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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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Letter From the Editors: There's a Point, We Promise

Why our publication prints this issue.

By RANIA JONES '27 & MIA TAVARES '27

If you are a parent, grandparent, professor, or even a student picking up this paper for the first time, you might be very confused right now. Perhaps you were drawn in, or disgusted by the illustration on the cover. Maybe you saw someone else laughing at an article and are curious as to what could be so funny about sex. Alternatively, you might have grabbed the issue out of pure curiosity, and balked at the obscenities in the table of contents. Whatever the reason, we are happy that you are reading it now and that we get to tell you why we print this issue, and why it is so important that we continue to do so.

From Rania—There are few moments at 12 Arrow St. that I remember more clearly than the first time I learned about the "Harvard Independent" Sex Issue. Sitting cross-legged, hands firmly pressed into our beige carpet, I listened intently as former president Eliza Kimball '25 enlightened us about her 2022 contribution to the Sex Issue. Her piece, "Fake It 'Til You Make It," broke down the question of why women fake orgasms, a topic she explained had been brainstormed with her mother—iconic. It was then, three fateful falls ago, that I knew the "Harvard Independent" was something I wanted to be part of and stay with for more than a while. My very own contributions to this seminal issue over the years have ranged widely. I have given credit where credit is most certainly due to the queen of "Let's Talk about Sex" herself, Ms. Alex Cooper, and, on a more personal note, I have reflected on the first time my girlfriends and I felt comfortable talking about sex amongst ourselves.

In this vein, I wrote in the fall of 2024 about the value of watching "Sex and the City" with my girlfriends, particularly how "seeing women talking unapologetically about orgasms, threesomes, and tantric sex at brunch is important, even when it may not seem like it." Vulnerability with the right people, after all, can catalyze genuine connection. The sentiment remains true, perhaps more than ever. Talking about sex is healthy, and it is normal. Say the awkward, uncomfortable thing out loud, and someone usually says, "Me too." Yet there are impossibly few spaces that allow us permission to talk, learn, and understand sex, let alone how to enjoy and embrace it.

Such principles have informed our work, both here and throughout the Indy's history.

Yes, it is completely unhinged to take our quizzes, use our branded condoms, and weigh the pros and cons of sex in a twin-XL dorm bed, but there's a point—we promise. The conversations that we have created and prolonged throughout the history of the Indy's Sex Issue celebrate and demystify the taboos of our daily lives: birth control, K-12 sex education, and the female orgasm. It is why we Indy—to be the driving force of these conversations that no one else can or is willing to have.

From Mia—Quite frankly, I am in large part proud to be in the "Harvard Independent" because of our Sex Issue. It is emblematic of the free-thinking, individuality, and edge that we bring to our publication. Talking about sex is uncomfortable and still heavily stigmatized in our society. Yet that should not stop us; in fact, it should encourage us even more. This publication was founded in 1969 in response to consistently biased campus news coverage of the Vietnam War protests. We arose to be counter-cultural.

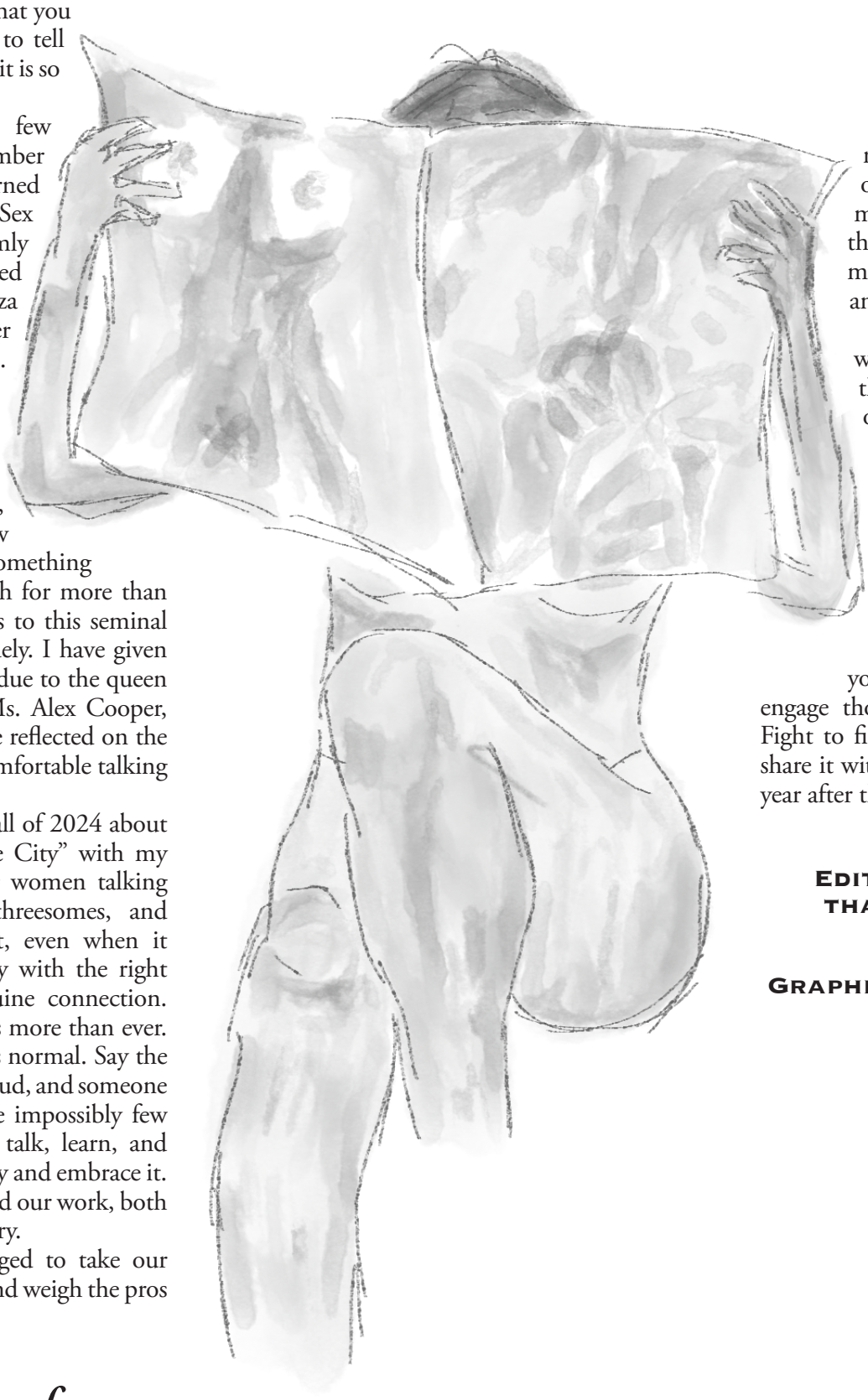
Today, we hold ourselves to the same anti-institutional standard. The "Harvard Independent" gives Harvard students real voices. Voices to call out injustices, to expose newsworthy organizational failings, to interrogate our own cultural biases. We cover politics, technology, international affairs, power, the earth, and pop culture. That means we should have an issue devoted to perhaps the most omnipresent and deeply human topic: sex.

The "Harvard Independent" is a paper written by Harvard students, so it should be enjoyable for them to read. And despite the wide variety of backgrounds that we may come from, college campuses prevail as notorious hotbeds of sexual activity. The evidence lies in our very own Sex Issue Survey: 73% of our respondents are not virgins, and 95% of those have had sex within the past six months. So the question remains: why are there so few platforms to discuss sex when most of our respondents are sexually active and open about it?

"Talking about sex is healthy, and it is normal."

As Rania noted, there are few spaces where students can openly discuss sex, and the "Harvard Independent" is proud to be one of them. If no one else will, we are honored to keep doing it. Within these pages, I hope you find articles that make you laugh, cry, ponder, and gasp. More importantly, I hope the words you see laid out before you encourage conversation. We live in a world that bombards us with conflicting notions about sex from all directions, 24/7, 365. In light of that, you must ask questions, do research, and engage thoughtfully with the people around you. Fight to find your own voice. And if you are bold, share it with us. We will be here next year, and every year after that.

The President and Editor-in-Chief are devastated that this is the last Sex Issue they will write for.



Graphic by Sarahluna Sassine '29

"Why are there so few platforms to discuss sex when most of our respondents are sexually active and open about it?"

NEWS

The "Harvard Independent's" 2026 Sex Survey Reveals Frequent Sexual Activity Among Harvard College Students

A breakdown of the "Harvard Independent's" annual sex survey and its on-campus trends.

By THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT NEWS SECTION

The "Harvard Independent's" annual Sex Survey offers a look at the relationships, preferences, and private lives of Harvard undergraduates. The 2026 survey received 407 submissions, with respondents sharing everything from their relationship statuses to their preferred hookup soundtracks.

Respondent Demographics

First-years made up the largest share of respondents: 39.6% were in the Class of 2030, followed by 29.7% in the Class of 2029, 16.9% in the Class of 2028, and 13.8% in the Class of 2027. By age, 62.2% were 17-19, 37.0% were 20-22, and 0.8% were 23 or older.

The survey also captured a range of genders: 61.3% of respondents identified as female, 35.9% as male, and 2.8% as nonbinary. In a separate question, 3.4% identified as transgender.

In terms of sexual orientation, 58.3% reported being straight, 29.2% bisexual, 6.0% gay or lesbian, 2.3% pansexual, 1.6% asexual, and 0.8% queer. The remaining 1.8% supplied other descriptions, expressed uncertainty, or gave a nonspecific answer.

Turning to students' broader outlooks, political views clustered toward the left: 79.8% selected very left, 11.1% selected moderate, and 9.0% selected conservative. As for religious views, 63.7% were nonreligious, 12.9% somewhat religious, and 23.5% very religious.

Relationships and Hookup Culture

This year's percentage of virgins on campus has remained roughly the same as in recent years. When asked about virginity, 27.3% of respondents said they were virgins, while 72.7% said they were not. These numbers are roughly the same from last year, when 26.5% of students reported being virgins. Among respondents who have had sex, 69.2% reported having sex at least within the past month.

Among those who named an age at which they lost their virginity, 18 was the most common answer at 28.1%. The median age was 17, a year younger than the 2025 median. Students found sex most commonly through their relationships, 39.5% of the time. Students also reported a median of two previous sexual partners. It's safe to say that hookup culture is a dying art at Harvard.

Attraction and Preferences

The survey also went beyond figuring out where students met their partners and explored why they were drawn to them. Men and women had the same expectations of their partners' sexual history: the median number of previous sexual partners considered "too many" was 10 for both genders. Most nonbinary respondents (55.6%) did not care about sexual history.

Additionally, 82.5% of students reported clean-shaving or trimming, while only 61.4% preferred their partners to shave or trim theirs. Among women, 53.3% reported being clean-shaven, but only 19.5% preferred clean-shaven partners. Meanwhile, 16.7% of men shaved, but 34.4% preferred their partner to be clean-shaven.

The importance of height in a partner differed by gender. Among female respondents, 81.2% preferred partners who were at least as tall as they were. Among male respondents, 54.4% preferred partners at least as short as themselves. Nonbinary respondents most commonly expressed no preference (45.5%).

Regarding what nether endowments respondents preferred, 39.7% liked girthier and longer penises, while 38.1% did not care. 48.4% of respondents preferred their partners to be circumcised, while 44.7% had no preference. This was consistent with the typical male genitalia at the College: 63.6% of respondents with penises said they were circumcised and 36.4% said they were not. The median penis size among respondents was 6.5 inches.

Students preferred tits over ass on campus. Respondents' median bra size was B though this statistic does not provide data on the quality of the average breast.

Attraction also extended to the groups students belonged to on campus. 46.5% of respondents found athletes more desirable. 33% of respondents were more attracted to people with impressive jobs or internships. This was followed by the arts, theater, and music scene at 25.5%, and final clubs at 23.1%. Students could select multiple groups.

How did students practice safe sex? Condoms were the preferred contraceptive method at 56.2%, followed by 33.4% using some form of birth control. 5.3% said they pulled out—which does not count as safe sex.

Unique Sexual Experiences

The campus was also moderately interested in fetishes: on the survey's 0–6 kinkiness scale, the average response was three. 42% of students reported themselves as very or extremely kinky.

The written responses gave those ratings more detail, naming choking, piss, bondage, breeding, edging, BDSM, and submissive or dominant dynamics. Other answers included "fascist/feminist" and "a moderate amount of body odor."

Additionally, some students reported having controversial relationships on campus. 0.7% reported having sex with a proctor, 3.6% with a teaching fellow, and 2.9% with a professor. Roommates accounted for 7.3%, blockmates and entrywaymates each for 13.9%, and teammates for 10.9%. As far as how many partners students had at one time, 6% of respondents reported having a threesome, 0% a foursome, and 0.4% participated in an orgy.

70.9% of students were also open to sex during menstruation, though only 28.3% had oral sex during menstruation. 32.2% of respondents reported having used sex toys with a partner.

Students were less experimental with sex positions, with missionary as the most popular option at 42.5%. Before getting to those positions, foreplay most commonly lasted 15 to 20 minutes at 36.4%, though 15.5% preferred it to last longer than 30 minutes.

Masturbation

Sometimes, sex doesn't need to involve any partner at all. Respondents reported masturbating an average of two times per week, though 27.9% of respondents reported not masturbating at all. Separately, 18.4% reported having masturbated in public.

Alongside masturbation, respondents described their pornography habits: 73% reported watching or reading it occasionally (weekly to monthly), while daily consumption accounted for 3.3%, and multiple times per day for 0.9%. Another 17.5% reported they had never watched porn, while 5.3% selected, "I looked once and felt ashamed."

Soundtracks and Aftercare

The survey also explored students' preferred soundtracks for intimate moments. The Weeknd was the most frequently named artist for sex at 15.5% of music responses, followed by Lana Del Rey at 6.9%. Daniel Caesar and Deftones tied for third at 2.6% each.

Once the music stopped, respondents had their own ideas about what to eat. For after-sex meals, Mexican food and restaurants led at 28.2%, including Felipe's, El Jefe's, and Achilito's. Pizza tied with chicken, wings, and chicken restaurants at 8.4% each. Ice cream and frozen desserts followed at 7.6%.

The top 3 desired professors on campus were Sergio Imparato, Steven Levitsky, and Amanda Claybaugh, respectively.

Student Commentary

Biggest misconceptions about sex?

- "That it's never awkward, and that it's always very serious."
- "Everyone is having it!"
- "That you can be 'dirty' for having a lot of sex, and that it has to have a lot of moral weight to it."

Weirdest sexual fantasy?

- "Getting pregnant."
- "Watching my significant other fuck someone else"
- "Threesome with my suitemates."
- "Being left in a cage/leashed by the door while my partner goes to work."
- "Being kicked in the balls by my girlfriend and her friends, then teased. And worshipping them."
- "Stepsibling or stepparent sex or with [actual] ones."
- "Pedicare ego Aurelium pathicum et irrumare eum, et quoque cinædum Furium eocum…"

Most awkward sexual experience?

- "Guy I was with kept asking if it was in because he wastoo crossed to know."
- "Turned on during section."
- "In the back seat of my car at a cematary [sic]."
- "Breakup sex cum on face."
- "Sidechat hookup who got uncomfy after and blocked me."
- "When his dick was so small I asked if he was hard."
- "His foreskin caught on my braces."

Written by the "Harvard Independent" News staff.

Do You Have A Tampon?

A conversation with FLOW about menstrual stigma and issues at Harvard.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30

We all bleed every month. Well, not everyone, but over 2 billion people menstruate worldwide each month, including women, adolescent girls, and transgender and non-binary individuals. An estimated 500 million of the 800 million people who menstruate on any given day experience period poverty, and in the United States, nearly one in four face the same barrier. In Massachusetts, one in seven children struggle to pay for menstrual products.

Across the world, menstrual stigma, a cultural and social phenomenon characterized by secrecy and shame around menstruation, serves as an additional barrier to accessing proper healthcare.

"In Massachusetts, one in seven children struggle to pay for menstrual products."

Harvard's menstrual support resources are limited. In 2023, a student-led team founded by Shruthi Kumar '24 worked with the facilities team on the Making Harvard 100% Period Secure project, which aimed to provide free, high-quality, accessible menstrual products across all women's and gender-neutral bathrooms on the Faculty of Arts and Sciences campus. As part of the project, the team conducted a landscape analysis and negotiated directly with distributors. The team successfully installed menstrual product dispensers in over 800 bathrooms across campus.

"I was pleasantly surprised at just plain old access on campus. I think almost every other bathroom has tampons, pads, etc.," Claire Sim '30, a member of FLOW's board who primarily works on community engagement, said. However, Sim noted that she had never used the products before and so could not comment on their quality.

Since then, the College has not followed up to assess the program's success. The College has also not updated its plan to ensure high-quality products remain available in all campus bathrooms. New bathrooms have been constructed in the Science Center as part of the College's plan to ensure compliance with accessibility standards. After the project, the College also closed the Women's Center in 2025, which previously stocked menstrual products.

The Harvard College Menstrual Equity Coalition, often referred to as Harvard FLOW, is the University's primary student organization dedicated to advancing menstrual health and destigmatizing menstruation on campus. FLOW's work aims to build upon the Making Harvard 100% Period Secure campaign.

Ashi Prashapati '29, co-president of FLOW, explained that she had been passionate about period poverty work for a long time. "I think in your day-to-day, as a person of color, as a woman, as any marginalized group, your body is inherently viewed as deficient, either by the medical society or just in the way people interact and treat you," she said to the "Harvard Independent." Racial bias exists throughout the healthcare system: 21% of Black women say they have been treated inequitably by a healthcare provider due to their race, compared to only 3% of White women. "I think menstrual equity is such a foundational way in tackling that idea of deficiency or the stigmatization around women's bodies, or just the female norm," Prashapati said.

"We are not a very well-known club," Prashapati noted. Although FLOW has been around since 2019, it has only grown in presence over the last two years. Despite its lower profile, the club creates space for important conversation, Prashapati explained. "People around me get a lot more comfortable about talking about their bodies, talking about menstrual experiences and issues," she said.

Though unable to share particular stories shared during the club's events, to protect student privacy, Prashapati explained that there were issues with menstrual resources at Harvard. "Menstrual poverty is something that students have experienced, and that is why we have space like this on campus," she continued. This issue is not unique to Harvard; 17% of college students who menstruate experience period poverty and struggle to afford products, and nearly 50% say they stretch their products or avoid changing them on college campuses.

Sim agreed that financial circumstances were a significant barrier to product access. "We live in an extremely expensive area. Our CVS is probably our go-to for products," she said. "My friends and I were at CVS and just looking at the prices and just absolutely astounded. So I think that is probably one of the biggest things. And it is obviously not sustainable to rely on going to a machine in the public bathroom every single day."

One first-year at the College said she felt menstruation resources were widely accessible on campus. "My experience has been very positive being a menstruator on campus, because I do not know if every proctor does this, but my proctor leaves tampons in the hallway for me," an anonymous first-year at the College said. "I'm not embarrassed to ask for help, so if anything ever went wrong, I would immediately find someone who can help me."

The student added that she believed Harvard had an obligation to ensure there was no period poverty on campus. "Every proctor should be supplying tampons and everything."

Sim and Prashapati both observed that access to menstrual products is fundamentally a structural issue. "The majority of people who are making legislation who are supposed to be at the top are usually not menstruators, which I think already is a huge barrier," Sim said.

"People viewing menstruation as a deficiency … just as something that you can not take pride in or you can not celebrate, is probably a big hindrance in feminist movements," Prashapati said.

Access to products is not necessarily the biggest issue at Harvard. Echoing Prashapati, Sim added that the College can also focus on social perceptions of menstruation: "I think there are a lot of organizations that are doing really great jobs at decreasing stigma there. But I think it is more about the individual and with smaller groups of people."

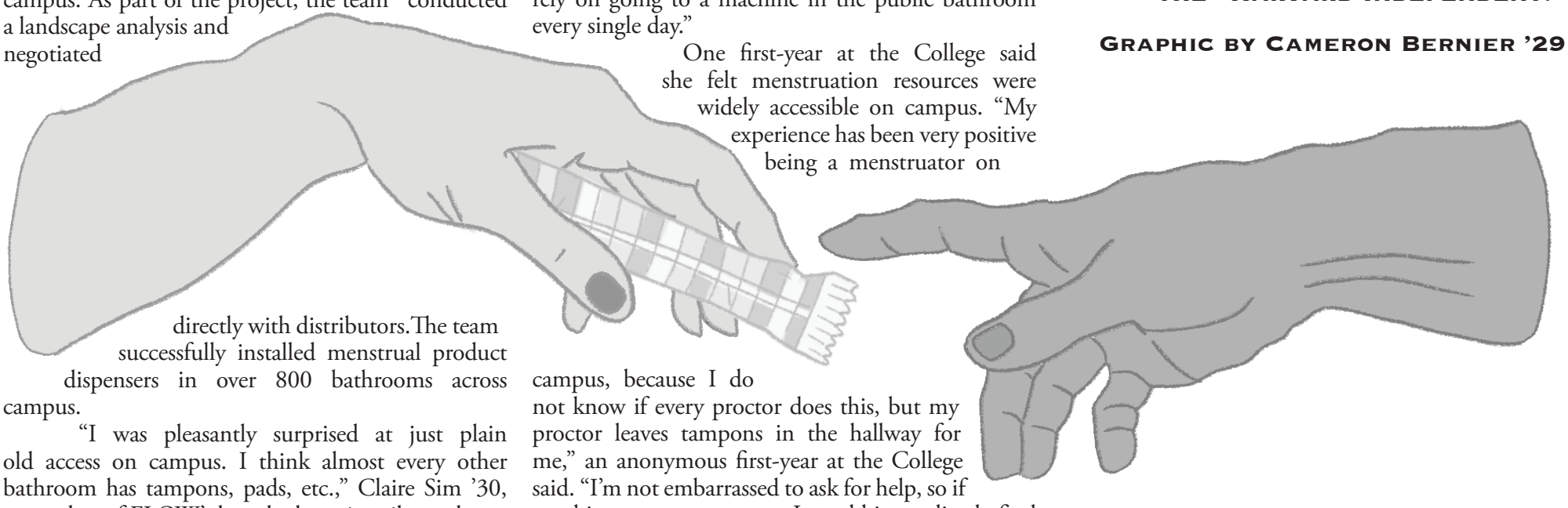
FLOW has been trying to increase its presence through collaborations with other student organizations, such as the Harvard Baking Club. Together, the groups organized a workshop on menstruation nutrition, where attendees baked cookies and assembled charcuterie boards while discussing how to nourish one's body during different phases of the menstrual cycle. Prashapati believes the College could offer similar support. "That's something really easy that any nutritional service on campus could provide, or even if we had little pamphlets in the dining hall that could talk about that," she said.

"Menstrual poverty is something that students have experienced, and that is why we have space like this on campus."
- Prashapati '29

FLOW continues to work to increase period accessibility on campus and is hosting an open mic on Nov. 13. "We bring those stories to light so we are more connected as a community and are able to relinquish any shame around that," Prashapati said.

Anika Gupta '30 (anikagupta@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Cameron Bernier '29



Messy Misdiagnoses and Medical Misogyny

Recent celebrity misdiagnoses put a spotlight on how medicine treats women with autoimmune conditions.

By SUCHETA SRIKANTH '29

On Oct. 1, "Science Magazine" published a special issue on women's health for the first time in the publication's history. Beyond studies in sex-differentiated reproductive health and gynecology, the journal detailed fundamental biological discrepancies, denoting a gap in women's health-specific research. Almost every organ functions differently in the female body than in the male, yet many sweeping medical generalizations have historically stemmed from predominantly male datasets. As highlighted by Senior Editor Yevgeniya Nusinovich, chronic pain disorders and autoimmune diseases are among the areas that remain understudied while disproportionately impacting women.

Actress Christina Applegate is only one such example. In 2021, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune condition and neurodegenerative disease impacting the brain and spinal cord. However, on Oct. 20, she revealed that MS was a misdiagnosis, leaving her with more questions than when she began.

"You don't get misdiagnosed and all of a sudden [you're] better. I haven't gotten better. If anything, I've gotten worse in some ways," Applegate said to Jamie Lynn Sigler on their podcast, "MeSsy."

Dr. Tanuja Chitnis, the Chief of the Division of Neurology at Mass General Brigham and Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School, is a multiple sclerosis specialist who has made breakthroughs in research. She provided insight into Applegate's potential situation and the broader implications for women's health.

According to Dr. Chitnis, there are several reasons why women may be predisposed to autoimmune disorders like MS. "Most autoimmune diseases are female predominant, and the ratios range from three to one in MS and Crohn's disease and other similar diseases, to nine to one in diseases like lupus," Chitnis said in an interview with the "Harvard Independent." She attributed these ratios to estrogen's pro-inflammatory effect on immune cells, for example, and to X-chromosome genes related to the immune system. MS, in particular, is expressed after puberty and can be less active after menopause, suggesting a potential hormonal link.

"Chronic pain disorders and autoimmune diseases are among the areas that remain understudied while disproportionately impacting women."

Dr. Marwa Kaisey, a neurologist at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, spoke on Applegate's podcast and later to "CBS News." She outlined how there is no consistent test to diagnose MS, leaving doctors with an adapting checklist instead. "These criteria change every seven or eight years as we get new technology and new information about the disease that allows us to refine them," Kaisey explained.

Chitnis echoed Kaisey's statements, discussing disorders that coincide with parts of the MS diagnosis criteria. MOGAD, or myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein antibody disease, can look similar on brain scans. "There are lesions in the brain, and in this case, we do, for the most part, we can detect an antibody to something called MOG," Chitnis added.

Neuromyelitis optica, lupus, Sjögren's syndrome, and occasionally rheumatoid arthritis can also present with brain and spinal cord degeneration. In fact, Applegate herself is now undergoing testing for many of these conditions. Symptoms of MS can also result from rare chronic infections, tumors, long-COVID fatigue, and myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome. However, ME/CFS does not present with the MRI lesions, Chitnis explained.

"Women weren't required to be in clinical trials until 1993."

- Couric

Extensive research has been done to understand better the risk genes and causes of MS, specifically related to the Epstein-Barr virus and how EBV infection precedes MS onset. This progress has been important to the field, especially in exploring blood-based biomarkers, but Chitnis said more work remains. "Every disease is understudied until we truly have a cure and optimal treatments for it," Chitnis said.

Chitnis explained the history and necessity of treatment, given the potential of medical misogyny and marginalization of women with MS. "This is a lifelong disease, and once someone is diagnosed, then we need to start disease-modifying treatment right away," said Chitnis. "There has been a historical tradition of not being as aggressive with treatment for women who, on the converse side, might have a more inflammatory form of the disease, so that in a way is a form of misogyny."

In July 2026, comedian Kylie Vincent spoke to "People Magazine" about her MS diagnosis after a male doctor initially dismissed her symptoms as a urinary tract infection (UTI). She explained how, in the seven months since her diagnosis, she is still not on disease-modifying treatment and how the medication would essentially dictate whether or not she would use a wheelchair. She was treated with antibiotics for a UTI for a week and felt a complete lack of trust. Her not yet being on disease-modifying treatment reflects the non-aggressive approach Chitnis described.

Chitnis also detailed that with fatigue and depression as symptoms of MS, the physicality and severity of the condition have gone underrecognized in the past, presumably related to the psychosomatic excusal of women's symptoms. A 2026 University of Cambridge study found that "Women with autoimmune diseases are 74% more likely than men to be told that their symptoms are psychological or psychosomatic," which in turn prolongs proper diagnosis and treatment. This phenomenon stems from historical sexism: terms like hysteria were commonly used to label unexplainable symptoms experienced by women, attributing illness to expressive emotional responses.

Journalist Katie Couric, founder of Katie Couric Media, discussed this connection at the Female Quotient Health Summit on Oct. 14. Her upcoming documentary, "HORMONAL!," focuses on the systemic misogyny that female patients face. "Why, for centuries, have women been marginalized, misdiagnosed, and gaslit?" Couric posed at the panel.

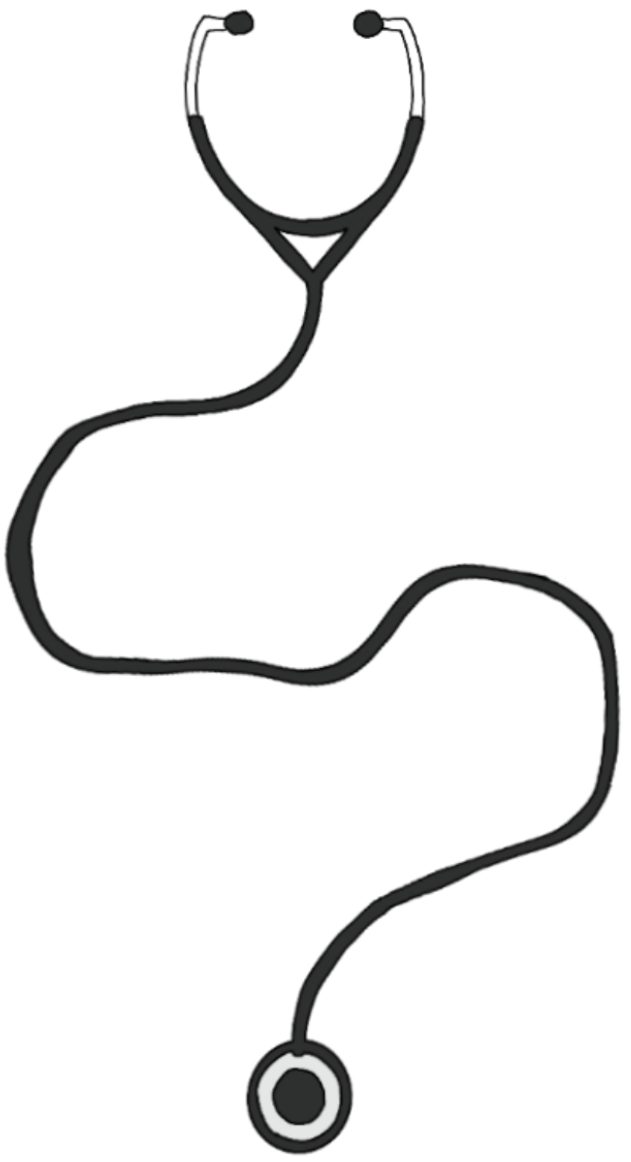
She furthered her complaints with statistics. "Women weren't required to be in clinical trials until 1993 … women take an average of four years longer than men to be diagnosed with a disease," she said. This prolonged state of uncertainty subjects women to worsening physical and mental symptoms without treatment, making it more difficult to manage challenging day-to-day conditions.

Couric's statements imply a link between the lack of research in women's health and the likelihood of successful diagnosis. Chitnis is determined to see this change, starting with MS. "I do think that we are very close to having a blood test for MS, to having even preventative treatments or strategies launched in the next ten years for MS," Chitnis said.

As Applegate continues on her journey for answers, Chitnis is hopeful for improvements in differential diagnoses. "If we learn a lot about MS, we're going to learn a lot about lupus and rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn's disease, and this is all going to impact many, many autoimmune diseases," Chitnis concluded.

Sucheta Srikanth '29 (suchetasrikanth@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent" and impatiently waits for a cure.

Graphic by Maya Kodali '30



Sex in Cyberspace

How the digital landscape is shaping Gen Z's sexuality.

By SADIE GUGLIOTTA '30

Gen Z is, apparently, in the midst of a sex recession. Though they have sex later and less frequently than previous generations, they are not necessarily any less horny. Instead, the new statistics may reflect a shift in Gen Z's sexual expression, as with many other facets of modern life, into the digital sphere. The rising popularity of platforms like OnlyFans has provided a conduit for many, including college students, to curate and monetize their sexuality.

OnlyFans is a website where independent creators can share content with their subscribers, or "fans," for a fee set by the creator. Creators can upload any type of media to the site, though OnlyFans is best known for distributing adult content. Creators keep 80% of the profits, and the company collects the remaining 20%. This financial and creative control makes OnlyFans attractive to many, compared with more mainstream social media outlets like TikTok and Instagram.

Sophie Rain, a 22-year-old OnlyFans creator and co-founder of the Bop House (a collective of female TikTokers-turned-OnlyFans stars), claims to have made more than $100 million on the site in three years. Some creators have gained enough traction selling their adult content to fund their college educations. Emily Cocea, a recent graduate of Carnegie Mellon University and current University of Michigan law student, has reported earnings of $1.5 million under her online moniker "hotblockchain."

Cocea and Rain are outliers in terms of the massive popularity and financial gains they've achieved. In reality, only 0.1% of OnlyFans creators generate 76% of the platform's earnings. Still, their stories are amplified by mainstream media as symbolic of changing sexual mores in the digital era.

In an interview with the "Harvard Independent," former adult performer Maya Morena noted the unique financial control that sex work can provide. "Sex work was the fastest way I could think of to successfully and quickly be independent from my family. Retail, sales, and fast food restaurants weren't paying enough," she said.

Morena immigrated from Honduras as a child and was granted the ability to work in the United States through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Following President Trump's 2016 election, Morena's status as a DACA recipient was jeopardized. The consequent culture of hostility toward undocumented immigrants in the workplace made sex work feel more secure to Morena. "I was afraid of losing immigration status because it was constantly under threat by politicians. My thinking was that I could build a consumer base underground, even if I lost my work authorization," she said.

For many, however, the draw of OnlyFans is not purely financial. Catherine De Noire, manager of a legal brothel in Europe and prospective organizational psychology PhD, explained the role that OnlyFans plays in distributing taboo content that may otherwise be censored. "OnlyFans lets me write about things I can't write about this openly on mainstream social media, so that's why I joined," she said to the "Harvard Independent."

De Noire's OnlyFans account functions more as a diary of her experiences working as a brothel manager. She uses the platform as a more direct tool to demystify sex work for a broader audience outside of academia. "Of course, content behind a paywall won't reach society as a whole. But I think it definitely reaches more people than published academic articles, and it's far more accessible and readable."

The freedom to control her schedule and have time to pursue other passions was another draw for Morena: "I had the free time to study what I wanted, join protests, write, and start a local co-op with friends," she said. This flexibility is not afforded to many young people in the modern workforce, especially as Gen Z scrambles to find even entry-level employment.

Although OnlyFans has the resources to impose security regulations for users and creators, including age-verification measures and content-vetting processes, the platform is not immune to abuse. A public presence online, especially for creators who share other marginalized identities, can pose safety risks even for those in control of the curation of their own image, according to adult creator and director Vanniall.

"It's often said visibility is a double-edged sword, and that always bears repeating. This past decade has seen incredibly increased visibility for both trans people, sex workers, and honestly women in general," Vanniall explained. The pervasion of AI content into every corner of the internet has made it harder for anyone posting to control their own likeness. "I think it's safe to say this has been a mixed bag. Even the average woman now has to fear deepfakes or doxxing in a way that was unthinkable just a short time ago," she continued. An investigation by Reuters turned up records of child sexual abuse, "revenge porn," and sex trafficking through OnlyFans between 2019 and 2024.

Politics has undoubtedly shaped the way that many young people view and experience—or choose not to experience—sex. In the aftermath of the 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade, 27% of Gen Z adults said they were more reluctant to have sex. Gen Z has grown up with nearly unmitigated access to porn and digital discourse surrounding sexuality; it is also more openly queer and more likely to engage in kink behaviors than young adults of generations past. Some attribute this willingness to broaden sexual norms to a greater awareness of the politics that are tied up in sexuality.

Expanded no-tions of sex beyond the penetrative penis-in-vagina act point to Gen Zers' interest in exploring different styles of intimacy. The trend toward young people subscribing to OnlyFans accounts may partially be explained by the cultural normalization of digital sexual expression, De Noire said. "Surprisingly, many [OnlyFans users], at least among my subscribers, aren't looking only for erotic content, but mainly for someone to write to and share things with," she explained. "Sometimes it's almost a kind of online therapy. They find it easier to open up to a stranger on the internet than to their friends, because they're afraid of looking weak in front of them."

The "Harvard Independent" publishes the results of its own Sex Survey each year, measuring changing sexual attitudes among Harvard students over time. The 2026 survey reflected that of 2025, indicating students' sexual behaviors trending toward abstinence. This aligns with generational patterns; however, it does not indicate sexual ambivalence: according to this year's survey, 73% of Harvard students report regularly watching porn. As more young people vie for control of their sexual expression and image, platforms like OnlyFans appeal to Gen Z's inclination toward curiosity.

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Graphic by Karishma Kodali '29



The Hypocrisy of Sex in Politics

The gendered fallout of sexual assault allegations among politicians.

By NAOMI BEINART '30

Why have men's' political careers remained seemingly indestructible in the face of sexual assault allegations while women face the brunt of repercussions?

One-third of President Donald Trump's original cabinet members have faced claims of sexual assault. The list includes currently employed members, like Pete Hegseth, the United States Secretary of War, who was accused of sexually assaulting a woman in her hotel room in 2017. The twenty-two-page report filed by the Monterey Police Department includes details of him snatching her phone, barricading the door with his body, and refusing to let her leave. The woman who accused Hegseth in the report, Jane Doe, recounted that throughout the night she continued repeating the word "no."

Also on the list is Matt Gaetz, who self-withdrew from the nomination process for U.S. Attorney General after sex trafficking allegations grew to such heights that they "enmeshed" him. According to a House Ethics Committee report, Gaetz was accused of having sex with a 17-year-old girl, paying women to have sex with him, and granting special privileges to women with whom he was having sexual relations over female colleagues with whom he wasn't.

While Gaetz withdrew from the nomination, other cabinet members like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has served as United States Secretary of Health and Human Services since early 2025, did not. In July of 2024, Kennedy was accused of groping a babysitter. "I have no memory of this incident, but I apologize sincerely for anything I ever did that made you feel uncomfortable," he later wrote in an apology text to the woman.

Trump, who nominated each of these men, has faced multiple sexual misconduct allegations, and a jury found him liable for sexual abuse in the Carroll case. He also has thirty-four felony convictions in connection with hush-money payments to adult film actress Stormy Daniels and numerous connections to human trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

But none of these cases exist in a vacuum. The one-third statistic is notable, and it fits a broader pattern of sexual misconduct allegations against lawmakers, many of whom faced no loss of office.

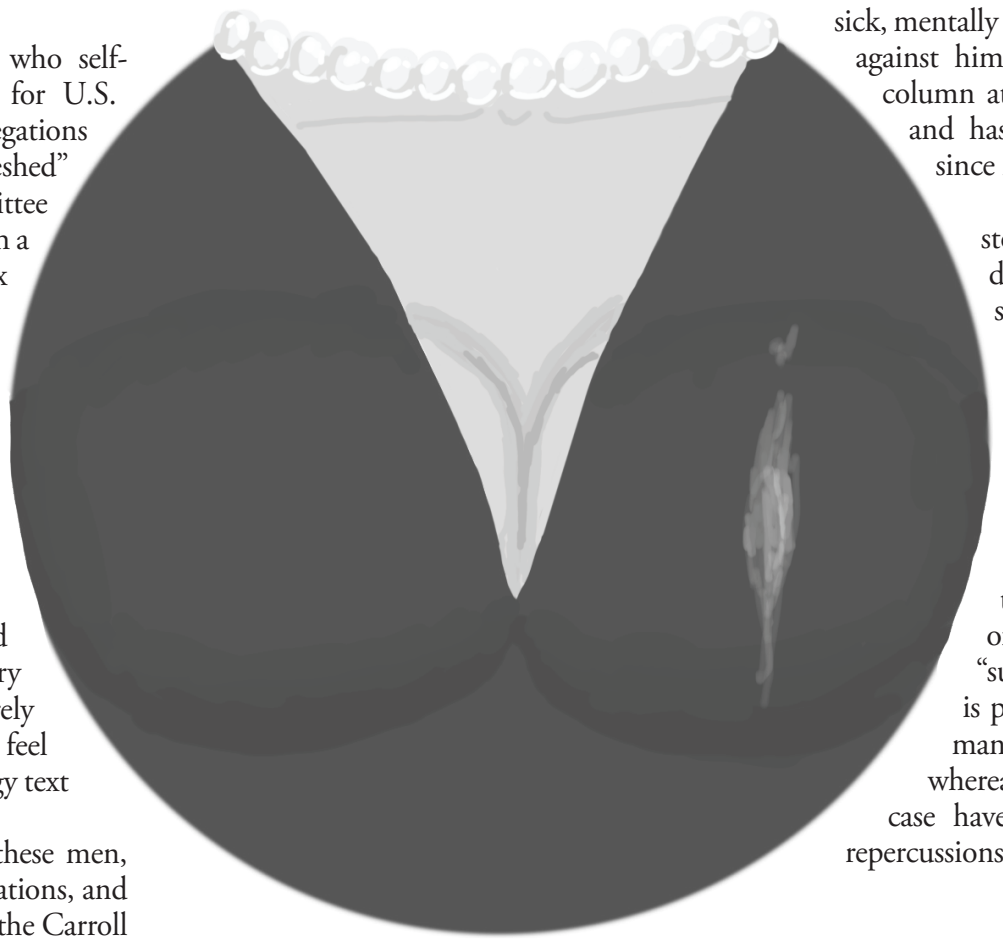
How have these men managed to keep their careers amidst the accusations? Trump, Hegseth, and

"The social punishment Ford faced starkly contrasts with that of her male counterparts, but it is not unprecedented."

Kennedy are not the founding fathers of evading consequences. They are simply joining the ranks of durable, prominent men. Figures like Clarence Thomas, Bill Clinton, and Brett Kavanaugh have also outlived their respective scandals.

The news outlet's role in spreading information about scandals has exacerbated the differing consequences between men and women in politics. In an interview with the "Harvard Independent," Former Professor of Journalism at the University of North Texas Tracy Everbach, who wrote "Junctures in Women's Leadership: Media and Journalism," described the role of the media. "Journalism is one of the worst [actors] in the portraying of women and men," Everbach said. "Journalists like to report on the most sensationalist cases [rather] than the big picture, the overall problem."

"Journalists play [into] the tropes and the stereotypes," she continued, describing the issue with biased language. And, according to Everbach, when the language is not equal, the outcomes rarely are either. In her eyes, men usually get the benefit of the doubt, whereas women are offered little empathy.



In 2018, after listening to the testimony of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, who accused the Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh of sexual assault in high school, Kavanaugh himself took the stand. He was seen choking back tears, becoming visibly furious and later crying while speaking. "NBC News" described it as an "angry, emotional … marathon." He was confirmed to the Supreme Court just nine days after the testimony. "A lot of women know it's BS," Everbach muttered.

In contrast, Ford had to hire private security after the testimonies. She could not return to her teaching job for months because of security threats. In her 2024 book, "One Way Back," she wrote that following Kavanaugh's appointment, she discussed the harrowing death threats that affected her life. "They would never give up," she explained regarding these messages. Meanwhile, Kavanaugh received a lifetime appointment to the nation's highest court.

The social punishment Ford faced starkly contrasts with that of her male counterparts, but it is not unprecedented. In the realm of accusations against Supreme Court nominees, Ford was not the first. In 1991, Anita Hill accused then-nominee Clarence Thomas of making lewd, consistent, and inappropriate comments continuously during their time working together. The televised congressional hearings lasted for three days. The committee was chaired by future President Joe Biden, who later expressed regret for the treatment Hill received. Days later, Thomas was confirmed. Joe Biden was the only one to apologize to Hill.

Often, scandals define these women's personal lives and careers for decades. Monica Lewinsky turned into a national euphemism for oral sex, being

"How have these men managed to keep their careers amidst the accusations?"

referenced in numerous pop culture songs. E. Jean Carroll has endured perpetual mocking from Trump, who has called her a "nut job" and said, "I think she's sick, mentally sick," for her accusations of sexual abuse against him. In 2019, she lost her 27-year-long column at "Elle Magazine" called "Ask E. Jean" and has endured thousands of death threats since her testimony.

For the male counterparts in each story, the allegations were not similarly derailing. Often, they are simply another scandal that dots their political careers.

In this context, many understand that women are rarely afforded the luxury of being unperturbed. In 2018, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center published that only 25% of sexual assault cases were reported to the police. At the same time, "Sage Journals" found that 60% of incumbent male politicians' careers "survive" a scandal. So a striking disparity is presented: male politicians at large have managed to retain power despite allegations, whereas the women on the other side of the case have often faced the lasting, destructive repercussions.

Naomi Beinart '30 (naomibeinart@college.harvard.edu) is interested in gender politics and how it affects our daily lives. She does her best work with 70s music blasting in her ears.

Graphic by Sophia Jo '29

FORUM

The Unsexy Panopticon

A read on why Gen Z doesn't—or won't—have sex.

By SEYI AMOSUN '29

Our jaded elders like to describe Gen Z with a list of "don'ts": Gen Zers don't drink. Gen Zers don't leave the house. Gen Zers don't know how to work. Gen Zers don't know how to socialize properly. Gen Zers don't have sex. All of these don'ts, whether you view them as good or bad, have begun to characterize our generation as a bunch of internet-addicted, antisocial, puritan homebodies. I don't dispute these assertions—who am I to argue with the statistical data? But the "what" is not the interesting part. It is the why.

"For those seeking to explore their sexuality and connect with others online, there may be an added fear of the permanence of these actions in a way that does not show up in real life."

Most younger Gen Zers have solidly grown up in the internet era. Even for the oldest of us (currently 29—born in 1997), iPhones and Google have been foisted on us in academics, social lives, and everything in between.

The result is what I call the digital panopticon: an internet-enforced version of the theoretical prison designed by philosopher Jeremy Bentham and later analyzed by Michael Foucault. In the original design, inmates are located in a circular structure where their cells face a central watchtower manned by guards. They interact only with the watchtower—not neighboring cells or other prisoners. They operate under the assumption that guards could always be watching them, but they never know when. Bentham argued that this uncertainty would drive self-regulating behavior.

Foucault extended this theoretical design to the panopticon's development in broader society. Today, individuals take on the role of both the surveillant and the surveilled. With broader knowledge of others' comings and goings, people internalize the rules, expectations, and stigmas set by society—even if they are not being observed in reality, the possibility of being observed always remains. This level of conformity drives individuals to regulate their behavior, even in private.

The internet has only reinforced individuals' tendency to think about the possibility of being watched and act accordingly. For instance, sharing locations has become the norm. For most friends, it's expected to share your location, whether via Snapchat or Find My. There are objective safety reasons for this, especially for many young women in college. However, there's also the understanding that you can always be watched. Nowhere you are going is a secret anymore—and if you are in the market for a covert hookup, a nosy Nellie can put two and two together just by seeing where your phone is heading.

Social media only amplifies this feeling of being watched. It does not just affect your behavior in the moment. Every action, online or offline, can be enshrined in a string of zeroes and ones for perpetuity—texts, images, and posts live forever in internet history. For those seeking to explore their sexuality and connect with others online, there may be an added fear of the permanence of these actions in a way that does not show up in real life.

This has hindered several avenues of sexual exploration for the 21st-century youth. Messages to a significant other, once communicated over a phone call, letter, or in person, are now sent over text and snaps. Anything even slightly NSFW could be screenshotted and shared with unwanted eyes. For those who would rather not test the sexual waters via the internet for fear of its permanence, there is a big barrier to entry there.

Growing up, it often felt as though "revenge porn" or the nonconsensual sharing of nudes is something that girls—in particular—should be wary about. However, it is a matter that affects us all, regardless of gender identity. When I was in high school, during intense school rivalry weeks, "Barstool" Instagram accounts would post a spree of the most humiliating snaps, DMs, and messages leaked from (male) players and students on the opposing team. It was incredibly trivial, and anyone would admit that the original messages were downright embarrassing. But is not that what being 16 is about—making publicly embarrassing mistakes in your love and sexual life as you grow into a young adult?

At Harvard, and at colleges across the United States, the digital panopticon has evolved into a new form: Sidechat (or YikYak or Fizz). Instant, anonymous, and universal. These apps give any college affiliate a chance to share details about other students as just another anonymous poster. While being posted about and becoming the subject of the latest rumors carries a significant social burden, there is virtually no barrier to entry for someone to type a sentence and hit post. We have essentially created our own prison of constant surveillance. Everyone has a phone, and anyone can make a post about you at any time. The panopticon no longer needs to be an intricate circular prison in a thought experiment—it is already in our pockets.

"There is no going 'off the record.'"

These days, it is clearer that what you do can be weaponized against you in seconds. There is no going "off the record." If an action you take can be instantly relayed to potential employers, family members, or partners, you have even more impetus to restrain your behavior. For something as personal and intimate as sex, it only makes sense that Gen Z as a whole would take a step back.

Sex is normal and a natural part of being human. I see other things impacting our generation's tendencies to engage in sexual activity, like the vulnerable state of female reproductive rights, a resurgence in conservatism, discourse around the threat of sexual assault, and stigmas around normal parts of human interaction. But, at a minimum, I argue that the digital panopticon is somewhat intertwined with some of these things. At worst, it may even drive them.

Then again, why do we care? Why does it matter what other people do with their sex lives? At the end of the day, maybe this whole conversation is derived from our tendency to observe and police people's behavior, just as the panopticon does. I implore members of older generations to think about a bigger lesson: perhaps there is no merit in defining whether a deviation from the "norm" of sexual activity is good or bad. The choice to have sex is ours, and the societal pressure to "do what our parents did" is no different than the societal pressures of self-regulation by the digital panopticon. We are individuals with our own agency. Now, we are opening up the conversations about our sex lives and owning that too.



Seyi Amosun '29 (samosun@college.harvard.edu) is a chronic Find My location stalker.

Graphic by Ella Cohen '29

Rekindling an Old Flame

An alleged account of descending into the fiery depths of hell just to get (not) laid. Also, Breaking News.

By NUTS O.N. FIRE

It is a Saturday night. You and your girlfriend just broke up. Your best friend's birthday party is in half an hour, and you have decided some special supplements are in order. The pregame hit you hard, so you don't have the capacity to be creative about who you ask. You fumble for your phone and text the first person who comes to mind, confident she will have what you need. Obviously, it is your ex-situationship that you told your girlfriend not to worry about.

"God gives his toughest battles to his strongest soldiers."

Whatever. You told yourself and all your friends that you would never hook up with this ex again. You were not good for each other. You believe in your own strength and send a little prayer to the Big Guy Upstairs. Always the practical one, you tell your friends to call you in exactly 15 minutes to snap you out of whatever hypnotic trance she might leave you in and head to her dorm.

In her room, you giggle and flirt. It is intimate, but forbidden. She wipes your nose, and you can't help but stare at her lips as she slowly rubs a finger along her gums. God gives his toughest battles to his strongest soldiers. Your friends call you, and you hustle out of her room, promising to catch her later. She nods knowingly. The trap's set, and you are just a fly circling the web.

The party goes as parties do. Open bar. Strobe lights and dancing. Then friends together in the bathroom. Then more dancing. A yak. Gum. Cig. Dance. Uber. Closed Bar. DoorDash? Noch's. Uber. As the night winds down, your phone turns red-hot in your hand. You get bold on text.

Your ex asks you to come over to help her edit her Instagram post (which, by the way, never gets posted). You both know exactly what she is really asking. You agree and start walking to Adams House, hoping she will text you the room number before you get there. You think you can probably find her room. After all, weren't you there just a couple of hours ago? Her typing bubble shows up for two minutes, then disappears.

The beat allows you to look up from your phone as you notice a growing crowd in front of the Lampoon. *Weird*, you think; *the Lampoon party was yesterday, and the theme definitely was not pajamas.* You start to recognize a few people in the crowd. They wave to you. Giddy with excitement over the illicit ex-sex you are soon to engage in, you barely pay attention to the fire truck flashing nearby and holler a "hey!" back.

Slowly, your drunk gaze slides to the sky, and you notice smoke billowing out of a window. The pieces start to click together. You text your ex, giggling, "oh wait, why is Randolph literally on fire?" It takes you a minute longer to have the next important thought: *That is odd—that window looks familiar.* You count the windows … *1 … 2 … 3 … fuck.* A glance at a friend quickly confirms your suspicions. You fire off another text. "WAIT IT'S LITERALLY UR ROOM—R U SERIOUS."

She texts back immediately. "yeah." You wait a beat, begging your brain to catch up and start processing all this information. Another ping comes quicker than you would like. "can u come pls." You dash through the crowd, willing the cold air to kill your buzz before you have to engage in anything that requires a responsible adult. After a couple of minutes that feel like ages, you find her barefoot on the corner outside and bring her to your room—the rest of the night blurs. You are not great with crying, especially not from someone you are actively trying to disengage from emotionally. You feel dead sober and very turned off. Nothing about this clandestine meet-up feels sexy anymore. It is terrifyingly raw. *Damn it*, you think. *How the fuck did I get cockblocked by a fire??*

You call your EMT friend to ask if she heard anything about the fire on comms. She says no one is hurt and they have no idea what started the fire. You briefly wonder whether they will be able to catch your fingerprints in the white residue left on the now very crispy desk. You relay the information back to your ex. She tells you that her sister is downstairs waiting to pick her up. *Great*, you think, *what a way to meet the family*.

The interaction is awkward as fuck. It is clear her sister knows who you are, and not in a flattering way. Overwhelmed, you leave them in your room and sprint to your best friends down the hall. Unfortunately, they didn't suffer the same buzzkill you did. Both of them are belligerently drunk, and they yell at you to "kick her out and block her!" You leave them to enjoy their Taco Bell in peace. When you get back to your room, it is empty. Your favorite pajama pants and Birkenstocks are missing. Awesome.

In the morning, you check SideChat. It is bad. You immediately contact your ex to inquire about the source of the flame that displaced all of Randolph. She sends you photos of the destruction and zooms in on the alleged culprit. It is worse than you could have imagined. In preparation for your arrival, she made a couple of important aesthetic choices, including lighting a candle.

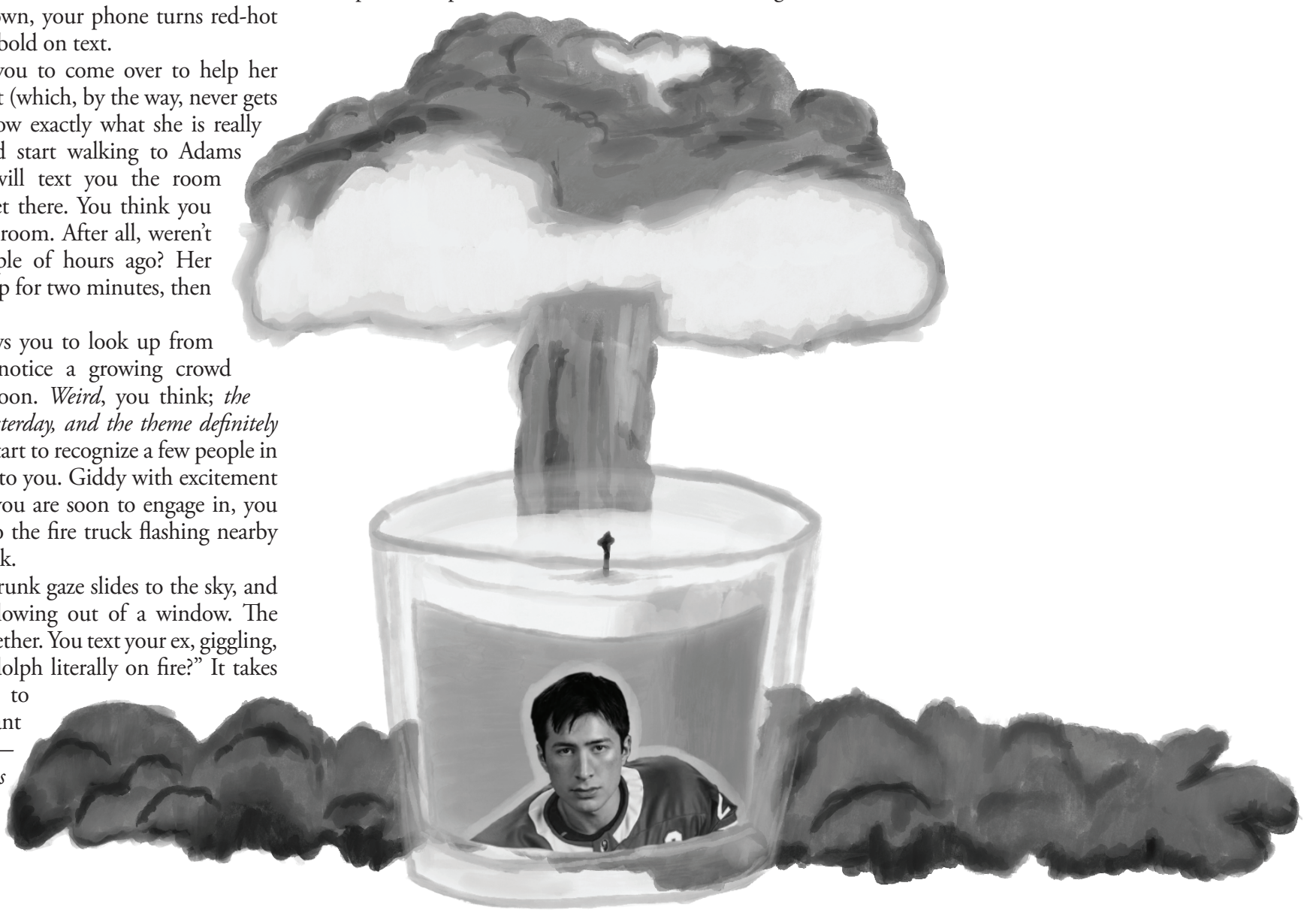
Oh, you would like a better description of the flammable offender that sent all of Randolph into a mad hysteria? I bet you fucking would. The text you receive forms a sentence never spoken before in modern history. "A Heated Rivalry Shane Hollander Scented Candle from Etsy burned down Randolph 407."

A sign from the universe has perhaps never been more explicit—do not fuck your ex. Lest you want to set our world ablaze.

"A Heated Rivalry Shane Hollander Scented Candle from Etsy burned down Randolph 407."

This anonymous author wants legal authorities to know that they should probably consider this story as entirely fictional.

Graphic by Lola Selberg '30



Enough Sex Talk, Let's Get Serious

Deeper than sex: real relationships and why they matter.

By NOAH BASDEN '29

I find that when we talk about sex, especially at college, we focus solely on the physical. What you did, how long it lasted, how many times you did it, and whether your partner, or partners, if you are feeling especially freaky, was up to the task. It feels like a sport. There are all of these metrics against which we measure ourselves and our partners, and, in my mind, that is not what sex, or more generally intimacy, is supposed to be about.

Who knows? Maybe I am being a prude; we are in college, after all. Isn't it time to explore and be free? Yes, I know the argument, and I agree with parts of it: college is a time to explore and find out what you like, what you don't like, and everything in between.

"Isn't it time to explore and be free?"

I am not here to judge anyone's body count or insist that you have to be in love with the person you have sex with, but along the way I think we have confused exploring with competing.

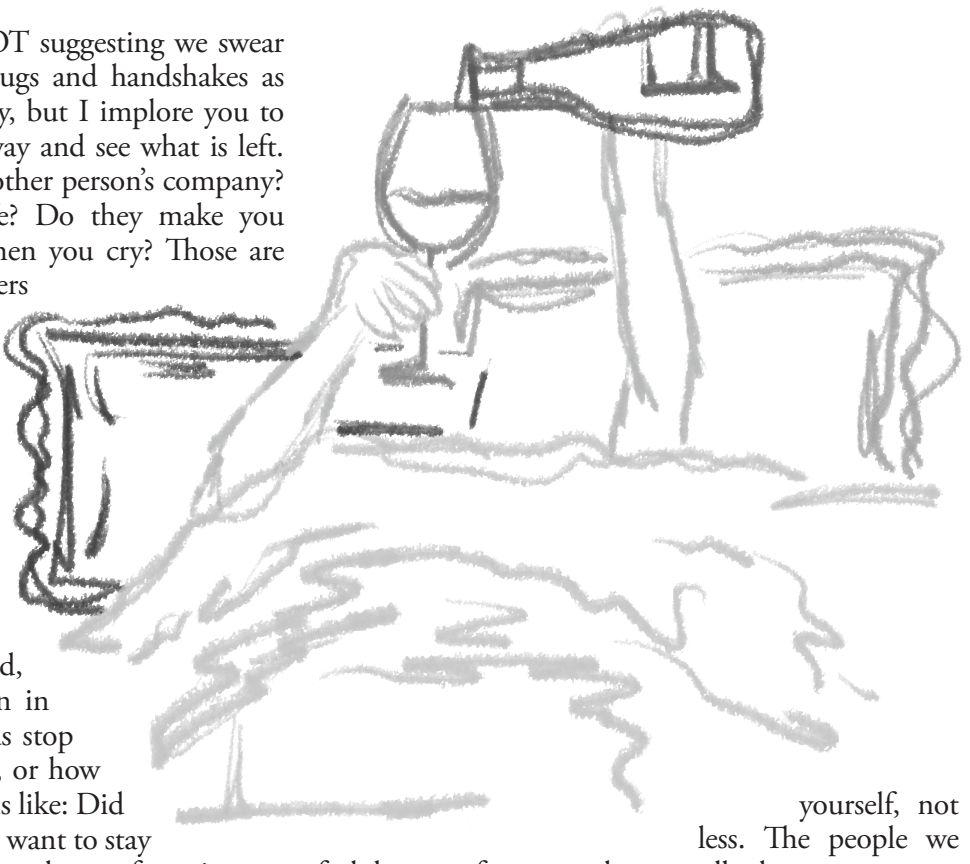
In writing this, I keep returning to a song by Leith Ross called "We'll Never Have Sex." Many of you may have inadvertently engaged with this song through sad edits on "TikTok" over the past couple of years, but beyond being a trendy tune, the lyrics touch on something very real.

"If I said you could never touch me/You'd come over and say I looked lovely/Oh, you kissed me just to kiss me/Not to make me cry/It was simple, you are sweetness/Let's just sit a while."

What gets me about these lines, in particular, is their premise. Ross takes the prospect of sex off the table from the outset, and the lover is undeterred. The singer calls the lover "sweetness," and that is what a relationship is supposed to be. The kiss just to kiss is not the precursor to more action, nor is it done in service of a potential future reward; it is the whole point.

It is a strange cultural phenomenon that we describe physical intimacy in terms of bases. First, second, third, and the coveted home run. We have been treating it like a sport for a long time, and through that framework, everything that is not sex becomes the warm-up. When the end goal is all we can see, it's easy to forget the person right in front of you. Instead of being present, we start performing. We are thinking all the wrong things, like what to say in the group chat the next day or how this time stacked up against the last. Our bodies may be in the room, but our minds are elsewhere.

To be clear, I am NOT suggesting we swear off sex and switch to side hugs and handshakes as our primary form of intimacy, but I implore you to think about this. Take sex away and see what is left. Do you genuinely enjoy the other person's company? Do they make you feel safe? Do they make you laugh? Do they hold you when you cry? Those are the questions whose answers are worth knowing, and that truly define a relationship.



To me, that is the dividing line between competition and exploring. Exploring is driven by curiosity and teaches you things about yourself, and in the end, you find something that feels right. Competition is driven by comparison and, often, the audience isn't even in the room with you. So, let us stop asking how many, how good, or how long and start asking questions like: Did you actually enjoy it? Did you want to stay afterward? Real questions that take sex from just an act to something meaningful, more akin to intimacy than a purely carnal act of passion.

Perhaps this is brushed aside; for many, it just isn't their style, and that is completely fine. Casual hookups can be fun and freeing, exactly what is needed at a given time, and I am all for it. Nobody needs my permission, that is for certain, or should feel guilty for enjoying sex with no strings attached. If that is what works for you, keep doing your thing.

Furthermore, a lot of people just do not want relationships. Sex provides an escape from the everyday for many people, and that is a valid reason to seek it out. There is no space for the outside world between the sheets and shallow breaths of two lovers doing what lovers do, but when all is said and done, it is gone. The pillow on the floor and messed-up sheets stand as evidence of passion. Eventually, the bed gets made, and the memory fades, as with all things that are temporary. Some find enjoyment living in the temporary; however, I do not think that is the preferred human condition.

I think humans strive for two things. One is freedom; the second is meaningful, life-sustaining relationships. For a long time, I thought those two things were at odds; to have one, you would have to give up part of the other. I now see that view as misguided; you can have both and thrive within both. My principal mistake was viewing freedom as the absence of attachment when, in reality, the best relationships give you more room to grow into yourself, not less. The people we feel the most free around are usually the ones we never have to perform for.

And when I say "life-sustaining relationships," I don't mean only romantic or sexual ones. Connections with family, lifelong friends, and institutions, to name a few, can fill that same desire I speak of, but in this article I focus on romantic bonds because … it is the Sex Issue after all!

The main point I find in Ross's song is this. Take away the sex, though obviously an important part of a romantic relationship, and what is left is the stuff that actually holds two people together. It is the late-night talks, the inside jokes, and everything in between that make a relationship. That is the foundation. Sex is the spark, but the everyday closeness keeps the fire going. Without it, all you have are flashes, moments that burn bright and then go dark.

Noah Basden '29 (nhbasden@college.harvard.edu) doesn't like writing for the Sex Issue ... his parents read this!

Graphic by Amelie Lima '27



In Defense of Casual Sex

What critics of casual sex get wrong.

By CAT JOHNSON '30

There is an inherent connection that comes with having sex with someone. Sex, in any context, is a vulnerable experience that asks participants to bare themselves, both physically and emotionally, to another person.

Sex is arguably difficult, as it demands a high level of security and self-confidence to achieve the level of trust necessary to partake in the act. It involves a commitment to honesty: honesty with yourself about your own fantasies, desires, and insecurities, as well as honesty with your sexual partner about what you are interested in and how you feel. In this way, sex also necessitates a level of comfort with rejection.

"Do not deprive yourself of pleasure just because you know it will end."

The possibility of rejection means that sex, in all of its (consensual) forms, is inherently negotiated. Sex is a negotiation, a dance of giving and receiving pleasure. In this way, sex is an exercise in empathy; any attempt to pleasure someone requires intentional acknowledgment of their point of view and what they feel. This creates an authentic connection between people, a closeness that exists within all forms of sex.

With casual sex, though, there is the added understanding that those feelings, the erotic intimacy shared between individuals, are only temporary.

Something deeply human lives in the little joys of fleeting connection: a chat in line at the coffee shop about the weather, a compliment from a passerby on the street, or commiserating with a stranger while waiting for the train. No one expects a relationship beyond the present moment, but the momentary solidarity between strangers is beautiful. These brief connections make us feel just a little less alone in the world.

Something short-lived doesn't mean it never existed. You are allowed to feel a connection, erotic or otherwise, and then let it go. You are allowed to enjoy yourself. I am reminded of a quote by poet and writer Ocean Vuong in his novel "On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous." "Too much joy, I swear, is lost in our desperation to keep it," he writes.

Do not deprive yourself of pleasure just because you know it will end. Do not crush a moment's joy by holding on too tightly.

The fleeting nature of a casual sexual relationship also facilitates a degree of freedom for the participants. Unlike a committed relationship or a situationship, where there is a constant reevaluation of the traits and value of the partnership, with casual sex there is less expectation of future value. This leads to more expression during sex, because the stakes of judgment are so much lower. The consequence of judgment is not the possible loss or weakening of the relationship, because there is no expectation of continued connection.

Due to the heightened freedom, there is also a greater ability to try new things sexually. While growing comfort can also develop within a long-term relationship between loving partners, added loyalty and dependence raise the stakes, making the loss feel more intense if the relationship ends and making people less willing to risk conflict by trying something new. The decreased sense of personal consequence during casual sex allows for heightened comfort with sexual experimentation, which can, in turn, lead to more pleasurable sexual experiences in the future. Knowing what you like and do not like during sex is critical for establishing a safe and supportive environment in the bedroom. For a partner to respect your wishes, you have to communicate them. Casual sex is a great, low-stakes method of sexual discovery.

While a relationship may be fulfilling, many people don't have the time or energy to engage in one. At Harvard, time is precious. Students' days are filled with classes, homework, clubs, sports, networking, and countless other time-consuming activities and roles. Free time is hard to come by, and students often sacrifice sleep. The time obligations of a romantic relationship can seem especially daunting when a student is already spending whole days in the library studying. The lack of free time does not mean they suddenly stop feeling sexual or erotic desire.

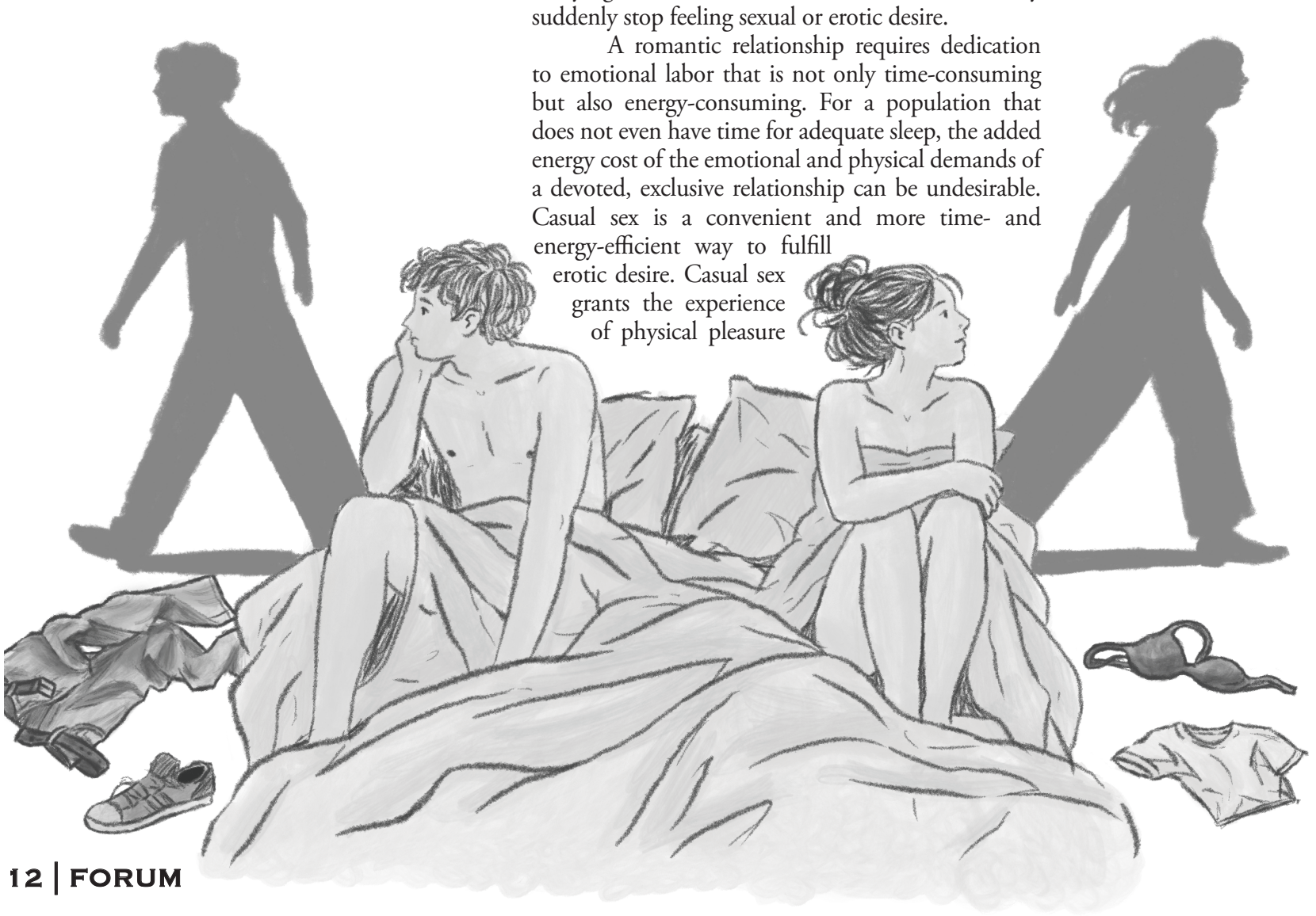
A romantic relationship requires dedication to emotional labor that is not only time-consuming but also energy-consuming. For a population that does not even have time for adequate sleep, the added energy cost of the emotional and physical demands of a devoted, exclusive relationship can be undesirable. Casual sex is a convenient and more time- and energy-efficient way to fulfill erotic desire. Casual sex grants the experience of physical pleasure with another person, without having to make the time commitments or emotional sacrifices that come with established relationships and situationships.

Many critics of casual sex talk of the disproportionate harms to women compared to men who engage in casual sexual relations. Casual sex is critiqued as a contributing factor to gender-based violence. Other critiques frame men as the sole beneficiaries of casual sexual encounters and describe an emotional incongruence between men and women in these situations. These critiques fall flat because instead of addressing casual sex itself, they are more focused on the hierarchical power dynamics between men and women in society. Casual sex for two people of the same gender does not have an inherent gender-based power disparity because two people of the same sex share a similar level of power within the patriarchy. This means that the supposed harms that come to women who engage in casual sex are not based on the sex itself, but are instead rooted in the oppressive structures of our society.

Ultimately, the decision whether or not to have casual sex should be a personal one. We all crave human connection and pleasure. And sex, casual or otherwise, is centered on connection and pleasure. We all deserve to experience those feelings, and if a person wants to use sex to that end, they should feel empowered to do so, free from shame.

Cat Johnson '30 (catjohnson@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent" and has heard rumors that straight sex is boring.

Graphic by Cara Cronin '28



Kissing, by the Numbers

A reflective chronology of the 109 people I've kissed.

By ANONYMOUS

This chronology is organized by the first time I kissed each person.

One. My first kiss was rushed, wet, and sloppy. I'd met my paramour in the brightly lit bathroom on the ground floor of our middle school English complex; as class continued overhead, we indulged in a covert embrace. I hated the kiss, but I felt accomplished, like I wasn't falling behind my more experienced peers. For months I dreaded that all kisses had to be slobbery; it took me 2.5 years to want to touch my lips to someone else's again. Half a decade later, I learned that eighth grade is, in fact, an early time to have a first kiss. The shame of knowing I'd rushed to embrace sexuality followed me for months.

"I thought I would be able to make it to my grave without kissing more than 100 people."

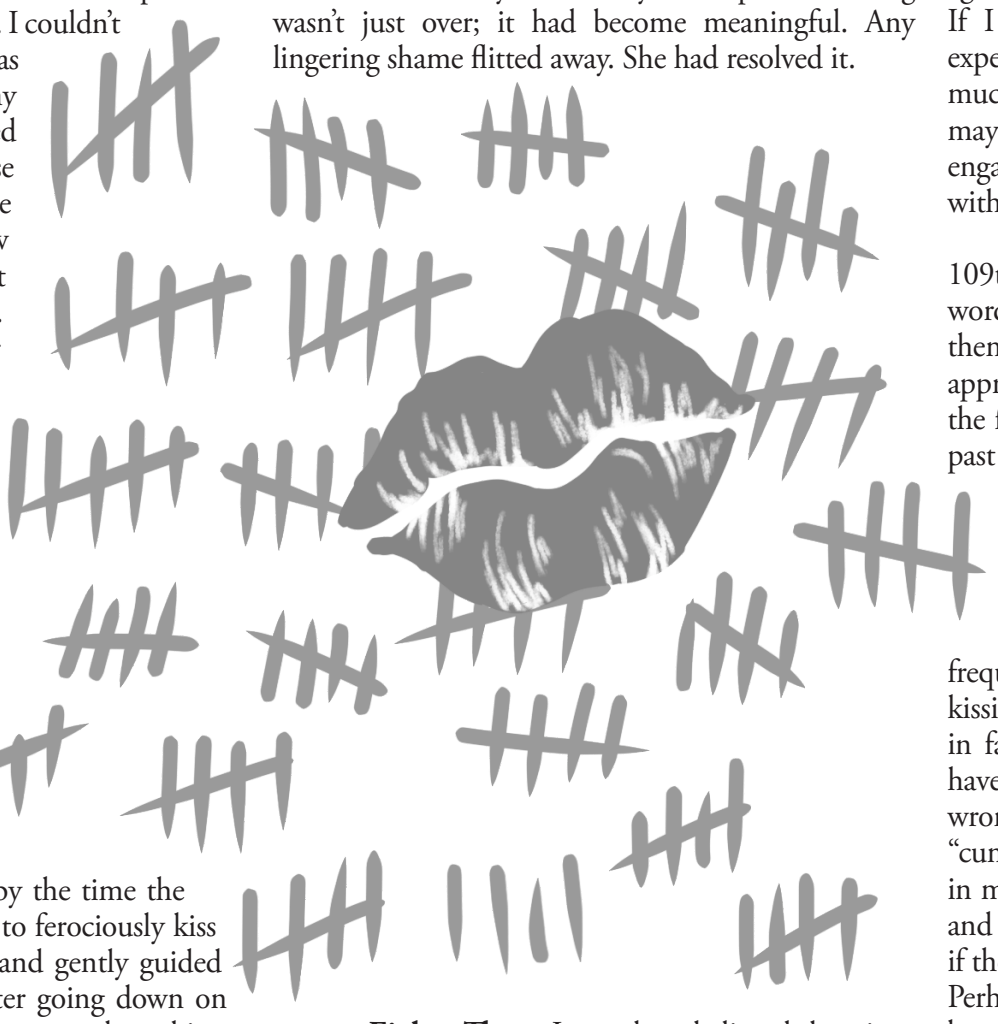
Seven. I figured out that I was bisexual just five months before ending up on a weekend retreat with the most mesmerizing and assertive girl I'd ever met. I was terrified of kissing her but was equally desperate to do so. The feeling of her lips on mine lingered for days, and I thought I'd never experience anything that extraordinary again. I couldn't wait to see her again, but I was also incredibly anxious about my own sexual inexperience. I forced myself to kiss six people and lose my virginity between the time we first kissed and when I saw her again four months later. Yet none of my "preparation" helped. Once we started dating, the fear of sexual inadequacy became so overwhelming that I never even let us get to "real" sex. As soon as the heavy petting got too heavy, I'd find an excuse to end the night. When we finally broke up, I felt a weight lift off my shoulders.

Twenty-Five. He was a friend of a friend and had just gotten out of a three-year relationship with a girl four years his senior. We met at a beach bonfire, and he'd charmed me into his arms by the time the sun had set. He showed me how to ferociously kiss a neck without leaving hickeys, and gently guided me through my first blowjob after going down on me. I felt safe and like I could mess up and try things again and learn how to do this weird thing that is sex without any pressure or judgment. In the morning, we parted ways and never spoke again. I naively believed that every new experience I'd have would be as caring as this one. I tossed myself headfirst into the dating pool, hoping to find a long-term beau to grow sexually with. Instead, I found many, many short-term hookups that only stalled my exploration.

Forty-Two. She asked when I'd last been tested while I straddled her on the couch. I told her I was clean, even though I'd never been tested. I didn't think I needed to be. She pulled out a box of toys and asked me what I liked. I didn't know. I tried to leave at 4 a.m., and she asked what I was doing. "Isn't that what I'm supposed to do?" I replied. She let me stay the night and cooked me eggs in the morning. In the Uber home, I relished the fact that I was officially an adult living in an adult world, getting asked adult questions and doing adult things. I was 18; she was 28. A child playing pretend.

Forty-Three, Forty-Four, Forty-Five, Forty-Six, and Forty-Seven. Coming off a long European summer and an even longer first year, I finally found myself so comfortable in my body and brazen with my sex appeal that dancing in a club and flirting with strangers was where I felt at home. Kissing five guys in one night at the same club felt, at the time, like the accomplishment of a lifetime. It was freeing, and it was feminist. I don't regret the fun I had, but I do lament the perception of me that formed in my friends' minds after that night. The line I'd been tiptoeing as the "fun friend" slowly fell into less flattering territory. I told myself that was the last time I'd kiss more than two people in a single night, lest I turn into a full-blown slut.

Eighty. Kiss 67 had always told me that having sex with someone you genuinely loved was even better than having sex high. I hadn't believed her, especially since I never loved her, and we always had sex high. The 80th kiss of my life changed my mind. She wasn't only the best kisser I'd ever met; I loved her. Deeply. She was going to be the rest of my life, and I liked that 80 was a nice round number. It felt like kismet. I wasn't just going to break 100, but I was never even going to reach 81. All the time I spent searching for true love's kiss had finally paid off, and here I was with the evidence in my hands. My time spent searching wasn't just over; it had become meaningful. Any lingering shame flitted away. She had resolved it.



Eighty-Three. I somehow believed that since it hadn't happened to me yet, it never would. I trusted him as my friend and thought I'd be safer because he had a girlfriend (as did I). Pure naïveté; sexual assault doesn't care if you're cuffed. After nine drinks, the world begins to move in slow motion, and yet I remember the frantic haste with which I struggled to pull my pants back on. I told no one, for fear of being seen as the "other woman," or just another slut who got too drunk but wanted it anyway. Two days later, I was told to beg him for a favor because he was the President of an important club. Power is a funny thing. I couldn't bring myself to even think about kissing anyone for months. It felt like I was back in middle school.

One Hundred. I thought I would be able to make it to my grave without kissing more than 100 people. Seeing the number written out for the first time brought back all the shame I'd thought I'd outgrown, rather than a sense of accomplishment or happiness for the good moments I've shared with many wonderful people. I chose my 100th carefully, hoping it was someone I'd eventually have a long relationship with. If I could excuse every silly, meaningless kiss that got me there as a journey to finding my person, I might once again be comfortable with my promiscuity. If I couldn't make 80 mean anything, then with 100 I damn fucking would. I'm still terrified that things won't work out. It'll leave me with not just one more senseless kiss, but 100 of them.

One Hundred and Seven. Dissociating is an interesting feeling. It's hollow. I'd heard about it online and from friends, but I didn't think I'd ever experience it. I hooked up with people I liked. How could you dissociate if you were entirely into the person? After 100, I began to regard every new kiss as entirely futile. They wouldn't bring me any closer to my forever person, so I had to be content with each kiss solely for my present happiness. I thought I'd like this one because I thought I liked this person, but instead I found myself out of my own body and depressed in a new way.

I tried to blame it on our sobriety, on the fact that I hadn't had sober sex in a while, and that this had to be a new adjustment. I wondered if it was because I still loved and missed my ex. In the morning, I convinced myself the solution was to try again, because maybe the moment was just a fluke. If I couldn't create sexual chemistry with all the experience I had, what use was it at all? We didn't have much romantic chemistry either. I felt relieved that maybe I wasn't alone in my apathetic response to our engagement, but wondered why we both went along with it anyway.

One Hundred and Nine. Last night, my 109th told me that I was a really good kisser. The drunk words stumbled out of my mouth before I could stop them: "I'd sure fucking hope so." Not happiness, or appreciation for the compliment. I could've basked in the flattery or turned it into a flirt. Instead, I felt my past catching up to me.

Now the struggle is finding meaning in it all. If the 109 people I've kissed haven't somehow enhanced my craft for the better, then what the fuck have I been doing? What was it all for? I've frequently thought to myself that I don't need to keep kissing more people. No one is making me do this—in fact, many people probably wish I'd stop. But I haven't, because it's still fun. Each time, I think, what's wrong with one little kiss? Yet in accumulation (or "cumulatively"), it seems unreasonable. It's true that in my experiences I've learned so much about myself and others, which I am grateful for, but I wonder now if the next lesson I must learn is found in the not-kiss. Perhaps then I'll be able to declare, with finality, "It's better than sex."

This anonymous author really hopes that none of the 109 read this article.

Graphic by Sarahluna Sassine '29

First Year First Times

A compilation of our favorite awkward first-time stories from the Class of 2030.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30 AND SALMA GHEITH '30

Freshman fall is full of firsts: first roommates, first B grades, first relationships, and first times. For your eyes only, we hunted through Annenberg, the Yard, and, of course, MIT's frats to uncover some of the most interesting first-kiss and first-time stories we could find, and put them together for your reading pleasure. Enjoy!

Playhouse Player

This is a classic situation: hooking up with your best friend's sibling. The Playhouse Player's first time was with his close friend's sister, after their high school homecoming. "She brings me to the little playground set up in their backyard, right?" he said. "And we just get down and dirty, bro."

But things then took a turn for the worse. "While she's on top of me, her mom opens the backyard door and calls out to her," he said. "I'm like, I'm going home soon. Don't worry," he said. "Like, while P[enis] is in V[agina], you might say." Unfortunately, it wasn't the most glamorous of hookups. "We had gotten McDonald's before, so we had McDonald's breath," he continued. "That's an integral component of it, really."

Although the Playhouse Player conceded that his partner was probably a better kisser than he was at the time, he claimed he'd improved since. We cannot confirm this fact, but feel free to verify the accuracy of that statement yourself (if you manage to unmask this first-year student).

Timer Terrorist

Many of the best relationships start as friendships! Not this one. "We were talking on and off for basically four years, and we [had] never hooked up," an unsuspecting freshman explained. Little did she know that she was involved with the Timer Terrorist. "We were sitting in the parking lot, and we knew we were gonna kiss, but we had been friends for so long that it was insanely awkward. So he was like, okay, I'm just going to set a timer, and then I'm going to do it," she continued.

"Many of the best relationships start as friendships! Not this one."

A timer is perhaps a unique choice, and our interviewee was not a fan. "I was like, 'Get the fuck out of my car! This is giving middle school,'" our interviewee said. (A countdown also unfortunately did not help the Timer Terrorist achieve his goals.)
"He kept having to reset it because I would start laughing," our source explained. "He was like, 'I'm just gonna set another timer, and I'm not gonna tell you when it goes off, and then I'm just gonna kiss you.'" She made him leave, but they hooked up the next day.

"We're no contact," she concluded.

Fishy Financier

Our interviewee's encounter with the Fishy Financier was her first kiss, and it was actually at a Harvard summer program! "There was this guy. He was super cute, he was blonde, and he kissed like a fish. It was kind of bad," she said. "I didn't think about him for a while, and then I found out his dad is a billionaire."

Could you overlook piscine smooches for the promise of financial security? Our interviewee wishes she had. "I did fumble that," she lamented.

Consent Crusader

This story started with our interviewee and the Consent Crusader lying in bed together. "Our humor really complemented each other, so we were having a really good time," she said. This first-year described a running joke in her friend group, where her male friends would jokingly touch each other.
"Then there's this guy that I'm in bed with, and the other guy touches my guy's butt, and you know," she said. No, we do not know. "They just touch each other unconsciously, so it's a running joke."

"So he leans in, and he's like, 'Do you consent?'" Honestly, shoutout to the Consent Crusader. "He's a respectful queen," said our interviewee. "He asked for consent multiple times." Although this is perhaps the bare minimum, the Consent Crusader is who we should aspire to be.

Unfortunately, this relationship did not succeed. "Yesterday I saw him with a girl at 1 a.m.," she said. "I was also with two other guys." Maybe they are made for each other.

Hickory DICKory

Hickory DICKory shared with us the juicy details of his first Harvard relationship. "It started off on the first day of orientation," he said (classic!). "Someone came up to me, basically, and since then we were talking, but this person hates my ass." That might not seem like the best foundation for a healthy relationship, but who doesn't love an enemies-to-lovers story? "After that, things worked out, and now I walk to Berg with a collar of hickeys around my neck every day."

Hickory DICKory took a holistic perspective on his situation. "Experiences are experiences, and you learn and grow from them," he proclaimed.

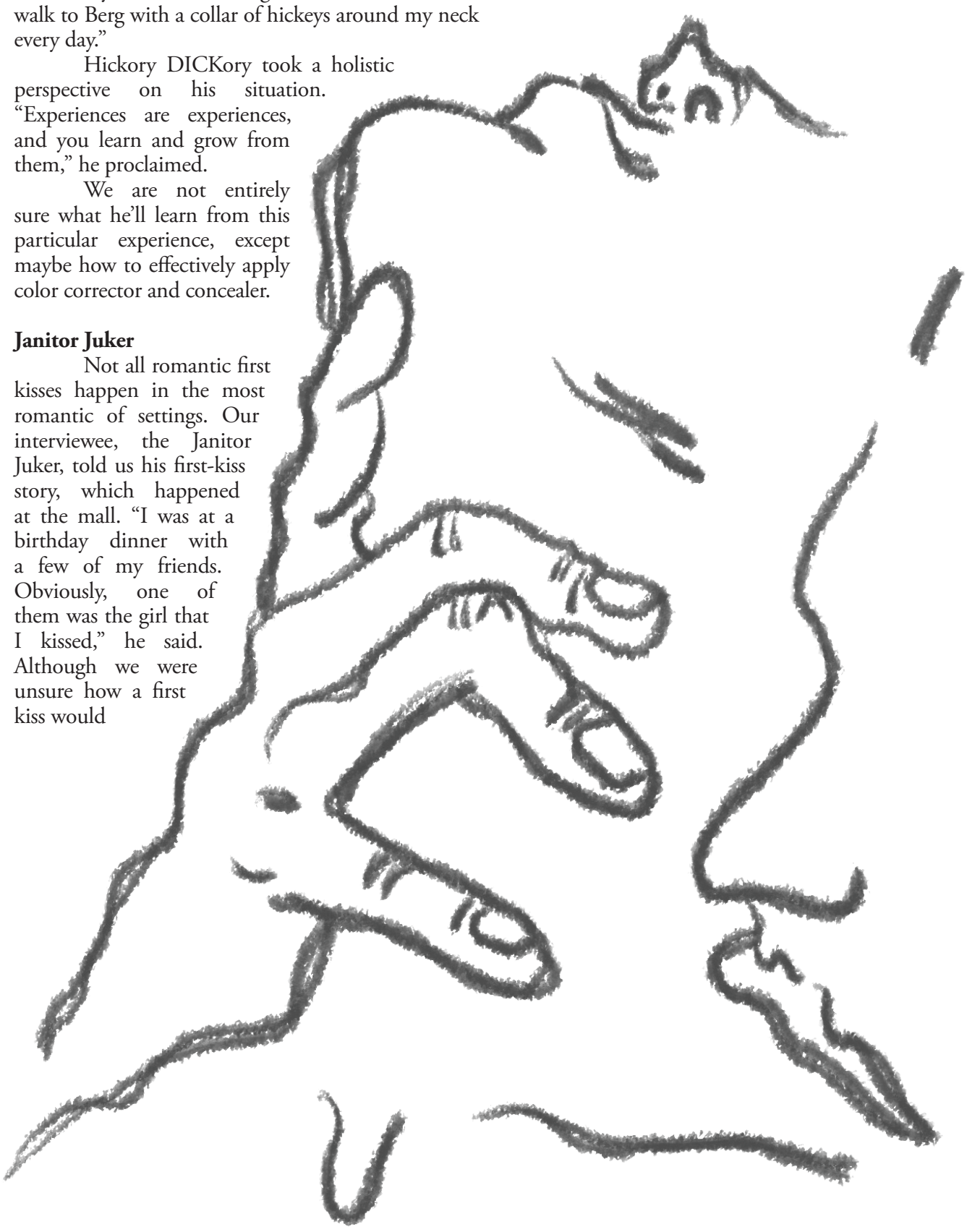
We are not entirely sure what he'll learn from this particular experience, except maybe how to effectively apply color corrector and concealer.

Janitor Juker

Not all romantic first kisses happen in the most romantic of settings. Our interviewee, the Janitor Juker, told us his first-kiss story, which happened at the mall. "I was at a birthday dinner with a few of my friends. Obviously, one of them was the girl that I kissed," he said. Although we were unsure how a first kiss would naturally happen at someone else's birthday dinner, Janitor Juker proved that when there's a will, there's a way. "I asked if she wanted to go somewhere more private, whatever, and she said yes," he continued.

There are not many "private" places to make out in the mall, but luckily for the Janitor Juker, he found a solution. "We went into the changing room," he shared conspiratorially. Our interviewer clarified and asked if the Juker meant the baby-changing room. "Yes, that room," the Juker replied. They shared a magical first kiss by the diaper tables and breastfeeding supplies. Our Juker did not wow his lover—"she had more experience than I did," he explained. Unfortunately, their rendezvous was short-lived: "We heard something outside, and the janitor lady was mopping the floor. So we went out quite fast, and then skedaddled that way," our freshman concluded.

"This story started with our interviewee and the Consent Crusader lying in bed together."



Middle School Meddler

Do not fret about the title; our interviewee was also in middle school when this happened. "We're like, 'Okay, let's go to the park after school,'" he said (a very chic spot for a middle school first date). "We go to this area that has a bunch of trees or whatever, and then we're just talking, right?"

"This story sounds like an ancient ritual, but it is just a middle school classic."

Unfortunately, relationship drama started early for him. "She was talking about her ex. I forgot what she was saying, but I just remember she was talking about her ex, and I was a little weirded out. And then she kissed me," he explained. Certainly a less-than-ideal situation to find oneself in. "I should have taken that as the first sign that this girl is crazy." In her defense, she was 14.

Countdown Coward

This story sounds like an ancient ritual, but it is just a middle school classic. This was our interviewee's first boyfriend in seventh grade, and they had an impressively long middle-school relationship (two whole weeks!). "We planned after school that we were gonna kiss," she said. "Both of our friend groups were surrounding us, and then they counted us down, and then we did a peck, and then he ran away."

Our interviewee wasn't the biggest fan of the Countdown Coward's cowardice. "Mind you, he was like 4'11", and I was like 5'5" at this point." Friend groups, a height difference, and a corny countdown—this story gives us nostalgia for the good old days.

Texas Chainsaw Man

For some, the Texas Chainsaw Massacre wasn't just a movie. This first-year student had quite an experience with her first kiss in the great state of Texas, no less. "He ended things because he didn't want to go any further with a relationship. Like he was still into his ex," she said.

Our interviewee knew she deserved better, but just couldn't help getting revenge after finding out. "He was talking with other girls or getting lunch with other girls while we were exclusive, about to be dating." Fortunately, the Texas Chainsaw Man got what he deserved. "We stole some condoms from Target, and then sprinkled them around his yard and took them out of the wrapper, and put them on his car antenna, and in his mailbox, and under his mat, and just like everywhere," our source explained.

"For some, the Texas Chainsaw Massacre wasn't just a movie."

Although some kind of reaction may have been in order, the Texas Chainsaw Man went to the end and prepared for a massacre. "He found out that me and my friends were playing pickleball the next day at our local pickleball courts, and so he drove drunk to the pickleball courts with a rifle," she explained. "He showed up to the pickleball courts, hair disheveled, bloodshot eyes, and then whipped out a rifle behind his back."

We know that some of our readers may like themselves a cowboy, but we assure you there are better people to practice cowgirl with. While some chasing could be construed as romantic, this was not the case. Our interviewee described her harrowing escape: "I just sprinted to my car, and I drove out of the court parking lot as he was following us on foot with the gun, and then fell into a random cul-de-sac and turned off my lights, and we just waited it out there."



Veritas Voyeur

"My first kiss is boring, because it was when I was a freshman in high school, when I was in my straight era," said the Veritas Voyeur. Thankfully, he came out of the closet and rewarded us with a juicier story.

"My first time having sex was junior year of high school, so I was not out to my friends and stuff, but I had this guy over with me and my friends, and we were all hanging out. We were in the theater room in my house, which is where there are recliners and stuff."

The Veritas Voyeur and his partner were ready to hook up, but they were afraid to go anywhere else. "We lowkey waited till our friends were asleep and then did it while they were in the room, and it was so awkward. But it also added to the excitement of it all." We are not personally fans of voyeurism, but hey, no kink-shaming! "We ended up having the courage to leave the room, and we went to my bedroom, and then it proceeded."

Whether you have had your first time or not, we hope these stories bring you comfort in knowing not everyone's experiences are picture-perfect. Regardless of whether your first time involves pickleball or playhouses, we hope you at least get a good story out of it (and that you share it with the Indy)!

Anika Gupta '30 (anikagupta@college.harvard.edu) and Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harvard.edu) have stories that may or may not be in here!

Graphics by Amelie Lima '27

Some reported kinks include: choking, tying up or bei
praise, dom/sub, biting, voyeu
edging, begging, piss, pain, spank
spitting, slapping, degradation,
pet play, roleplay, feet,
blindfolding, anal

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

58.3% straight
28.9% bisexual
6.1% gay/lesbian
2.3% pansexual
1.5% asexual



63.9% of responders are circumcised

congratulations Prof Bernhard Nickel, multiple responders want to fuck you!

70.5% of responders lost their virginity as a teenager, and 25% still have not done the deed.

AVERAGE RICE PURITY SCORE: 52.8

44.6% trim
37.9% are clean-shaven
17.5% stay au naturale
BUSH?

24.3% prefer their partners to be clean-shaven
36.7% prefer their partners to trim
36.2% have no preference

TITS OR
42.9% tit
32% ass
25.2% no

40.
report

ATTRACTIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Athletes
2. People with impressive jobs/internships
3. Art / theater / music groups

2026 INDY

ng tied up,
rism,
king.

responders
him to have
d sex with
professor

ASS?

preferenc

7% of responders
having had sex within
the last week

IS BEING EXCLUSIVE THE SAME THING AS DATING?



43.3% no
31.1% yes!
25.6% it's complicated...

42.9% HAVE FAKED AN ORGASM



48.2% of responders are single, 35.3% are in an exclusive relationship, 16.5% say it's complicated or "other," and one person says "she tryna ignore it!" I wish you luck, soldier.



Most popular sex position is missionary, followed by doggy and cowgirl.

HOT SPOTS

BUTT STUFF: only 15.8% have tried anal

7.2% have had sex in the stacks

27.8% have had sex outdoors, 2.4% by the Charles

25% of responders use sex toys

our responders like the penis a dick and the vagina a pussy (boring) margin (boring)

somebody's sexual fantasy is "they r doing math"??

AVERAGE PENIS LENGTH (SOFT): 5"

AVERAGE PENIS LENGTH (HARD): 6"

SEX SURVEY

Who Are We Having Sex For?

Casual sex isn't the problem, but the culture surrounding it might be.

By ANNA MOGEL '30

In college culture today, "hooking up" involves more than simply having sex. Rather, sex has become equated with performance, and friends share details as a way to show off their desirability and maintain social capital. College is supposed to be the place where people find their identities and explore their sexuality, but this exploration rarely happens in a vacuum. There are expectations about how much sex one should have and who it should be with. If sex is supposed to be an expression of personal desire, then why is it so often a social performance?

The Cornell 7 case shows how much sex can become a social performance. One of Jane Doe's alleged assailants was her friend, who texted her after the alleged assault, "apologizing" for what he had done, and then later disinvited her from a Chi Phi Halloween party.

On Oct. 19, 2024, a young woman arrived at the Chi Phi Fraternity house. According to a civil lawsuit filed in September 2026, she was allegedly given ketamine and sexually assaulted by multiple fraternity members while incapacitated. While Jane Doe was incapacitated at the house, one of the men sent a Snapchat message to the frat group chat inviting other members to "come get 'free pussy.'" In September, Jane Doe filed a civil lawsuit against 7 former fraternity members and Cornell University, alleging that they had drugged and sexually assaulted her. The tragedy of the Cornell 7 has sparked national and worldwide conversations about hookup culture.

The Cornell 7 controversy exposes the broader dynamic of treating sex as something to accomplish, collect, or use to gain status. As college students, I think we need to recognize what hookup culture has been rewarding all along. Hookups have recently become ingrained in college social life, with parties acting as primary locations for casual encounters. Meanwhile, a National Bureau of Economic Research study on hookup culture showed that partying also increases the incidence of rape due to increased social contact and substance use. These potential pathways are supported by statistics indicating that over half of incapacitated rapes and a quarter of forcible rapes take place in such settings.

Now, the facts are not all negative. The growth of college parties has contributed to sexual liberation since the 1960s. But the difference between sexual liberation and sexual entitlement is important to distinguish. Sexual liberation means feeling free to explore one's identity and making sexual choices without judgment, whether sex is casual, monogamous, or non-existent. In contrast, sexual entitlement entails a belief that one person's body or attention is something that is "deserved." Sexual entitlement can become part of the performance of masculinity; people can act as though they deserve sexual access to someone to prove their "manliness" or gain approval from their friends.

There is something deeply troubling about a culture where people act as if someone else's body is an object of desire and something they can "have." In the Cornell 7, sexual entitlement was frighteningly prevalent.

I was utterly disgusted when I first read about the Cornell 7 case. As a woman in college still adjusting to living away from home, the story genuinely scared me. I can say from experience that college parties are not just an excuse to drink and let go; they also serve as a way to branch out without as much anxiety or pressure. Since this case broke, I have started thinking about the importance of surrounding myself with people I trust when I go out. However, the burden of preventing sexual assault should not fall on women alone.

The case also raises questions about casual sex and hookups. In my opinion, "casual" hookups are not inherently bad. It is the adjacent culture, one that makes men feel they need to prove themselves to their peers, that is the problem. And especially after the Cornell 7, it seems like casual sex may not be so casual anymore. I was horrified by the leaked messages from the Chi Phi group chat. What scared me most was that none of the guys involved were reported to have tried to protect Jane Doe. They all shamelessly treated her in such an inhumane way, revealing the current cultural separation between using sex as a way to have an emotional connection and treating it as mechanical and disconnected. The men allegedly joined in her assault to feel the pleasure of power and domination, but also to gain approval from the other members of the fraternity, some of whom allegedly encouraged the assault.

In our current world, sex is currency, and the intimate act seems to be veering away from an expression of sexual desire and toward a social performance. The emotional connection and passion involved in sex are lost when sex is framed as merely a goal to achieve. I've heard conversations between guys asking if they "went all the way" with a girl; a simple nod garners a round of applause and fist bumps. Not all casual sex is necessarily performative, but in a culture that rewards sexual achievement, the meaning of sex is changing into a mechanical act that someone needs to accomplish rather than a form of communication, vulnerability, and desire. It becomes a way to garner personal confidence and validation from peers.

This pervasive performativity generates a double standard for women. They are expected to be sexually available and experienced but are then shunned when they dress a certain way or are too sexually active. As men use sex to gain social status, women are forced to navigate the contradictory expectations around it. I should be able to express myself freely and explore without worrying what people say about me.

According to a study published by the American Psychological Association, 78% of women and 72% of men in a sample of 200 Canadian undergraduates reported regret following an uncommitted sexual encounter. This isn't to say that casual sex is inherently harmful or always leads to regret, but it raises questions about what makes these experiences feel negative afterward.

Since reading about the Cornell 7 case, I've become much more aware of my surroundings when I go out. I will continue to surround myself with people I trust, pay attention to what I drink, be mindful of who I talk to, and avoid walking alone at night. But the burden of preventing sexual assault should not fall on women alone, and I should not have to live with the fear that those precautions are the only thing standing between me and sexual assault. The alleged perpetrators and the communities that tolerate such behavior should bear the burden, not the victims.

"The alleged perpetrators and the communities that tolerate such behavior should bear the burden, not the victims."

But perhaps more than all, this story—one of so many— should prompt a broad reconstruction of how students approach sex, especially in party settings where alcohol and social pressure are present. Perhaps its biggest consequence will not just be more caution around hook-ups, but setting intentional boundaries in relationships and reframing sex in terms of intimacy and vulnerability rather than a performance for others.

I have started to feel like sex is becoming defined by and for people who aren't even involved in it directly. College should be a time of exploration, but that is not possible unless the culture we create embraces exploration rather than quantifying and judging it.

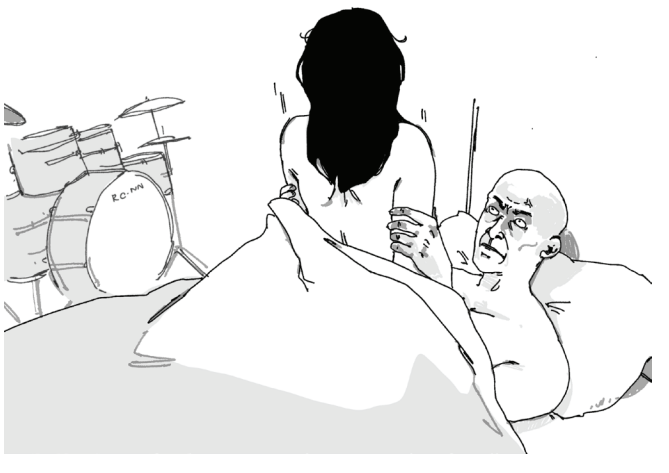
Anna Mogel '30 (amogel@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Linden McCarl '28



Post-Whiplash Clarity

By RIDE CYMBAL & NASTY NEIMAN



"Were you rushing or were you dragging?"

Sex Ed at Four? The Dutch Say Ja

Why we should teach kids about sex.

By ZOË MACKLOWE '30

This past summer, I visited Amsterdam. Stepping off the Eurostar, I was met by swarms of bikers and numerous incredibly stylish, tall pedestrians. I immediately felt the city's vibrancy—held together by a culture of openness and a little bit of weed.

One of my favorite moments from the trip was a bike tour. My guide, Kendra, was hilarious, rambling on about her dominatrix friend who had a two-week waitlist of men who paid her to kick them in the balls. While we were stopped outside the NEMO (From Latin: 'Nobody') Science Museum, Kendra told us about an exhibit that introduces kids to the concepts of sex and love.

This culture of sex positivity, particularly with younger kids, fascinated me. Sex was not taboo here; it was part of the curriculum. The Dutch exemplify how comprehensive sex education at a young age promotes healthy and safe sexuality, and the United States, with no federal mandate and shrinking abortion access, should follow their lead.

The Netherlands requires sex education by law for primary and secondary school students. Many schools use the Kriebels in je buik ("Butterflies in your belly") method starting at age 4. Kriebels in je buik seeks to increase students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to sexuality and relational development. Secondary school (starting at age 12) switches to the Lang Leve de Liefde ("Long Live Love") approach, exploring love, relationships, and sex.

"Sex education gives teenagers the proper communication skills to assert their boundaries and make personal choices."

Inside the classroom, 84% of Dutch students learned about contraceptives and condoms, 73% about reproduction and abortion, and 49% about STIs and HIV. Exhibits like "Humania" at the NEMO Science Museum further this education. "Humania" targets secondary school students, diving deep into sexuality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and consent.

At one interactive station called "Tongue Kiss with a Foreigner," visitors put their hands into tongue puppets to simulate French kissing. The exhibit also contains a tank of white goo visualizing "a lifetime's manufacture of semen." More highlights include a video about orgasms, a novelty condom display, and a guide to good sex printed in Dutch and English. The guide emphasizes the importance of communication between romantic partners.

What is more awesome than a giant container of (fake) semen? Its results. By promoting consent and sexual safety before the onset of sexual activity, early sex education helps decrease rates of STIs, HIV, and sexual violence.

Sex education gives teenagers the proper communication skills to assert their boundaries and make personal choices. A study by Rutgers, a Dutch NFO focused on sex education, found that robust sex education decreased psychological abuse and sexual violence.

The rate of teenage birth in the Netherlands is low, too. In 2024, 1.75 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 gave birth. This number is down from about 4 per 1,000 women in 2012, the year sex education became more legally enforced in the Netherlands. By comparison, the United States had around 12.7 births per 1,000 women in 2024—over seven times the Dutch rate.

This gap is likely not a coincidence. Considering the gaps in American sex education and abortion policy, these numbers are unsurprising. There is no federal mandate for sex education in the United States. Only 42 states require public school students to take sex education that covers at least one topic. Of these states, only 19 require medically accurate instruction. And 34 states allow parents to prevent their children from receiving any sex education.

"Decisions are often left up to individual school districts, creating a patchwork of inconsistent policies and practices within states," Planned Parenthood explains, acknowledging district discretion even with state regulations. Plus, private schools and public institutions with more funding can offer more robust programming, further widening this gap.

Comprehensive sex education reduces unplanned pregnancies, but when one does occur, access to abortion matters. In the United States, that access is shrinking. In the Netherlands, abortion is legal and free of charge. Since the 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade, abortion is fully legal with "expanded access" in only 11 states.

Abortion is completely illegal in 13 states, and 12 states are hostile, meaning abortion could soon be banned in those regions. Moreover, insurance does not always cover abortion services; in 2021-2022 alone, 53% of people covered the bill themselves.

We need an American federal mandate on comprehensive, medically accurate sex education that begins at a younger age. Decreased abortion accessibility jeopardizes the ability to correct for the results of gaps in education, like unprotected sex. By beginning sex education before sexual experimentation begins, we can ensure that more kids approach sex safely.

"When parents teach their kids about sex early, framing it positively rather than pushing abstinence, they can help fill gaps in formal sex education."

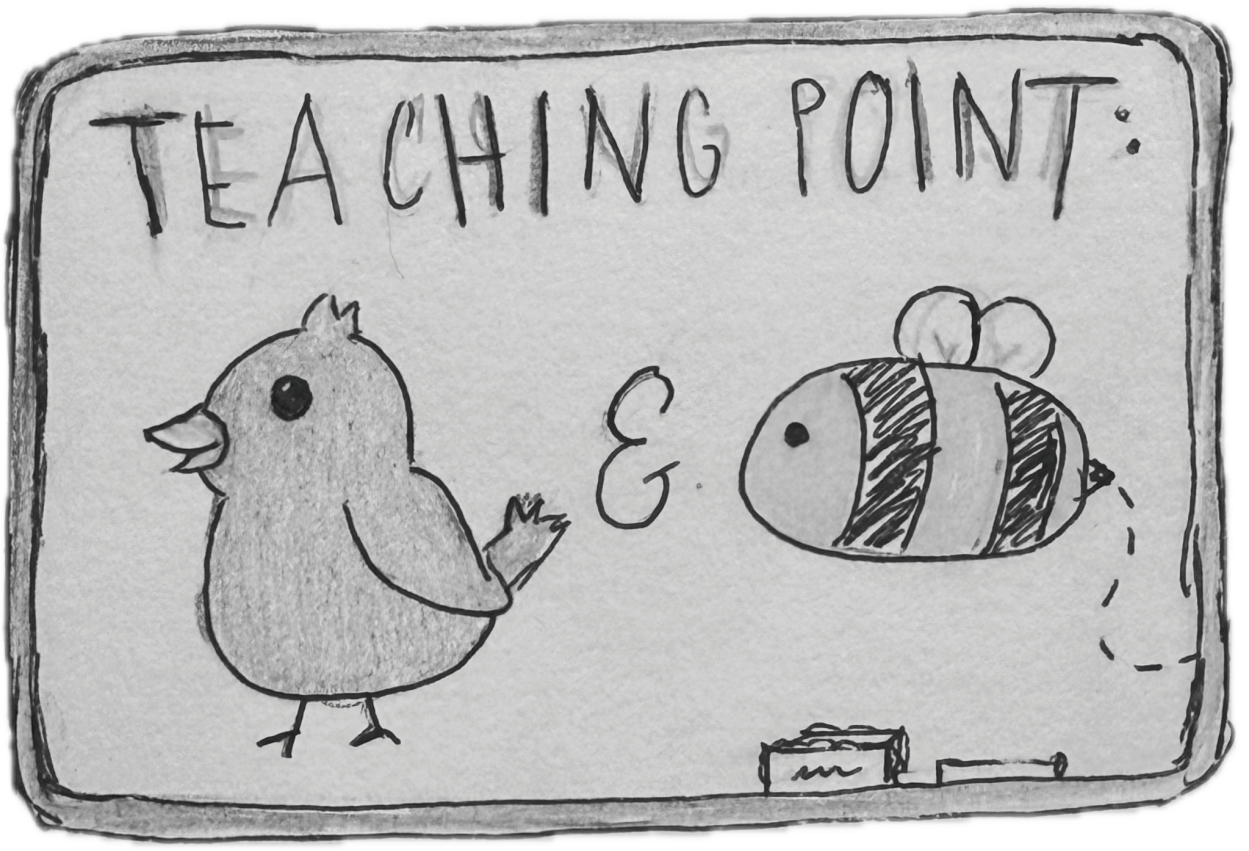
That said, standardizing and managing the implementation of sex education is challenging. School curricula will never be perfect, especially given that American schools already have large quality disparities by district.

We can, however, mend these educational discontinuities by changing attitudes at home. When parents teach their kids about sex early, framing it positively rather than pushing abstinence, they can help fill gaps in formal sex education. The discussion should not be limited to one brief "sex talk." Rather, conversations around sex should be an ongoing dialogue between the parents and their child. Dutch kids even prefer learning about sex from their parents.

Still, some parents may postpone the "sex talk," arguing that exposure to sex at a younger age causes sexual activity too early. And some parents simply tell their kids not to have sex.

Rutgers outlines how better sex education actually causes teenagers to postpone having sex: waiting allows for a positive experience that matches their sexual needs. Indeed, only 15% of Dutch boys and 16% of Dutch girls had sex by age 15. On the other hand, pushing abstinence negatively impacts sexual health—despite 34 American states mandating such instruction.

Contrary to popular belief, early sex education does not mean more sex at a young age. Early education does mean safer sex, healthier relationships, and less sexual violence. So, let us learn from the Dutch and talk about sex, baby.



Zoë Macklowe '30 (zmacklowe@college.harvard.edu) wants to go back to Amsterdam ASAP.

Graphic by Adriana St. Clair '29

Dirty Language

A dive into the sexual expressions one hears around campus.

By STAR BINYAMIN '30

For all the trouble we give Dick, Richard is a rather common name. In fact, the nickname 'Dick' predates the anatomical implication by at least three centuries. In the time between these interpretations, 'dick' took on the meaning 'guy,' a reasonable segue to its current meaning, which men are often associated with. Fascinatingly, 'dick' also serves as a shorthand for detective—which I can only imagine arose from a rather unfortunate encounter a Richard had with the law.

Regardless, it is not fair for Dick to receive all the attention. It is easy to consider the modern sexual lexicon in isolation, but good reason—or at least comprehensible insanity—must stand behind each word we currently use. Modest terms are quickly warped into desire, and expressly sexual terms are thrown around in a surprisingly unwarranted 'PG' manner.

For instance, consider 'punk.' Originally meaning a socially undesirable or sordid individual, the term took on the meaning of female prostitute in Shakespearean English. Later, it meant a young gay prostitute. But these meanings are nearly forgotten when the modern individual thinks of 'punk.' Today, 'punk' has lost almost all its sexual undertones. When punk rock emerged in the 1970s, it quickly became a major music genre and came to monopolize the word. It is now almost exclusively interpreted as meaning a ruffian or a global music genre.

Perhaps more intuitive is the origin of 'scumbag.' Though a relatively tame insult by modern standards, the word is innately lewd. It began as a term in sugar refining and came to mean condom by 1939. Thirty-one years later, by 1970, it had become an insult. Since then, the thought behind the insult gradually faded to its modern iteration, entirely dissociated from sex.

It is often difficult to track the exact origin of a word. After all, slang is rarely recorded. Take, for example, the term 'pussy.' One explanation says the word derives from the Old Norse term for pocket or pouch. The more popular explanation traces it to a Low German word for cat, 'puss.' Hence the modern meaning of 'pussycat,' a term which was actually considered to be a compliment for women and later morphed into a crude anatomical descriptor. Of course, as feminine descriptors tend to do, it would also become an insult amongst men to call each other cowardly. Yet, the real reason it is considered so derogatory is the use of the term as synonymous with women altogether, diminishing the individual into just an organ.

"Yet, the real reason it is considered so derogatory is the use of the term as synonymous with women altogether, diminishing the individual into just an organ."

Similarly contested and offensive is the term 'cunt.' The word's origins are disputed. Some trace it to the Latin 'cunnus' ('vulva') or 'cuniculus' ('burrow' or 'channel'), while others point to Kunti, a figure in the Hindu epic the Mahabharata. However, that is a popular but unproven theory. The popularization of 'Cunnus Diaboli'—the notion that women's genitals were innately sources of evil—would not occur until long after these origins crossed paths, making it all the more difficult to pinpoint a source. In this case, the word has been somewhat reclaimed. I could not count how many times I have heard someone claiming to be 'serving cunt'—a phrase popularized by drag communities.



More modern terms are perhaps easier to trace. Consider the popularization of the pet names 'mommy' or 'daddy.' Though they may have seemed absurd, they have quickly taken on enough socio-sexual context for the relatively inept listener to assume a sexual relationship rather than a familial one. Perhaps this is related to the natural evolution of using 'baby' as a term of endearment, which has been occurring since at least the 17th century. Except, 'daddy' is not that new. In fact, since at least 1681, 'daddy' has been used to refer to the pimps and older customers of prostitutes. In 1912, African American women used the term to refer to their male lovers. By 1922, 'daddy' became a quick abbreviation of 'sugar daddy.' Currently, society accepts that these terms are used to invoke not only a sexualized power dynamic but also a sense of caretaking rather than true incestuous fantasy.

Perhaps the simplest term in origin is 'fuck.' It is an entirely English word, Germanic in origin and related to others meaning "to strike" or variations of "to move back and forth." Despite this simplicity, plenty of false histories have been popularized. It is not Latin in origin, nor is it Old English. It is certainly not an abbreviation of "Fornication Under the Consent of the King" or "For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge." I suppose, in the modern world, it's a good thing these sayings are fake, as they would not still apply; yet, I am partial to the notion of an acronym. I'm personally fond of "Favor Upon and Caress Kismet," though I suppose that may be too flowery for the context in which 'fuck' is generally spoken.

Of course, a term can be used in both gentle and rough contexts. Pornography, derived from a combination of the Greek words for prostitute 'porne,' and writing 'graphein,' was defined originally as any writing or art regarding prostitutes themselves. It was in the early 20th century that 'pornography' began to refer to the genre. Still, it remains a rather vague term, encompassing various media, methods, and magnitudes. While we often shorten the word to 'porn' or 'porno,' specifying a sexual video, a glance at social media will reveal the increasingly popular alternative—'smut.' Originating from the German 'smutten,' meaning 'debase' or 'defile,' 'smut' meant 'stain' long before it meant any reference to sex. In the 1660s, it was noted as meaning 'obscene language.' Today, 'smut' and 'porn' are synonymous—the only difference I have noticed is in context. That is to say, 'smut' seems to serve as the more polite, literary version of 'porn.'

To consider any depiction of sex more polite—or impolite—than any other might seem rather arbitrary. Yet, in the natural flow of ever-evolving language, we have managed to codify socially acceptable—and unacceptable—ways to refer not only to sex but to all of sexual identity.

"Currently, society accepts that these terms are used to invoke not only a sexualized power dynamic but also a sense of caretaking rather than true incestuous fantasy."

Star Binyamin '30 (starbinyamin@college.harvard.edu) is [insert expletive here] comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Sam Park '29

On the Same Ship With Your Situationship

The reasons and ramifications of being involved with someone from your club, class, or house.

By DELFIN URUNDUL '30

Imagine you're seeing someone casually. You're talking, but haven't put a label on what you are yet. Now imagine that you see them multiple times a week to work on problem sets or for club meetings. If being in a situationship is not perplexing enough, try having one in a shared space (or don't, actually).

Since most Harvard undergraduates take multiple classes each term, spend a lot of time in student organizations, and eat, sleep, and study in their Houses or dorms, this is a very likely scenario.

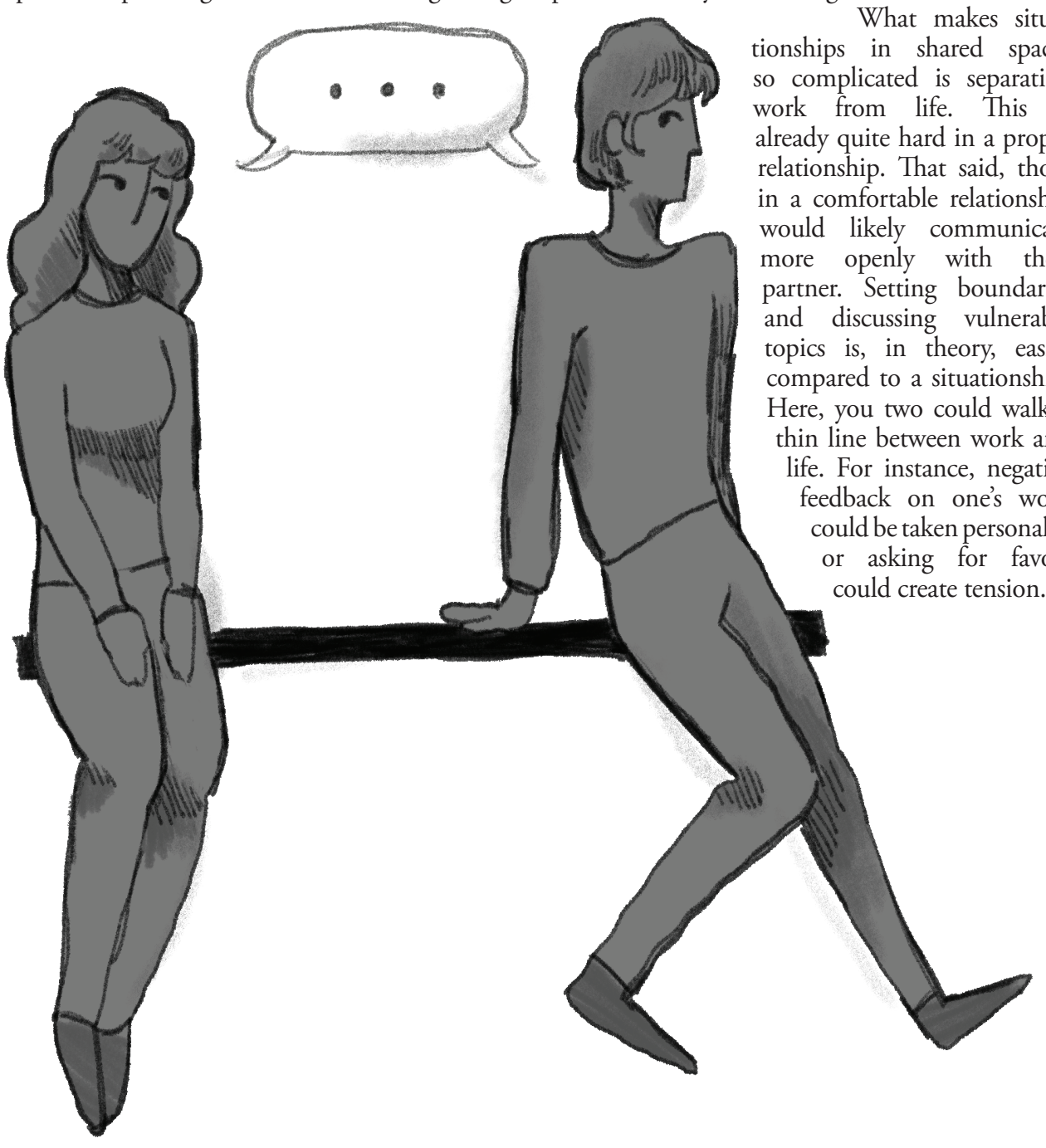
"Whether it's a burgeoning romance between classmates or an office scandal waiting to be revealed, something about those close to you is so appealing."

But is it really a good idea to be involved with someone you do work with? The dilemma between staying professional and following your heart can be hard, especially when a failed romance can make you feel out of place in a community you care about.

What is it about sharing a space that makes people develop feelings? Whether it's a burgeoning romance between classmates or an office scandal waiting to be revealed, something about those close to you is so appealing—first, the undeniable temptation of forbidden fruit. Many people are attracted to others because they cannot attain them, or because being in a relationship with them is prohibited. For example, "Romeo and Juliet," one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, centers around the forbidden romance trope. The thrill of the chase, the rush of adrenaline, the rebellion and rule-bending—all for love's sake.

Another potential reason is the "epidemic of loneliness," a term Surgeon General Vivek Murthy popularized in a 2023 advisory. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a modern focus on the individual over the collective, and a rapid increase in technology use are causing people to feel more isolated than ever. Classes, student organizations, and houses are great places to get to know others, since they often make up part of a Harvard student's social circle. A situationship with someone they already know from one of those places can offer the sense of closeness they crave in a relatively easy way.

You could argue that one modern-day option for meeting potential suitors is dating apps; however, many people do not have very positive experiences on such platforms. Studies discuss the mental health effects of swipe-based dating apps. Instant gratification and easy rejection can take a significant toll on individuals' self-esteem. In a July 2022 survey of American adults, 35% of respondents said online dating algorithms could not predict love, while 21% said they could, and the rest were unsure. On top of that, these platforms are used more casually and don't serve those seeking commitment well. Although dating apps make meeting people easier in general, they aren't a perfect option for a fairy-tale ending.



What makes situationships in shared spaces so complicated is separating work from life. This is already quite hard in a proper relationship. That said, those in a comfortable relationship would likely communicate more openly with their partner. Setting boundaries and discussing vulnerable topics is, in theory, easier compared to a situationship. Here, you two could walk a thin line between work and life. For instance, negative feedback on one's work could be taken personally, or asking for favors could create tension.

That is not the only thing, though. Depending on people's roles within the organization, power dynamics could also shape the situationship. Some might see them as working in their favor, while others might get uncomfortable. If power dynamics make one side feel constantly insecure and push them to always perform at their best, it can damage the individual and the relationship.

When we talk about shared spaces, unfortunately, we cannot only consider the people involved and call it a day. Whether it is kept secret or not, people can sense a new couple. In some organizations, this might not be an issue; members may be friends who respect each other's privacy or simply do not care.

"Setting boundaries and discussing vulnerable topics is, in theory, easier compared to a situationship."

However, gossip will certainly spread like wildfire in some cases. This could affect both the situationship and the organization's dynamics. Something as simple as agreeing with your situationship in a discussion could be taken as an attempt to impress them, even if you genuinely agreed.

There is also the aspect of what happens when the situationship dies out. In my experience, ending a relationship was not as simple as stopping contact with someone. I went to a small boarding high school of about 250 total people in a rural area. All students took the same classes. That meant living in close quarters with everyone—including your situationship, or even more uncomfortably, your ex. Breaking up meant breaking up with their whole friend group, which also happened to be most of yours. People take sides, things get awkward, friendships end, all because of the butterfly effect from this situationship.

At Harvard, a situationship can end before the semester does. When boundaries, side-eye, and power dynamics come into play, things can go downhill faster than you expect. Yes, chemistry is tempting, but spending the rest of the year avoiding eye contact during lab is less so. Yet, if your heart beats for a special someone, maybe you are better off bending the rules a little to be with them. Not me, though. So, to all the people I had crushes on before: I would totally date you, if only we weren't in the same club or class section. Maybe next term?

Delfin Urundul '30 (durundul@college.harvard.edu) admits that her class crush motivates her to go to lectures more than the attendance policy.

Graphic by Taylor Bierwerth '29

The Lost Practice of Meeting Someone Organically

The qualms, confusion, and lack of connection that come with a new online dating scene.

By ANNELISE PACZESNY '29

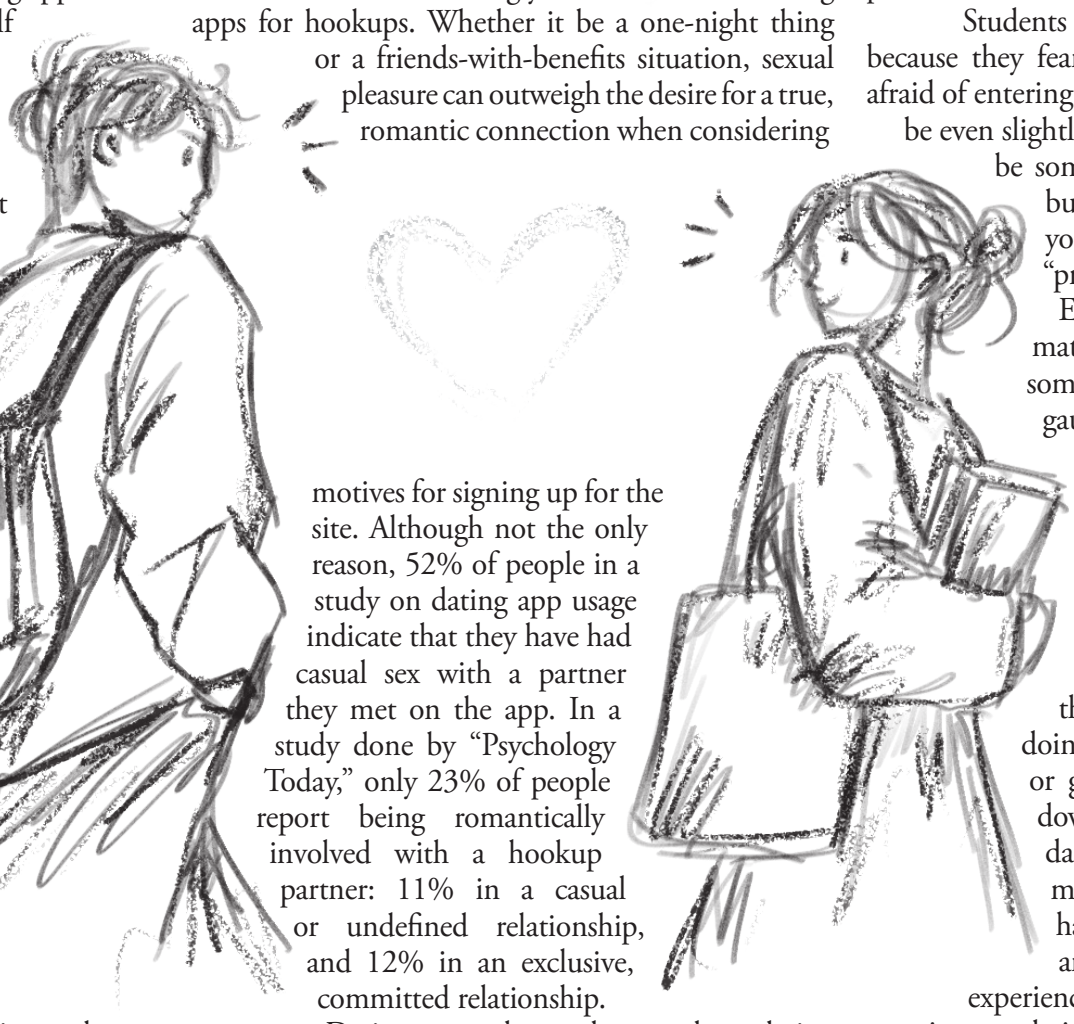
I have never once downloaded a dating app. Shocking, right? Nowadays, it seems like almost everyone has some sort of online dating platform installed on their phones; the ability to "make a match" just clicks away. Online dating platforms have exploded in popularity in recent years. Three in 10 U.S. adults report having used a dating app or site, and that number has risen to about half of adults ages 18-29.

My first serious relationship began at a summer leadership program during my sophomore year of high school. Although it didn't work out, it taught me a lot about the importance of real connection that wasn't over a screen. Without the protective shield of Do Not Disturb, I had to face the awkwardness of complimenting someone face-to-face, and I had to ask them on a date without a virtual barrier to fall back on.

I've sworn off dating apps for a lot of reasons, but much of it started with the fact that my first real connections weren't made on the internet. It's easy to fall into the trap of convenient romance when society teaches us to expect it. But with the commodification of potential partners, the decline in the search for real connection, and the lack of tangible consequences for actions like ghosting, it stands to reason: dating apps have ruined dating—the very thing they exist to encourage. Dating apps perpetuate a culture of nonchalance; disposable options and emotional detachment are replacing true connection as these platforms force real people behind a screen.

It's natural to search for love, but commercializing your options isn't. Society used to view marriage and courtship as means to material or social gain. Over time, as human rights advanced, marriage began to be understood in the context of love and commitment. It seems we've almost gone back in time when you look at the business models of modern dating apps—sites like Hinge and Tinder make money off of the average person's quest for their soulmate. Without us, they wouldn't be in business. Instead, they turn love into a "game": swiping right or left based on whether you like the profile on your screen, with only the most surface-level information about a person. It's basically doomscrolling for matchmaking.

Another increasingly common use is dating apps for hookups. Whether it be a one-night thing or a friends-with-benefits situation, sexual pleasure can outweigh the desire for a true, romantic connection when considering



motives for signing up for the site. Although not the only reason, 52% of people in a study on dating app usage indicate that they have had casual sex with a partner they met on the app. In a study done by "Psychology Today," only 23% of people report being romantically involved with a hookup partner: 11% in a casual or undefined relationship, and 12% in an exclusive, committed relationship.

Dating apps have also made dating harder. Terms like "ghosting" or "situationship" are starting to shape not only how we treat others, but also how we treat ourselves. Putting social interactions behind a screen lets us ignore someone for days instead of being upfront with them. Situationships—not really a relationship, but not really not one either—unleash a whole different beast in love lives.

What we've really lost from the dating scene is the art of meeting someone organically. At a coffee shop. At a dance class. Bumping into someone in the hallway. Summer camp. Someone who sits a few rows ahead of you in class. A friend of a friend. If you want to be a little risky, someone in your extended friend group. People are too afraid to take a chance on someone in their real-life circle for fear of rejection or appearing too "chalant."

The best part of meeting someone face-to-face is being able to establish that familiarity and connection in real life. Online connections lack body language, facial expressions, good jokes, and hearty laughs in real time. You are forced to stay present instead of deferring that spark to another task on your to-do list—something busy Harvard students often struggle with.

Many Harvard students don't really date. The "Harvard Independent's" 2026 Love Survey shows that only 37.6% of undergraduates are in committed relationships. In an attempt to combat the loneliness epidemic, platforms like Datamatch and Match 13.5 try to matchmake among the Harvard population, but the promise of funding dates via Datamatch seems to entice students more than the idea of actually hitting it off with someone.

Those looking for more casual hookups might prefer the ease that dating apps provide, especially on hustling college campuses. It's easier to assume that hookups coordinated on a dating app are often with people you'll never run into in real life again. Not only is this incorrect (ask how many of your friends have seen other Harvard students on Hinge—it's a lot more than you'd expect), but it also takes away the thrill of an in-person spark with someone; it requires you to evaluate your chemistry with someone's virtual profile, not their real persona.

Students avoid matchmaking with classmates because they fear how they'll be perceived. They're afraid of entering any situation where anything might be even slightly unexpected. You might not always be someone's cup of tea, and that's okay, but letting it dominate your life hurts you in the long run, even if it feels like "protecting your peace."

Even this worry of imperfect matchmaking is alleviated by meeting someone out in the wild. It's easier to gauge compatibility right from the first interaction and see if you have that "spark" everyone talks about; it's hard to perceive personality over text.

People are so scared of rejection or awkwardness that they stop putting themselves out there. They make excuses about only doing things "for the plot," ghosting or getting ghosted, and tearing others down to make up for a not-so-great date experience. But that's exactly what makes life so exciting. It's healthy to have those experiences sometimes, and it's character development to experience a setback every once in a while, even in your dating life.

"Dating apps perpetuate a culture of nonchalance; disposable options and emotional detachment are replacing true connection as these platforms force real people behind a screen."

"You might not always be someone's cup of tea, and that's okay, but letting it dominate your life hurts you in the long run, even if it feels like 'protecting your peace.'"

So, go out into the world. Ask out your section crush. Make a move on that person you keep running into on your walk to class. Let a mutual friend set you up on a date or two. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable and put yourself out there a little—I guarantee you'll have a much better story to tell at your wedding if things do work out.

Annelise Paczesny '29 (akpaczesny@college.harvard.edu) hopes to meet the love of her life "in the wild" instead of on Hinge.

Graphic by Trischelle Afihene '27

What Are We?

A field guide to some of the most popular types of "almost" relationships.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30 AND SALMA GHEITH '30

Situationship? The situation is that they don't want you.

Every college student loves a good situationship: flirty, fun, and noncommittal. Unfortunately, they're also a fast track to mixed signals, 2 a.m. overthinking, and heartbreak over someone you were never technically with. Situationships, or romantic and sexual relationships without clear labels or definitions, are increasingly popular among Gen Z. We've compiled a list of situationship tropes everyone knows (and hates).

Lesbian Who Is in Love with Her Ex-Girlfriend

One of them cheated, the other has issues with vulnerability—the perfect match! They went no contact over the summer but have been hanging out all of autumn. (Falling in love in October, anyone?) They both go on dates and flirt with other people, but they will keep reposting cryptic TikToks and sending each other sappy drunk texts. One is leading on an innocent bystander while debating whether to break no contact for the third time this month. No matter who they're fucking, they are always wishing they were with each other, but that doesn't mean they will stop seeing other people.

Guy Who Thinks He's Batman x Girl Who Loves Hello Kitty

This one is infamous; in fact, Batman and Hello Kitty might be patient zero for situationships. This combination is always made up of the two worst people you know, plus all their emotional baggage. Even though they are not dating, they wear matching "I heart my bf/gf" pajamas. He is still seeing other girls (including his ex). Their TikTok reposts are excessively performative, and their Instagram notes always have matching, cringe-inducing songs. He has extreme trust issues from "past trauma" (his ex posted a bikini pic once without asking him), so he makes her send outfit pictures every day. She is obsessed with his ex even more than he is—she dyed her hair like hers. Even though she loves Lululemon, she's retired her Scubas and Align leggings because they don't match his preferred brand of "emo mommy" aesthetic. Despite her love for pink and bunnies, she now has a tramp stamp and a septum piercing.

Finance Bro x Manic Pixie Dream Girl

He wears Patagonia, she wears Pucci, but they are both New York trust fund babies. She has micro bangs and styles her $700 Isabel Marant wedge sneakers with wrinkled Shein tops (but in a unique, niche way that "you just wouldn't understand"). He spends all day thinking about his future Goldman Sachs return offer and the first watch he'll buy after. They watched "You Can See Everything" together and thought Elizabeth Holmes and Billy Evans were "relationship goals." Manic Pixie Dream Girl posts blurry selfies of her and her man to Phoebe Bridgers' music, but she is nowhere to be found on Finance Bro's Instagram.

The College Girl with a High School Boyfriend

They met through a shared, competitive extracurricular, probably debate or Model UN. She writes sappy poetry about him in her Instagram highlights, as if it came out of a budget Bridgerton screenplay. The anniversaries they celebrate online are certainly … unique. You will catch a story about the first time they held hands, the first time they kissed, and the first time she farted in front of him. She brings him to her college events where he acts drunk after one vodka cran. He has promised to apply early but secretly wants to go to his state party school. And although she swears they have an amazing, healthy relationship, she still stays home from the MIT frats to apologize to him about her "revealing" outfit. Meanwhile, he struggles through his algebra homework.



Woke Juliet x Conservative Romeo

She is majoring in Social Studies because Government wasn't "intersectional" enough. He is an Economics major and follows Ben Shapiro religiously. She reposts TikToks about current events, but if you ask her follow-up questions, she can't answer. She identified as bisexual in middle school, but is now a proud "straight ally." He has a far more adversarial perspective on the LGBTQ+ community; drag shows make him uncomfortable (or perhaps, turned on), and he refers to it as a "lifestyle," but he does think it's hot when girls kiss, so you will catch her performatively making out with her friends. She scolds him for saying slurs when he's drunk, but they still hook up afterward. He typically lasts about three minutes, but he swears that doesn't usually happen.

"She scolds him for saying slurs when he's drunk, but they still hook up afterward. He typically lasts about three minutes, but he swears that doesn't usually happen."

Two Friends Who Just Won't Put a Label on It

They are in a large, mixed-gender, mixed-race friend group, with at least one other couple that is way more stable than they are. They are the same height, but he's totally not insecure about it. Although she makes fun of him with the rest of the girls in the friend group, she consistently bails on group hangouts to spend time alone with him. But don't worry—"it's not what it looks like." They also "jokingly" touch each other way too much. Despite showing up to multiple hangouts covered in hickeys, they are still iffy on the whole "what are we" of it all.

Girl Cracking Her TF

She just got out of a year-long relationship, is looking for some fun, and is finding it in her Gen-Ed section. Her TF is honestly only ranked third on her roster, but hooking up with one has been on her bucket list for a while now. She likes to act secretive and sneak them in and out of Adams House, but all of her friends (and all of their friends) know (because she tells them).

Athlete x Athlete

Teamcest is a classic. These two met at practice, and it was love at first sight. They have not put a label on it—partly to avoid scrutiny, but also because they are both still hooking up with other members of the team (messy!). You will see them sharing water from the same Owala after their morning runs—how romantic! Watch out for them speeding toward you while they share a scooter, arms entangled, ponytails flapping in the wind.

Whatever your relationship status, we sincerely hope you never experience any situationship of doom and despair. But if you do, we hope the sex is amazing.

"Despite her love for pink and bunnies, she now has a tramp stamp and a septum piercing."

Anika Gupta '30 (anikagupta@college.harvard.edu) and Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harvard.edu) are situationship survivors.

Graphic by Caleb Boyce '29

Back to Basics: Sex Positions, Ranked

Which (or who) comes out on top?

By MONA LOT

There are many ways to get down and dirty, but a few staples always make the cut. But not all positions are created equal. The real question is: what are the best basics to have on standby?

"The real question is: what are the best basics to have on standby?"

Missionary: #1

Reliably good, easy to execute, and maximum contact. Missionary is the classic for a reason. Some may call it basic, but I'm inclined to disagree. Few positions offer so much flexibility—unless your hamstrings aren't into being pretzelled. But if fundamentals are your thing, then lazy missionary is for you—channel your inner starfish as the receiver. If you're the giver, put in the work; your core should be shaking if you are trying to achieve the best result. One thing both the giver and receiver can enjoy is not just the physical contact, but the eye contact in missionary; it's the icing on the cake. Don't get me wrong, skin-to-skin is great, and unavoidable in missionary, but what's sexier than "fuck me eyes" while fucking?

Spooning: #2

Now this one steals the show at two specific times of day: those sleepy morning kisses and some before-bed bumping. I think that this is more intimate than missionary, and that's why it's a close second. It has the free and wandering hands of doggy, with the ease of sweet nothings whispered in your ear. It's hard to do this without passion, which is what makes it so hot. What makes it ideal for morning sex is that your morning breath, slight drool line, and smudged makeup aren't the focus. It's the perfect mix of pleasure and convenience, especially right before bed. Goodnight kisses and cuddles can easily turn into grabbing, moaning, thrusting, and busting. It's intimate, sexy, and best of all: low effort.

Cowgirl: #3

Save a horse, ride a—well, this is likely to be a favorite for many; there's a whole song dedicated to it. It's undeniably hot as hell. Something about this feels like it's straight out of a porno—the perfect time to channel your inner Stormy Daniels and pull out all the stops. But it's not much of an endurance sport so it can get tiring—but hey, it's cardio for a reason! That said, don't be misled; riding doesn't have to be one partner's job. Let the bottom partner take the reins, and it's like reverse missionary.

Doggy: #4

Sometimes there's really nothing like good backshots to get your day going right. For the giver, it's pretty easy; you can play with pacing, plus 10/10 visuals. I suppose it's called "doggy" because its primal aspect adds to the appeal. However, it's one of the positions with the least physical contact, but since it leaves all hands available, it's not really a downside. I mean, wandering hands are welcome, and this position can require some hand-holds. Doggy is also ideal for a good quickie because of its easy access; drop your drawers and go to town! It may not be best as the sole position for a session—it's sexy but not necessarily intimate. Better yet, if your partner isn't doing it for you—perhaps the person you brought home looked better in dark lighting—bury your face in that pillow or focus on the ass in front of you!

Oral: #5

Some may call this just foreplay, but hell, it's good as the starting act, intermission, or main event! For this, it gets the solid middle spot. There's no better way to give close attention and get up-close and personal than by diving below the belt. Enjoyable in all ways, this one has some flexibility: sitting, standing, horizontal, up, down, all around, the world is your oyster—but can you find the pearl?

Standing: #6

This one's often a variation of doggy, unless you're into aerial arts. That said, it's different enough to earn its own spot on this list, albeit a lower one. This one is definitely a group project, and its success depends heavily on how well you and your partner match. Some people are better climbers than others, but even so, some angles just aren't anatomically possible. When it works, it accommodates adventure: anywhere, anytime.

Prone Bone: #7

If doggy and spooning had a baby, it'd be prone bone. More intimate than doggy, with more full-body contact than spooning, it marries intimacy with some good old banging. It's often a result of doggy, when balance and stamina ebb. Sweet nothings are great, but dirty talk is better, and prone bone is the best position for salacious words right in your ear. The only downside is that it can get lazier than missionary and can literally be crushing. Even so, prone bone can't vie for a top spot, but it's a damn good finisher.

69: #8

Famous but overrated. It always sounds like a good idea, but rarely lives up to expectations. It's an excuse for lazy head on both sides. As mentioned, head is good enough to be its own event; no need to dilute it just for the allure. It also faces the same anatomical problem as standing: if you and your partner aren't standing eye to eye, chances are you won't be evenly matched, face to crotch. But if you're a die-hard fan like some are, congrats, you're the lucky few.

Reverse Cowgirl: #9

No. Frankly, too much risk of injuring a penis with one mistimed thrust. For the viewer, it's great. For the doer, unless you're into feet, it's less than ideal.

"Sweet nothings are great, but dirty talk is better, and prone bone is the best position for salacious words right in your ear."

While everyone will have their own ranking, opinion, and preference, these staples make the rotation most often, and for good reason. Ideally, we'd try every position all the time if each were equally pleasurable. Obviously, some physical factors determine what works best, but there's only one way to find out!

Mona Lott encourages you to test them all.

Graphic by Anonymous



Family Movie Night

By MONA LOT



Books Made Me Gay

The literature that turned me into a lesbian.

By SAM PARK '29

Ever since I became an avid media consumer in high school, I wanted to find the Aldo to my Regan from Olivie Blake's novel, "Alone With You in the Ether." The Ted to my Robin from the sitcom "How I Met Your Mother"; the Seb to my Mia from the movie "La La Land." Whether it lasted forever or ended in heartbreak, I wanted what the books and movies called "love," which was almost always between a man and a woman.

Despite growing up in downtown Chicago, where my high school and the general public were openly accepting of queer identities, I always felt like staying "straight" was the easier option. Straight men vastly outnumber gay women. It is slim pickings. Not to mention the whole ordeal of coming out. Maybe it was just the traumatic experience of trying to tell my parents I was gender-queer in sixth grade, but labeling myself as a social deviant, even in an accepting community, felt out of the question.

Plus, dating a woman would certainly be harder. Even when my high school boyfriend constantly asked me to send nudes and would not take no for an answer, I convinced myself that this was just the cost of being in a straight relationship. There were fewer examples to follow—I didn't

"Whether it lasted forever or ended in heartbreak, I wanted what the books and movies called 'love,' which was almost always between a man and a woman."

really know what a "successful" gay relationship was. Worse was that I would need to explain it more to outsiders, namely my conservative Christian relatives who specifically told me not to get a girlfriend in college.

But then I read "Maurice" by E. M. Forster. In the novel, Maurice falls in love with another young man named Clive. Clive is of a slightly higher social class than Maurice, and increasingly feels outside pressure to make the more socially acceptable decision after he sees a former classmate's life ruined by being outed as gay. Though Clive is deeply enamored with Maurice, he insists he is straight and marries a woman. This leaves Maurice with all-consuming loneliness until h meets another man, Alec, from lower social class who happens t be one of Clive's servants. Their relationship is threatened when Alec receives a job offer in Australia, but the novel ends on a happy note, with Alec giving it up to stay with Maurice.

This novel pushed me to question my own values and consider what kinds of sacrifices I would be willing to make. The hard thing about being queer is that there isn't an easy choice about what kind of life to lead.

I thought about this further with James Baldwin's "Giovanni's Room," which follows an American man named David, who travels to Paris and becomes involved with Giovanni, an Italian man. Both men are functionally escaping their lives in their home countries, but while Giovanni becomes emotionally committed to David, David insists that two men cannot build a life together.

I think that would ruin me. I had always worried that I thought of the queer part of me as an escape, some overly romanticized desire to be different. However, this novel made me consider whether or not I could imagine myself building a life with a woman.

I also read "The Price of Salt" by Patricia Highsmith. Nineteen-year-old Therese falls in love with a much older Carol, who is currently

"The hard thing about being queer is that there isn't an easy choice about what kind of life to lead."

going through a divorce and a fight for custody over her child. The novel explores the tension between queerness and motherhood, as Carol gives up custody of her daughter rather than live a lie. Seeing this kind of choice, even in fiction, showed me that deviating from society is never easy.

Another element of Highsmith's novel that I appreciated was Therese's obsession with the older woman. It was naive and over the top; from the moment she saw her, she wanted to profess her love.

"Passing" by Nella Larsen also features this idea of obsession, in which Clare insinuates herself into Irene's life. Irene constantly thinks about Clare, pulled between desire, repulsion, jealousy, and attraction. This mix of emotions can't be explicitly or cleanly defined as love, but it adds a layer of complexity that the general perception of being queer doesn't always capture. That is to say, queer relationships are complex beyond the designation of being "queer."

Lastly, I read "Stone Butch Blues" by Leslie Feinberg. This novel is a bildungsroman about Jess, who comes of age in the butch community. From a young age, this binary between "butch" and "femme" shapes all her relationships (romantic or platonic). Near the end of the novel,

"This mix of emotions can't be explicitly or cleanly defined as love, but it adds a layer of complexity that the general perception of being queer doesn't always capture."

her understanding of these designations is called into question.

This made me think of my own struggles with the terms "butch" and "femme," and because it was hard for me to classify myself as one or the other, I struggled to imagine myself in a "real" lesbian relationship. But being encouraged to question my understanding of binaries helped me realize these labels don't matter as much as I thought.

Maybe my ex-boyfriend just sucked and made me lose faith in men. Maybe I could have an easy, happy, and fulfilling straight relationship. But I realized that I do, and perhaps have always, desired a lesbian relationship more.

Queer literature helped me conceptualize different kinds of queer relationships and different ways to fit in or diverge from social norms. These novels showed me how hard being queer can be, and all the ways it might ruin my life. But they also showed me experiences I could imagine myself in, and they made me happier than imagining myself in the shoes of Regan, Robin, or Mia ever did.

Sam Park '29 (shpark@college.harvard.edu) hopes she isn't accidentally coming out to her parents.



Graphic by Sam Park '29

What Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter Reveals About Harvard's History

What Hawthorne's scarlet "A" shows about sexual policing at Harvard, and the women it erased.

By MUJTABA RAJA '30

Today, the scarlet "A" is easily recognized as the iconic literary symbol linked to Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel "The Scarlet Letter." For a younger generation, it might be the 2010 film "Easy A," starring Emma Stone.

In colonial Massachusetts, though, it carried a far more sinister meaning. In 1694, under the Massachusetts law titled "An Act against Adultery and Poligamy," convicted adulterers could be forced to stand at the gallows for an hour with a rope around their necks, endure as many as forty lashes, and "forever after wear a capital A of two inches long" sewn onto their clothing. The fabric letter had to remain "in open view" on the arm or back, and attempts to conceal it only invited further whipping.

This law belonged to the Puritan religious tradition from which Harvard emerged. At its founding in 1636, Harvard was intended, in part, to educate the colonial leaders who considered enforcing religious morality a public responsibility. Under the colony's 1641 "Body of Liberties," adultery with a married woman was punished by death. Though execution was substituted with public humiliation by 1694, the colony's power was still preserved by regulating the sexual conduct of its citizens through criminal sanctions.

Harvard itself did not administer criminal punishments, but it similarly disciplined the sexual conduct of its students, instructing them to lead a "Godly Life" in its 1655 laws. By 1767, the administration placed "Fornication" alongside "Blasphemy, Robbery, Forgery" as offenses warranting temporary removal or expulsion.

In his 1850 novel "The Scarlet Letter," Nathaniel Hawthorne took readers back to this world. Set in Puritan Boston during the 1640s, Hawthorne's novel follows Hester Prynne, a married woman who gives birth to a daughter, Pearl, as a result of an affair with the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. Refusing to identify her lover, Hester is forced to stand upon a public scaffold and wear a scarlet "A" on her chest.

But to complicate the stigma surrounding the "A" on Hester's chest, Hawthorne describes how Hester fashions her letter with "fantastic flourishes of gold thread," and one town spectator even accuses her of trying to "make pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment." In doing so, Hawthorne allows the stigmatized "A" to serve as a means of reclamation for Hester. Although townspeople eventually come to read her "A" as "Able" because of the selfless nature of her charitable work, her redemption still depends on the approval of those who once condemned her for her sexuality. Though she can influence the letter's meaning, she has no power in how she is ultimately perceived.

"The public nature of Harvard's disciplinary procedures in the 18th century is strikingly reminiscent of Hawthorne's scarlet letter."

In the 18th century, the University remained deeply aligned with its founding Puritan ideals around sex and religious morality. Harvard faculty meeting minutes from an 18th-century meeting document strict disciplinary actions against students for encounters with women the records describe as



prostitutes. Described in records as "lewd women" and "women of bad fame," they were characterized not merely by their sexual conduct, but by their perceived capacity to corrupt the moral character of "Harvard men." In a 1955 "Harvard Crimson" article, student Stephen R. Barnett '57, digging in the university's archives, found a particularly revealing incident from 1770: "'two women of ill fame' had 'spen[t] the night in a certain college chamber.'"

This incident is not isolated, as historian Conrad Edick Wright tells the story of how Harvard's faculty—"the president, professors, and tutors of the College"—voted in 1770 to rusticate (suspending a student and sending them away to the countryside) senior Winthrop Sargent '1770, just two months before his graduation, for entertaining two prostitutes in his room overnight.

Historian Sheldon S. Cohen wrote about how another student was rusticated in 1773 for visiting a "house of ill-fame" in Charlestown and more "were rusticated in May 1770 for keeping women of questionable morality 'in their chambers at night.'"

"The Harvard Corporation complained to the Charlestown selectmen concerning the corrupting influences of the town's notorious Ship Tavern [an infamous brothel during the era], and several students formed an Association for the Suppression of Vice (1767)," Cohen continued. "But these and other attempts to uphold righteousness and virtue proved unsuccessful."

The public nature of Harvard's disciplinary procedures in the 18th century is strikingly reminiscent of Hawthorne's scarlet letter. In a 1958 "Harvard Crimson" retrospective, alumnus John R. Adler '61 noted that 18th-century Harvard classified fornication, defined as sexual intercourse outside the institution of marriage, as an offense punishable by expulsion.

Such punishment was a spectacle: "The Entire college was assembled in hall, the President announced the crime and the Corporation's sentence." The student's name was then removed from the College register, and expelled students—"culprits" as Adler described them—could be readmitted only if they publicly confessed their sins and proved how they had repented since then.

Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" thus offers us a window into the moral world from which Harvard emerged, showing not only how sex on campus was surveilled and punished but also whose reputations, exactly, were made to bear the consequences, and who was allowed a second chance. Though the male students survive in the historical record with names, disciplinary proceedings, and a path back, like temporary rustication in the countryside, the women they encountered, who stood outside the "right," male Harvard bubble, appear only through vague and simplistic descriptions such as "ill fame" and "questionable morality."

Much as Hester's scarlet letter identifies her much more than it does her concealed lover, shielding him from equal repercussions and "accountability," Harvard's own archives still preserve the moral judgments attached to these female sex workers without telling us much about their lived experiences. Hawthorne, at least, gives Hester the agency to embroider her own scarlet letter, and even Emma Stone's character in the 2010 film "Easy A" reclaims the letter—Harvard's archives, however, leave these women only with the societal shame others stitched into their stories.

"Expelled students—'culprits' as Adler described them—could be readmitted only if they publicly confessed their sins and proved how they had repented since then."

Mujtaba Raja '30 (mujtabaraja@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Evelyn Ferguson '29

Klub Kinks

Student organizations and their respective fetishes.

By THE INDY MADAME

We're a kinky campus. How kinky, you might ask? Well, one Indy Sex Survey respondent detailed a personal sexual fantasy he hopes will come to fruition on campus: "Being kicked in the balls by my girlfriend and her friends, then teased. And worshipping them." Is this representative of Harvard students as a whole? We may never know! (The answer is yes.)

Inspired by the Indy's 2025 piece assigning Houses to kinks, I've taken precious time out of my busy, busy Harvard schedule to produce a list of campus clubs and their respective kinks for your pleasure. You're welcome. And before you assume each club's fetish is merely a comedic association, remember we have a man among us who likes getting kicked in the balls by a group of girls (no shame, of course, we don't kink-shame). There's a good chance there is some truth to my words.

Harvard Republican Club: Impregnation

These guys love babies. Or, sorry, fetuses. They really love fetuses. And some of them know how to make one! For your own safety, wrap it up before getting down and dirty with a member of this club. Chances are, they'll want to keep the resulting pregnancy, and they'll get off to it. Hey, maybe that's something you're both into. And I wouldn't mind seeing a couple of kids in my lectures from time to time. It could be cute.

The Lampoon: Orgy

What else would they need a castle for? Freaks!

Harvard College Debating Union: Submission

All that arguing! All that verbal domination! Sometimes, a debater needs to take a break, have an outlet. Naturally, that might lead to some impressive obedience in the bedroom. Just know that if you're having an insufferable conversation with a debate kid, they secretly want you to berate them into submission. Dominate a Debate Union member today.

"The Harvard Crimson": Voyeurism

Raise your hand if the "Crimson" has invaded your personal life! These guys want to watch everything, including when you fuck. Your favorite "Crimson" writer would love to sit in the corner of a dark room while you and your partner are raw-dogging. Don't mind them too much; they won't interfere. Just make sure they aren't secretly recording you or anything.

Harvard Undergraduate Consulting Group: Golden Showers

I considered financial domination, but that seemed too easy. And I don't think any HUCG member is willing to give up a cent of their nearly $3 million in assets. These students thrive in environments of abundance and love a steady stream of revenue and piss. Just imagine that liquid gold getting all over them, maybe them taking a couple sips here and there. Really, imagine it.

"The Salient": Humiliation

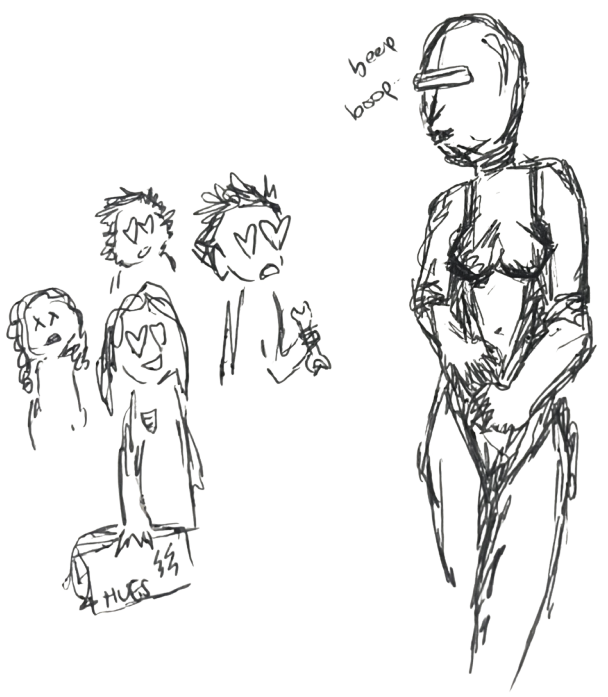
These guys couldn't have put themselves through last school year's controversy for no reason. Some part of them must have loved being degraded by the school body. At least I hope so. You can find out for yourself! Go up to a "Salient" writer, make a Nazi joke to them, and see how they react.

"The Harvard Advocate": Tentacles

A creative mind is bound to have a creative kink. "The Harvard Advocate" undoubtedly has one of the highest concentrations of former (or current) smut and fan fiction writers on campus. Just think of all the material those fiction writers can come up with. Beautiful.

Three Letter Acronym Improv: Roleplay

I would recommend hitting up a TLA member if you're looking to fulfill your wildest sexual fantasies. Student-professor? Pool boy? Nothing they haven't done before. Even if you've got a particular fictional character in mind, they've got you covered. Can I make a personal request for Megamind? I'm just worried they'd be too into it. Like, get too caught up in what's inside his big blue head, you know? I just wanted a couple "ollo's" between strokes.



Harvard Undergraduate Engineering Society: Mechanophilia

The age of the sex bot is coming, and HUES is bringing it to us. Not to play into stereotypes, but these members have a slight lack of appeal, though maybe it's because I don't get the chance to meet many of them; the Science and Engineering Complex maintains a certain stench that drives me away. But who needs a real girl when you can have a partner made just how you like "her"?

Harvard ROTC: Domination

These members are basically the antithesis of HCDU. Early mornings getting yelled at by military men can be emasculating, and so they need a way to get their macho back. It's a bit basic, a bit dull, a bit too expected, but hey, so is ROTC. They're hot, it's fine.

Crimson Key: Swingers

There are a lot of Key couples. It's adorable. Naturally, though, when you put together a bunch of social people with so much love to give, sometimes one partner just isn't enough. Maybe they're onto something: sharing is caring. Or maybe they're just a bunch of cheaters. Who knows.

Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra: Stuffing

Those instruments have to go somewhere.

Harvard College Democrats: Race

One Sex Survey respondent offered up a sexual fantasy that piqued my interest: "Woman of color slaps me." I think it's one thing to have a type, man. But this … yeah, I don't know. Definitely a Harvard Dem, though.

The Indy: Cucking

Walk with me here. The Indy sits in a purple chair at the corner of a dark room. Across from us is a bed; the sheets are a deep red. And there you, the student body, are, getting fucked. You're getting fucked by the "Crimson," and all we can do is sit there and watch you. And we like it. Why do we like it?

The Indy Madame hopes you get fucked, in a sex-positive way.

Graphic by Annabella Burton Boone '29

YOUR SEX LIFE IS PRIVATE.
YOUR PERIOD TRACKER
SHOULD BE TOO.

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The Harvard Purity Test

By MISS CONDUCT

This is totally unrelated to any other purity test that might have been named after a certain university in Houston, Texas. However, if it were, this test is inspired by a 1924 icebreaker for incoming students during orientation week, which later became a 100-question list in the 1980s.

From debatable academic decisions to questionable romantic entanglements, the Harvard experience is anything but uniform. Simply tally the boxes you leave unchecked to calculate your Harvard Purity Test score. The higher your score, the more innocent your Harvard experience. The lower your score, the more "scandalous" your time may have been.

Compare scores with your friends, question your life choices, and, most importantly, happy sinning!



CAUTION: THIS IS NOT A BUCKET LIST AND THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT" IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY QUESTIONABLE DECISIONS MADE IN PURSUIT OF A HIGHER SCORE.

0. Subscribed to the Indy's mailing list
1. Had a peer mention their legacy status unprompted?
2. Had a peer mention their parents' job unprompted?
3. Had a peer mention their SAT/ACT score unprompted?
4. Had a peer mention their summer internships unprompted?
5. Had a peer ask a question solely to hear themselves talk?
6. Been cold-called in a class?
7. Skipped an entire week of class(es)?
8. Skipped an entire month of class(es)?
9. Been accused of cheating on an exam?
10. Cheated on an exam?
11. Missed a final exam?
12. Failed a final exam?
13. Failed a class?
14. Had to retake a class?
15. Pissed on John?
16. Had sex in the Stacks?
17. Jumped in the Charles?
18. Participated in Primal Scream?
19. Participated in Primal Scream naked?
20. Killed a rat or mouse in your dorm?
21. Accidentally flashed another person through your window?
22. Completed all nine houses during River Run?
23. Blacked out from River Run?
24. Posted anonymous gossip about someone on Sidechat?
25. Had someone recognize you from Sidechat?
26. Had a post about you on Sidechat?
27. Received over 200 upvotes on Sidechat?
28. Had a Sidechat post about you go viral?
29. Posted on Sidechat looking for a hookup?
30. Hooked up with someone you found on Sidechat?
31. Matched with another Harvard student on a dating app?
32. Gone on a date from Hinge, Tinder, or another app?
33. Gone on a date from Datamatch?
34. Had a crush on your TF or CA?
35. Been on a date with your TF or CA?
36. Hooked up or had sex with your TF or CA?
37. Dated/dating a student from another Boston-area school?
38. Hooked up with a student from another Boston-area school?
39. Dated/dating another Harvard College student?
40. Ghosted/been ghosted by another Harvard student?
41. Been flown out by someone you met at Harvard?
42. Been on a date with someone solely because they had a Harvard affiliation?
43. Hooked up/had sex with another Harvard College student?
44. Hooked up/had sex with a Harvard graduate school student?
45. Hooked up/had sex with a Harvard alumnus?
46. Hooked up/had sex with a Harvard professor?
47. Had sex in a lecture hall?
48. Had sex in a classroom?
49. Had sex in a Yard dorm?
50. Had sex in every single Yard dorm?
51. Done yard work/been yard worked?
52. Had sex in an upperclassman House?
53. Had sex in every single upperclassman House?
54. Traveled from the River to the Quad for a hook-up?
55. Hooked up with a Yale student?
56. Hooked up with another Ivy League student?
57. Hooked up with a suitemate?
58. Hooked up with someone in your blocking group?
59. Hooked up with someone in your entryway?
60. Hooked up with someone in your dorm or House?
61. Hooked up with someone from your section or class?
62. Hooked up with someone from the same club or team as you?
63. Hooked up with a friend's ex?
64. Hooked up with your ex's friend?
65. Had a three-way with another Harvard student?
66. Participated in an orgy with one or more Harvard student(s)?
67. Skipped class to have sex?
68. Masturbated with a roommate in the room?
69. Masturbated in your roommate's bed?
70. Masturbated in the common room?
71. Had sex while your roommate was asleep in the room?
72. Sexiled a roommate?
73. Been sex-iled by a roommate?
74. Spent the night with an MPS in a twin XL dorm bed?
75. Showered with an MPS in a dorm or House bathroom?
76. Had sex in a campus bathroom?
77. Had sex outdoors on campus?
78. Faked sobriety in front of a dean, proctor, or professor?
79. Gotten a noise complaint?
80. Had a party shut down by a proctor or HUPD?
81. Run from HUPD?
82. Been arrested by HUPD?
83. Been called into your Resident Dean's office?
84. Been sent to the Honor Council?
85. Been Ad-Boarded?
86. Been placed on probation?
87. Taken a semester off from Harvard?
88. Taken a year or more off from Harvard?
89. Had a fake ID?
90. Been caught using a fake ID?
91. DFMO'd at a Harvard party?
92. Blacked out at a Harvard party?
93. Been kicked out of a Harvard party?
94. Thrown up in the Square after having too much to drink?
95. Called an ambulance, HUPD, or Boston Police because you or someone had too much to drink?
96. Been hospitalized or sent to the ER for alcohol poisoning?
97. Gone to HUHS to get an STI test?
98. Used the HUHS vending machine for condoms and/or Plan B?
99. Done an illicit drug at a Harvard party?
100. Bought an illicit drug from a Harvard student?

If you've made it this far, congratulations. Whether you're a first-year just getting started, or a senior with four years of questionable decisions under your belt, we hope you've enjoyed the experience. And if your score is still suspiciously high, don't worry—there's always next semester.

Remember: what happens in the Yard stays in the Yard unless someone posts about it on Sidechat.

Until next time, stay curious, stay sexy, and stay off your Resident Dean's radar.

This anonymous author has mastered the art of the twin XL dorm bed and has made several decisions they would prefer not to discuss with their Resident Dean.

Graphic by Justin Ma '29

Fountain of Knowledge

By JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27 & SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28



Something "Wicker" This Way Cums

What a wicker man teaches us about sex appeal and social norms.

By TAYLOR THORNE '28

"I heard that he's strong as a tree and just as hard."

This week I had the pleasure of watching the recently released film "Wicker," starring Olivia Colman and Alexander Skarsgård. The movie adapts Ursula Wills's 14-page 2008 short story, "The Wicker Husband." The plot follows a lonely fisherwoman living in a small village who commissions herself a husband from the master basket weaver (Peter Dinklage). This husband, standing ten feet tall, is made of wicker. Imbued with life, this wicker man can walk, talk, and function like anyone else in the village. When they officially wed at the altar, they forgo the town's metal "marriage collar" norm and begin living as equal partners.

Since the film's release on Oct. 23, "Wicker" has already generated a significant online following and inspired some rather unusual reactions. Skarsgård's character, the Wicker Husband, has quickly become what one could only describe as a sex symbol.

For those unfamiliar with the film, it seems quite unexpected that a sentient wicker basket would inspire such lust and horniness. However, after seeing his skills on the big screen, I can confidently say it gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "morning wood." After all, what is more sexy than a strong man who can throw you around and quite literally break the bed? The Wicker Husband does that and more, satisfying his wife to the point that the townspeople worry about the sounds of screaming at night. We discover he's well-endowed in more ways than one as he continuously repairs the broken bed and does expert handiwork around their home.

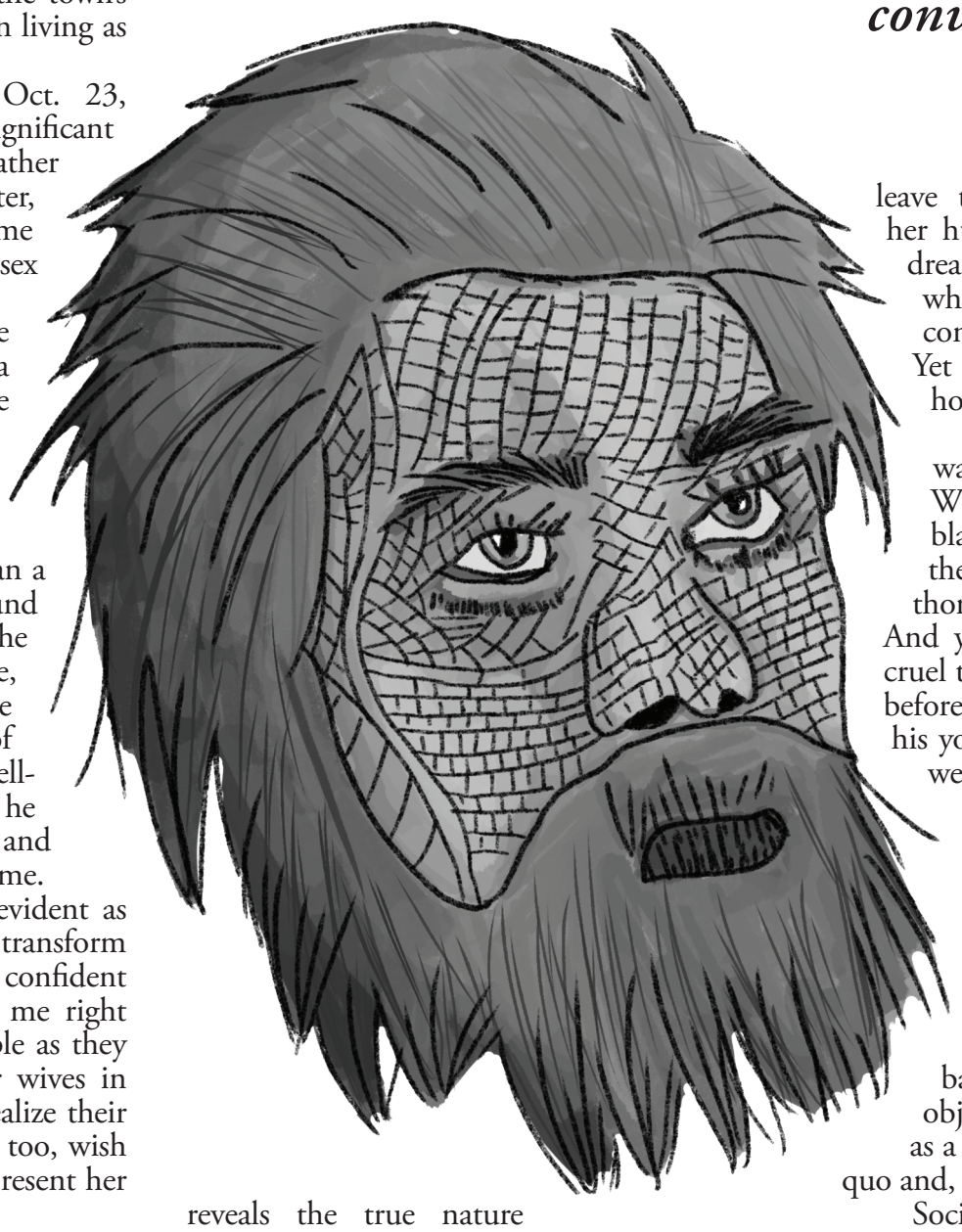
The power of "good wick" is evident as the audience watches the Fisherwoman transform from a withdrawn spinster into a confident and joyful woman. "He straightened me right out," she says to her fellow townspeople as they question her new attitude. The other wives in the village are visibly jealous as they realize their husbands' (literal) shortcomings. They, too, wish they could get wicked down, and they resent her for the pleasure they can't have.

One scene reveals this exact dynamic: we see the Bottlewasher's wife stone-faced and silent during sex with her husband, clearly not enjoying it in any way. In truth, this feels all too relatable to the real-life issue of many men only caring about themselves during sex. Often, women's pleasure can be disregarded by their partners or not considered a relevant priority. The failure and absence of intimacy rooted in the villagers' relationships is not foreign to many of our own lives, and it contributes to the film's resonance.

"After all, what is more sexy than a strong man who can throw you around and quite literally break the bed?"

In all fairness, it would be misleading to attribute the Fisherwoman's character evolution only to the miracle of good sex. The Wicker Husband frequently professes his care and love for his wife in poetic descriptions of devotion. "You are the reason I breathe and live," he proclaims to the Fisherwoman while the other husbands in town criticize and complain about their wives. This combination of both emotional and physical satisfaction is a testament to his character. The Wicker Husband embodies the ideal man, even though he is not a human man in the traditional sense. This is what truly earns him the title of sexual icon.

Perhaps inevitably, the Wicker Husband's arrival triggers a cascade of events that reveals the true nature of the townspeople's lives and marriages. You can feel the growing tension on screen as their jealousy runs rampant. Unsurprisingly, all the men worry their wives will leave them, so they literally climb that tree. A casual conversation between the husbands in the local tavern develops into a chaotic mess when the Baker frantically begs the Wicker Husband to fuck his wife. The repetition of this absurdity only adds to the cynical humor.



If I were acting in this scene, I personally couldn't have kept a straight face. Luckily, Skarsgård's woven prosthetic makeup is as effective as Botox at keeping a straight face. Even more importantly, the Wicker Husband, in his perfection, does not betray his wife, but the townspeople nevertheless spread rumors of his infidelity. To feel better about their own unfulfilling lives, they try to ruin the marriage and destroy the Fisherwoman's happiness. They ultimately fail, and we as the audience rejoice.

The climax comes when the Basket Weaver announces his retirement, proclaiming that whoever brings him the best gift in a week will receive his new creation: a Wicker Woman. And so, excluding the Tailor because his wife is so beautiful, every man in the village, even those married, brings their best gift to the sendoff. By this point in the movie, I don't think anyone in the audience was too surprised to see the men acting this way. However, shock does ensue when the Tailor's wife puts in her own bid, declaring her intent to flee the town with her sister and leave the Wicker Husband to deal with her husband and kids. Unfortunately, her dreams of a child-free future are crushed when the Butcher ultimately wins the contest thanks to his large bag of coins. Yet when he steps up to claim his prize, horrific irony is unveiled.

"Nevertheless, this film serves as a cautionary tale of accepting the status quo and, conversely, a message of hope."

Whereas the Wicker Husband was made from soft willow, the Wicker Woman was made from sharp blackthorn. Screams of pain echo from the Butcher as she envelops him in her thorny embrace, and the film concludes. And yet, in the face of his suffering, this cruel twist seems well deserved because, just before the competition, the Butcher locked his young wife in their cellar. At least now we can hope she finds a partner who actually respects her.

"Wicker" was a truly comedic and erotic breath of fresh air, but it also offers several relevant takeaways for our own lives. It's safe to say that finding ourselves our own wicker husband in the literal sense might be a bit difficult. I'm not aware of any basket makers who can give inanimate objects life. Nevertheless, this film serves as a cautionary tale of accepting the status quo and, conversely, a message of hope.

Social norms and the pressure to conform can powerfully inhibit change. In the case of the film, the townspeople, specifically the wives, expected unfair and unhappy partnerships. It was just the nature of their lives. Yet when they finally encountered a fulfilling relationship, they shunned it and tried to destroy it because it violated their norms. This reaction is what we should watch out for. Not everything unfamiliar is bad, and something different may actually be better. With this in mind, we should always strive toward our best possible future, in relationships and elsewhere, and not remain unduly bound to what we know. Sometimes, this might mean a wicker man to show us the way. It's up to us to follow the wick.

Taylor Thorne '28 (taylorthorne@college.harvard.edu) has recently developed an interest in basket weaving.

Graphic by Christiana Zembrowski '28

SPORTS

Let the Games Begin (Again and Again)

The only race where you don't want to finish first.

By SALMA GHEITH '30

Every two years, the world's greatest athletes gather to test the limits of the human body. These people have spent years preparing for the most competitive stage. Some events are so popular that even non-sports connoisseurs can recognize them. Others are so obscure that it seems like only a handful of athletes actually know the rules. What you may not realize is that some of the limit-testing happens after hours, and not in the lab or on the track. At this year's Milan Cortina Winter Games, the free condoms in the Olympic Village ran out after just three days—the games lasted 16 days. Village organizers had stocked the space with 10,000 condoms for about 2,800 athletes. You do the math.

The shortage was confirmed to be due to higher-than-anticipated demand, but who can blame the athletes? Sex is a phenomenal way to blow off steam at a high-stress, high-stakes event like the Olympics.

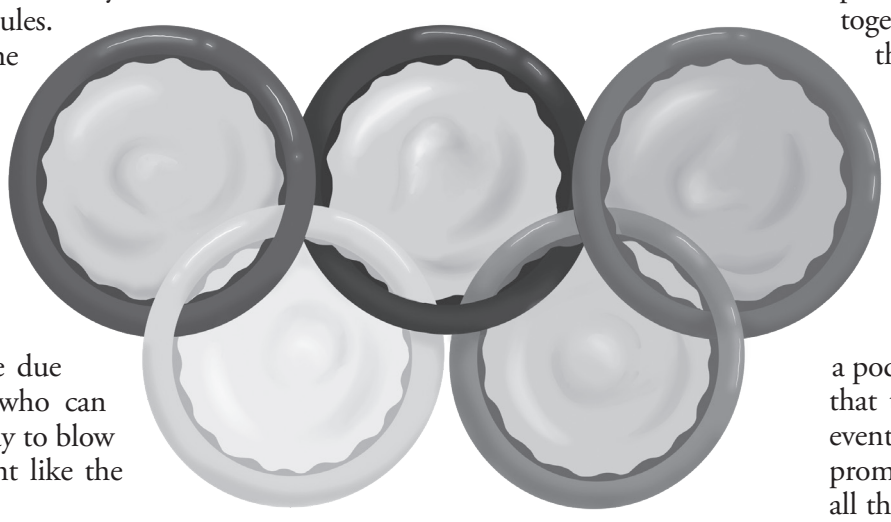
Shockingly, this does not come close to breaking the record for the most condoms used at an Olympic village. During the 2016 Rio Games, a whopping 450,000 condoms were distributed, and the 2024 Paris Games distributed 300,000.

Many athletes insist they are only taking these condoms as jokes, gifts for friends and family, or memorabilia from the games themselves; however, with roughly 2,800 athletes, that averages to roughly 3.5 friends and family members per athlete collecting latex souvenirs. We're not here to judge anyone, but I'm short on about four friends who collect themed condoms (besides Indy-branded ones!).

With all this rigorous training, it is important to make time for everything you want to do or need to do. So we asked ourselves all of the reasons Olympians may want to engage in some stress relief; below is a conglomeration of different reasons (excuses) that Olympic athletes have sex, and maybe why you should too.

It's Technically Cardio

Since Olympians are infamous for never taking a day off, it makes sense that their extracurricular activities include a healthy amount of "exertion." Sex is a rigorous activity and has the capacity to burn calories, not unlike cardio. Experts have compared sex to climbing a few flights of stairs or a brisk walk. However, these same experts also note that sex cannot replace a routine exercise regimen; luckily for these athletes, that is not a problem. Sex requires no equipment (depending on what you're into), gets the heart rate up, and works several muscle groups at once. It is safe to say that this isn't the worst use of time for Olympians.



Stress Relief

Training for years for an event that may last minutes, or even seconds, puts a lot of pressure on athletes. In addition to knowing that they have dedicated their lives to a fleeting performance, they are also keenly aware that their entire country is watching. Pre (or post) event sex could serve as a great distraction: it is widely linked to lower stress and a better mood, making it one of the few pre-competition rituals that does not involve a lucky pair of underwear or a sports psychologist.

Their Event Is Over

Not every athlete is competing until the closing ceremony. If they finish their events within the first couple of days, they will find themselves in the middle of a beautiful village with free food, amenities, and some of the world's most attractive people. When the competition ends, the schedule opens up—and that newfound free time may lead to the tragic condom shortage of Milan Cortina 2026.

Better Sleep and Recovery

Athletes are obsessed with recovery, and some statistics suggest you should be too. Sexual activity, particularly partnered sex that includes an orgasm (so ladies choose wisely), has been proven to help you fall asleep faster and improve sleep quality, resulting in improved physical and mental recovery. Think of sex as another part of the wellness routine: ice baths, the beloved Normatec, and the Kama Sutra.

International Relations

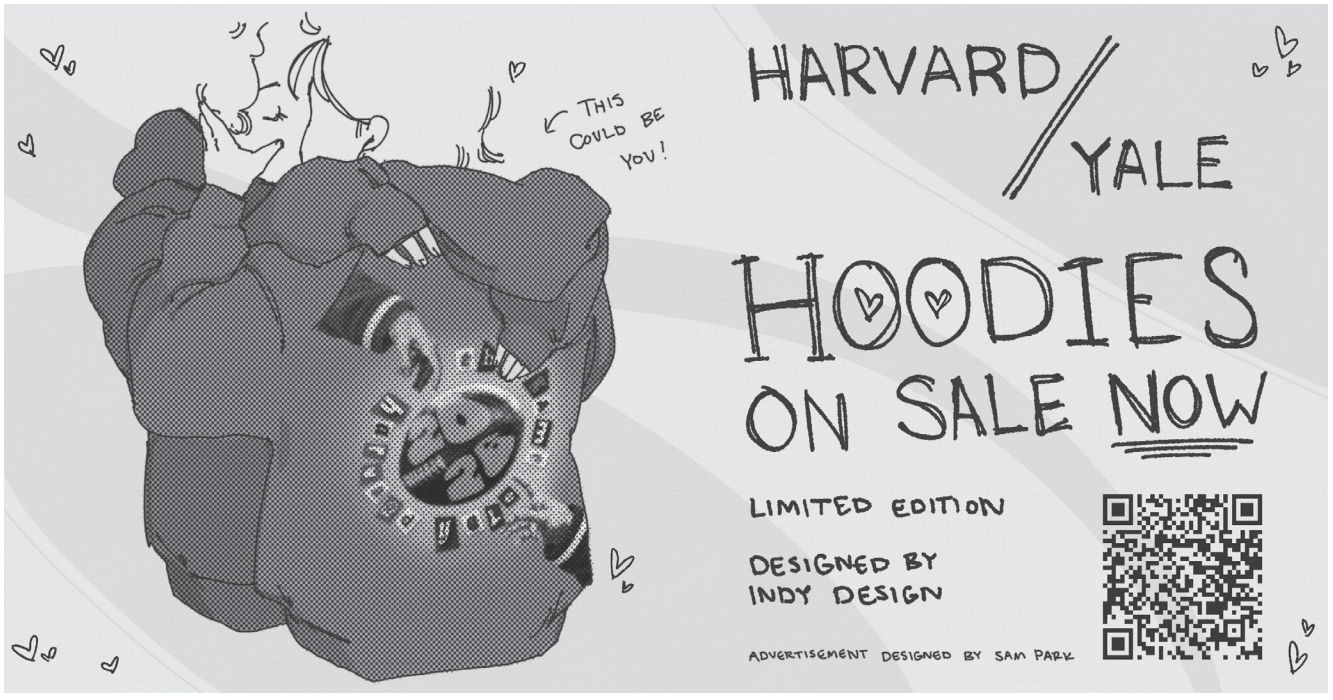
At its core, the Olympics builds goodwill and sportsmanship between countries, bringing the world together. Athletes from over 90 countries have put their differences aside in the name of athleticism, discipline, and, most importantly, unity. Some athletes just take that mission more personally (or intimately) than others. While trading pins seems to be one of the Village's most beloved traditions, it's clear pins aren't the only things being traded.

The next time you watch an athlete stand on a podium with a medal around their neck, remember that their Olympic experience likely included a few events that didn't make it to your TV. Organizers promised to restock the Village, proving once and for all that the Olympic spirit cannot be contained, only rejuvenated.

As for us NARPs (non-athletic regular people), though the Olympics may not be on our horizon, we all have stress, need more sleep, and are more likely than not to skip cardio. The athletes and the "Harvard Independent" have made their case. The training is left to you. Just remember: this is the one race where nobody wants to finish first.

Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harvard.edu) is feeling... inspired.

Graphic by Neshama Ryman '28



Keeping Score: The Sport of One's Body Count

Ambiguity, pressure, and the scorekeeping of sex.

By SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28

"What's your body count?"

It is a question that seems to circulate casually (and crassly) among modern generations. Its meaning: "How many different people have you had sex with?" The question implies a transactional, impersonal maneuvering through sex, reducing a partner to the noun of a "body." More importantly, it raises the question: why does body count even matter? With an increasing focus on the number of sexual partners someone has had, everyone seems to have a different opinion on how many is too many. Your total can shape views on compatibility and reinforce double standards in relationships. Most importantly, your score is everything: too low, and you are inexperienced; too high, and you are a slut.

It is impossible to discuss the social parameters that define the scoring rules of a body count without referencing the social contradiction between the Madonna and the whore. Social conservatism has been rising in the United States. Trends revolving around "tradwives" and "alpha-males" have been popular for years, gazing longingly back at an archaic fantasy that was never based in reality. In this fantasy, women are Madonnas: domestic, caring, and submissive creatures, devoid of passions that could disrupt the patriarchy in which they exist. Yet, women have never been single-faceted, which is what creates the flipside of the coin: the whore.

Under the Madonna half of this system, the perfect score (for women, that is) would obviously be zero: winning a game by never playing. This system has created an impossible double standard that has stood the test of time. Virginity has historically been valued in women. It was deemed necessary for a woman to be a faithful wife to ensure legitimate heirs, so women were kept sheltered and uninformed, a dynamic Bridgerton dramatizes. Yet, for men, it was normalized to frequent brothels and have mistresses, as they were not constrained to the same sexual rigidity as their female counterparts.

Times have certainly changed, yet the allure of virginity remains. Once "taken," it is not regained—it is your first score. I think that it is unfair to peg your first time as unimportant, but I also do not think that it should be seen as devaluing for either men or women. This "score" is experience. In the game of body count tallies, it simply means you are on the board.

From then on out, you are a player. The lines that distinguish between too few, too many, and just enough are ill-defined. However ambiguous, there seems to be an awareness of judgment. I know many people who have lied about their body count when others asked.

So, what is the "perfect" amount? What constitutes enough knowledge to be experienced, but not too much to have carelessly "slept around"?

I do not have a right answer, but most people seem to settle anywhere from three to five. The answer, however, is almost always gauged in ratio by how many people the person asking is assumed to have slept with. Understandably, from an ego standpoint, you do not necessarily want to be wildly more or less experienced than your partner.

Body count plays out much like golf: to be on par is perfect, except everyone's score sheets and course are kept a mystery.

"Love Island USA" season seven is a recent pop-culture example of body count and its value. Contestants had to reveal or guess each other's body counts among other things in the game. In this, the girls with lower scores were audibly praised, while the men with high scores—reaching over 100—were criticized. While part of a cheeky game, it was meant to expose the contestants to each other and the audience in their potential "value" as partners.

Meanwhile, Sydney Sweeney's recent ad for Novig—a sports prediction market app—drew attention and controversy. A famous actress, nude on regular TV, marketing sports. She is also often cited as a poster child for the conservative aesthetic. She is both the Madonna and the whore, a sex symbol and ideal—yet her sexual and private life has rarely made headlines. Sweeney's dual image acts as a modern intersection between sports, sex, and entertainment, one which is becoming increasingly entangled with political and moral ideologies. At face value, her physical assets have nothing to do with sports, and yet, sports is one of the biggest markets in the United States. And, after all, sex sells.

Clearly, sex is everywhere in the media. Still, it is the taboo aspect that makes it exciting—the idea that the number of sexual partners is intrinsically entangled with relationship worth.

If no one can fact-check, and no one can be believed to be completely honest about their body count, then what is the fascination with keeping score? It all seems to stem from an obsession with gauging one's own behavior within the flock, trying to follow a path without a map. Yet, notoriously, bedrooms usually have doors, so even the best peepers struggle to get an accurate read on what goes on between the sheets.

This has not stopped some from wanting insider access to others' intimate details. Often called "locker-room talk" or "conquest contests," male sports teams and organizations are infamous for secret competitions and tallies of sexual escapades. While these stories often linger as urban legends or word-of-mouth rumors, the general narrative stays consistent enough to be based in some truth: contests exist to see how many people members can sleep with and how quickly. Generally, this is regarded as a degrading practice, not because casual sex is bad, but because valuing someone as a number, a body, especially if they are unaware of the scheme, is demeaning.

As for score and the game of it all, it revolves around the enigma. To play the game, you have to be on the board, but too many scores and you are notorious—a psychology that takes hold in few other areas. Needs are needs; I have no qualms with that; however, sex, no matter how casual, transactional, and forgettable, isn't a race to the top like adult creator Bonnie Blue. There is nothing wrong with notches on a bedframe. Still, when those notches become tied to an individual's value, and more often than not a woman's, as a person and partner, human and relationship value, that is when the sport of sex crosses a line.

Frankly, what happens in the bedroom is nobody's business. The double standards, impossible expectations, and social contests make winning impossible. So what is the point of partaking in such a game?

"Generally, this is regarded as a degrading practice, not because casual sex is bad, but because valuing someone as a number, a body, especially if they are unaware of the scheme, is demeaning."

Sophia Gonzalez '28 (sophiagonzalez@college.harvard.edu) honestly doesn't care about your body count, and you shouldn't either.

Graphic by Miranda Chao Hwang '28



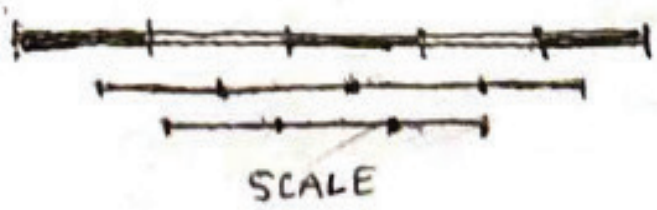
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