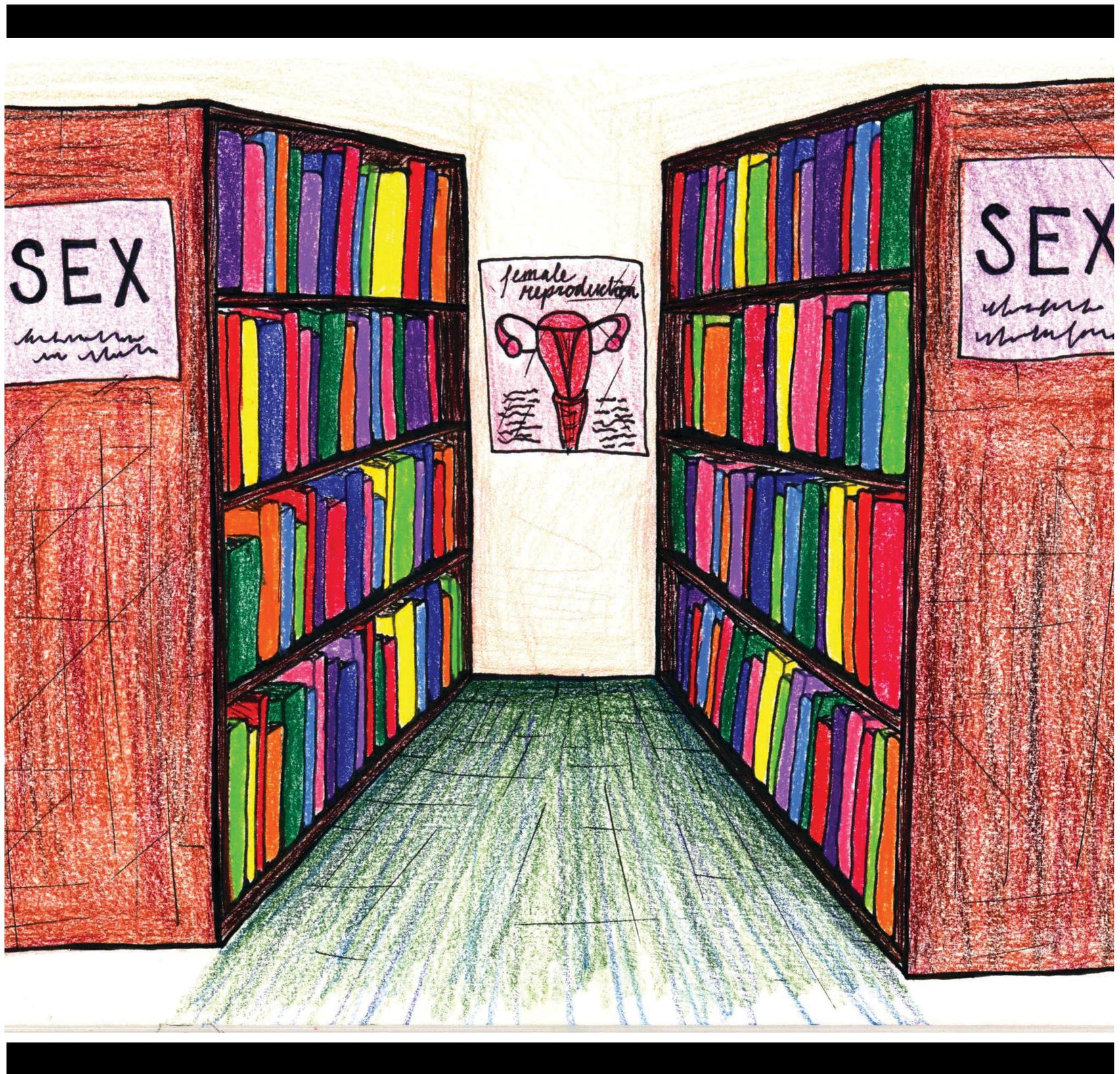


THE HARVARD  
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04.18.19 THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

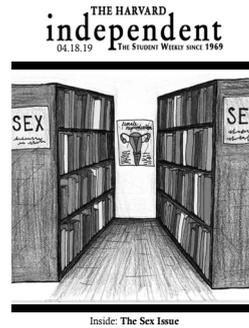


Inside: **The Sex Issue**

# The Harvard Independent

04.18.2019

Vol. L, No. 20



The Indy is sneaking into the Stacks.

Cover design by Natalie Sicher '21

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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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# INDY SEX ISSUE

## Letter From the Editor

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Dear Reader,

The staff of *The Harvard Independent* is proud to present to you the 2019 Sex Issue! As an organization, this issue is one of the most exciting and interesting for us to put together, and we hope that translates to you as well. This issue is a collection of Harvard undergraduate sexual statistics based on the answers you provided while taking our annual Sex Survey. The Sex Issue, one of our most widely read issues, is meant to expand and engage in dialogue concerning sex on Harvard's campus by way of statistics, personal narratives, humorous, but accurate quotations, and poetry.

The Indy's Sex Issue has a storied mission. For over twenty years, The Indy has aimed to demystify sex among Harvard undergraduates and promote sex positivity, for freshman and upperclassmen. These aims are perhaps more important now than ever as we strive to live healthy and fulfilling lives amidst the stress and new adventures that Harvard brings. We believe that it is vital to maintain an open dialogue for all voices and opinions in order to elevate the discourse of sexual positivity.

The Indy does not wish to trigger sexual assault and harassment survivors or in any way invalidate negative experiences with sex. Instead, we hope that our issue captures the various positive and consensual experiences people have in an affirmative space. We wish to offer this space where we may center ourselves in our feelings towards sex and relinquish judgement, bias, or negative sentiment of any kind.

French philosopher Michel Foucault writes in his seminal work *The History of Sexuality*, "We demand that sex speak the truth [...] and we demand that it tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves, which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness." We hope that *The Independent's* Sex Issue helps each of us uncover something about sex, but more importantly, unearth our true selves.

Thank you for answering our survey, sending in your work and thoughts, and being a part of this year's issue. As you read the various statistics and anecdotes from your peers, we hope that you all find something that makes you rethink previous conceptions of sex, something that makes you laugh, and something to which you can relate. Enjoy!

Yours,

Tushar Dwivedi '20

Editor-in-Chief, *The Harvard Independent*

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# INDY SEX ISSUE

## Val Elefante: "The One Who Is Writing Her Thesis on Porn"

*An insight into the power of Harvard students who question the current sexual culture*

By MIMI TARRANT

For the Sex Edition, the Indy connected with Val Elefante, a senior in Leverett House who has spent her four years at Harvard exploring the medium of pornography and its implications regarding sexual culture. In this interview, Val explains why she chose pornography as the basis for her thesis, and how her experience at Harvard has shaped her views on sex as a whole.

**Indy:** What is your concentration at Harvard and what made you choose it?

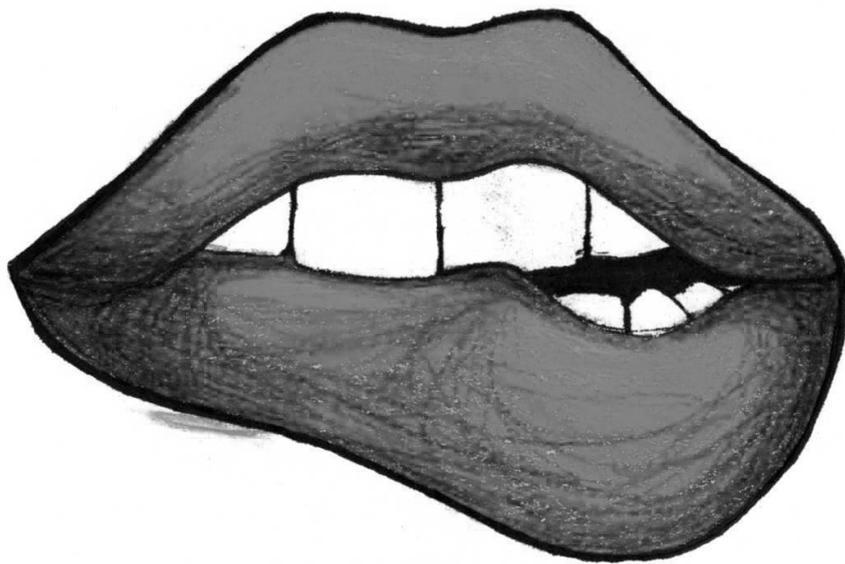
**Val:** I decided to concentrate in Social Studies at Harvard. I have never really had one clear intellectual path; even in high school, I was always interested in a lot of things and loved using many different subjects to understand social phenomena; I remember being interested in government and history in high school, especially social science. This meant at Harvard I loved Social Studies and how it kept open so many doors.

It is a concentration that combines history, government, sociology, anthropology and economics, so within that you can take a lot of different courses; I knew that social science generally was of interest to me, but I wasn't quite sure what route I would want to take. Social Studies enabled me to keep my options open and discover a wide range of different methodologies to explore different academic paths.

**Indy:** Turning to your thesis, can you give us an overview on the topic?

**Val:** So I was happy with my decision to study social studies as it enabled me to write my thesis on a topic that a diverse array of disciplines have analysed or looked at, which is pornography. The people who analyse porn range from psychologists (who look at porn and its influence on society) to historians and film studies people, but I was particularly interested in the feminist and queer theory approach. Feminists and queer theorists have been using pornography for decades as a lens into society's sexual culture in a lot of different ways. My project looked at feminist and queer theory starting from around the 70's, looking at what feminists were saying about pornography then, what pornography looked like then, and trying to trace their arguments through time, understanding how their approach to pornography, or their thoughts (what I like to call their ethics) have changed. What I think is super fascinating is that in the 70's pornography was seen as the antithesis to feminism; it was the manifestation of patriarchy in concrete material form.

Going from that definition to now, sex



Natalie Sicher '21

## Val Elefante, continued.

positive feminists are much more open to the opportunities within pornography, seeing it as a tool for empowerment and a place where sexuality can be explored and experienced by people for whom sex has historically worked against (women, LGBTQ+ communities, among others). This has been a key component of my project and something I was really fascinated with. I think it is just a really interesting lens into sex and sex culture, as pornography is a super diverse medium but is often viewed as irrelevant smut, despite being so prevalent. Porn websites compete with websites such as Amazon and Yahoo, and are getting more traffic than some of the biggest players on the internet. That says a lot about our culture and its importance, yet people are unable to take it seriously, as porn is not often seen in mainstream discourse or as worthy of academic study. With all this in mind, I wrote my thesis with the title “Beyond Pleasure and Danger: Autonomy and the Ethics of Pornography”

**Indy:** What originally inspired you to pursue this topic for your thesis?

**Val:** Definitely feminist theory: in the social studies intro-level course you read about feminist theory, such as the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Foucault and Judith Butler, which introduced me to ideas about sex, sexuality, gender, and how they manifest in complex ways in our society. So I definitely took an early academic interest, as I took that class sophomore fall and sophomore spring. Also, classes like “Money, Markets and Morals” and feminist classes in the French department helped develop my academic

passion and curiosity. I was also definitely personally influenced by sex culture; we live in a society where, depending on who you are and where you are, individuals have a complicated relationship with sex, such as with your own sexuality and figuring out what and who you like or don’t like.

Obviously there is a huge personal component to all of this; I grew up in a relatively conservative town in Long Island, New York, and I remember in 7th grade sitting in my sex-ed class and having to repeat “The only safe sex is abstinence,” with that being the main takeaway from that day’s lesson. It’s crazy to think of me as a young person learning that and having it so deeply ingrained in my head, and I am not quite sure how that has influenced me in my life but I definitely think that I realised coming to college that sex was a topic that was shut down really quickly. Most people are having sex, but most people aren’t learning what they need to know before they go into their first sexual experiences. I was lucky in that I had a boyfriend in high school and got to experience that with him for the first time, so I was with someone who cared about me, but I got to Harvard and couldn’t believe how no one was really on the same page. I guess no one’s ever on the same page when it comes to this, as maybe we all learn “Intro to Biology,” but when it comes to sex everyone is different depending on who you are, where you’re from, and so many other variables.

**Indy:** How do other students react when you tell them the topic of your thesis?

**Val:** I think for the most part people are really intrigued right away, and I’m known as

“the one who is writing her thesis on porn.” I think people definitely want to know more, and they love to ask me questions about my thoughts. I would say that I can tell that some people are surprised by how pro-porn I am, and how much I think it can do, and continues to do, good things in our world. People assume from the offset that I must hate porn, which is so untrue, and is not what I think and feel, so people are usually pretty intrigued by my topic and eager to hear more.

**Indy:** How are you looking to take the work you have done at Harvard beyond Cambridge?

**Val:** I am not quite sure what I am doing next year yet, but there are a lot of young women building technologies that deal with this space of sex and sexuality, such as dating apps, different porn platforms online, and vibrator companies. There are a lot of new companies that are dealing with these topics that I would be interested in working with, alongside, or for, but I am still working on post-grad plans. However, I do think that social media, technology and the startup culture is going to be conducive in the next few years to our changing sexual culture and norms as a society, so I look forward to all the incredible ways that technology is about to impact our sexual culture. I want to work somewhere where I am going to ensure, or at least strive to ensure, that technology will be a positive part of people’s sexual experiences.

**Indy:** How has sex culture on Harvard’s campus shaped your views on sex as a whole, if they have changed your views at all?

# INDY SEX ISSUE

Val  
Elefante,  
continued.

**Val:** I think that each of us experiencing Harvard's sexual culture coming from where we come from is super interesting, and I am sure for some people it is a stark contrast from their very conservative upbringing, with events such as Harvard Sex Week, the CARE workshops, and the OSAPR workshops. I think that these are some amazing resources that Harvard has for dealing with sexual issues on campus and help to create a good sexual culture, and so going through that stuff in freshman year especially was great. I went to Harvard Sex Week my freshman year, where they were talking about vibrators and condoms, and found myself dealing with these things that I had never really heard people talk so much about, apart from perhaps when giggling with my friends in high school. Yet here I found these different workshops dealing with issues like consent, porn and masturbation, meaning that in coming to Harvard I was definitely personally (as well as academically) fascinated by Harvard's sexual culture, and it was a big factor when deciding to write my thesis on a similar topic.

The social scene of Harvard is obviously hugely impactful in this conversation; I don't think Harvard's social scene is any better or worse than any other campuses across the country when it comes to this stuff, but it is obviously a complicated issue, especially when it comes to the night-time social scene. It's complicated, and I don't really want to delve into the Final Club argument right now....

**Indy:** If you could change anything about Harvard's sex culture, what would it be?

**Val:** I think the problems we face start before Harvard - I believe sex education in high school is where people are learning most of the stuff regarding sexual ethics, and high school should be targeted as a place where people can think about sex in a critical way, alongside their own sexualities, to come to terms with sex. I just don't think this happens enough in high school. In terms of on campus, I have personally loved my times with the OSAPR and CARE workshops, when you sit in a room of people who are all in it together, as Harvard students; whether in an organization together, or with some other form of connection, there is a level of care that you have for each other. Sitting and talking about these issues, such as how sex has affected us or how Harvard's sex culture has impacted us in different and unique ways is super important for moving forward and improving our campus sex culture. Ultimately, I would say more of that sort of stuff is important on campus.

More generally, I would say people themselves can take responsibility; in the future, if better sex-ed happens, people will be able to talk more openly about this stuff with each other. But first, I think friends should look after each other and be able to think and talk about sex with each other, across gender lines, sexualities, race, class, everything. We are all living in this community together and all hold obligations to look out for each other in all forms of life. In thinking and talking about these things more, we can move toward a campus and societal sexual culture where we look after each other. Whether it's

a person that you're sleeping with or a person that you are walking past on the street, it's important that we are critical, conscious, careful and considerate of each other.

Sex is supposed to be something positive, something that we enjoy, rather than a weapon, so the more that we can make positive sex a part of our dialogues, the more we can improve our sex culture on campus and beyond.

*Mimi Tarrant '21 (ameliatarrant@college.harvard.edu) strongly encourages you to check out Val's Indiegogo page for a short erotic film that she wrote and will be directing, titled "The Way We Are". Go. Donate. Now.*

# INDY SEX ISSUE

## SEX SURVEY

### *Quotes & Highlights*

#### **Tell us your most awkward sexual experience**

- I pulled up to the dude's apartment and he opens the door in just a leather harness.
- During my first college hookup, my partner came on my shirt (that was still on) after I touched his penis for about 5 seconds. When I returned to my room, my roommate asked me if I had jizz on my shirt.
- My "dirty talk" was so bad that my partner started laughing and I was so embarrassed that I cried.
- 2 bottoms don't make a top
- A one time hookup got a nose bleed on me right as we started having sex. His blood all over my face and I didn't even know him
- My boyfriend accidentally left his condom in me and i didn't realize
- One morning, my girlfriend and I woke up early after she slept over in my room and were feeling a particular type of way. Unfortunately my roommate was still in the room and we have a double, so we thought if we turned on the fan it would drown out the noise and it wouldn't wake him up. Yeahhh...probably not the best idea but in the moment it seemed totally fine. A few days afterwards we found out he woke up in the middle of us having sex and just pretended he was asleep.
- First time my ex-girlfriend and I fooled around; she was giving me head and I told her to go deeper, so she did. She then threw up on me. I thought it was funny; she was mortified
- Having anal sex while stoned and shitting massively afterwards with my mans in the same bathroom
- Girl just went full Magikarp on me. Limp dead fish. It was a time.
- Making out with a guy and his lips were too small
- Dressed up like a green mystical character, painted green.

#### **What is the craziest place you have had sex at Harvard?**

- 12 people said in the stacks
- 18 in their own room
- In the accessible bathroom down the hall, her hands on the sink, me hitting it from behind, both of us looking at ourselves fucking in the mirror; oh also maybe oral sex on the banks of the Charles near Weld Boathouse
- Banks of the Charles near Weld Boathouse
- Behind Lamont
- In front of the arts museum
- Science Center classroom
- Science Center Observatory
- Pre-frosh host's bed
- Lamont basement
- The basement of the Office for the Arts
- Boathouse
- The practice room in the basement of Kirkland C
- In your mom
- Grille
- Roommate's bed
- Ticknor Lounge
- Public bathroom in Kirkland's basement. The lock on the door was broken. We had to dive into the stall when someone came in

#### **Tell us about one of the BEST sexual experiences you've had this year**

- Had a really great night with my boyfriend that started with strip poker and wine, then we ended up having super hot kinky sex. Handcuffed and he even got out my vibrator too!<3
- They were all lackluster and equally unmemorable. Sorry!

- Had sex tied up on ecstasy
- Not sexual but the closest I came was sleeping over in the same bed and cuddling with a friend. It was transcendental to be honest.
- A man just finally made me cum... like WHY DID I HAVE TO WAIT SO LONG
- My boyfriend made me orgasm twice. The first time, he only sucked my tits. It was wild.
- Like 45 minutes of foreplay, then we had sex for like 2 hours. It was dope. Also the views were sick because it was in the back of a truck in the mountains... we filled the truck bed with pillows and blankets and yoga mats.

#### **Any other funny or interesting stories you would like to share?**

- I once walked in to my room and caught my roommate sitting on her bed completely topless while eating a popart and scrolling through her phone
- Two out of the three guys I've had sex with on campus are in one of my classes and consistently ask me for pset answers :)
- Doing doggy style so loud that his roommates couldn't look me in the eyes after.
- I lost my anal virginity on my 21st birthday! I was doing Harvard summer school in Denmark and ended up meeting a hot 23-year-old Dane who works as a photographer and does illegal rooftopping/urban exploration stuff. I'm now doing a semester abroad in Denmark and I'm still hooking up with the guy! We basically only have anal these days.
- P.S. Guy got some "fame" in December for climbing the Giza Pyramid and taking a nude photo with a girl up there.
- Got my first internship via Tinder

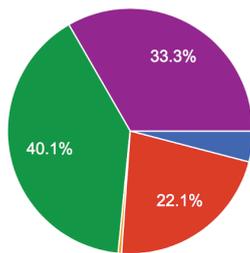
# INDY SEX ISSUE

## SEX SURVEY

*By the Numbers*

What does the term "hook up" mean to you?

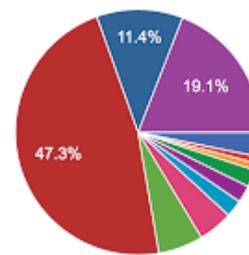
222 responses



- Random dance floor make out
- SEX - one time, one night
- SEX - more than once, more than one night
- Completely context dependent
- Mixture of the above

What is the furthest you have ever gone sexually?

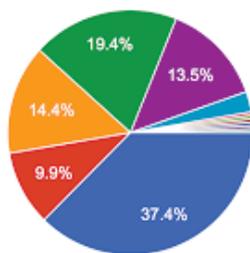
220 responses



- Nothing
- Holding hands
- Cheek kiss
- Mouth kiss with tongue
- Mouth kiss with vertical fondling
- Horizontal fondling
- Manual stimulation of genitals
- Oral stimulation of genitals
- Sex
- Anal
- Freaky shit

What is your relationship status?

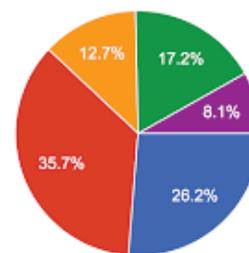
222 responses



- In a serious relationship
- Exclusively seeing someone, not th...
- Not exclusive with anyone, but still...
- Single and ready to mingle!!
- Not actively looking, focusing on ME
- Open relationship
- IDK, frankly
- I wish I knew
- whatever happens happens
- Married
- romantically / sexually involved with someone who is in a non-monogamous relationship
- In a serious polyamorous relationship

How many people have you had sex with in the last school year (from Fall 2018)?

221 responses



- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3-5
- 5+

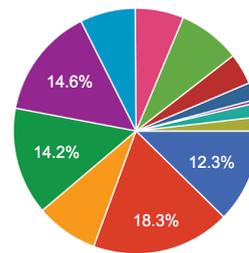
# INDY SEX ISSUE

## SEX SURVEY

*By the Numbers*

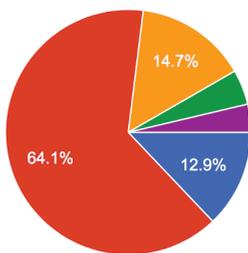
### Total # of Past Partners

219 responses



### Polyamory?

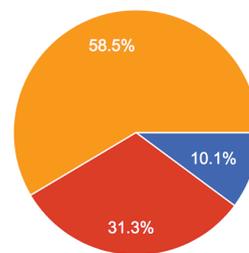
217 responses



- No, I could only have one sexual partner during a given time period
- No, if I'm in a serious relationship with someone then I want to be exclusive
- I'd be open to it
- Yes, I am in/ have been involved in a polyamorous relationship
- I'm confused about what exactly it is

### Have you ever had sex in the Widener stacks?

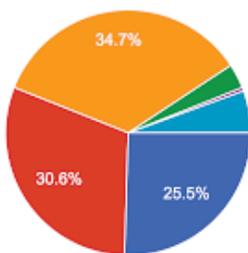
217 responses



- Yes
- No, never doing that
- No, but planning on it

### What is your preferred level of man/woman-scaping?

216 responses



- just a little trim around the edges
- whatever u want
- bare as hell
- landing strip
- waxed once - was horrible never doing again!!!
- allll natural

# INDY SEX ISSUE

## On Loving Self-Love

### *Masturbation and How No One Wants to Talk About It*

By ALAYA AYALA

**J**acking off. Alone time. Wanking. Touching yourself.

Whatever you call it, it's technically known as masturbating. It's healthy, a lot of people do it. It's normal, yet no one wants to talk about it. This is really weird given how often people talk about sex in everyday life and how boldly. It's the subject of jokes, it's exalted in media, it's threaded into advertisements for everything from food to house furniture. Centuries-old literature that has been lauded throughout the ages harps on about sex for pages upon pages.

There's always some shame associated with it, as sex isn't something generally considered to be an acceptable topic during polite conversation. Still, sex is discussed, and people don't shy away from it as much as they do from masturbation. If sex is taboo, masturbating is utterly forbidden, unless the goal is to shame someone for it via joking about it or outright bullying.

If I'm being frank, I'm embarrassed even writing this. Growing up, I remember having literal nightmares about one of my parents or siblings finding out that I masturbated. It's always been this thing that I did for myself when I was stressed, or bored, or just happy and alone. I don't even think I could remember the first time I did it if I were pressed to; it's just something that became normal for me. I know on a surface level that I shouldn't be ashamed of it, especially in 2019 when more and more people are claiming sexuality and all that comes with it as something that is inherently natural and right. That didn't stop the disgust I used to feel about it when I was younger, or the fear I feel now, writing this and knowing that I'm publishing it somewhere where my family might read it.

In high school, I remember my group of

friends being really forthright when it came to talking about sex and sexuality. We were open to discussing masturbation pretty regularly, which is odd for a bunch of high school students, even if we did self-identify as the "weird ones" a lot of the time. We discussed these things with each other because we didn't feel like we could talk about them at home, for whatever reason. For me, it was because the thought of talking about masturbation with my mom made me shudder, and still does to this day even though we discuss sex pretty regularly.

I've tried to sit down and think about why it makes me so ashamed and fearful many times, and especially now that I'm no longer living at home. Sometimes I attribute it to the fact that it's something I do alone. Other times I think it's because I'm scared of what other people will say, that they'll think I'm disgusting, which is one of my biggest fears when it comes to leaving the house. I used to be convinced it was sinful and that God would strike me down where I stood if I ever told anyone about it. I'm not sure today if my hesitance to talk about it with friends is because of these reservations, or just one of them, or a combination of mine and those of whoever I'm talking to. I just know that I haven't discussed masturbating out loud with anyone except my boyfriend since high school, and that's ridiculous to me.

If we can have school-sponsored forums on safe sex and how to safely engage in kinky sex, why not masturbation? Sex Week and Sex Weekend are excellent for teaching students not to be afraid of sexual relationships with other people, but there hasn't been an event about masturbating since 2017.

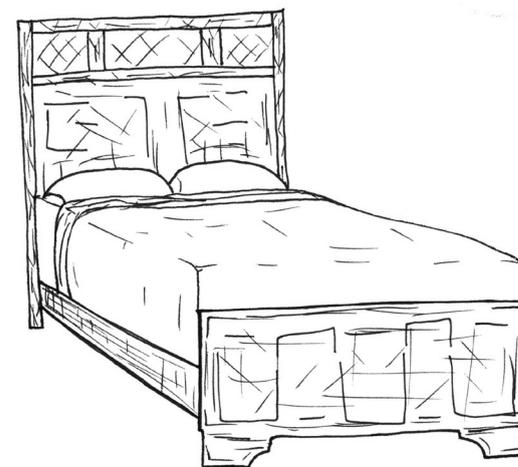
For me, masturbating, while it is something that I'm terrified to talk about, is also an action that has inspired a lot of love for my own body over the years. It's taught me to know what I like when I'm having sex with other people. It's

also helped me explore the different avenues of my sexuality by letting me figure out what turns me on without the pressure of another person being in the room with me. I like sex, but I love masturbating -- and that is something that I wish wasn't so hard to write down.

There's no safer sex than sex with yourself, and I really encourage whoever is reading this to give it a shot if you haven't already. You might not like it, or you may really, really love it. Either way, you'll learn something about your body and what it wants from sex, and that information is invaluable when it comes to forming a healthy relationship, whether it's with yourself or with someone else.

Just make sure when you do try it, that you have plenty of time to get comfortable and be alone. There's truly nothing more terrifying than the thought of a roommate waltzing into your thin-walled room while you're scrambling to hide your slightly-too-loud vibrator from sight.

*Alaya Ayala '21 (alaya\_ayala@college.harvard.edu) is a big fan of self love.*



**Natalie Sicher '21**

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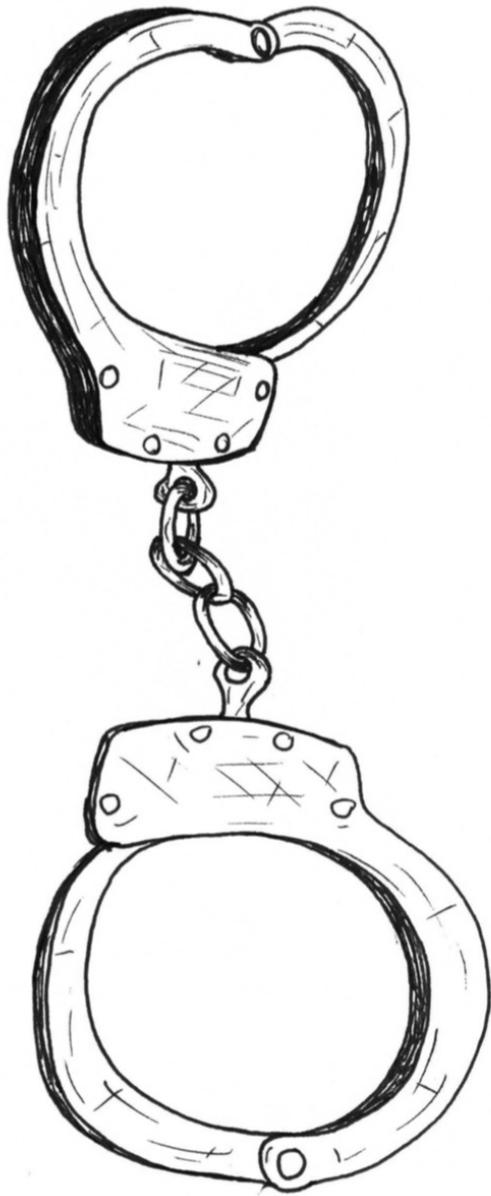
# INDY SEX ISSUE

## Securing the Double Legacy

*Insight into Harvard Freshman Dating Culture*

By JAYCEE YEGHER &  
GRAHAM WALTER

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Natalie Sicher '21

It's a pretty safe assumption that most of us are really here to find a match and create a double legacy. I mean all of you have at least said it jokingly and know that there is definitely a little bit of sincere intent behind the words.

Coming to Harvard, we all had some expectations. Our pre-fresh minds may not have even known about the value of double legacy, but the prospect of being constantly surrounded by thousands of peers is enough to make us wonder: what's in store for the next four years?

For upperclassmen, these expectations have been addressed and possibly forgotten, so, while it is fresh on their mind, we surveyed some freshmen about their own expectations of the Harvard dating scene now that they have had a full year to participate. They told us what their expectations before coming to Harvard were and how they felt after a year here.

After a survey of some freshmen, we found that about half of those surveyed responded that they expected to find a romantic partner. The average age for women to get married right now is 27, and for men it's 26; in 1990 it was 22 and 23, and in 1960, it was 20 and 22. On average, as the age of marriage grows older, especially among academics, getting involved in serious relationships become less of a priority. It seems more likely that you'll meet your life partner long after you graduate. So why waste the time actually getting to know someone, when you can focus on

your career instead?

The pressures of finding the love of your life around this time are very real, especially when talk of "cuffing season" seems to roll around...every season. Some students have expressed that they feel potential dating prospects are too career minded, stating that Harvard students tend to forgo spending time experiencing relationships in favor of resume building activities. One student in particular left us with a few words of wisdom: "growth as a person is just as important as resume growth."

Other students found the challenging dichotomy in the Harvard dating scene between the mature expectations and still developing nature of students; one student stated, "I expected both the people and the environment to be more adult-like but I feel like we're still kids."

And finally one freshman left us with a parting wish: we need more hot people.

*Jaycee Yegher '21 (jayceeyegher@college.harvard.edu) and Graham Walter '21 (grahamwalter@college.harvard.edu) have already found a double legacy in each other.*

# INDY SEX ISSUE

## On Polyamory *A word--- or, a few words--- about polyamory*

By AIDAN FITZSIMONS

I think I realized I was polyamorous near the end of last term. It had been a wild term, and I had been having a lot of sex, with a lot of different people. I had been absolutely addicted to Tinder, and I increasingly loved both the thrill of becoming intimate with someone new and the pleasure that comes with cultivating and deepening an existing relationship. For a while, I simply thought of myself as a bit of a slut, something to feel guilty about; I chalked it all up to a high libido, an unresolved psychological need to be enormously loved, and my mimetic entanglement with Walt Whitman. Then, near the end of the term, I started meeting people through this weird network, people who really blew my mind, who were uniquely brilliant, interesting, exciting, and beautiful. My romantic side came out swinging, and these romances felt much, much deeper than sex; they were with people who I knew I would hang out with whether or not we were sexual together (although I also wanted to be sexual with them). I found myself thinking “Yeah, I could honestly marry someone like this.” While home for winter break, after casually sleeping with a 30-year-old polyamorous programmer in Providence who explained polyamory to me after taking me to a kink dungeon, I realized that I could marry, or at least love and live with, a *lot* of people like that. I started entertaining fantasies of being a part of the coolest “polycule” ever a decade from now, experimenting with boundary-pushing love like a 21st-century Simone de Beauvoir.

In my head, then, I started thinking of myself as polyamorous. It explained so much about how I felt about love, and so perfectly. Love is more infinite and more powerful than any social construction, including monogamy. What we think of as natural monogamy is highly conditioned by historical, social, and political-economic forces -- for example, the idea of a wife as private property to be traded for a dowry. The divorce rate in our society peaks four years after marriage, due in part to the biology of sexual attraction, which is designed to keep a couple together just long enough for the baby to be able to walk on its

own. Beyond that, we are essentially designed to have as many babies with as many people as we can. My desire for multiple romantic partners was not an evil thing, but a biologically understandable one. Of course, this doesn't invalidate the very real monogamous feelings that most people have; it just validates the very real polyamorous feelings that I have as a sincere alternative. When I told someone I loved them, I really meant it, regardless of my lack of desire to own or be owned by them in an exclusive relationship. I have truly loved many, many, many people in my life, and often they overlapped; loving people is my primary motivator and value; it's something I think about philosophically and something I practice. After realizing I was genuinely polyamorous, I felt free -- I could love beyond constructs; I could love beyond jealousy; I could love beyond one person, without detracting at all from my love for any one person, or at least in an ideal world.

However, we live in a messy world. Our society is still not very conducive to polyamory. I discovered this in the best way possible -- by falling in love. Near the end of January, before we returned to school, I had been texting this wicked cute girl from Tinder for weeks, and we clearly had chemistry. I told her up front, before we ever met, that I was polyamorous, and she said we could work it out. On the night of a snowstorm, I spontaneously drove to Boston to see her, and we had the most insanely romantic 36 hours of my life. Her eyes were magical, her smile was bright, her mind was intelligent, and the sex was, honestly, the best that I've ever experienced. She felt the same way, and we both instantly knew it after the long, transcendental first time (of six in that period). We were absolutely crazy in love. For the first month of this term, I was seeing her a few times every week, way more than I saw even my best friend. Quickly, I realized that this was my most serious relationship since high school.

She was monogamous, though, and we had a few deep talks about our relationship, eventually settling on an open relationship. But when I told her, about a month later, that I had slept with three other people over that

period and over break, she was deeply hurt and cried a lot. We talked through the night, trying to figure it out. She felt like she wasn't “enough,” and it was so hard to explain to her that there was no “enough” and never would be, and one person would never be it. And I tried to get her to see that there were other human beings involved, who also felt love and would be hurt to lose me, and that love didn't have to be a finite resource the way time was, and that she had most of my time as well as my love, especially while I was here in Boston. She looked at some websites to try to figure things out; one website, MoreThanTwo.com, was particularly useful, and had an article about poly-mono relationships. The drive to seek out new relationships, which in her monogamous mind had turned off when she found me, never turned off in me; it was something I couldn't change about myself without mutilation. If I had cheated or lied, then my polyamory might have been less legitimate (there are people who claim polyamory to simply get away with hurting a partner), but because I had been honest from the start, she recognized the legitimacy of how I felt. It was difficult to find a compromise; after all, one person would end up changing who they were. We are still together and happier than ever, although she has made more sacrifices than I had to, and I am grateful to her for her willingness to change. In fact, she slept with someone else last week, and I was so, so happy for her. That feeling is called “compersion,” the happiness you feel for your partner when they enjoy love from another partner, or your “metamour.” Now, I have a girlfriend, as well as my polyamorous identity, and there are a few other people I still love scattered around the country who I have not had to cut from my life. I truly love those people, but I love my girlfriend more. It's hard to qualify or quantify these things; the “muchness” of love is simply so much that it's worth putting faith into, and not worth attempting to regulate or label or compare. Polyamorous relationships are hard, but they can work, with communication, honesty, and love.

*Aidan Fitzsimons '20 (aidan\_fitzsimons@college.harvard.edu) probably thinks you're cute ;)*

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# INDY SEX ISSUE

## Wearing Your Sexuality on Your Sleeve

*The Seventh Installment of a Weekly Fashion Column*

By GRACE TWOREK

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Sex. People love to talk about it. People hate to talk about it. But what so many people don't realize is that we wear sex. One may ask, how?

Through the clothes we put on our body, we have the ability to express our sense of sexuality in so many ways. No matter how much or how little we choose to express our sexuality through our wardrobe, the most important part is that it is OUR choice. The world, similar to fashion is ever changing and as society reinvents itself through new norms, fashion evolves and becomes a place where people can experiment with their style and began to understand their own sexuality.

I cannot even begin to count all the times my mom has said to me, "Go up and change. That outfit is completely inappropriate" or "Would your father approve of that?". And I am not here to tell you that the skin-tight tank top and low-rise yoga pants I wanted to wear to school in sixth grade were in any way shape or form the move. I am here to tell you that as a twenty-year-old, I am tired of hearing people tell me what I'm wearing is too revealing or not appropriate for a certain occasion.

I express my sexuality through my clothes quite often, but to me, sexuality is also expressed through self-confidence and in order for me to feel

like my best self, I have to feel confident in what I put on my body. Sometimes, that means crop tops, leather skirts, or thigh-high boots (Sorry mom and dad). As college students, understanding our own sexualities and learning to accept the expression of sexuality through fashion can be very complicated and confusing, but by learning to express yourself through fashion, this process can not only be a lot easier, but more fun, too.

Sex sells and the fashion industry is catching on to this. The fashion industry has been evolving into an even more accepting space as it ages, and with this sense of acceptance, more and more people have felt comfortable and confident enough to step out of the box with their style and take chances with their clothes that may be regarded as 'sexier' than the norm. Whether it's going braless or even incorporating lingerie pieces as part of your everyday outfit, these trends are not only becoming merely accepted by society, but rather encouraged and supported by the fashion world.

One of my favorite things about fashion is that it allows you to express how you feel on a day to day basis. Sometimes this means wearing bright colors to pair with your bubbly mood, athleisure to ease your inner athlete at

heart, or rocking a leather dress and a red lip because you feel like channeling your inner minx. No matter what, the world of fashion accepts you for you and encourages individuals of all ages to explore and accept their own sexuality regardless of what you choose to dress your body in.

*Grace Tworek '21 (gtworek@college.harvard.edu) loves writing about fashion for the Indy.*

# INDY SEX ISSUE

## Rêverie

*For C.*

The Athenians enjoyed  
The strategic luxury of the acropolis.  
Likely not by chance –  
But by design they huddled  
The heart of ancient leadership about  
One tremendous stone.

Crowned with their temple,  
The daily penance was  
Up a mighty slope which I presume  
Tested the fortitude of the pious,  
And children's courage,  
Among the other things.

As an economist, I worry myself  
Often with spillovers:  
The unseen consequence on the other –  
The unplanned and,  
The eventuality.

This “other thing” that Athens –  
In a singular wisdom capable of:  
Cleisthenes' birth,  
And provisions for the good of all people  
(Which liberal time has hurriedly expanded) –  
May well have deliberately summoned  
In building their great hearth of stone,  
I found in you.

As a short man, I  
Grew shamefully cordial with  
Widener's height and age.  
By my third year library was a common noun,  
And I feared I might scale its columns that  
By then to me were foliage  
As shrubs, or trees.

Our greatest secret here and  
Yes, the weakness too, is that  
When nothing is out of reach,  
No majesty persists.

*Who is God to fear but his own image?*

I like to think Athens wished  
To look up each day, as I did  
On the one where we met,  
Where I was struck down by  
Your pitfall eyes, reductive to  
Men like me at any angle,  
But head on and wide open  
The oubliette swallows whole.

I am sure Socrates knew too how  
The consequential sight  
Can wind you edge-bound,  
Tumbling heart over head  
Listless into the void.  
Inevitably all concerns but hers fall away:

*Enduring romance of the obliteration of the soul!*

My own fall  
Caught only by your voice  
Calling me into the Egyptian Wing,  
And by my own laugh,  
So startling  
And violent  
When you twirled off my hand  
It shook the skin from an overpriced man and  
I stood shorter, again.

We build our cities about idols like you  
To which eyes rise and fall and  
On which humble swords are cut –  
Trimming us down to size and  
Giving us room to live.

- J.L.E.

# INDY SEX ISSUE

## Body Talk

*Thoughts & Conversations About Hypersexualizing Athletes*

By ALAYA AYALA

If there's any group of students on campus that know a lot about bodies and how they work, it is pre-med students and athletes. Pre-med students need to know these things because it will ease them into medical school where they can relearn it all when the time comes. Athletes, on the other hand, need to know about their bodies for more immediate and practical reasons. Their bodies are what allow them to engage in sports, and without knowing how they look, feel, and what they need, they'd be floundering in the dark for ways to get better at doing what they love.

It makes sense, then, that athletes may have more awareness of what their bodies look like and how they are perceived by others on a regular basis. It also makes sense that they would be aware when their bodies are being perceived in a way they don't necessarily like, such as in an outright sexual way. Athletic bodies are constantly in the public eye as they play sports. They are scrutinized and praised, made fun of, exalted, and unfortunately, sexualized in excess.

This holds especially true for female athletes, although it does also apply to male athletes. As sex gains ever more traction in the media, more athletes find themselves subject to body shaming and perversion.

Think of the way you've seen athletes like Serena Williams and David Beckham portrayed in media. A simple google search will likely turn up articles about their stats alongside sports magazines ranking them by hotness. It's clear that athletics has been something that people have learned to consume over time, but the degree to which people put emphasis on the attractiveness and sexuality of an athlete's body has grown to an uncomfortable point.

The Indy seized the opportunity to discuss this topic with Brooke Istvan '19. She is on the Women's Volleyball team at Harvard and offered some of her thoughts on body image within collegiate athletic spheres.

**Indy:** What are some ways that you have perceived college athletes being made into overtly sexual objects?

**Brooke:** In my experience, discussion of the

opposite gender in circles of athletes is usually much more physical than in circles of non-athletes. My team and I might talk about how hot a guy's body is, or how attractive a certain guy is because he is so good at his sport. I have also been around male athletes as they objectify female athletes, reaching consensus on what are the most attractive teams and who in particular are attractive athletes. I believe this driven by people's knowledge of each other and each other's physical performance in the athlete community where a high premium is put on physical fitness and athletic performance.

**Indy:** Do you think the hyper-sexualization of athletic bodies impacts the way they perform in sports or in academics?

**Brooke:** I think there is a large emphasis put on body image especially for female athletes. I think the positive to this is that women are taught that it is attractive to look fit and athletic. This idea promotes a healthy lifestyle and generally good values. It can inspire confidence in a lot of athletic women. But, I believe that most of the impact is negative, because some young athlete women care so much about what they look like, they are disincentivized from lifting/training hard and eating what they need to fuel their bodies. These women worry about "getting too big." This negatively impacts the athlete's health and performance. Even if the athlete is healthy enough to compete, she could be stronger and better contribute to her team if she makes that her priority above fitting a societally set image of an attractive woman.

**Indy:** Do you think it impacts them outside of sports too?

**Brooke:** I think this can have negative impacts on the woman's health and confidence in the long run. When women get too obsessed with their body image, they run the risk of developing body dysmorphia and developing issues such as eating disorders. They also may suffer from a lack of confidence as they transition from no longer being an athlete. I think the focus female athletes place on

body image has the scary potential to shift focus away from things beyond athletics and body image that really matter, like positive relationships and academic or professional pursuits. I don't know how founded this is but I worry that if a woman is an attractive female athlete and becomes a sexualized object, she will feel the other aspects of her as a person are less important. This is really antiquated and plays into the patriarchal idea that women exist just to please men while men are the ones who go forth, have a career, and contribute to society.

**Indy:** Why do you think people perceive the college athlete as something sexual?

**Brooke:** I think that college athletes may be perceived as something sexual because of their athletic physique. Men and women are generally attracted to more fit looking individuals. I believe this is part of our biology; it comes from a "survival of the fittest" mentality. As people are looking for mates, they look for the ones that seem like they will create healthy strong offspring and help them survive to maturity. I think this sort of primitive attraction is especially strong among athletes because of the physical fitness of both men and women's bodies.

In circles of non-athletes I have noticed that physical fitness and performance matter less, but they can be replaced with other things of value to individuals in that community. People find it attractive when someone is really smart, has a great job, or is really good at a certain instrument. These things are not that different than being really fit, they reflect the values of that community. I do worry, however, that the emphasis on physical fitness can distort body image and have some longer term negative impacts on athletes, especially female athletes.

*Alaya Ayala '21 (alaya\_ayala@college.harvard.edu) hopes people will one day move away from hyping up how "hot" athletes are.*

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# the independent



**It's All About the Birds and Bees**

By NATALIE SICHER