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the SHORT issue

Inside: Spring's Focus on Mental Health

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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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but never stressed!*

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INDY FORUM

The High Functioning Trap

More than what you produce.

By ANONYMOUS

Standing in an empty kitchen in an apartment in Brookline, my boyfriend and his new roommate talk about their experiences with hospitalization. They swap programs, talk about partial hospitalizations and residential stays. I stay silent. Somehow, despite being actively suicidal several times a week throughout high school and self-harming on and off for six years, I managed to avoid ever being hospitalized. Always stopping on the edge something that would be majorly self-destructive, something that would get noticed.

My therapist finally mentioned recently that I probably have Borderline Personality Disorder, confirming a suspicion I've had since high school. Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is defined by a pervasive pattern of instability in moods, behavior, self-image, and functioning, often causing impulsive actions and unstable relationships. I remember Googling stories of people with BPD and feeling shocked and scared, immediately pulled out of identifying with a symptoms list. In high school I was having bouts of severe panic, paranoia, and dissociation multiple times a week and was self-harming, but I made good grades. I ran organizations. The first semester of my junior year, arguably the worst period of time in my emotionally abusive relationship and with my mental health, I made straight As in 5 AP classes.

For as long as I can remember I've loved personality tests. I used to spend hours on website taking quiz after quiz from "what is your soul type" to "what color describes you in relationships." It was an obsession. I made graphs to help me remember zodiac signs and learned the ins and outs of Myers Briggs. I never managed to connect this to the fact

that I found it easier to describe myself as a Scorpio INFJ than to actually understand myself as a person.

I think, too, I sought to define myself through academic work. When my teachers told me I was a good writer or were impressed with my work or my grades, I could be somebody. I was always the smart one, and the label seemed to work well enough. I was even voted smartest in my high school class (along with the aforementioned abusive ex, our relationship now forever captured in a picture of us together in the yearbook). I don't believe that my academic achievements in high school were a triumph over my mental illness. Rather, they were a coping mechanism, a way to simultaneously define myself and distract myself from my tenuous mental state.

When my therapist said BPD, he used the word "high-functioning." It's a term I know well because of how it's resented in most of the mental health communities I'm involved with. It's often used to draw a distinction between mentally ill people who are still productive under a capitalist definition and those who are not. Furthermore, it implies that this sort of production is a proper measurement of functioning. In high school I may have come across as high functioning, but the acute and constant strain of my mental health was only masked by my ability to perform.

Now in college, I fall into old habits. I make straight As during my most mentally taxing semesters. I run organizations, I plan events, I make posters, I write papers professors praise. I imagine I'm one of many here who has heard the label high functioning tossed around. We are all overachieving while trying to play neurotypicality.

A friend from outside of Harvard recently told me they met someone who went here in

the psych ward. I thought of all the people I've known and heard of who have ended up there. So many of us, high functioning by most standards, end up hospitalized for mental health. I have never been hospitalized for my mental health only because I've learned to fake it well enough to stay off anyone's radar.

I wish this piece could end with a call to action. But the truth is, as long as there are institutions to validate our worth based on our academic performance, there are those of us who will sit on the high functioning cliffside, precipitously close to collapse. We will always fall asleep wondering if we'll make it through tomorrow, and we'll keep making it through tomorrow under the guise of thriving until we don't.

I suppose my call is this: We're all scared. Every person on this campus is scared of something. If you see someone who seems off, reach out, check in. Take care of yourself and, if you have anything left over, make sure your friends are ok. I never would have made it through nights waiting for UHS counselors had friends not been on hand to drop everything and bring snacks from CVS and their company. Your company is valuable. Your presence is valuable. You are more than what you can produce.

Please contact editorinchief@harvardindependent.com for questions or comments on this article.

INDY FORUM

For spring break this year I visited the only college in America that could figuratively say it's older than Harvard: the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Fifty-seven years after Harvard's founding, William & Mary was officially chartered in 1693. In 1618, however, the original plan for the college that would eventually become William & Mary was made by the Virginia Company of London, before the Pilgrims made land at Plymouth. In this way, William & Mary could be said to be older than Harvard. However, a devastating Indian

Trains, on the other hand, take away much of the liberty you have with a car. They get you from A to B but your choice in the path is taken away. In exchange, you see things you wouldn't normally allow yourself to see if you had the choice.

Gary, Indiana's Freddie Gibbs and his rap song "Deeper," or Portland band STRFKR and their alt song "Florida."

Poetry also seems to share the same rhythm as a world at work and good music. To me, it's not a coincidence that as I read U.S. Poet Laureate Philip Levine and his poem "What Work Is" on the train, landscape and poetry follow the same beat.

Where does the beat that landscape, music, and poetry follow exactly lead them? I don't know. But if my train ride showed me anything, the beat is a good one. It might start and stop, speed up and slow down, but it always leads to an enjoyable somewhere.

On the Rails

uprising and the revocation of the Company's charter delayed the plan's fruition by almost a century. Four centuries, two existential wars, and forty-five United States presidents after its original conception, I found myself enjoying what became of the Company's plan to make a college in Virginia.

This op-ed isn't about my visit to William & Mary, however. It's about the four-hour train ride after.

I had a lot of time to think and to look out the window on that train ride home from Williamsburg. Initially the history of William & Mary was on my mind. But this history intermingled with what I saw in the storied landscape of Virginia made me think—whatever confusion or disarray might be going on in the country right now, there is a steady beat keeping it going forward.

I don't think this thought would have come to me if I took a car or plane.

Trains cut paths through the world differently than planes or automobiles. Planes don't cut through the world at all. They fly miles above it, and you seem to get the objective perspective on the order or chaos of the landscape below. Then again, the objective perspective gives little knowledge of what it's actually like on the ground.

Cars are grounded, but their way of traveling through landscape is centered on the ways one wants to go. So if I want to go from A to B, I can decide to take roads One, Two, and Three—or road Four instead of Three if the traffic is bad.

For one, you wouldn't typically see a man drinking his morning coffee while standing in the doorway of a lumber mill and staring at your train passing by. This sight is especially atypical when one sees repurposed industrial buildings with shiny metal vats for a biotech industries just seconds before. And seconds before that, one can peer into the industrial tobacco buildings converted into luxury loft apartments.

In a larger context, all the sights of Richmond, Virginia along the rails can be contrasted to the idyllic views of small-town Ashland. On the train fifteen miles north of Richmond, one can see Ashland's many southern homes, often flying the Virginia state flag on their porches. As the train enters downtown, the relative bustle of main street stores can be seen along with the adjacent liberal arts college, Randolph-Macon, and its students, walking among sober academic buildings.

This concatenation of Virginia landscape is tiny compared to the immense United States, but I doubt it's uncommon. Cities, small towns, and trains at work are not exclusive to Virginia. And they all seem to work at a steady, eternal rhythm, progressing toward a climax that is near but never quite arrives.

This work's rhythm isn't unique to it, though. The sights of places at work stimulate the eyes at the same pace that good music stimulates the ears. Looking out a train window at Richmond while listening to "Really Love" by Richmond native D'Angelo confirms this. So does listening to

Professor John Stilgoe — who on his own essentially constitutes the Environmental Studies portion of the VES department at Harvard—says trains are making a comeback. He also says that drones are the future, not autonomous cars. I think and hope he's right on both counts, but with a qualification: once drones are allowed by the government to hug the contours of the landscape with enough power to fly people and their baggage en masse, trains will no longer maintain a monopoly on the unique perspective they provide.

I hope that more people will be able to see and hear the good thrum of American life once the future becomes more drone than train. With the unique paths they take you can see so much going on that is outside half of the stories in any given issue of *The New York Times*, the half that is entirely devoted to reporting on all aspects of the syncopated Trump presidency. But since the future isn't here yet, we will have to make do with trains.

There is a caveat to riding on trains nowadays, however: trains are increasingly running behind schedule. So if you want to see things outside of what you read, you might have to wait a bit. The wait will be worth it, though — surely enough a train will arrive at the station and take you where you need to go.

Dan Valenzuela (dvalenzuela@college.harvard.edu) is a biweekly columnist for the Indy.

Expectations on My Dream School

A reflection.

By HUNTER RICHARDS

When my mom came to visit me for Junior Parents Weekend, she wanted to see the buildings I spend most of my time in for classes. “That’s Pierce: I have my physics class there on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That’s Maxwell Dworkin: I took Fluids there last year. That’s the Science Center: I took biochemistry in there freshman year.” Unfortunately, it’s harder to lie to my mom in person than it is when she’s 800 miles away.

My mom wasn’t on campus for more than 6 hours before I pointed out where I was sitting when I had called her crying because I realized I hated what I was studying. She admittedly didn’t know how much longer I ended up sitting on that stoop in front of Currier House or how long I had already been there when I called her, but she knew that it was a hard time for me. Realizing I wasn’t happy with what I was doing didn’t make it easy to admit that I wanted to give up everything I had thought and start over in a new direction.

My mom never went to college, and neither did anyone else in my family. I couldn’t explain how stressful blocking was freshman year because they weren’t even entirely sure what an upperclassman house was. I couldn’t explain why I was upset about not getting lotteried into a class when they’ve only heard of large, auditorium-scale lectures at our state schools. I couldn’t explain how upset I was in section for a philosophy class when they didn’t understand why I was taking classes not directly related to my degree, let alone the

general education system. That’s why Junior Parents’ Weekend was so important to her: It was her first glimpse into what life was like for me now. The hard part was showing her that it’s not what we thought it would be.

Even after 3 years at Harvard, I still catch myself feeling inadequate. I know that I struggled through plenty to get where I am in life, but it’s hard to give myself credit for that. Being a first-generation college student coming from a poor, rural background, it can start to feel rather lonely on campus. Having my mom visit felt so good because it’s one of the only times I could see my two worlds joined: who I am back home, and who I am on campus.

While Harvard was my dream school, I never imagined that I would ever even make it to its campus for a visit. Yet there I was, crying outside of the buildings I was absolutely in wonder of during Visitas. It took me time to understand that achieving my goals of getting to Harvard and becoming an engineer who would go on to help others could also damage my mental health.

In sophomore fall, after hearing yet another section kid “push back a little,” I snapped. I was crushed by the audacity of my classmate after he had said, “I really didn’t realize how bad poverty was, but it’s kind of their own fault.” Being at Harvard, I’ve become incredibly aware of how different my life is from those around me. Catching friends jokingly compare running out of BoardPlus to the actual hardship of scraping by on food stamps

struck me freshman year, but I didn’t have the courage to out myself. Rather than speak up and ask my peers making such comments if they had any idea how many hours you would need to work in a typical blue-collar position just to afford bread, milk, eggs, and apples, I internalized it. The frustration built up until I finally erupted sophomore spring and began demanding respect after becoming a student leader tasked with representing people like me on campus.

I've become incredibly aware of how different my life is from those around me.

Even though I’ve learned how to advocate for myself, educating my peers is exhausting. I was nervous having my mom on campus because I didn’t want her to meet some of the people I have to interact with daily who are incapable of acknowledging their privilege and ignorance. I didn’t want her to feel the same sense of not belonging that I still sometimes get. Showing her around campus made me reflect on my own experiences at Harvard and how fulfilled I feel. Although I’m stressed out and struggle to be confident in myself sometimes, I can start to care for myself better now that I have admitted it to myself instead of hiding and internalizing it.

Hunter Richards (hrichards@college.harvard.edu) is still proud to be at Harvard, even if it’s different from what she imagined!

Fulfilling and Transforming

Peer counseling at Harvard faces changes.

By CAROLINE CRONIN

Though the spring term seems to be passing us by at breakneck speed, last week's respite from academic work perhaps allowed students to take a mental breather. For many, such a break is imperative to maintaining the strength to finish out the semester successfully. It is no secret that attending Harvard College, with all its mix of experiences, opportunities and challenges, is wonderfully transformative yet still mentally taxing. For this reason, the University has, in recent years, celebrated the plethora of mental health counseling and assistance available to all students. Many students on campus make it their mission to provide this counseling to their peers. Groups like Room 13, ECHO and SHARC help individuals with a variety of concerns.

The University administration plays a large role in the resources available. On the online version of the FAS Student Handbook, under the heading of 'Peer Counseling,' it reads, "The Mental Health Service at HUHS, in conjunction with the Bureau of Study Counsel, oversees the training and supervision of five undergraduate peer counseling groups offering anonymous, confidential hotline and drop-in counseling throughout the academic year." These five listed groups are Contact, Eating Concerns Hotline and Outreach (ECHO), Peer Contraceptive Counselors (PCC), Response, and Room 13.

To anyone younger than the class of 2017, PCC is foreign. They are, in fact, the group that is now known as SHARC – Sexual Health and Relationship Counseling. The name change

was executed in order to reach a greater audience of students and to welcome a wider range of counseling needs. Nora O'Neill '18, one of two Co-Directors of SHARC, states that outreach to students is a huge priority for the group. SHARC hopes to further this goal by transitioning to a Peer Education group. The change will mean that SHARC is less about students providing counsel and more about them providing resources and references to anyone who asks for them. O'Neill hopes that this change next year will better allow the group, "to go out into the community" instead of students having to "seek out counsel."

This trend of outreach and inclusion has been one seen in many of the groups as well as the administration itself. The 'Mental Health Service at HUHS' is now called Counseling and Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The problem that this name change seems to address is the issue of stigma and alienation. The phrase 'Mental Health' can be daunting and conjure up images of an extreme variety, resulting in the alienation of students with concerns they themselves see as lesser, or different. Therefore, CAMHS and the student peer counseling groups work hard together to make sure students receive the care they need.

The exact nature of this working relationship varies by group. According to Cass Hastie '18, of ECHO, "We receive some support from University Health Services and they help advocate for our funding and training resources. In this dynamic environment where mental health is justly becoming more prioritized, we hope the administration will continue to support our financial needs in order to accommodate the student body." A specific financial need that ECHO and other peer counseling groups have every year is the need for meal funding during pre-term training. ECHO is one of the groups that relies on time spent before the semester begins in August to train counselors on the specific and complex issues within eating concerns. The dining halls do not open during this pre-term time and yet the University has not provided meal vouchers or other funding of the like. This can be a difficulty for any college student

– but for those working to help their peers with mental health and eating concerns it may be especially troubling.

Alex Graff '17 and Rachel Talamo '18 of Room 13 expressed the same concern: "During the 2015-2016 academic year, peer counseling was moved from Harvard College supervision to CAMHS supervision, and after that move, we lost some necessary funding, including money for food during training. That was a huge issue for us last August, and we're currently looking at the same situation for this coming August, so we've asked the College for some extra support. They've expressed interest in helping, but we haven't yet been able to secure the resources we need." Room 13 is another of the groups that uses the training to ensure that peer counselors are able to make a real difference on campus. Frankly, it is unfair of the administration to expect these students to be able to do so but not provide adequate support.

In this changing environment on campus, the admirable work peer counseling groups do is equal to the professional expertise available through Harvard University Health Services. Connecting the two at all times in order to better the experience of college students is the goal of all involved. Hastie confirms, "Peer counselors, like all people, are constantly adjusting to climates and events however it is hard to say how that impacts our responsibilities. As various events come up, we prepare ourselves to deal with any and all concerns and think about how we can best support the student body." But to be able to reach that goal, the administration must be willing to fulfill the physical and financial needs.

Caroline Cronin (ccronin01@college.harvard.edu) applauds the peer counselors and hopes that their dedication will continue to help Harvard college students.

Competition

The buzzwords of "mental health" and "athletics" typically evoke thoughts of concussions, CTE, and other such forms of physical injury to the brain; examples in professional sports abound, and recent attention has highlighted the impact of new research in football specifically. When watching sports on TV, reading about them in the news, or hearing of injury on ESPN, it is simple to limit the definition of mental health, especially when considered in the context of athletics. However, playing the sport, or even watching it in person, conjures a new realization.

The understanding of mental health in an academic setting has been rapidly gaining more attention. Pressures to perform well in classes and exams, maintain societal expectations, remain healthy and happy, while also carrying the burdens that each individual must bear are well understood to put pressure on a student's mental state. As a result, support systems abound: peer-to-peer support, institutional assistance, or outside references. Although their effectiveness may be questioned, their existence belies an understanding that a student's mental wellbeing is critical to their success. The analogy to sports is very similar; there exists a constant pressure to perform and also a necessity to balance practice, training, events, games and competitions with schoolwork. Therefore, it is apparent that mental health in athletics extends far beyond physical injury. Athletes should have the same if not greater level of access to mental health facilities as they do physical health.

To understand where athletes derive respite from the tolls of both academic and athletic rigor, I spoke to freshman athletes who went through the process daily. A Men's Rugby player mentioned that the primary source of support derived from the camaraderie and close-nature of the team itself; the team stood by its teammates. This type of support makes sense; while academic competition can sometimes drive students apart, competition as part of a team often fares to bring team members even closer together.

There are instances, however, where inter-team conflict can put its own pressure on mental health. While these cases are often kept quiet and within the team, some instances rise to media spotlight. One of the largest, and most controversial, cases in the popular culture sphere was that of Jonathan Martin, an offensive lineman for the Miami Dolphins in the NFL. In his story, he succumbed to bullying/harassing tendencies by a fellow teammate, and chose to release his encounters with the harassers publicly. Martin had previously dealt with depression, and the treatment by his teammates only further pushed the limits of his willpower. The lack of a proper outlet, while on the team itself, challenged Martin to handle and solve his issues alone – which is unreasonable for any of his position. Here at Harvard, according to several students across teams, a convenient outlet within the team is still difficult to find and even harder to take advantage of; however, the resources that the college has put in place offer a reassurance – there is always someone there to listen.

&

Balance

Mental health in athletics.

By TUSHAR DWIVEDI

On the other hand, many describe the positive benefits athletics have on maintaining a healthy and balanced physical and mental lifestyle. The challenge of meeting high demands encourages discipline and necessitates taking care of oneself. The team atmosphere, and having the oft described "family" is absolutely critical, and the group of friends that results from being a member of an athletic team is one of the greatest advantages of being a student-athlete. Sure, athletics can add stress and pressure, but the sport or event itself, and its preparation, is referred to as a highly motivating factor, and offers a release and escape from daily academic rigors that is unparalleled. Thus, the very same nature of the sport that puts athletes under such duress oftentimes can provide the very same outlet they need to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Tushar Dwivedi (tushar_dwivedi@college.harvard.edu) is taking research from the lab to the sidelines!

captured and shot



Color in the world.

By FRANCESCA CORNERO