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# the eye



THE MYTH OF  
THE COLLEGE SWEETHEART  
*by Meredith Foster*





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# THE MYTH OF THE COLLEGE SWEETHEART

Where do love and marriage fit into Columbia's dating culture? pg. 07

*by Meredith Foster*  
*illustrations by Maddy Kloss*  
*cover illustration by Cindy Pan*

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In eighth grade I was briefly smitten with this kid named Jordan. He was a class-clown type in my algebra class who made eye contact with me a few times, which was basically all I needed.

After he transferred out of my class, I asked my friend Lauren to send me dispatches about the funny things he would do in Spanish class. Every day, she'd hand me a note on college-ruled paper:

"We sang Selena and he was really loud during the 'Oh, oh, baby' part."

"He made a mirror in art class for his two sisters. One of them has an ice skater on it."

"He didn't talk today because we had silent reading."

Passing notes about a crush seems pretty juvenile. But in that wonderful moment just before Facebook and widespread texting, that's what a shy teenager had to do to get details on a potential interest. It's what I imagine most college students had to do, too.

I don't pass notes anymore, but I stalk people on Facebook regularly and perform intricate text-message dances, which are basically the modern equivalent of note passing. My macro-scale

romantic life, I imagine, is that of a pretty typical college student: rare moments of real intimacy between little somethings that are mostly nothing.

This week's lead story by Meredith Foster takes a closer look at the constantly shifting dating patterns of college students. Technology's changed the way we communicate with our love interests, but economic and social pressures have had an impact on whether or not we engage in romance at all. Columbia students reflect and respond to bigger societal changes in their romantic relationships, but often in ways you wouldn't expect.

I never talked to Jordan. He goes to Brigham Young University now. Lauren, always one to keep a deal, recently e-mailed me a screencap of his Facebook profile. It had just been updated to reflect the languages he speaks: Spanish, English, and "love." This Valentine's Day, I take solace in knowing that at least someone out there has got it figured out. Well played, Jordan.

Amanda Cormier  
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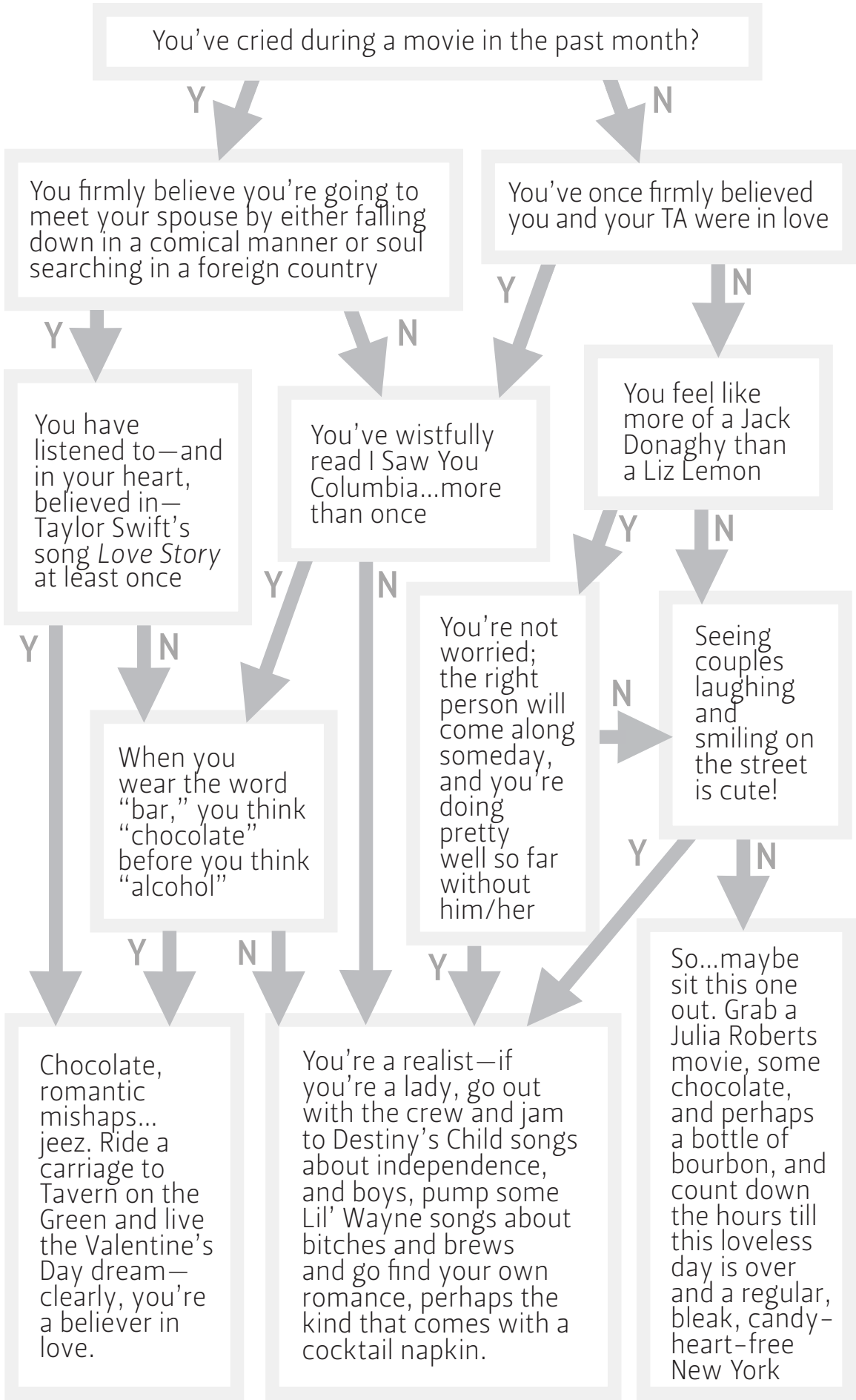
GO WITH THE FLOW

# HOW YOU SHOULD SPEND VALENTINE'S DAY

BY MARGARET BOYKIN AND ASHTON COOPER

Valentine's Day can be a source of anxiety and pressure for the average college student regardless of whether or not they're in a relationship. Should

you and your friends exchange gifts in lieu of a significant other? Should you take a risk and go on a blind date, awkwardly charged with Valentine's Day energy? Or should you just stay home? We'll make it easy for you.



EDITOR'S PICKS

## SOFT CORE

In the spirit of Valentine's Day and things hideously inappropriate, **we asked the editors to describe their thoughts on American Apparel's new "watercolor" advertisements.** Some are calling it soft-core porn in soft pastels, but the brand seems to believe that stenciled or painted nudity is not only art, but an effective marketing device. We're not sure exactly what kind of market they're looking for.



COMPILED BY MARGARET BOYKIN



# WHAT'S IN

from Rice Dream to Wonder Bread, a tour of Columbia's culinary caves

ADP



ART HISTORY DEPT



CULINARY SOCIETY



JOCKS



# YOUR FRIDGE

photos by Tala Akhavan, Maria Castex, and Rose Donlon

SPECTATOR OFFICE



SORORITY



PRE-MED



AEP







# 16 Going On 27

how the *skins* controversy confuses depiction with advocacy

BY KATIE REITBERG  
ILLUSTRATION BY LIZ LEE

A 17-year-old boy throws a wild house party, gets locked out by a squatter sleeping in his bathtub, and walks to school naked. This is what the Parents Television Council calls “the most dangerous show for teens.” MTV’s *Skins*, an adaptation of the acclaimed British teen dramedy, has censors and advertisers outraged over its depiction of teens engaging in sexual acts and drug use. Since its premiere on January 17, there has been constant media coverage, as sponsors soon dropped out and the PTC accused the show of violating child pornography laws. Vice president of corporate communications at MTV, Nathaniel Brown, said, “MTV stands by the show.” All this controversy has only helped to spread the hype, and there have already been skits about *Skins* on *Saturday Night Live* and *Funny or Die*. PETA has even volunteered to fill the sponsor void with an ad featuring Pink and Ricky Gervais as the voices of an alligator and rabbit, respectively, who make the case that “exotic skins and fur belong on their original owners,” despite the fact that in the third episode, Chris is shown giving drugs to his goldfish.

Although the UK version of *Skins* has been aired on BBC America since 2008, news of the MTV adaptation has caused a virtual media frenzy in the US. But *Skins* isn’t the first U.S. teen drama to deal with issues like drugs and sex, and it certainly won’t be the last. So why have sponsors like Taco Bell, GM, Wrigley, and Subway pulled out? Professor Evangeline Morphos, who teaches a course called “Television as a Dramatic Medium” at the School of the Arts, says, “I think the threshold tends to be the depiction of high school sexuality. Except the flip side is, it’s nothing that isn’t being dealt with on *Gossip Girl*. Is it that we tend to see this happening in a kind of upper-class situation, so it’s a little bit

like *Sex and the City*, and we accept that as a kind of fantasy.” If MTV’s unscripted reality shows, like *Teen Mom*, have taught us anything, it’s that these issues aren’t going to simply go away if we ignore them. Why do we watch adults and reality stars on *Jersey Shore* behaving this way, but condemn a scripted show like *Skins*? Why do we focus on censoring fictional events, when *Skins* might address real issues beneath its over-the-top persona?

## SOME FEAR THE RAWNESS OF THE ORIGINAL WILL BE GLAMORIZED.

“I think this is what’s admirable about what they’re trying to do,” says Morphos. “There has to be a way to jump-start the discussion for kids, which is not ‘I am doing this.’ But if you can say ‘Effy is doing this, what do we think about it,’—then it really has a very positive impact. I think we’re at a point, and we have been for a long time, where we confuse depiction with advocacy and that’s clearly what has happened with *Skins*.” Of course, not all teens are doing what the characters on *Skins* do, and the producers of the show are not endorsing this behavior. “I think having a wide range of work out there on teen life available, versus only certain or prevalent forms of portrayal, is always preferable,” says Anthropology Professor Margaret Vail. In the same way that *Glee* has been credited with helping to promote tolerance through its representation of teen sexuality, co-creator Bryan Elsley, in a statement to MTV News, says the UK *Skins* “has drawn praise for its portrayal of mental health issues and explorations of bereavement, sexuality, bullying and gender stereotyping.”

Fans of the UK *Skins* are concerned that Ameri-

can television can’t handle such a gritty show. Some fear the rawness of the original will be glamorized, and the contradictions and complexities of the characters all organized into neat stereotypes. However, the American show was received acclaim for its commitment to authenticity, with young writers, an unknown cast (who are the same ages as the characters they portray), and a teen advisory panel. *Skins* has always been about celebrating young voices, as the original idea came from Elsley’s son, Jamie Brittain, when he was 19 years old. The characters were inspired by real people in the young writers’ lives, as well as a short story Brittain wrote when he was only 15 years old.

The issues that *Skins* has encountered could be a preview of the increased corporate censorship that will result in years to come or perhaps an uncensored future for teen television. The Internet provides a way around censorship for teen shows under fire. The WB series *The Bedford Diaries* (filmed at Barnard), which revolved around college students in a sexuality seminar and was produced by Morphos, posted uncensored episodes online. Maybe MTV would be better off distributing *Skins* online, in order to circumvent restrictions.

It’s still too early to judge, but Elsley promises the story lines will start out similar and then become very different once the American writers have time to explore their options. They’ve already made the choice to replace the tap-dancing Maxxie with the lesbian cheerleader Tea, and the dreamy Cassie to the deadpan Cadie. Even Tony has been softened a bit for U.S. audiences.

Alex Klein, a junior in CC, whose band Night Eyes can be heard in episodes four and seven, says, “I’m going to keep watching because I’m curious.” Indeed, everyone is curious to see what writers will come up with next. Heroin overdoses? Polyamory? Multiple homicide? Only time will tell if *Skins* will change how American viewers watch and censor television. ●



# THE MYTH OF THE COLLEGE SWEETHEART

where do love and marriage fit in Columbia's dating culture?

by Meredith Foster

illustrations by Maddy Kloss

During every student's first few days at Columbia, he's introduced to the legend of Alma Mater's owl: the first Columbia College boy of every class to find the owl hidden in Alma Mater's robes will graduate valedictorian and marry a Barnard girl. This legend promises one lucky Columbia man academic success and the chance at true love.

However, much has changed since Alma Mater took her throne in 1903. And while this legend may date back to a time when Columbia had an all-male student population and gay relationships existed undercover, it raises the question even today—do Columbia students still count getting married as part of a dreamlike end to a Columbia education? Or in an increasingly competitive society, is a chance at true love no longer possible when graduating at the top of the class?





#### A Brief History of Dating

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median marriage age in 1960 was 22.8 for men and 20.3 for women. If we assume both parties were going to college (although men did outnumber women by 60 percent at four-year institutions), women would have been planning their weddings during their sophomore year, and men their senior year. So what turned college years from the time to settle down into the time for casual, no-strings-attached hook-ups that students know today?

Professor Sylvie Honig, who teaches a class called “Adolescent Society,” in Columbia University’s sociology department studies how teenagers have changed their perceptions of marriage throughout history. Honig says that for the first half of the century, “marriage was really an economic arrangement. There was sort of a separation between love and marriage. It was much more utilitarian and it was based on an economic arrangement—a pool of resources, division of labor in terms of bread-winning and homemaking. But as the century progressed, culture changed—extended education, more peer influences, things like that—attributed to the fact there was a rise in what is called the ‘pure relationship.’”

A “pure relationship” is based on a connection and is formed around love, self-sufficiency, and personal fulfillment.

The “pure relationship,” as a dominant mode of relationship, started to disintegrate in the late ’60s and ’70s. The reason? The ’60s and ’70s were

### “EVEN IF I REALLY LOVED SOMEONE HERE, I WOULDN’T BE WITH HER.”

when women’s rights took center stage. Women started working higher-paying jobs, and could support themselves. Honig says that this shift was key. “Women [were] in a different position in terms of what they need out of a marriage,” she says. Because women were no longer financially dependent on men, marriage became something that women could wait for.

However, at the same time, another big culture shift was arising. With the widespread release of the birth control pill in 1960, women were given more secure opportunities to have sex outside of marital bonds. La Salle University professor Kathleen Bogle writes in her book, *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, that with the pill “intercourse became thought of as a sign of intimacy and physical pleasure rather than merely a means of reproduction.” Men and women were able to have sex more freely. Marriage became something to do whenever it felt right—whether that was at 30, 40, or 60.

Janet Gold, BC ’71, managing editor of *OnEarth* (the magazine of the Natural Resources Defense Counsel) and Richard Levine, CC ’71, vice president of editorial operations at Condé Nast Pub-

lications, met at Columbia in the middle of this cultural revolution. The Columbia riots of 1968 occurred during the spring of their first year. Gold says that the dating culture was similar to the current one—most of her and Levine’s friends were not in relationships in college, and almost all were engaging in casual hook-ups.

However, Gold believes it was more complicated than that. “I think people were screwing around a lot, but hoping for relationships,” she says. Does this hold true today?

#### What is a Relationship?

“What do you mean? How do you define a relationship?” Bruno Esquen, a junior in CC, says. The question of whether one is in one is difficult to answer.

When asked the same question, Heema Sharma, a sophomore at Barnard, answers, “No, I’m functionally single.” The question is about as useless as asking, “Are you smart?” or “Are you athletic?” Answers are intentionally qualified because the terms “relationship,” “smart,” and “athletic” do not mean the same thing to almost any two people. And while Esquen’s answer is probably what most Columbia students think to themselves, when their family members ask them the same question around Valentine’s Day, most students will end up drawing an official distinction—“Yes, I am in a relationship,” or “No, I am single.” However, the question becomes: Is it ever suitable to say “yes” while in college?



Like many students, Esquen, who is a swimmer on the Columbia varsity team, feels that the term “relationship” doesn’t apply to college couples. He says, “I don’t know how you describe a relationship. If I am in a relationship, I say not officially. When you are in college, you are exclusive, but you are not really boyfriend and girlfriend.”

However, Esquen is “unofficially” seeing three people. Esquen says, “Right now I am hooking up with someone. She’s a junior, she’s my friend from freshman year. ... I saw her two weeks ago, we hooked up, and we have seen each other every day. But at the same time, I also have been making out with another friend. At the same time, I like another girl. She’s a freshman.”

Many students share Esquen’s philosophy that serious relationships don’t work—or belong—in college. Students see college as a time for casual hook-ups. A recent study by professor Paula England of Stanford University reports that, among 19 universities, 72 percent of students had hooked up at least once by their senior year of college. According to England’s study, one third of student hook-ups extended only to kissing, one third to touching and oral sex, and one third to intercourse.

“Even if I really loved someone here, I wouldn’t be with her,” says Esquen. While this comment may make it seem that the hook-up and the relationship have nothing in common, this isn’t quite true.



#### Where do relationships start?

The idea of meeting one’s soul mate at a bar or club may sound unlikely to most students. When heading to a bar or a party, a student doesn’t usually give off the impression that he or she is looking for a serious relationship. Instead, it is usually interpreted that he or she wants something casual, a “no-strings-attached” relationship. However, many modern Columbia relationships show that the respective domain of the hook-up and the relationship overlap, and students do find love in unlikely places.

Elizabeth Lundberg, a senior at Barnard, says she met Cary Aldrich, CC ’10, at Bourbon St., a bar on 80th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. They had gone to the same high school but didn’t meet until Lundberg’s junior year at Barnard. Now, they are engaged.

Lundberg says that most of her friends at Barnard who are in long-term Columbia relationships met their boyfriends the same way she and Aldrich met—at bars like O’Connell’s and Havana Central.

This is also true of Simon Jerome and J.T. Ramseur, both sophomores in CC, who met at a First Friday dance. When asked how much later they started officially dating, Jerome responded, “Twelve hours.” He says, “We both just sort of went for it, and it has been great.” They have now been together for over a year.

Long and serious relationships can exist on college campuses—places where many believe that such relationships are impossible. Further-

more, these relationships also show that there is not a clear line between those who are partying and hooking up, and those who are searching for relationships.

Lundberg says that she has always been a long-term relationship type. Aldrich, on the other hand, wasn’t so during his time at Columbia.

### “BECAUSE WE’RE IN THE CITY, PEOPLE HOOK UP AND THEN EVENTUALLY WANT TO SETTLE DOWN.”

When Aldrich came to Columbia in 2006, he went out a lot and had a few casual flings with girls on campus. However, by Aldrich’s senior year, he was no longer enjoying the casual party scene. He said, “Because we’re in the city, people hook up and then eventually want to settle down. I was getting sick of all this hooking up meaninglessness. [Settling down with Lundberg] was just right.”

A similar series of events happened to the boyfriend of one of Lundberg’s friends. He hooked up a lot in the beginning of his time at Columbia, got sick of hooking up, and then settled down with her friend. Interestingly, Lundberg’s friend was also one of the girls Aldrich hooked up with



in the beginning. “I had a friend who was hooking up with this guy for a long time ... and then finally, senior year, he decided to settle down, and they have been happy ever since,” says Lundberg. Aldrich agrees, saying that this is common with a lot of guys he knows from Columbia.

## “I’M EXTREMELY PICKY. I’M NOT LOOKING FOR A FLING. I’M LOOKING FOR SOMETHING LONGER-TERM.”

### The Columbia Girl and Boy

Gossip about greek life seems to perpetuate the notion that college is a time for casual, noncommittal relationships. “The guys from my fraternity, they don’t believe in relationships,” Esquen says.

Esquen says he has a friend who will never date. “Actually, I remember he did like someone,” he says. “He is the type of guy who hooks up with a girl and never texts her the next day—that’s a rule. If not, she will think he is leading her on. But he hooked up with this girl, and she was really cute and he asked me ‘Should I text her, because I really like her?’ and I was like ‘Yeah,’ so he texted her. And what happened? She rejected him. So I think he would [date a girl at Columbia], but [it] is really hard. The only time he actually decided to try, he got rejected. That is probably something that sticks in your mind, same thing with me. I have tried trusting girls and they have disappointed me. I am less willing to try and commit myself [in the future].”

However, being afraid of disappointment doesn’t seem to be the only reason men and women aren’t opting for relationships at Columbia.

The principal reason students identify when asked why they aren’t in relationships is that they haven’t met anyone “right.” “I’m not in a serious relationship right now because I just haven’t found what I’ve been looking for, as clichéd as that sounds,” says Sharma. “There is no one who really captures my eye, so I guess I’m ‘still searching.’ ... I’m extremely picky. I’m not looking for a fling. I’m looking for something longer-term, so I’m not looking to just rush into something.”

Meanwhile, Esquen said that the guys he knows “don’t really want to be in a relationship with anyone from Columbia. They just think they don’t respect those girls.”

Esquen’s opinion of potential dates at Columbia is polarized. “There are two types of girls at Columbia—there are the girls who go out to frat parties and the girls that don’t go out,” he says. “And I think those are the girls I want to meet. You know what I am saying, because those are the girls that are worth it, worth my time. But I never get to meet them. ... I have been in classes with really smart girls who are really cute, but I have never seen them out.”

For many Columbia students, settling down with someone who is less than perfect does not

seem like a very good option. They hold out, waiting for the good-looking and intelligent person of their dreams.

In response to the question whether students are more practical about picking out partners now than they were in the past, Rosalind Rosenberg, a professor of history at Barnard College, responded, “Practicality counted far more a century ago than it does today. The relative affluence of modern American society has made the French mathematician Blaise Pascal’s observation truer than ever: ‘Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait pas. (The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know).’”

Honig agrees, saying that this is also reflected in student’s ideals of marriage. “I just spoke with this woman who is finding is that, in general, men and women have the same ideals about marriage, they are both looking for egalitarian marriages,” she says. Ideally, men and women both want their marriages to be 50-50. They want to split the housework 50-50, they want to work 50-50, and they want to be in love and supportive of each other.

Honig says that the reality is that most people never find this perfect spouse and end up with their second choices. Furthermore, men and women have different “second choices.” Honig said, “Men are more willing to want a modified traditionalism, which is sort of the breadwinner-homemaker ’50s model: men do the work, women do the work in the house.” On the other hand, according to Kathleen Gerson, a professor of sociology at New York University, women are more likely to opt for independence. Unlike men, women tend to prefer being alone to being with men who do not live up to their expectations.

Along with this, Honig identified another, perhaps more interesting, trend. Rather than explain who people are marrying, her hypothesis explains why people are marrying when they do.

### Top of the Class

According to a study performed in 2009 by MTV and the Associated Press, 85 percent of students said they have felt stressed often or sometimes during the last three months. Seventy-seven percent of students felt stressed by schoolwork, 74 percent by grades, 67 percent by financial worries, and 53 percent by relationships.

Almost every Columbia student can identify with these problems. For some it may come as a surprise that 15 percent of students didn’t feel stressed often during the last three months. Columbia students juggle extracurricular activities, classes, internships, schoolwork, and friendships on a daily basis. In a bleak job market, students have more reason than ever to be stressed out. Adding a relationship to the mix feels almost impossible to most students.

Lundberg said that the pressures of schoolwork have made her relationship with Aldrich challenging. Because Aldrich was on the varsity wrestling team, she says, “We definitely have an easier time in the summer. It was harder when Cary was in school, because he also had wrestling every day. He’s very easy-going, so he was better at it than me ... but I definitely have let the anxieties of school affect me at times. Now

that he’s out of school, it’s easier ... even though I don’t get to see him [until] 7:30 p.m. at night.”

Furthermore, hectic schedules seem to have deterred many Columbia students from choosing to take time out for relationships. “Right now I can’t [be in a relationship],” Esquen says. “I have a lot of things to do. You’re in college, you have to do well in school, you have swimming, I have an internship now—I have a lot of things I have to prioritize now. So it’s pretty hard for me to have the time, to commit myself, to give her the time she deserves. I don’t think it would be fair for her to be with someone like me.”

Heema also identifies a full workload as a large part of the reason she isn’t seeing anybody at Columbia or looking for marriage as a college sophomore. She says, “I don’t exactly have a list [of what I want to accomplish before marriage]. I’m pre-med and I’m totally focused on my career right now. I mean, with med school and residencies, it takes a long time to build credentials. If [love and marriage] happens along the way, that’s great; if not, that works too.”

Honig said that letting marriage come after economic success is a trend amongst the country at large. She says, “People say: ‘When I am economically settled, that is when I will get married.’” When asked whether the growing competitiveness of colleges and the job market will further affect the age at which students will get married, she responded, “As it is harder to establish yourself, I would say it will definitely have an impact on marriage. ... I think as it gets harder to establish yourself economically, and as economic independence becomes more deeply connected to marriage or a prerequisite for marriage, I think it would definitely have an impact.”

## STUDENTS HAVE LEFT THE DOOR OPEN TO LOVE AT COLUMBIA, BUT JUST HOW FAR?

It may seem that students are picking jobs and academic success in lieu of true love. However, rather choosing between the two, students may just be delaying the latter. Rosenberg says, “Students, in common with the population at large, are less likely to marry than ever before, especially in the decade after college. ... That said, 90 percent of all women eventually marry. They simply marry later.”

### The Legend Continued

While the competitive culture of Columbia—in schoolwork, extracurricular, internships, and job searches—may appear to have pushed marriage to the back burner for many students and produced a culture of hooking up and noncommittal relationships, the full picture may not be so clear. The domain of the hook-up and relationship are blurred. Students sometimes find love at bars and clubs, but the intentions of many students are not necessarily concrete. Students have left the door open to love at Columbia, but just how far? ●



# On The Town

a barnard alum recreates social networking for new york women

BY LIANA GERGELY

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMANDA HOFMAN

Amanda Hofman, BC '03, is the CEO of Urban Girl Squad, a social networking group for women in their 20s and 30s. Urban Girl Squad creates a community of supportive women in Manhattan, by allowing them to explore the city that never sleeps in a new and entertaining way. As the internship-search craze reaches a peak, Hofman shares her ideas about how to make a job feel more like fun than work, and gives an inside look at the working world of New York City.

**Tell me exactly what you do and what Urban Girl Squad does.**

We have events a couple nights a week such as wine-tasting night, and beauty and spa nights—just a lot of fun ways to explore the city. We also have out-there events like gun shooting, pole dancing, and sky-diving.

We also do your more traditional events like beauty nights at the Plaza. Part of what's so cool about Urban Girl Squad is we do the girly-girl stuff and the not so girly-girl stuff. Like we have a poker night coming up, and we're hoping to do a cigar and scotch tasting, and we do the hiking events, and it really appeals to a wide variety of women's interests, rather than just being a beauty group, or a fitness group, or a book club. Because you don't want to be pigeonholed in one interest. One part would be the events, and the other part is the community. So it's also a group of women who come to these events, but its a very inclusive, interesting, and fun group.

**"I THINK IT'S KIND OF COOL WHEN YOU DO THE THINGS YOU'RE DOING ON THE SIDE AND TURN IT INTO YOUR JOB."**

**How did you get the idea of starting Urban Girl Squad?**

I went to Barnard and I was an RA there...I've always kind of been doing this on the side. I think it's kind of cool when you do the things you're doing on the side, and turn it into your job. I was running a knitting group on the side, and having knitting events all over the city. The truth is, I don't care that much about knitting, but I loved getting the women together, so I decided to give this idea a try.

**How did Barnard prepare you for the job? How did your education at a women's liberal arts college influence the kind of company you started?**

The community at Barnard is really diverse



and interesting, and I found that a lot of women that I met loved to challenge each other to try new things. I think that community can be missing from the working world in the city, especially for people that just moved here.

**So what does your daily schedule look like? Are you attending these events? Planning them?**

Oh god, I do everything. I spend most of my time talking to businesses in the city, or people who want to get involved in Urban Girl Squad, such as make-up artists, business owners, wine-shops, etc...people that want UGGs coming into their store.

**This job seems like a heavily network-based job, since you're really in constant contact with people in the food, makeup, fashion, PR industries. How do you feel about the fact that you're in many different industries at once?**

It's really challenging all the time, and I love that.

**What have been the most rewarding experiences you've had being the CEO of Urban Girl Squad?**

This is my favorite thing that's happened: there was this lingerie event, and there were not enough dressing rooms. The idea came up: why don't we just make one giant dressing room, and a few of the women were really excited about it.

And suddenly they made it OK for everyone to feel really comfortable just like trying things on and not feeling self-conscious. These women didn't know each other and they were so support-

ive, and they turned something that would not be OK into something totally OK.

**That sounds so empowering, and liberating in a sense.**

I mean, we're not always in bras and underwear, but this supportive environment can be found anywhere.

**What Urban Girl Squad events are happening in February?**

A lot of the events are sold out, which is great! We have a Casino Cocktail Party coming up on Feb. 24. We're partnering with Harrods and Caesar's Palace. They're coming up. We're doing a poker night in the Empire Room where you can learn how to play poker, and black jack—it will be a huge, fun, awesome party. And the other event we have is cross-country skiing! In February we have an entrepreneurship event, too. We're starting to add in more career events.

**What advice would you give to someone who wanted to pursue a job in their interest?**

I struggled with this a lot. The one thing I was missing was that I didn't take internships, because they didn't pay and I didn't think I would learn very much. But I would just say that the entrepreneurship community in NYC is huge and they are dying for help. Find a small company in the industry where you want to learn, and just ask them if you can help them out. They will either pay you in money or recommendations and experience—or both. ●



# Post-Post-Modern Poetry

can a great poem still make us pause?

BY VALERIYA SAFRONOVA  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ZHOUNAN XIE

In 1821, Percy Shelley put pen to paper and composed an essay defending poetry against science, called “A Defense of Poetry.” A famous line emerged, inking poets’ into readers’ minds as the “unacknowledged legislators of the world.” A humanities major wishes that the argument would have ended then and there, yet practically two centuries later, here we are, still arguing for poetry’s validity and importance.

Can poetry still be relevant and great in this age? Shelley lived and wrote a long time ago. So long ago, in fact, that when he was around, women were squeezing into corsets, men were tipping their bowler hats, and they all drove around in carriages. Carriages! And here we are, 190 years later, in an entirely different world—one with the Internet, nanotechnology, and

the human genome. The slowed-down, pensive world of poetry doesn’t even seem to belong to the fast-paced atmosphere of the 21st century. Outside of English classes, poetry seems to be nonexistent. How can poets be the “unacknowledged legislators of the world” if it seems that no one even reads their work? And what are people missing out on when they don’t engage with poetry? I turned to Columbia University’s array of experts on poetry for the answers.

## Where are the poets?

Idra Novey, the director of Literary Translation at Columbia, a program within the School of the Arts, argues that there are still great poets around today. “There are great poets in every generation,” she says. “So, what are they up to?”

Novey has translated two books of poetry. “There is fantastic Brazilian urban poetry coming out of Sao Paulo, out of the beach culture of Rio, and also from more remote regions like the wetlands of the Pantanal,” she says. “I just trans-

lated a book by a poet from the Pantanal, Manoel de Barros, who has never been part of a poetry scene. He’s lived in the wetlands on his family’s ranch for ninety years and has written nearly thirty books of poetry.”

Other contemporary poets are trying to play with old-fashioned notions of creativity. Michael Golston, an associate professor of English and comparative literature, says, “One way some contemporary poets ‘keep it ‘fresh’ is by not trying to keep it ‘fresh’ anymore—‘freshness’ is something of an old-fashioned idea at this point. I’m interested in Conceptualist poetry, in ‘uncreative writing’, in appropriation and plagiarism.”

In the minds of some, the distinction between poetry and music—which has never been exact—has become even more blurred. Saskia Hamilton, the inspiration behind the Ben Folds/Nick Hornby song “Saskia Hamilton,” and an assistant professor of English at Barnard, explains the connection, “A lot of great poems started out as songs. Early lyric poets such as Sappho were accompanied by the lyre. Poems have inevitably involved the eye and the ear,” she says. Sara Sayed, a Fordham student, agrees. “I definitely think of rap as poetry. A good rapper plays with words in interesting ways to get across a point,” she says.

## HOW CAN POETS BE THE “UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS OF THE WORLD” IF IT SEEMS THAT NO ONE EVEN READS THEIR WORK?

Steven Massimilla, an adjunct assistant professor in English and comparative literature, is a little more wary of the poeticism of music, specifically pop. “If you look at pop music and you write the lyrics down, you won’t have a good time with them if you don’t take out your guitar. Pop stars publish books of poetry, which are not nearly as good as their songs, but they want the gold star of high art on their report card,” he says.

## Technology’s Influence

Perhaps the most unavoidable influence on contemporary poetry is technology. With the invention and expansion of the Internet and social networking sites, poetry has undergone a big change. No longer is it limited to a few poets whose poems make it to publication—self-publishing is so simple that anyone can be a poet. Over winter break, my 14-year-old sister’s Tumblr, which had previously been covered with photos of Robert Sheehan, was suddenly brimming with long, heavily-commented-on poems. My peers kept angsty, teenage poetry tucked away in a diary, whereas my modern sister was putting hers forth for criticism by the angry vultures of the web. Something had definitely changed over the last decade.

“Internet opened up a world of language—texts, archives, out of print books, obscure journals, blogs, email—that no one had any access to





before. Poets use language to make poems. Now they have purchase on an infinite amount of it,” says Golston. Massimilla pointed out another aspect of the accessibility. “There’s something really great about having poems on the Internet. They have a much broader audience and stay available for a long time,” Massimilla says.

The technological world made poetry more accessible, but it has also inspired many contemporary poets. In Charles Bukowski’s poem, “My Computer,” he discusses that many people told him that buying a computer would hinder his poetic imagination. On the contrary, Bukowski concludes that his computer actually expanded it. Massimilla also adds, “There’s a whole camp of poets that are interested in what you can do with poetry and technology—there’s a school of interactive poetry and computer poetry.”

It appears that poetry is a flexible art, and has been able to adapt fluidly to technological advances. However, while poetry may have been able to make its leap into the modern era with a large audience, for many students today it is still unclear why poetry is relevant.

Students are busy checking off courses, applying for internships, and finding creative ways of paying whatever bills they may have. How can poetry be useful to them? Where can they put “reads poems nightly” on their résumé? As Pragya Nandini, an Economics major at George Washington University, points out, “I read for two reasons: an entertaining story or information. And let’s face it, mainly I read for the latter of the two.” So what can poetry add?

#### What Keeps People Coming Back?

Erik Gray, associate professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia, explained Shelley’s version, “Poetry is the most practical, the most beneficial to humankind of any possible pursuit,” Gray says. Shelley prized poetry’s ability to make people question their environment and in turn consider information rather than simply repeating it. Gray adds that, “Shelley would say that words are infinitely possible because they are creations of the mind. You have no constraints. The possible worlds of literary production are infinite.”

“We’re in a rush all of the time, and a great poem makes us pause,” Hamilton says. She referenced a poem, by Adrienne Rich, called “From an Atlas of the Difficult World.”

“I know you are reading this poem / late, before leaving your office / of the one intense yellow lamp-spot and the darkening window / in the lassitude of a building faded to quiet / long after rush-hour. I know you are reading this poem / standing up in a bookstore far from the ocean / on a grey day of early spring, faint flakes driven / across the plains’ enormous spaces around you.”

Poetry is a part of the everyday in this poem, yet it also works in distancing readers from the mundane—a pause, as Hamilton phrases it. Tabitha Wood, a junior in CC, expanded on the idea of poetry fitting into daily life, she says. “Poetry is reflective of how we usually think: images and concepts in brief, delineated form. Because it conforms to such a natural thought process it can be easier to understand than fully fleshed out prose.” Ana Baric, a junior in CC,

## “POETRY IS REFLECTIVE OF HOW WE USUALLY THINK: IMAGES AND CONCEPTS IN BRIEF DELINEATED FORM. BECAUSE IT CONFORMS TO SUCH A NATURAL THOUGHT PROCESS IT CAN BE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND THAN FULLY FLESHED OUT PROSE.”

finds that poetry is for her, a “peek into the recognizable human condition,” a connection to a greater whole. Massimilla echoes her thoughts, saying, “poetry is a lens through which we process experience.” He notes that even outside of formal poetry, “people spend a lot of time writing down song lyrics and picking out birthday cards. All of these are ways of saying what would otherwise be left unsaid.”

For others, it is a fascination with poetry’s structure that kept them intrigued. Golston says, “What poetry brings to the table that other modes of writing don’t is an especially heightened attention to matters of form, to how the writing is shaped on the page or for the ear.” Jenn Leyva, a CC junior, notes, “Poetry is very purposeful. Words are limited, so every word, phrase, and piece of punctuation is doing some-

thing important. It’s the essence of language, distilled down to beauty.”

#### The Perennial Myth

So here we are, 190 years later, in an entirely different world. Or so one would think. But take a second look: the corsets have simply been replaced with less painful versions, the hats modified to declare one’s athletic allegiances more often than style, and the carriages restricted to Central Park. Apparently, we’re not as distant from the early 19th century as we’d have ourselves believe.

It took me a while to understand that the Golden Age of poetry that I envisioned is probably limited only to my imagination. The professors I interviewed all seemed eager to disprove the existence of such a period—Massimilla calls it a “perennial myth,” while Golston says, “‘Great’ is an inaccurate and irrelevant term. Who the ‘great’ poets are in any generation is open to debate. It’s a subjective judgment.” Golston even adds that more people are reading poetry in America today than ever before.

The responses of these professors hinted at a sort of temporal unity that explains why ancient Greeks and contemporary Columbia students all read poetry, an idea that reflects Ezra Pound’s declaration that “all ages are contemporaneous.”

As more people than ever turn to writing and reading poetry, the idea that poetry doesn’t fit into this world seems to be outright false. Instead, for people throughout time, poetry transcends the changing fancy of the times and reveals something much more central about the world. ●





# Hogwarts is Lovely This Time of Year

musings on unexpected culture shock across the pond

BY SARAH SCHEINMAN  
PHOTOS BY ABBY SIWAK  
ILLUSTRATION BY THUTO DURKAC SOMO

“I’d do it for the banter,” Alex said, taking a swig of Guinness from his pint glass amid cheers of “Lad!” from his chums. We were packed around a small wooden table in the back of a warm little pub, escaping the grim English weather for a beer. Alex was explaining, of course, why he would have sex with the Queen, if given the opportunity. I listened on, perplexed. I thought going to England would be easy: no language barrier and therefore, no problem. This is mostly true, until you hear a Brit say con-TRA-ver-see instead of controversy—and then you see that my expectations demanded reevaluation.

My name is Sarah and I’m a junior at Barnard, currently studying history and politics at Hogwarts. I mean reading history and politics, of course—that’s what they call it at Oxford, and it’s fitting, really, given that we spend four days each week with our heads stuck in the

twenty or so books that our tutors have prescribed in preparation for our essays. Oxford charts a middle course between an academic establishment like Columbia or Barnard, and the exotic, dreamlike world of Hogwarts—robes are worn to formal hall, people write actual letters to one another—I’m only waiting for my wand to arrive.

## THE ONLY THINGS MORE UBIQUITOUS THAN POTATOES ARE THE LIBRARIES.

We have Porters who welcome you with open arms and bellowing hellos. They wear green at St. Peter’s (my college), and are always there to greet you with a friendly smile—except when they “pop out” for a “cheeky” cigarette late at night. Green is also the color worn by the scouts, who come around to clean rooms at 8:30 a.m., making one regret that final pint and reach for the paracetamol.

Christmas began in November, and was celebrated well into January. We had Christmas dinners, markets, drinks, carols, services, and lots of parties. Don’t even bother looking for a dreidel in the city of Oxford, they simply do not sell them. To tell someone “Happy Holidays” is an insult—everyone should be given best wishes for a Merry Christmas.

There are college bars, bops, and beautiful balls. There is bubbly cava at every event, hearty pints at every pub, and potatoes, everywhere. Seriously. No dinner, formal affair, or celebration would be complete without a bucket of piping hot potatoes. Sometimes they’re baked, sometimes spiced, and sometimes they’re fried, but regardless of their condition, they are perpetually served with your meal. Not to be confused with chips, a staple of the collegiate diet—chips, mind you, are not to be confused with crisps. No matter what you call them, all of these confusing edible delights originate from potatoes, which, again, are everywhere.

The only things more ubiquitous than potatoes are the libraries. There are hundreds on campus, boasting access to every book ever







published in the United Kingdom. Except not all libraries are accessible. Libraries are closed by six or seven on weekdays, and entirely on Sundays—a foreign concept for someone accustomed to camping out in Butler—not to mention whenever students take over buildings (see: BBC coverage of the Radcliffe Camera) to protest education-funding cuts. Oh right, students protest here. They go to London; they hold signs in the streets of Oxford, they takeover Parliament—or attempt it—they yell, they scream, and sometimes they light things on fire. It’s all very European.

As we make our way from the dive bar after an evening of “lashing,” you can hear students chanting, “With the Keys on My Chest, Give Me Peters!” We pass other Oxfordians from neighboring and potentially rival colleges, sporting suave tuxedos or costumes from the sexy cartoon character bops that preceded the midnight McDonald’s run, as most pubs will have already shut their doors. It’s just an ordinarily black-tie/costumed night at Oxford.

You’ll have to pardon me, but I must go and check my pigeon hole (read:mailbox) to see if that wand has arrived. Cheers! ●





Dear \_\_\_\_\_,  
(valentine's name)

Spending V-Day with you is \_\_\_\_\_,  
(adjective)

even though most people think it's a(n)

\_\_\_\_\_ holiday. When I see you I  
(adjective)

think of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
(noun) (noun)

Remember that time we \_\_\_\_\_  
(verb, past tense)

in the park? That was \_\_\_\_\_!  
(adjective)

I \_\_\_\_\_ you!  
(verb, present tense)

Yours,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(your name)