
Society.”

These forms sustain us when we feel like Atlas bearing the weight of the world. Sometimes they aren’t just what we stay alive for, but why we stay alive, easing the burden as if it were shared.

Buckley escalates longing into sacrifice, a reach for the irretrievable:

“My body turns
And yearns for a sleep that won’t
ever come
It’s never over
All my riches for her smiles
When I’ve slept so soft against her
It’s never over
All my blood for the sweetness of
her laughter
It’s never over
She is the tear that hangs inside my soul
forever.”

It’s impossible to capture the intensity of Buckley’s melancholy through print alone. It’s his voice that completes the ballad.

In 1997, while working on what would have been his second album, Buckley drowned in an accident, cutting his career short. The unfinished quality of his music mirrors the ache it captures: what we once had is all we will ever have. The past stays frozen.

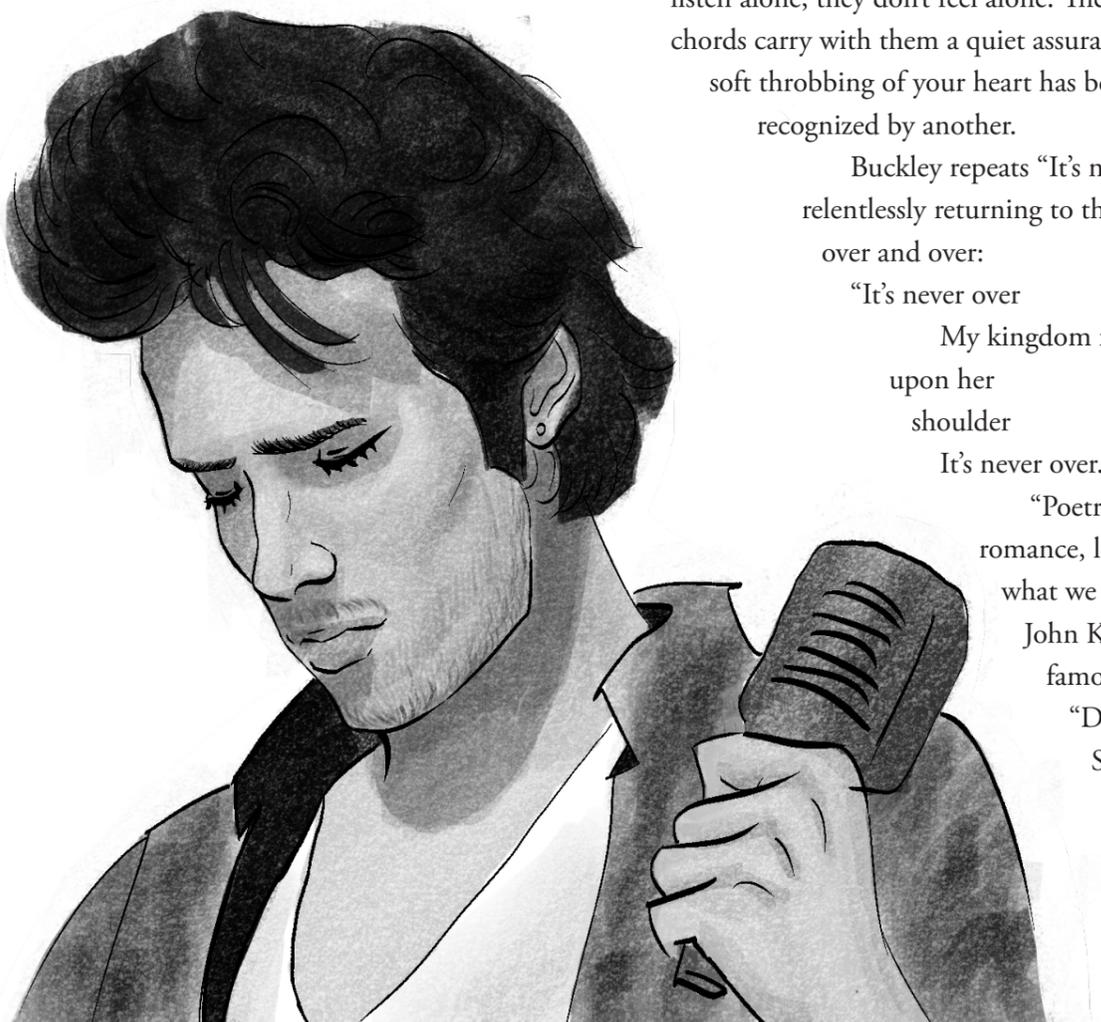
While the past in itself may be unreachable, the feelings remain. Songs like “Lover, You Should’ve Come Over” stir buried emotions and bring them to the surface, which can feel confrontational. Yet, there’s something to be said for lingering in the discomfort. Just as the body adjusts to temperature, the soul adjusts to its own depths. To feel deeply is to yearn deeply.

Love isn’t just the fairy tale ending we grew up with as kids or what we hope to find at the end of the day. Reality is harsher, but it’s shared. With Buckley’s resurgence, people are finding comfort, or at least community, in the art of yearning. So, dear reader, make that playlist of songs full of heartache, watch the classics starring pining leads, and let yourself sit with the emotions they stir.

Finally, put some headphones on and listen to “Lover, You Should’ve Come Over” in all its glory.

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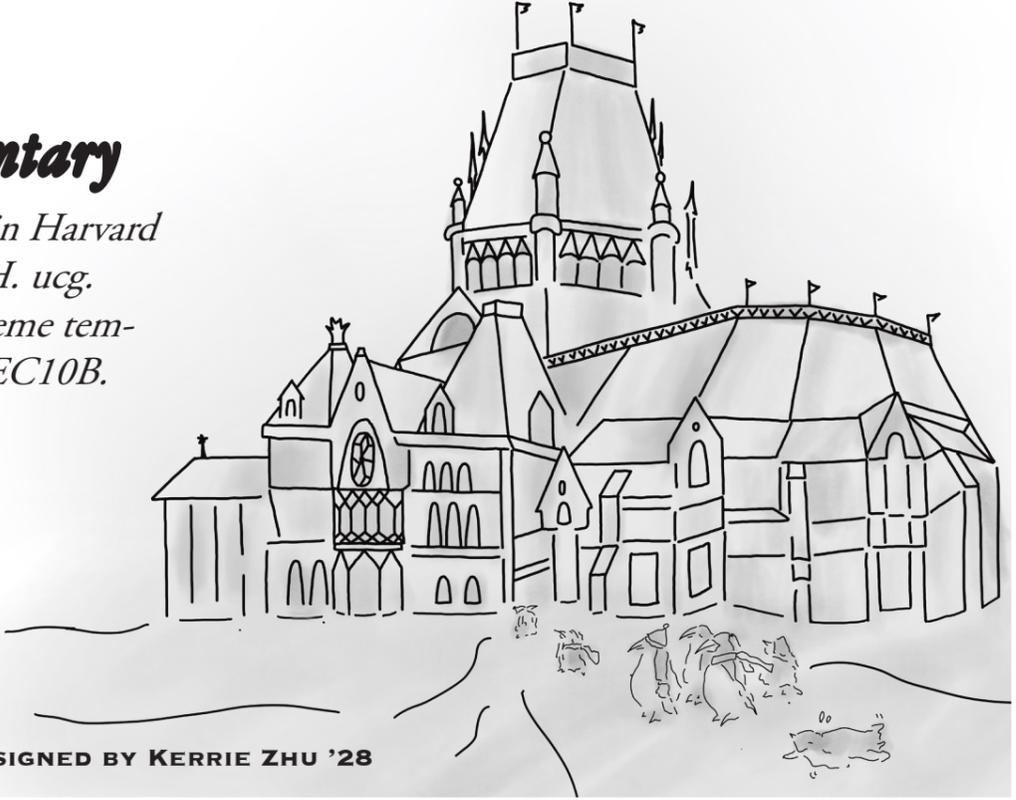
GRAPHIC BY MADISON KRUG '27



Collection of Comics

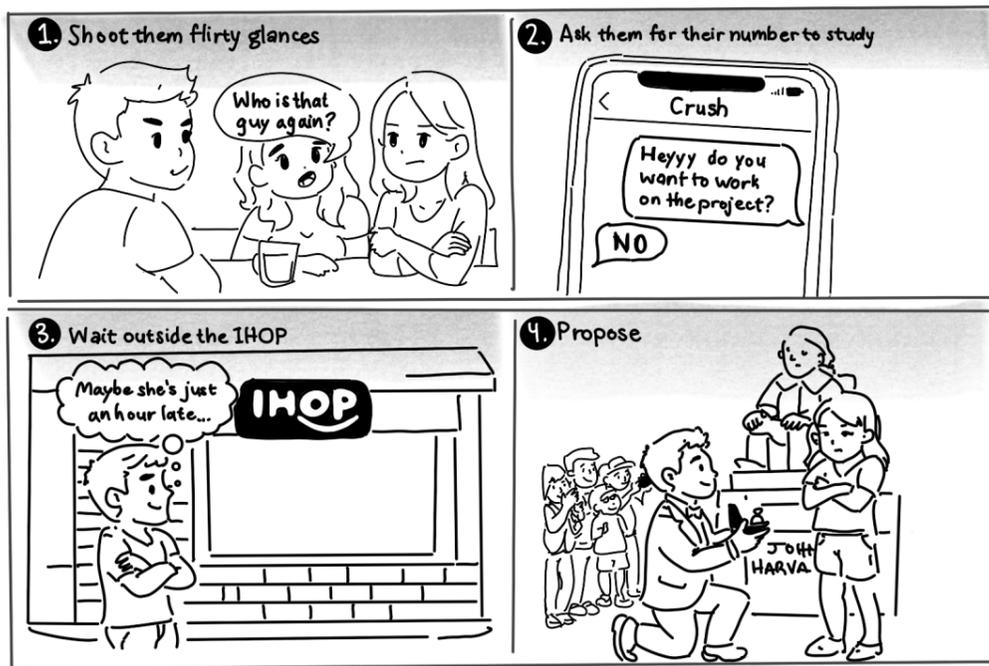
Yard Nature Documentary

“...And here is an unlikely sight—penguins in Harvard Yard! They belong to the species *H. fac* and *H. ucg*. They will encounter difficult terrain and extreme temperatures during their arduous migration to EC10B. Some may not survive the journey.”



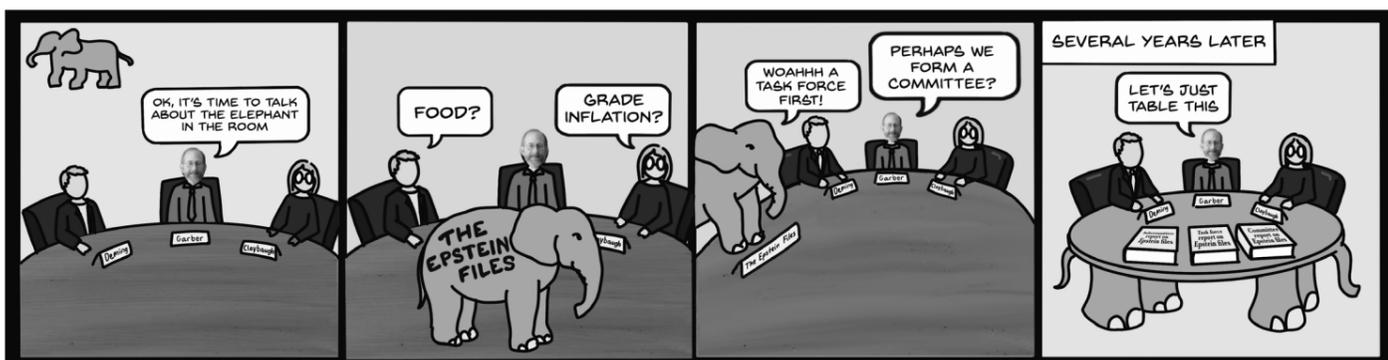
WRITTEN BY ELLIE GUO '29, DESIGNED BY KERRIE ZHU '28

The “Independent”’s Guide to Securing a Significant Other by Valentine’s Day



SUBTLE CONTENT WARNING: YOU MAY JUST FREAK THEM OUT
WRITTEN BY JULIA BOUCHUT '29, DESIGNED BY ANGIE LI '28

The Adventures in the Garber Administration: The Epstein Files



WRITTEN BY KALVIN FRANK '28, DESIGNED BY NESHAMA RYMAN '28

SPORTS

The “Chase” for Love

The story of an almost-running romance.

BY A HOPELESS RUN-MANTIC

As our generation gradually realizes that love cannot be determined by dating-app algorithms, and that potential lovers are more than just profiles in an endless stream of matches, hopeful romantics have turned to new ways of finding “the one.” Enter: run clubs.

As a weekly ritual where dozens of young, sporty, and often single people convene, one could not conceive a more perfect place to mingle. Run clubs have taken to social media to show off their “more attractive” members in hopes of recruiting new ones. Posts are flooded with comments reading, “Run clubs are the new dating apps” or “How can I sign up?” The stories of couples who met at a run club and later married only further prove that jogging can jumpstart your love life.

It makes sense that one might turn to this sport to find love. Running with a partner shares many similarities with pursuing love. In both, participants attempt to find the perfect pace that matches the others’ preferences. Often, as things get hot and heavy, runners may find that they are suddenly not compatible, and the pursuit stops.

Unfortunately, my brief foray into the world of run clubs did not end with marriage—or even any first dates—but it did teach me an important lesson about myself: I’m a much better runner when I’m not alone. This discovery resulted in my first-ever run-mance.

I cannot get through a conversation with a new person or catch up with an old friend without bringing up running. To non-runners, I can impress them with my pace and distances. When I meet another aficionado of the sport, it can result in a new running buddy. So, naturally, on my first weekend living in New York this past summer, the topic arose when I met a friend who lived only a few blocks away. After discovering that we both wanted to increase our weekly mileage over the summer, we planned a run for that Sunday, and we were off to the races.

Despite my love for running in groups, my people-pleasing tendencies can leave me stressed when I run with someone for the first time. Am I meeting the pace they want to run? Am I being a good conversationalist? Do they think I’m a good runner? They are the same anxieties one feels before a first date, with the added stress of being judged not only on one’s social ability but also on one’s athletic capabilities. As a lifelong athlete, sometimes the latter is more important to me than the former.

On that first jog with my newfound friend, I had my typical pre-run nerves, and after just a mile, it became clear that I would not be able to sustain our agreed-upon pace. The conversational, easy run I had envisioned steadily progressed into a sprint, only exacerbated by the June humidity. But I could not say anything, obviously—he couldn’t know I was struggling. Fortunately for me, my friend was observant and offered to slow down. It was at that

moment that I realized I had found a good running partner, and so began a weekly tradition.

We attempted a few morning runs, but one too many hangovers made the evening our go-to time—late enough to avoid the heat but early enough to catch some good sunsets, and, unintentionally, a touch of romance. It was like a recurring date that I looked forward to every week, but with a good friend.



A few runs in, our conversations got deeper, and our mileage got higher. He pushed me as a runner in both distance and pace, and I pushed him emotionally. We covered a wide range of topics in our mid-run chats, including job aspirations, religion, views on morality, and, of course, love. Our views varied, but I loved our conversations. I found myself pouring my heart out about past breakups and listening to him talk about his own dating struggles. The more we ran, the more I wanted to run (and it was not just because he looked good shirtless).

Suddenly, the line between friends and something more felt blurred. We had been spending so much time together that he was starting to fulfill the emotional role of a boyfriend without any of the expectations or love attached to that title. I was hesitant at first to tell him about a guy I had been seeing at the start of the summer. Did that cross some sort of line?

We had never come close to having a label, but I somehow felt like I was being unfaithful. I decided to share, but I did not linger on the subject long. One Sunday, I nearly canceled our run out of embarrassment when I woke up with a hickey from someone else, but all he gave was a passing comment.

Like so many “almost-D1” sports careers, our runs ended with every athlete’s worst nightmare: injury. The entire summer, he had been complaining about an old injury, and when we got back to campus in the fall, he delivered the heartbreaking news: he

could not run anymore. Just like that, our tradition was over.

But when one tradition dies, another one is born. It turns out those semi-romantic feelings were mutual, and back in Cambridge, we swapped miles for make-outs. Suddenly, we seemed to only see each other after midnight, and our conversations dwindled.

But after a few weeks, I realized I missed my running buddy. Every time I achieved a new PR on the banks of the Charles, I immediately wanted to tell him; each accomplishment seemingly meant more with his validation. Training for the Cambridge Half Marathon, I sent him screenshots of my runs, and he would lament the fact that he could not do those distances anymore. I would lament the fact that I had to make the treks alone.

When the big race day finally came, he cheered me on from the sidelines, despite how much we both wished he were alongside me instead. After the race, we hung out, both lying in my bed, as I was unable to move from the morning’s exertion. It was on that day that we had an important conversation—we could never date.

In the midst of the many miles and words we shared while running together, we discovered that great running and life partners were not the same thing. We were fundamentally different people; it would never work out. Like how our running distances diverged, our lives were on different paths. From all our long-term conversations, I knew we wanted to live in different places and in different ways; I was drawn to the East Coast, and he wanted to return to the Midwest. He is a religious person, and I have no interest in church. As much as we enjoyed spending time together over the summer, we knew we were better off as friends.

Although true love has not run me down, so to speak, running has still taught me a lot about love. You must find someone who can match your mileage and pace, and who you can talk to when things get hard. So often, people focus on who is putting in more effort or who is pursuing whom, but at its core, love is about choosing to show up and meet your person where they are. Sometimes, in a quest to be chased, we end up outrunning love.

A HOPELESS RUN-MANTIC IS HOLDING OUT FOR A LIFELONG RUNNING PARTNER.

GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26

Love, All: Racism in Sports Media Makes Everyone Lose

Black female athletes face notable scrutiny in sports media for their actions, which challenges their success.

BY SEYI AMOSUN '29

It's unusual for someone to be reprimanded for being in the right. But for certain athletes, criticism will follow them regardless of their conduct.

On Jan. 22, the second-round 2026 Australian Open match between Naomi Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam singles champion and former world No. 1, and four-time titleholder Sorana Cîrstea turned sour. Osaka's self-motivation before a serve agitated her opponent, sparking a terse back-and-forth between Cîrstea and the umpire.

Osaka: "C'mon, C'mon!" she said to herself.

Cîrstea: "Is this okay? To do 'C'mon' between points?"

Umpire: "Between serves, yeah, you hadn't got the ball yet either. This is fine."

As Cîrstea's appeals were unfruitful, the match continued, ending in Osaka's (6-3, 4-6, 6-2) victory. Contrary to typical tennis fashion, Cîrstea's emotions overtook any semblance of good sportsmanship, offering merely a cold handshake before hastily leaving the court.

In her post-match, on-court interview, Osaka expressed frustration at the situation that had unfolded just hours earlier. The reporter raised the question of what it took to get through the tough match. "Apparently, a lot of 'c'mons' that she was angry about, but whatever ... I tried my best. She's a great player. I think this was her last Australian Open, so okay. Sorry, she was mad about it," Osaka responded.

This commentary elicited mixed reactions from the crowd, with both supportive cheers and shocked gasps. She appeared visibly upset, her voice wavering while still maintaining poise and composure before a crowd of thousands.

Following this interview, Osaka graciously addressed the situation in her post-match press conference. "I think the first couple things I said on the court [were] disrespectful, and I don't like disrespecting people, that's not what I do ... when I'm pumping myself up, I'm not like, 'okay, and now I'm going to distract the other person.' It's purely for me."

Cîrstea kept her remarks cordial and reserved during her own press conference. "We just had a chat [after the game], nothing big. I don't think that's the main thing after tonight's match ... Yeah, she deserved the win." Yet the one thing notably absent from Cîrstea's remarks was an apology for her behavior.

I find little fault with the way the two athletes handled the situation; for a tough, highly charged tense match, their two press conferences reflected their professionalism. However, I take issue with the fact that Osaka alone had to apologize for her conduct—especially since the umpire ruled in her favor. It's egregious and points to the fact that Black women are continuously scrutinized—regardless of the scenario, regardless of their talent.

This phenomenon can be better understood by the term *misogynoir*, which refers to the effects of both anti-Black racism and misogyny for Black women in our society.

Sports media only exacerbated this racialized judgment. Subsequent headlines read:

"Novak Djokovic's wife lashes 'disrespectful' Naomi Osaka ahead of showdown with Aussie qualifier on Rod Laver Arena."

"Naomi Osaka accused of 'disrespecting tennis' after what she did at the Australian Open."

"The real trouble with Naomi Osaka."

"Naomi Osaka criticised by two former world No. 1s after Sorana Cîrstea controversy at Australian Open."



One notable video was posted to a major tennis news outlet, Tennis Channel, titled, "Was Naomi Osaka in the Wrong Against Cîrstea?" Endless users in the video's comment section continued to harp on her, claiming it was "poor umpiring not to penalise Osaka" and "Osaka is extremely immature and hypersensitive."

It seems like the tennis world has forgotten that she apologized, instead exclusively sensationalizing Osaka's "c'mons" during the match and antagonizing statements she made during the on-court interview. Most seem to ignore the fact that Cîrstea was the one who prolonged the situation through the back-and-forth banter with the umpire.

For sports media, this phenomenon is nothing new. Other Black female athletes, including tennis megastar Serena Williams and Olympic gold-medalist Simone Biles, have faced notable criticism in their careers. Conspiracy theorists have falsely alleged that Williams was born as a man, while Biles was called a "quitter" for her brave decision to drop out of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics for mental health reasons.

To make matters worse, these outlets are often quick to pit Black women against one another. In the 2018 U.S. Open women's singles championship, featuring Osaka and Williams, the Japanese player claimed a 6-2, 6-4 victory. Williams had a tough game, receiving multiple code violations for receiving illicit sideline coaching, racket smashing, and heated discourse with the umpire.

Following the match, political commentators created drawings of Williams's behavior, depicting her as an angry caricature jumping on the racquet, while Osaka was drawn as a skinny blonde woman standing next to the umpire. Critics referred to the drawing as racist, as it was reminiscent of the Jim Crow-era minstrel cartoons; I agree with this sentiment.

Moreover, I find it telling that, when Osaka's behavior wasn't called into question, the Australian publication depicted her as white.

It's not that I support any of Williams's behavior, but this is yet another example of the sports media simply going too far.

Perhaps said criticism is baked into the

original culture of the sport. Tennis, at least the way we know it today, rose to prominence among royal and aristocratic circles during the 16th century. Many of the sport's rules are based on traditions of "proper etiquette and controlled behaviour."

As its history is fundamentally intertwined with white, colonial society, modern-day tennis's restrictive treatment of Black women becomes less surprising. However, I see no reason as to why the sport's culture can't join the rest of us in the 21st century.

Maybe the headlines aren't intentional. Maybe they're just playing a numbers game, hoping to draw clicks and views to their pages. Regardless of the reason, it's time for the media to make a change. Racism in tennis media is not doing anyone any favors. For the athletes, I can only imagine the mental toll of being constantly scrutinized for every action and word.

In Williams's case, she took a break due to suffering from depression and a knee injury; her coach stated that "she has a level of expectation that is much higher than anyone."

Osaka's story reads the same way: "The truth is that I have suffered long bouts of depression since the U.S. Open in 2018 and I have had a really hard time coping with that," she said. She withdrew from the French Open in 2021 as a result of these struggles, despite being ranked No. 2 in the world. She even went as far as to mention not wanting her stardom to steer media attention away from the tournament at hand. "I never wanted to be a distraction, and I accept that my timing was not ideal and my message could have been clearer. More importantly, I would never trivialize mental health or use the term lightly."

These players are remarkable: Black, female, and excelling at their craft—each of them was ranked No. 1 in the world at some point in their respective careers.

This stardom understandably attracts media attention. Excellence should not be accompanied by racism. The mental health concerns that these athletes experience are exacerbated by the pressure they're under from the public eye, let alone bigotry and prejudice.

Tennis news outlets must consider their role in this story. Targeted, biased headlines weaken the game by artificially inducing stress that can push players to withdraw from tournaments, losing out on matches that strengthen competition and improve the sport. For audiences seeking to enjoy a good match, this hypercritical environment can take away from the love of the game, distracting us all from the true skill and prowess these players possess.

It's time that sports media takes the agency to realize its role in fueling unnecessary division; sports should be a uniting force we can all enjoy together, regardless of our personal identities.

SEYI AMOSUN '29 (SAMOSUN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) THINKS OSAKA'S ON-COURT FASHION LOOKS ARE FIRE.

GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN '28

The 2026 Super Bowl Recap

An overview of the biggest game of the NFL season.

BY TYLER DANG '28

After a two-week break, National Football League fans and players gathered for the final game of the season: the Super Bowl. More than a decade after their last match-up, the New England Patriots and the Seattle Seahawks competed again for a chance to earn another Super Bowl ring. Both teams have definitely changed from that fateful 2015 game, which saw the Patriots win after a goal-line interception. But now, instead of Tom Brady and Russell Wilson leading the two teams, Drake Maye and Sam Darnold were seated at the helm.

Whether you saw the game at Levi's Stadium in San Francisco, watched at home, or maybe even missed it altogether, the "Independent" is here to share all the highlights and storylines to get you through the inevitable "Did you watch the game?" conversation.

Preseason

At the beginning of the season, few expected the Seahawks or Patriots to make a deep playoff push, much less reach the Super Bowl. Seattle was ranked No. 20, with the biggest question revolving around their offense. New quarterback signee Sam Darnold had a breakout season with the Minnesota Vikings after years of disappointment on different teams before arriving in Seattle. The Emerald City would also be employing a new offensive coordinator. With this fresh offense, few expected the team's offense to match the level of their defense.

As for the Patriots, they were ranked No. 26 with many doubts about the depth of their roster. Their sophomore quarterback, Drake Maye, had a solid freshman season, showing flashes of brilliance despite a 4-13 record. To lead the team alongside Maye, the Patriots also brought in former Pats linebacker Mike Vrabel as head coach. But despite forecasted team potential, New England was expected to be a wildcard at best.

Postseason

While both teams began the season with losses, they both ended the season tied for the best record in their respective leagues. With a 14-3 record, the Seahawks were the No. 1 seed in the National Football Conference, earning a bye in the wild-card round. Meanwhile, the Patriots were beat out by the Broncos for the No. 1 seed in the American Football Conference because of their superior record against common opponents.

Seattle's first playoff game against the 49ers was a blowout, but their second game against the Rams was a closer finish that highlighted the strength of their defense. New England began the playoffs with an easy win against the Chargers, followed by another against the Texans with C.J. Stroud's four interceptions; they finally won the division with a victory over the Broncos, who had to rely on backup quarterback Jarrett Stidham. New England's postseason path was a similar display of intimidating defense despite Maye's subpar play.

With the match-up set for the Super Bowl, fans and media alike understood that, regardless of each team's offense, this game would come down to a battle of the defenses.



The Super Bowl

The Seahawks received the kickoff, and Darnold entered for the first possession. Marching down, it seemed as though fans would be treated to an excellent offensive performance, but Seattle's first drive ended in a field goal.

Maye and the Patriots then took possession, and though they converted a few first downs, Seattle's defense forced the offense to a halt. At the Seahawks' 44-yard line, the Patriots decided to punt instead of relying on rookie Andrés "Andy" Borregales to nail the tying kick. Certainly a questionable decision, but New England wasn't punished as their defense forced Seattle to punt without converting a single first down.

However, the Patriots' next possession quickly ended due to Seattle's lightning-fast defense, which racked up two tackles for loss and a 10-yard sack. Just like the legendary "Legion of Boom" a decade prior, the Seahawks' defense led the league in points allowed per game.

That's not to say the Patriots' defense wasn't potent as well. The edge-rushers of New England and their blitz were just as formidable, often forcing Darnold to throw the ball away instead of taking a sack. The defensive prowess continued to show as the two teams exchanged punts until Seattle's running back Kenneth Walker III broke off for two 30-yard runs. Still, the game was touchdownless, as Seattle settled for a field goal to put them up 6-0.

The offensive struggles continued for both teams. Finally, at the end of the half, the Seahawks were well within field goal range. Darnold attempted a pass to Offensive Player of the Year, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, for the first touchdown of the game. However, Patriots cornerback Christian Gonzalez broke up the pass to force Seattle's third field goal. Gonzalez, in just his third year, earned his first Pro Bowl honors this year. He hounded Smith-Njigba throughout the first half as the receiver had only one reception. At halftime, the Seahawks led 9-0.

The Patriots started the second half with the ball, but were unable to even pick up a first down. The Seahawks, however, immediately marched down the field to put up yet another field goal.

Despite the Seahawks' first drive, the punt-fest continued until the end of the quarter. On the 3rd-and-5th-yard line, Maye stepped up in the pocket, and like many plays before, his offensive line was unable to contain the Seahawks' rush as linebacker Derick Hall pushed the ball out of Maye's hands for a fumble and the first turnover of the game.

The Seattle defense ignited the offense, and Darnold connected with AJ Barner for the first touchdown of the game to extend the lead to 19-0. While Maye connected for his own touchdown just afterwards, the clock was ticking down, and it was clear that the Patriots were looking for anything to bring them back into the game. As such, Maye began to throw riskier passes, including an easy interception just after throwing a bad ball into triple cover.

In his next drive, the sophomore quarterback failed to react to the blitz in his field of vision. Releasing the ball as he was getting sacked, Maye threw an interception to Uchenna Nwosu, who ran it in for a pick-six. Though Maye threw another touchdown afterwards, the game was all but over.

The Seahawks won Super Bowl LX, 29-13.

Standouts

Seahawks running back Kenneth Walker III was named the Super Bowl MVP, making him the first running back to win the award since Super Bowl XXXII of the 1997 season. Walker had 135 rushing yards and 26 receiving yards.

Darnold finished with 202 yards on 19 completed passes of 38 attempts and a touchdown. While he didn't decisively outplay Maye, who had 295 yards with two interceptions to match his two touchdowns, Darnold did enough to get the win.

The Patriots' biggest flaw was their offensive line. Rookie Will Campbell has received much criticism for his poor play. The left tackle allowed 14 pressures throughout the game, which was a massive contributor to why Maye and the offense struggled to put up points. However, it isn't just Campbell to blame, as the entire offensive line allowed Maye to be sacked six times compared to Darnold's one.

If there was an MVP for the losing team, it would have gone to Christian Gonzalez. His defense covering Seattle's most dangerous threats prevented many touchdowns and massive yard gains. He recorded three pass deflections, the highest in the game.

Looking Forward

While Patriots fans are certainly disappointed at the loss, there is hope. The team wasn't even projected to make it to the Super Bowl. With a talented coach and Maye's future development, the offense is sure to improve even further; as for the defense, it has been a strong point all season. So, for better or worse, the Patriots are going to make another Super Bowl appearance in this decade.

For Seahawks fans, this win is cathartic and a great victory for the city. Who knows how long they can keep this talented roster together, but it will be fun to see what's next for Seattle.

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GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE '29

The Perfect Match

How love stories in sports expand our understanding of relationship values.

BY TILLY BUTTERWORTH '28

Our favorite athletes, champions of clubs and nations, sometimes meet their lifetime partners through the sporting community. Whilst this may seem coincidental or convenient, it reflects the importance of finding and leaning on people who deeply understand and support your life ambitions, daily habits, and energy.

Sports are not typically associated with romance, but rather with grit, dedication, teamwork, and composure, to name a few values. However, upon closer inspection, it is clear that these traits are also critical features for a successful relationship. To be someone's trusted companion—their person—requires dedication, passion, trust, and compatibility, ultimately driving one another to be better. Could these characteristics explain why there are so many compatible power couples in the sports world?

Many of the world's favourite sports couples met in unexpected circumstances. Whether from watching a professional game or sharing accommodation in the Olympic village, it is unlikely that these professional athletes had “find myself a fellow sporting fanatic” on their agenda whilst they were competing. However, sometimes the most unexpected encounters are the most successful. I'm sure many sporting couples wouldn't necessarily attribute it to fate, but it feels as though their passion for sports brings them together on a level that is difficult to replicate.

The most decorated gymnast in history, Simone Biles, met her husband, Jonathan Owens, a safety for the Chicago Bears, on the celebrity dating app Raya. While many people voice negative opinions about dating apps, Biles and Owens' shared athletic background likely contributed to their online relationship materializing into a successful romantic partnership. Both Biles and Owens are professional American athletes, representing often intense sports.

“He's an athlete, too, so we really understand each other, and I think that's why our relationship has been seamless,” Biles shared during an interview with “Today” in 2021. Biles continues to cement her impressive legacy with three gold medals at the 2024 Paris Games, and Owens' 2025 season with the Chicago Bears saw him consistently deliver key defensive performances as a starter for the team. Couples like Biles and Owens are not isolated cases.

U.S. Olympians Gerek Meinhardt

and Lee Kiefer are the romantic duo of the fencing world, both competing in foil. Their relationship began during the 2012 London Olympic Games, and their successful careers brought them together again at the 2021 Tokyo Games and the 2024 Paris Games. They have consistently supported and trained with each other, laying the foundations for their joyous marriage. Kiefer recently secured her first individual World Championship gold in 2025, and Meinhardt earned a bronze medal at the 2025 World Cup in Cairo. Meinhardt and Kiefer's shared interests strengthen their relationship as they both understand and push each other to achieve their dreams, a highly valuable component of companionship.



Sports stars Andre Agassi and Steffi Graf knew each other through the tennis world and eventually became a couple after they both won their respective titles at Wimbledon in 1992. Agassi shared that he was “dying to go” to the Wimbledon Ball since it was tradition for the men's winner to dance with the women's winner, according to “People.” While this romance seems straight out of a Hallmark movie, the dance was in fact cancelled, but it was still enough for Agassi and Graf to finally speak and spark a connection over the next few years. Agassi's courage to speak to a fellow star of the tennis world led to their joyous and successful marriage. Whilst we may not all get the chance to reach out to our crushes or inspirational colleagues, we should take Agassi and Graf's story as a sign to find the

confidence to begin those connections.

The sporting community is also responsible for the fruition of many precious, platonic relationships. An endearing example of this was the friendship of Rob Burrow and Kevin Sinfield, both figures of the rugby world. Burrow and Sinfield played together for 15 years at the Leeds Rhinos Rugby team when they were teenagers. Following Burrow's devastating diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease, Sinfield raised millions for MND charities by competing in gruelling physical challenges and ultramarathons.

Sinfield's dedication to raising awareness and support for his best friend's condition will always be remembered, with the iconic moment of Sinfield carrying Burrow over the 2023 Leeds Marathon finish line serving as a testament to their friendship. Burrow sadly passed away in 2024 due to his ongoing condition, and Sinfield continues to raise money and awareness in his memory.

These romances and friendships didn't form solely because of sport. They grew into strong relationships because of a shared understanding of each other's passions, interests, and dreams. And this doesn't just stem from playing a professional sport; this comes from community. Rather than providing a distraction, the community fostered in the sports world allows athletes to pursue relationships that contribute to their success.

Bringing these lessons to Cambridge, Harvard is full of student athletes who can and should lean on one another to build these tried-and-true relationships, which offer both comfort and ambition. And even beyond the sporting world, academically, artistically, or otherwise, we can all make the most of the lessons of these stories by applying them to realms outside of the sporting world. We should strive to build romantic or platonic relationships that encourage us to trust, work hard, and become the best versions of ourselves.

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GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29

A Love Letter to the Sport that Made Me Who I Am

My best memories, friends, and favorite places.

BY OLIVIA LUNSETH '28

For the first time in my life, I draw a blank when simply asked, “What do you do in your free time?” I can no longer talk about the sport that shaped me into the person I am today. Skiing was never just a hobby or winter activity for me—it was the structure of my days, the reason my afternoons had purpose. It was on the slopes where I learned who I was, shaping my childhood and giving me lifelong friends.

Alpine ski racing is made up of four main events: slalom, giant slalom, super-G, and downhill. Slalom and GS are considered the technical, or “tech,” events, while super-G and downhill are known as the speed events. Younger athletes usually compete in slalom, GS, and super-G, and as they get older, they find their niche. I was always a tech skier, and slalom was my favorite. Even now, the sound of someone running a slalom course is one of my favorites—the quick snap of skis carving and gates hitting the snow. I loved how fast everything happened in slalom. Once I found a rhythm, it was reflexive; soaring down the slopes let my mind go free. Skiing made me feel like the clearest, most focused version of myself.

In high school, no matter how much I dedicated myself to my academics and extracurriculars, skiing was always at the front of my mind. I was always thinking about my next race, practice, or workout.

I spent nearly every afternoon driving straight from school to the hill, clicking into my skis as the sun began to set. After practice, I stayed to help coach the U10 racers, then headed to the gym, chasing the strength I thought would make me faster the next day. Repeating this routine every weekday and finishing homework late at night built the discipline helped me get into Harvard. It is the same discipline that now helps me push through difficult classes and long nights of studying. Though I now run in my spare time, nothing will ever compare to the structure—and more importantly, the thrill—of racing.

In my senior year of high school, I got the chance to compete in NorAms, competing against athletes who are now skiing at the Olympics, like AJ Hurt. At the time, it felt surreal, but looking back, it feels like the perfect culmination of something that had defined me for so long.

Skiing also took me across Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, New York, and into Canada—places I might never have seen otherwise. Growing up in rural Michigan, many of my classmates had never traveled far beyond the Midwest. Through ski racing, the country and world began to feel bigger

and more within reach. I learned that if I worked hard enough and qualified for races, I could earn the chance to see new places, stand atop unfamiliar mountains, and race alongside my friends.

But skiing was about more than the places I went; it was about the people I met. I made my closest, dearest friends through the sport. Some of them have been in my life for as long as I can remember. There are pictures of us together at the ski hill when we were only six years old. My closest childhood friend lives in California now, almost 3,000 miles away, but no matter how long we go without seeing each other, we always pick up right where we left off.



The older girls on my team and my coaches modeled what dedication and confidence looked like, on and off the mountain. One of my coaches had attended Dartmouth. Growing up in a small town, I rarely met anyone who had attended an Ivy League institution. Knowing that someone from my hometown had done it made that path feel not distant, but possible.

She is also part of the reason I now coach when I go home for Christmas break. I want the younger skiers on the team to see what the sport can give them—not just results or medals, but confidence, opportunities, and a sense that a bigger world awaits them if they are willing to work for it. Coaching has also made me reflect on everything skiing has given me and how much those years shaped me.

Skiing has a permanent place in my life, even in the small details—like my nickname, “Bird,” something my dad called me when I was little. When the head coach of my race team heard it, she picked it up. Soon, all my coaches were calling me Bird, and when I started coaching, kids would get my attention by yelling, “Coach Bird!” To this day, some have no idea what my real name is.

I wrote my Common App essay about this nickname. It is part of who I am, tied to some of my favorite people and memories in the same way skiing represents something deeper: a constant

in my life. Through moments when everything else felt uncertain, practice with my coaches and teammates was always there, teaching me how to keep showing up and putting in the work even when things are hard. Consistency turned into dedication over time, shaping how I approached life. I truly believe skiing helped me get to where I am—it pushed me to stay disciplined, aim high, and apply to scholarships and schools that once felt out of reach.

One of my favorite memories now lives on the lock screen of my computer: me skiing at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, on a powder day. I was there for a race, and a massive snowstorm prevented it from happening, meaning we had the whole day to explore the resort. Even though I got frostbite on my face, the day was otherwise practically perfect.

Once the weekend concluded, my mom and I flew out of the Jackson Hole airport to Attitash in New Hampshire for another competition, while my dad drove separately to meet us there. That trip is just one example of the lengths my parents went to so I could keep competing, something I didn’t fully appreciate at the time.

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to understand just how much they sacrificed. They traveled across the country with me, taking time off work and spending their money and energy to support my passion. Sometimes I feel guilty that I devoted so much to skiing only to stop competing in college, but then I remember how it played such a formative role in shaping me into who I am.

When I graduated from high school, my ski team awarded me a scholarship that helped make college possible. I don’t race anymore, but I will never regret the time and effort I gave to the sport, for what it gifted me in return is worth much more than I could have ever lost.

I have had to learn new icebreakers. I can’t tell people that I spend all my spare time on snowy hills and mountains anymore, something that was at first painful to admit. However, if someone really knows me—if they know where I come from and what matters to me—then they know about skiing, too.

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Love Crossed

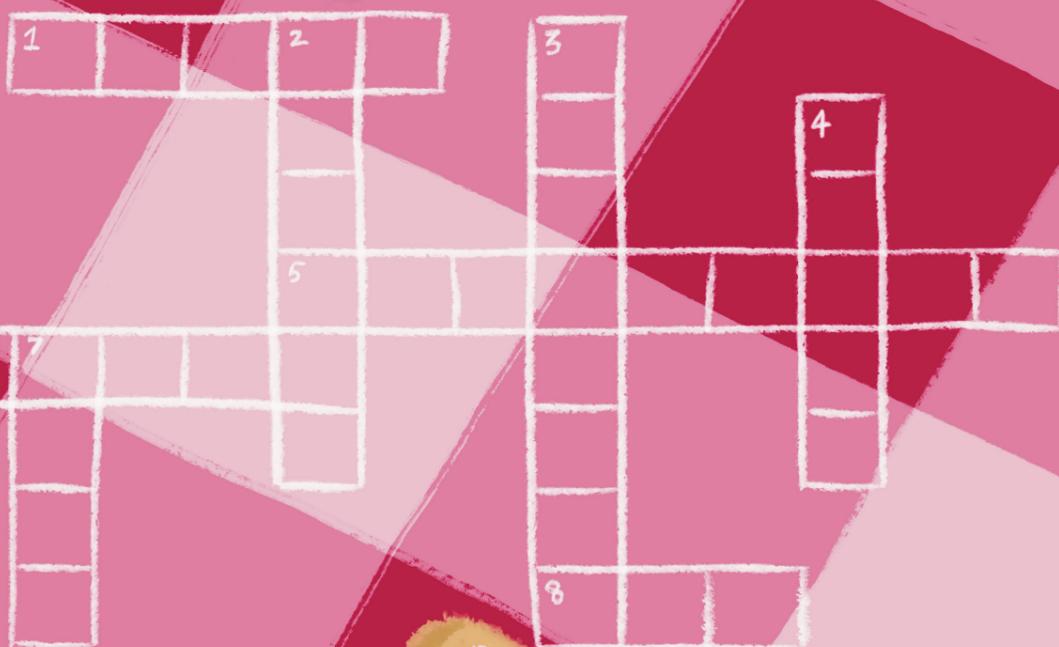
By Chau Nguyen '29

Across

1. Entity of fear; for horror movies and a new texting stage
5. Date with a girl-friend on 14th
6. Chappell Roan's "more than friends, less than lovers" song
8. Where one may meet a date, or what one uses to measure dating standards

Down

2. Album with one song
3. Amorous explosion
4. Adjective part of reality TV show where contestants marry without seeing each other
7. How one might describe pairing Kylo Ren and Rey together



Mia Park Tavares

Rania Jones



design by Clara Lake '27

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