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On her way to serve the courtroom, this soon-to-be lawyer is definitely more than what meets the eye.

Presenting the contenders aiming to seize the crown as the 2019 Playmate of the Year.

Fierce and passionate with everything she does, Jennifer Sills aspires to reconnect with her Filipino lineage.

Our Japan-born International Woman embodies freedom—her way.

This month’s Asian Beauty is a self-made woman who has a very strong personality, and in contrast, a very soft heart.

Sofia David dreamt of becoming a Playmate, and she did just that with flying colors.

Up for the task to be the ultimate video entertainment portal in the Philippines, iFlix country manager, Sherwin dela Cruz is redefining how we consume content.

The What Men Want star holds nothing back in her interview with Playboy.

Pursuing a career in a foreign land, Indian-national actor shares the importance of learning and perseverance.

The What Men Want star holds nothing back in her interview with Playboy.
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HUAWEI WATCH GT
Smart watches offer lots of compelling features, but the problem with a lot of these devices is that you need to charge them often. Huawei aims to address this issue with the Huawei Watch GT, a smart watch that could last for up to two weeks on a single charge even with heart rate monitoring on. Aside from long battery life, this watch also offers various features such as smart fitness coaching, multiple sport modes, and even a sleep monitor.

ASUS ZENBOOK S13 (UX392FN)
With a 97% screen-to-body ratio, the new ASUS ZenBook S13 is the laptop with the world’s slimmest bezels. Thanks to its design, the ZenBook S13 manages to fit a 13.9-inch display in a light and ultra-portable body, making it a great productivity companion for professionals on-the-go. It’s also no slouch in the performance department with its 8th-gen Intel Core i7 processor and MX 150 video card.

SAMSUNG GALAXY S10E
The S10e may be the smallest of Samsung’s Galaxy S10 line, but it may just be the best deal among the three. The S10e still packs the gorgeous Infinity-O display and the powerful Exynos 9820 processor, just without the S10+ and S10’s telephoto camera and curved edges. In exchange for these features, the S10e is the most wallet-friendly in the S10 line, perfect for owners who don’t want to spend over PHP 46,000 for a new flagship.

APPLE IMAC (2019)
iMacs are the default choice for a lot of creatives, and this year, Apple made its iMac even more powerful. The new iMac lineup packs up to a 9th-gen Intel Core processor that is paired with an AMD Radeon Pro Vega graphics cards. Both the 21.5-inch and 27-inch iMac will get these spec upgrades, making Apple’s signature product all the more compelling for creative professionals.

SENNHEISER MOMENTUM TRUE WIRELESS
Wireless earphones don’t always have to sacrifice audio quality, take for instance the new Sennheiser MOMENTUM True Wireless, a wireless version of the popular Sennheiser MOMENTUM earphones. The True Wireless model promises high quality audio in a package that’s both portable and tangle-free. Best of all, it also has added features such as Transparent Hearing which lets users still be aware of his/her surroundings while listening to music.
GAMING

TEAM SONIC RACING - MAY 21
The first of two big kart racing games releasing on May-June, Team Sonic Racing is the latest racing spin-off for the Sonic franchise. Fans of the blue hedgehog can finally take to the track once again and race against friends using one of 15 select Sonic franchise characters. Not a big multiplayer fan? The game will feature a story-driven campaign, as well as time trials and other single player-focused game modes.

CRASH TEAM RACING NITRO-FUELED - JUNE 21
If you grew up during the PS1 days, chances are, you’ve played Crash Team Racing, the PlayStation’s answer to Nintendo’s Mario Kart series. This June, you’ll be able to revisit the beloved PS1 title on the PS4, Xbox One, and PC with the release of Crash Team Racing Nitro-Fueled. Not only is Nitro-Fueled a full-blown remake of the classic Crash Team Racing, it’ll also feature split-screen and online multiplayer modes on all platforms.

RAGE 2 - MAY 14
Tired of playing the standard old military-based first-person shooter? If yes, then the colorful and crazy Rage 2 should definitely be on your to-play list this May. The sequel to id Software’s 2010 title, Rage 2, is an open-world FPS set in a Mad Max-inspired post-apocalyptic open-world. Much like the first game, Rage 2 is a single player-only affair, meaning fans of classic FPSes with sprawling campaigns should feel right at home.
**X-MEN: DARK PHOENIX (2019)**

The X-Men are back for one last mission, this time to defeat one of their own. After a space mission goes wrong, Jean Grey (played by Game of Thrones’ Sophie Turner) finds herself being consumed by an entity known as the Phoenix, which unleashes her full power and drives her insane. To save their teammate, the X-Men must face different kinds of threats, including old friends, a mysterious shape-shifting alien, and awkward 90’s references. Cue: X-Men cartoon theme song.

**ANNIHILATION (2018)**

After reuniting with her lost husband, cellular biologist Lena (played by Natalie Portman) suddenly finds herself caught in a covert mission to discover the nature of a mysterious alien entity called “Shimmer” which can alter reality. What follows is a dizzying, edge-of-your seat, thriller complemented by stunning visuals and serious philosophical undertones that explores themes of grief, depression, and self-destruction. In a nutshell, this Sci-Fi film runs like a Hayao Miyazaki fever dream.

**AMERICAN PSYCHO (2000)**

People would kill to have the life that the young, wealthy, and good-looking Patrick Bateman has. Patrick, however, just likes to kill. This satirical psychological horror film, based on Bret Easton Ellis’ 1991 novel of the same name, developed a cult following since its release in 2000, and helped launch then-unknown actor Christian Bale into leading man material, as he portrays a smooth and smart serial killer who has ways with the ladies—murderous ways, that is.

**IT**

By Stephen King

A mysterious creature wakes up from its hibernation and eats the children in Derry, Maine. Frustrated by the inaction of the adults in their town, seven children take matters into their own hands, and team up to track and find the creature known as “It,” which has taken the form of the sinister clown Pennywise. Beneath the eerie and gory thriller by horror master Stephen King lies a thoughtful coming-of-age story about dealing with grief and losing one’s innocence.

**AMERICA IS NOT THE HEART**

By Elaine Castillo

With its title as a play on Carlos Bulosan’s essay “America is in the Heart,” this novel follows the story of Hero, who moves to America to recover from her traumatic experiences as a former communist rebel tortured during Martial Law and finds purpose in taking care of her young cousin, Roni. This future classic reveals the disillusionment that Filipino immigrants endure while living in a foreign country hoping for a better life, only to find it in each other’s company.
SOLE SLAM STORIES:
BORDELO

“Bordelo is not just a clothing brand or a streetwear label as everybody thinks. Bordelo is an outlet with a group of individuals all getting together to express each other’s talents and make everybody better.”

“Everybody in the group has their own talents. From designing to directing, to editing videos, and even musicians. We treat each other, not as a group or as a business or as just a ‘club,’ but each of us helps one another out so nobody will be left behind.”

“Never give up no matter how much trash people talk. No matter how much they try to bring down you and your work, don’t ever give up.”

“We are all inspired by each other ‘cause without each other how could we, as a group, keep this going. We could do things individually, but together, that’s when we are at best.”
CELEBRITIES ARE SUPER COOL

At a time when the free press is under attack, we sent Broad City’s Paul W. Downs to execute the highest form of journalism: the celebrity profile.

By Paul W. Downs

Photography by Nick Rasmussen
As I sit at the bar at the Hearth & Hound in Hollywood, a hip restaurant my subject suggested because it’s helmed by a female chef, I can’t decide if I should get a drink or not. Maybe a drink will take the edge off, cool my nerves. I’ve done this kind of thing countless times, yet somehow I’m nervous. I guess it’s not that surprising. It’s not every day I get to profile a bona fide multi-hyphenate. Paul W. Downs is a comedian, actor, writer, producer and director. And judging from his body, he could be a dancer. But I don’t want to drink if he’s not drinking, so I order a sparkling water and wait.

I don’t even need to look behind me to know he’s entered the room. People in the restaurant perk up. When I do turn around, I realize it’s because he’s waving to them, blowing kisses at random patrons. He doesn’t seem to know these people, but it doesn’t matter—that’s just how warm he is, how generous with his attention. Standing an impressive five-foot-nine, he somehow seems larger, more commanding.

“Sorry I’m late,” he says. “I was just driving back from canvassing in a congressional swing district up north.” Wow. How Downs finds time to volunteer is hard to imagine. At the time of this interview, he had just wrapped shooting in New York on the critically acclaimed Broad City’s fifth and final season, launching in January. Not only is he one of the show’s main writers, an executive producer and a beloved cast member (he plays Trey Pucker), this season Downs is adding “director” to his repertoire. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. With his partner and live-in girlfriend, Lucia Aniello, Downs helms a production company called Paulilu (a clever take on Desilu); the company produced 2017’s Rough Night (which grossed nearly $35 million at the box office) and Comedy Central’s Time Traveling Bong, a prestige miniseries. He’s currently writing a Kevin Hart movie for Universal and producing a sketch show that’s in development at the aforementioned cable channel. And those are just the projects he’s “allowed” to talk about.

“Oh, you’re just having water? Mind if I drink?” he asks. Damn. Guess I should have had that cocktail after all. He orders a glass of Rioja, so I get one too. Downs has a disarming quality about him. He looks, as the internet will attest, like a Disney prince. His dark brown hair and blue-gray eyes twinkle as he talks. But it’s his quick wit and bawdy humor that make him such an enigma. He reminds me of a young Martin Short with the sex appeal of Jessica Rabbit. And then our conversation begins.

**DOWNS:** Your most recent film role is in Netflix’s Like Father, which was the streaming service’s number one movie in 160 countries the weekend it premiered.

**DOWNS:** I know—pretty crazy.

**DOWNS:** Kelsey Grammer is known for his iconic roles on television but hasn’t made so many films. Was it your involvement that drew him to the project?

**DOWNS:** No, no. He and Kristen Bell were already attached when I was cast.

**DOWNS:** Really? I’m surprised. Well, in the film you play a family psychologist who is obsessed with the relationship between Kelsey and Kristen. What did it feel like to give advice to one of TV’s most iconic therapists, Dr. Frasier Crane?

**DOWNS:** Oh, it was so trippy. But an honor.

**DOWNS:** How do you stay in shape?

**DOWNS:** Right now, a lot of volunteering. You burn a lot of calories walking door to door and canvassing. Also, resistance training.

Clearly, I go on: “As a movie star—” but he stops me. “I’m not a movie star,” he says earnestly. “But you are,” I tell him. “You star in Rough Night opposite Scarlett Johansson, with Kate McKinnon, Jillian Bell, Ilana Glazer and Zoë Kravitz....”

“Well, when you put it that way, I guess. But I don’t consider myself a movie star.”

But I don’t consider myself a movie star.”

“Don’t worry, I got you,” he says as we slow for traffic. “Don’t worry, I got you,” he repeats. “You’re one of the greatest comedic minds of our generation,” I blurt out. “I wouldn’t say that,” he says. I fire back, “Well, I would. And I’ll be publishing it in this magazine.” He smiles that smile and drives off. I go up to my room, call room service for another Rioja and masturbate until I fall asleep.

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**Editor’s note:** Paul W. Downs was asked to provide 1,200 words for this piece but turned in more than 5,500. Special thanks to his editor for his overtime on this feature.
Playboy

Make Westing, a popular bar in Oakland, California, has a front patio that some patrons refer to as the city’s front porch. “We have a huge crowd, and it’s everything—it’s black, it’s white, it’s old, it’s young,” says a representative of the bar, who asked not to be named. Imagine their surprise last summer when an assistant manager saw a Reddit post claiming that a local chapter of the Proud Boys would be meeting there.

The bar had a choice to make: Let the group in or kick them out. “We were between a rock and a hard place,” the rep says. “If we said, ‘Fine, come,’ we’d get destroyed in a liberal city like Oakland. And if we didn’t let them come, the alt-right would come after us.” (Started during the 2016 presidential campaign by Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys reject the “alt-right” label; the group calls itself a “Western chauvinist” organization. The Southern Poverty Law Center classifies it as a hate group.)

After consulting with lawyers and other bars in the neighborhood, Make Westing decided to “figure out what good we could possibly bring to this.” They created a Facebook post disavowing racism and announcing an event of their own for the day of the planned Proud Boys meeting—one that would raise money for Black Lives Matter, the ACLU and other organizations.

The day before Make Westing’s event, African American teenager Nia Wilson was mur-
and voice-mail vitriol from both sides. “No matter what we did, we were wrong in a lot of people’s eyes,” the bar’s representative says.

In this apparent civil-liberties stalemate, the staff of Make Westing is not alone. In September, a group of alleged white nationalists harassed and pepper-sprayed a Democratic Socialists of America meeting at a bar in Louisville, Kentucky. In July, six skinheads were charged with ethnic intimidation and simple assault after beating an African American man at a bar in Avalon, Pennsylvania. Later that month, Joey Gibson—a U.S. Senate candidate and the leader of Patriot Prayer, a farright group whose marches and rallies have turned violent several times—urged followers in a Facebook Live post to contact a Vancouver, Washington bar that had kicked him out. The bar was inundated with harassment and threats.

It can happen the other way too: In Los Angeles last summer, a scuffle broke out in a bar one Saturday night after a Proud Boys gathering wasn’t ejected quickly enough and opponents of the group showed up en masse. The bar closed that night and Sunday. Its owner, who was not at the bar during the incident, issued a statement: “I am ultimately to blame for not having a policy in place to deal with this sort of thing that could be implemented in my absence,” he wrote. “I’ve just never had any experience with something like this before.”

The political and business consequences of refusing to serve certain people may be complicated, but the legal consequences are not. “You have a First Amendment right to associate with some and to disassociate with others,” says Matt C. Pinsker, a constitutional law expert and adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. “The general rule is private property owners can do whatever they want as long as it doesn’t discriminate against a legally protected class, including those based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability and a few other categories—but definitely not including political views. (Sexual orientation is a protected class in some states but not federally; see the Supreme Court’s 2018 Masterpiece Cakeshop decision.) Technically, then, business owners and staff ‘can discriminate against other groups,’” Pinsker says. “If you have something you find morally appalling, you have the right to exclude them from your bar. Some people might find fans of the wrong football team morally appalling, and others might find neo-Nazis morally appalling.”

Even on a small scale, the decision to kick someone out for their beliefs is fraught. San Diego bartender Ashley Wardle learned this firsthand when she eighty-sixed a customer wearing a Proud Boys shirt last summer. “I was the person in charge at the time; none of the owners were in,” she says. “I told him, ‘I can’t serve you at this bar wearing that shirt.’ He said, ‘Well, now who’s the bigot?’ ”

The customer left, and Wardle thought that was the end of it. But a few days later, her phone started blowing up with messages from her bosses. She heard the guy she’d kicked out had posted about the incident on several far-right websites, and the bar was getting hit with negative reviews and posts. One now-deleted tweet from a local conservative activist even named Wardle specifically. The bar’s owner worked quickly to have the online abuse taken down, but the experience contributed to Wardle’s decision to find a different bar.

“I kick people out for being too drunk, but that was the first time I’ve had to deal with anything like this,” Wardle says. “Like most bars, this is a small start-up. There was barely a training or an employee manual, let alone a policy for this situation. The idea of an alt-right person coming in the bar was not even in the owner’s mind.” Make Westing’s representative agrees:

“If you’re fighting or treating people poorly, you’re kicked out; you’re banned. But there was no specific policy on the Proud Boys.”

There’s still no specific policy at Make Westing, and the representative is ambivalent about the bar being drawn into this controversy. “Hopefully it brought more good than bad, but I don’t know.”

Wardle doesn’t regret her actions. “Wearing a hate group’s shirt is a statement of hate; it was designed to provoke a reaction,” she says. “Whether or not he was a member of this group, his shirt made him one. As proprietors, our responsibility goes way beyond just putting stuff in glasses. It’s creating a space that’s inviting and safe.”

Most bars, of course, don’t have constitutional scholars on staff. But there may be hope in numbers: In advance of the Unite the Right 2 rally in Washington, D.C. last August, the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington sent a “toolkit” to its members, affirming their freedom to refuse service to white nationalists and other political groups. The event and its counterprotests were relatively peaceful, especially compared with the deadly Charlottesville rally of 2017; D.C. saw only one arrest. But with hard-right groups growing ever more bold since the 2016 election, standoffs like these won’t be going away anytime soon. Proprietors, pint pullers and patrons will have to decide for themselves whether extremist groups should hide in the shadows or be exposed to the (neon, possibly smoke-wreathed) light.
Petrolheads, it’s that time again when we feature the best and latest rides that should be on the lookout. If you love motorcycles, you are in for a treat!

**DUCATI SCRAMBLER CLASSIC**

The Scrambler Classic has all the functionality of a modern bike, but with the appearance of a classic ‘70s scrambler. This retro looking motorcycle is powered by an 803cc L-twin desmodromic engine that makes riding classy yet dynamic.

**BMW R 1250 GS**

This GS motorcycle is a combination of beauty and beast, packed with a 1254cc twin-cylinder Boxer engine that ensures every rider a powerful thrilling ride experience. It is also equipped with a 6.5-inch TFT display that allows rider to have access to navigation, music, phone, as well as monitoring speed and RPM with ease.

**MAZDA CX – 5**

This new SUV by Mazda is equipped with G-Vectoring Control that improves stability and handling when it comes to tight curves and turns. The CX-5 is also packed with Lane Keep Assist and Lane Departure Warning which are very helpful on a very long drive. Powered by a 2.5L (variant) engine, this SUV is the best for long drives.
Dear Dr. Holmes,

My wife and I no longer love each other. I had many girlfriends before, during and after the open marriage we agreed on. I admit I had bore hatred on her [my wife] since she started making fun of me in front of other people. She reciprocated the same feeling of hate the moment she found out about the many girlfriends I had all throughout the course of our relationship. Despite so, we still have sex. Although it is not ideal, given that I have a girlfriend I am currently in love with, I still give in every time she insists on doing it.

Question, why do I last longer with my girlfriend whom I love than with my wife whom I hate?

I thought premature ejaculation happens only if you were away from someone you love and haven’t had sex with for a long time. Thus, in Filipino term, “sabik na sabik” or overly eager.

I hope this does not mean that I am unconsciously still in love with my wife. To give up my girlfriend and to go back to what we were before our open marriage would be like hell on earth.

Sincerely, Confused

Dear Confused:

Thank you very much for your letter. First, let me reassure you straight away that ejaculating fast when you have sex with your wife does NOT mean you are secretly in love with her. It does not even mean that you are more turned on by her than you are by the girlfriend you love.

People say cuteesy things like: “Think with your big head (brain) and not your little one (your penis),” and often that advice is worth its weight in gold.

However, there are times—admittedly not very often—when it is not only okay, but much better to listen to the little guy.

The common expectation is that a man comes more quickly when he is in love with or truly desires his female partner. That is true in most cases. Since your wife neither fit both categories, it is understandable that you wonder why in heaven’s name your penis behaves as though she is the love/lust of your life.

I understand your surprise—even terror—at the thought.

But please remember that your ejaculating prematurely is situational: it happens only under specific circumstances—like when having sex with your wife. If it were global, it would happen all the time, under any circumstances, and with everyone.

When premature ejaculation is global, the more common explanations make sense. Paramount among them is the behavioral school of thought that postulates that a man who ejaculates quickly is someone who has been rewarded in the past for coming quickly.

But when situational like yours is, it is almost like your penis is talking to you, asking what the bloody hell am I doing inside this woman who makes fun of me and forces me to make love to her. Maybe I can’t change that I’m in here right now, but I can get out of here as soon as possible.

The most logical and efficient way to stop having sex with your wife without being obviously hostile is to ejaculate, the sooner the better. She can hardly complain that you are purposely withholding pleasure from her because we have been taught that premature ejaculation is not under our voluntary control. Perhaps consciously it is not. But unconsciously, sometimes, it can be the way you think. It might apply in this case.

With premature ejaculation, she can complain about your lousy lovemaking to all and sundry, but she cannot accuse you of being purposely nasty.

This is how psychoanalysis explains premature ejaculation—an act of covert hostility because it is a metaphor of what is truly going on in the relationship.

Admittedly, the psychoanalytic view has lost many believers, with most mental health professionals preferring more “modern” explanations including variables like number of thrusts or intravaginal ejaculation latency time (IELT) that can be measured objectively.

However, a theory hardly used nowadays does not mean it is not valid. And just because an explanation has lost many believers does not mean it does not apply in some cases.

I hope this has helped eased your mind somewhat, Confused. Please write me again if there is anything else I can do for you. Take care!

BY DR. MARGARITA HOLMES
A LIKE FOR A PESO

Following counts and likes have turned into a new form of gauge on people’s worth which translates to actual monetary values. Influencers are now being paid in amounts depending on their follower count, something not even showbiz firmly quantified before.

With the advent of digital age, through various technological advances like smartphones, also came the inception of social media presence.

Social media is computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. Users engage with social media via computers, tablets, or smartphones with web-based software or web applications, often utilizing it for messaging.

Nowadays, it is almost impossible to meet someone who does not own any social media account—be it Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. In fact, it has permeated our lives so much, that using social media is already a part of our daily routine. People spend a number of hours in a day just to share mundane matters to their deepest thoughts. The ideas they then share generate likes and boost their follower counts.

Along with the interjection of social media in our lives was the obsession of people on their following counts and likes. To some, the numbers and figures that make up one’s likes and following count is tantamount to their worth as a person. People scramble to get the most likes and followers. We have become a culture that is fixated with updating Facebook statuses, uploading Instagram stories, or sending tweets.

Ironically, social media has made us anti-social beings.

Despite these negative bits, this culture also breeds a positive repercussion to society. One’s standing in likes and follower counts can actually be commensurate to a monetary value that can be a source of one’s income.

The 21st century has brought both opportunities and challenges in our global, boundless world. As such, companies need to continually stay up to date on technology, customers, and social media. For instance, marketers must truly engage with customers, embrace technology, and be informed about the opportunities of social media.

Marketing with the use of social media essentially consists of taking advantage of follower counts in order to gain more publicity and customer reach. In this sense, the brands get to advertise their products to a much more active audience measured through the online reactions such as likes.

Normally, these corporations get an already existing social media account with a preferred social media channels and generate large followings of enthusiastic engaged people who pay close attention to their content.

Brands love social media influencers because they can create trends and encourage their followers to buy products they promote which translate sales, then profit for them.

In return, these social media creators get paid in proportion to the amount of likes or exposure they were able to get for the product. An influencer shares, “Basically, we do our thing, brands approach us to take a photo or talk about their product/service/campaign, and post about it on our social media and we leave it all to our audience (who is the brand’s target consumer).

Instagram is the main platform because this is where these personalities-turned-influencers, and consumers are mostly at. This is where brands can purely direct people’s attention to their product through photos or videos, and hopefully get them to consume with the aid of the influencer’s personality, content, and/or creativity.

The proliferation of influencers begs to answer these questions: Are influencers positive or negative inclusions to society? Could their standing in life being broadcast all over social media be detrimental to how people think their lives should be?

An influencer posits, “As far as I’m concerned, I don’t think we are a negative inclusion. We help entrepreneurs big or small. We make things, ideas, goals, whether it’s personal or marketing-related, happen. No matter how much some people complain about how better life is without social media, it’s already there. We just have to learn how to utilize it. It creates many opportunities. At the end of the day, where there is people and their attention is, business, advertising even politics will be there.”

Accordingly, he added that influencers are also more than what we see them, “It’s way more than that. Personally, I don’t want my creativity and authenticity being limited by campaign briefs and I don’t work with brands that I will not actually use or believe in because I will eventually feel guilty posting about it. I just hope people will know the difference. Being an influencer is not the “dream,” it’s just part of the process of becoming your own brand for your own business.”
SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS

Football star Cristiano Ronaldo is the most 'liked' personality on Facebook with 122,585,580 likes.

Katy Perry is the most followed Twitter user with 107 million followers.

The most-subscribed Pinoy YouTuber is Ranz Kyle with 6.9 million subscribers.

Internet users worldwide watch video game live streams.

4% Of the social media users, 3.256 million are active on mobile.

Despacito is the most-viewed video on YouTube with 5.89 billion views.

The third-most visited website in the world is Google for 2018.

71% of the Philippine population is active on social media.

17th on the most-visited website worldwide list.

64% of Instagram users in the Philippines are women, the highest female ratio.

Facebook messenger is the dominant messaging app in the Philippines.

Facebook’s active user base use smartphones and tablets to access the network.

11th-most visited website in the world.

Philippines has the highest female ratio of Twitter worldwide with 83%.

13.7 million

Fortnite streamer Ninja is the most followed Twitch streamer.

The top three most-used emojis on Twitter.

3.484 billion

Active social media users in 2018, that’s 42% of the world population.

Philippine population aged 13 and above are social media users.
TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE
Imagine a Program That Could Predict Your Every Fetish, Memorize Your Every Desire. Would You Use It? One Porn Company Thinks You Would. Inside the Latest Advancement in Sex, Tech and Getting Off

In the fourth season of Silicon Valley, HBO’s Emmy-winning, Cupertino-mocking comedy series, one of the characters develops a visual-recognition app that can identify food in pictures, classifying every image as either “hot dog” or “not hot dog.” When one of the guys uses the app to take a dick pic, he discovers that he does, in fact, have a “hot dog.” They end up selling the technology to videostreaming app Periscope, which plans to use it to detect porn.

Visual-recognition technology is, of course, nothing new. Most social media companies—dating apps included—use computer vision to enforce community guidelines and root out X-rated images. If Instagram or Facebook has ever deleted one of your photos, it’s because computer vision told it to do so. For the most part, its function has been to prevent adult content from spreading where it doesn’t belong.

xHamster, one of the highest-trafficked porn sites, has other plans. Currently, to find a specific scene on the site, users have to browse a category page or search a tag. xHamster vice president Alex Hawkins wants to move toward searches without words—ones in which “AI facial and body recognition tech” will access your viewing history “to identify similar performers or the same performer or similar videos.” The question is, can it be done? Distinguishing one hot dog from another hot dog isn’t easy—that is to say, recognizing something as pornographic is a different skill from finding the best video for you. In a world where most computer-vision technology is developed to identify tangible objects such as clothing and food, can an algorithm be trained to know your sexual desires?

The answer, according to Matias Klein, chief executive officer of the artificial intelligence company Kognition, depends on data. “The accuracy of the model is highly dependent on the quality of the input training data,” he says. And data sets aren’t always interchangeable. In other words, the same machine-learning engine that recognizes shirts and sandwiches won’t instantly know porn. “Which categories will be created is a human-level decision, not necessarily a computer task,” explains Albert Bou Fadel, chief executive officer of technology company SmartBarrel. “It is a human filter that will decide what to keep as a category and what to disregard.”

His question is a subjective one about what porn is and what it isn’t. That’s important, given that watching porn is a deeply personal experience. If we each have our own idea of what’s sexy, how can we collectively train a computer? To the machine-learning systems of today, there are few visual differences between nipple play and checking yourself for breast cancer: Both show a hand circling around nipples. One is clearly sexual; the other is not. This illustrates a problem Facebook has encountered and why the platform has been criticized for mislabeling photos of women breast-feeding as porn. “Building and labeling a training data set and then designing and optimizing a deep neural network is not a trivial task,” Klein says.

In 2016, Yahoo made one of its deep-learning algorithms public by open-sourcing its code for the entire internet to use. What’s fascinating about that release is that Yahoo explicitly told the public its algorithm does not detect porn but rather flags visual content “not suitable/safe for work (NSFW), including offensive and adult images.” As Yahoo research engineer Jay Mahadeokar and product manager Gerry Pesavento wrote in a company blog post, “Defining NSFW material is subjective.” Unlike the hot dog app on Silicon Valley, Yahoo’s system isn’t designed to give users a hard yes or no. Instead, it analyzes images individually, assigning each a score based on how likely it is to be offensive. “Developers can use this score to filter images below a certain threshold,” the two explained, “or use this signal to rank images in search results.”

Because we live in a time when you can’t publish a NSFW detector without someone hacking it, a young computer programmer named Gabriel Goh quickly manipulated Yahoo’s algorithm to produce extreme versions of NSFW imagery. (In programming speak, Goh accomplished this “by maximally activating certain neurons of the classifier.”) If you were to look at the images—highly exaggerated, colorful, mutated and abstract versions of male and female genitalia—you’d notice there’s little about them that’s sexy. To echo United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s infamous words on porn, “I know it when I see it.” This isn’t it.

Because of how open source works—once code is shared with GitHub’s tech community, it’s available for anyone to play with—Yahoo can’t track how many engineers have used the tool for its intended function. But people are indeed using it, based on the chat boards on start-up accelerator Y Combinator. There, engineers have complained that Yahoo’s system works well detecting porn for white performers but not for those of color. One user, niftich, suggests Yahoo’s training data must have included more white actors, which brings us back to Klein’s point about the importance of data.
Indeed, the porn industry has been heavily criticized for treating minority performers more as fetishes than people. According to a 2013 study from data journalist Jon Millward, “Deep Inside: A Study of 10,000 Porn Stars and Their Careers,” 76.5 percent of female stars are white. But user aabo notes that the difference in system performance may “also reflect what is most distinguishable. Which is easier for [the computer] to confidently distinguish: black pubic hair on black skin, or black pubic hair on white skin? Darker nipples on black skin, or darker nipples on white skin?”

Nipple color, waxed versus unwaxed pubic regions and other precise physical characteristics are where visual recognition may truly revolutionize search. “This level of specificity is hard to do with keyword searches alone,” says Hawkins. “Specifically, with a platform like ours, where self-produced amateur content is often uploaded without significant keywords or descriptive text, these unarticulated visual identifiers can help connect the content.” In his view, a computer may be better able than language to tell us what we want. With xHamster’s system, which the company began developing in July 2017, Hawkins says, “the AI can help identify performers similar to one a viewer already likes, matching body and facial structure and other identifying features.”

Hawkins points out that xHamster isn’t using Yahoo’s tech — its own tech is already in use. For example: When you visit xHamster.com, the site drops a cookie that tracks the videos you view. When one clip ends, the system uses that video’s visuals to recommend what you should watch next. Right now, the software focuses on facial characteristics and body types. An ideal system would pick up on every other visual element that could make or break the mood. From large tattoos to badly lit rooms, from women pulling back their hair with 1980s headbands to nature settings, visual-recognition software could help porn platforms create an endless array of previously unimagined categories.

“This,” Hawkins says, “becomes increasingly important as we move toward virtual-reality productions, which move consumers further and further away from the keyboard.” In November, xHamster launched a VR platform that allows viewers to navigate using eye movement. This is critical to bringing a VR world alive — and because our eyes naturally fixate on what our brains deem attractive, eye tracking might one day also help visualize search pinpoint exactly which seconds of video turn us on the most. “Our current data base now includes more than 1 million individuals and 3 million videos,” Hawkins explains — everything from real-life exhibitionist couples to independently produced fetish clips. At the time of this writing, xHamster’s internal tech team had analyzed some 35,000 of these videos, webcam performances and studio clips.

Hawkins claims the goal isn’t just to offer better search results but to help fans and performers connect to create a pathway to finding more porn featuring the people they like. Visual recognition won’t stop at recommending another (possibly free) clip to stream. It will direct — and up-sell — you to upcoming webcam engagements or specific channels.

Of course, in threeway and orgy videos, xHamster’s system still isn’t sophisticated enough to determine who turns you on the most. As with computerized translation, chatbot development and other types of machine learning, AI engines learn not only from the data engineers who train them but from real people who provide feedback on system results. Along with eye tracking, user feedback might someday help xHamster pinpoint which performers are more engaging.

Bou Fadel calls visual recognition “a work in progress,” something that will take years to perfect. “Computer vision today is still a black box. There’s a lot of science and theories of how it works, but for the most part, we’re scraping the surface,” he says. In the meantime, hackers, xHamster’s team and porn giants will continue to tweak algorithms, unveil virtual-reality programs and track your viewing, all in an effort to find a single formula for predicting the sexual desires of all humankind. The biggest takeaway? Deleting your browser history may soon become pointless.
ADULT BOOKSTORE

LIVE TUTORIALS

BIGGEST SELECTION OF ADULT BOOKS...

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GUIDE TO MORTGAGES  FILING FOR DIVORCE
PARENTING FOR DUMMIES  HOW TO DO YOUR TAXES

ATM  WE'RE HERE FOR A LONG TIME  NOT A GOOD TIME  OPEN 24 HRS.
corporate job and four start-ups later, dela Cruz found himself torn between keeping his last company or signing up to a much robust and capable one.

He saw an opening when the very first press release of iflix came mid-2014 as he was then raising funds from venture capitalists and bigger companies for his own firm. Days after, he was able to immediately connect with iflix Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mark Britt and book a meeting with the company bearing two things in mind: (1) raising money from the enterprise itself and (2) selling his company to hopefully let iflix absorb him.

It was not hard for him to see how strong iflix was and will even be.

“Do I keep my company now? Or do I just wait for the inevitable na they will steamroll us for the next 6-12 months?”

He made a bold decision to leave the company he built and join the subscription video-on-demand (SVoD) provider.

“They [iflix] were strong. They really knew what they were doing,” he gushed.

Stirred by the support he was assumingly to have from the company’s CEO Mark Britt and his regional team, it was relatively easy for him to accept the offer.

It was quite a breath of fresh air for him to actually have a solid network behind him as he has been used to doing things all on his own especially during the first 7-10 years of his entrepreneurial career. Prior to his stretch at iflix, he admitted he had problems when it comes to budgeting his time.

“The struggle really was I don’t have as much help… Maybe I don’t also know how to hire great people once upon a time,” the 34-year old said.

But his new work environment immediately painted a different picture with the right people surrounding him, “Now, I do feel na I’m in much better company.”

Atypical ‘boss’

His managerial style is not something taken out of a textbook as well: it is new and different.

Starting off at the post fairly young at 29, he does not associate his skills with the older ones in the business.

“I don’t care if you come 8-9 hours a day.”

It does not work out that way for him. As his life turns very mobile, so do his methodologies.

“Everywhere I sit is an impromptu meeting,” he said. “Or when I reach out on a 10 p.m., almost everyone is a WhatsApp away.”

He believes these contemporary ap-
proaches are what gave them an edge over their competitors.

“No non-sense, no bureaucracy, no red tape.”

Supposedly, it is way easier and expected for them to just follow the business model set by the other players in the market. But instead, iflix went on a different route.

According to dela Cruz, it was fundamental for them to learn through experience, and that was something you need time for.

He added, “And by being more agile on the whole learning process, that’s how you grow.”

However, he confesses that one of his main struggles as a leader is his aggressiveness. He thinks that everybody is like him and can easily keep up with the rate he is at. He sees that it gets a little too intense with everyone else most of the time.

As he wants to be as flexible as possible in terms of the system of his people, he acknowledges that they can already pick up his pace while in reality they are daunted, and still, need a little more hand-holding.

“Maybe pre-mature pa, iniwan ko na yung mga tao ko. ‘kaya mo na ‘to,’ I trust you,’ I believe in you.”

Thus, now, Sherwin tries to understand the needs of his employees and during which, attempting to maintain the level of passion and motivation.

For your entertainment pleasure

For Sherwin, customer experience is at the top of the priority list. Iflix makes it a point to continuously analyze the taste of its market.

The key, however, is thinking like them and understanding the content they are more likely to consume. At the same time, take into consideration the threats to these depending on which viewpoint you are looking at.

“The industry in itself is daunting,” he claimed. “The competition is fierce.” According to him, international players have more money and it is just a question of who can go further in terms of funds. Meanwhile, from the local scene, it is how you will be able to convince telecommunication companies or television networks, who already have their customer base, for them to sell their content.

“Yung point A to point B para makuhang content nila [tv networks] took a while, and a lot of thinking and understanding of how to bring out the value for them,” Sherwin said. “But we’re now doing business with all of them and we’re quite cozy with all the Filipino players.”

He further explains that in the Philippine setting, it is not actually the cable industry that SVoDs are disrupting, considering that there are only 500,000 subscriptions all throughout the country. But rather, it is the people’s hunger for content that’s free to air—leading up to another subject of concern: piracy.

With all these exclusive contents SVoDs are releasing, piracy has become more rampant.

“And that’s what I’m really competing against,” he underscored.

Thinking local

Apart from delivering prime content, Sherwin regards his purpose in life rests on the idea of giving back—and where better else to start with than his homeland.

Unlike almost everybody today, he is refreshingly a fan of the country.

“My one northern star would be I would always be in the Philippines. I’m not interested in getting a job abroad. I don’t want to leave the Philippines.”

Being born, raised and educated here, he developed a strong affiliation with the country. He saw it evolve and grow to what it is in the present, and be one of those very few who actually believe in its potential, “Ang galing ng Pinoy, e.”

So it is fitting enough for him to be a part of a company which is in line with his personal vision of doing everything anchored on his motherland.

“Iflix is very Filipino. Everyone in the team is Filipino; knows the Philippines; and is born and raised here,” he shared.

He thinks that those characteristics are essential for them to be able to serve their long-term goal of being the ultimate video entertainment portal for high-quality content for every Filipino.

Only then are they able to cater to their 2.4 million Filipino monthly active users.

So far, though, the numbers have been strong for iflix. Market share is growing; more people are watching content at 15-17 million minutes a day. The company is also sustaining its progress as it moves into the production side of things and starts creating originals just last March.

According to him, iflix is doing really well already have their customer base, for them to achieve more for himself, the company, the industry, and the country.
A few weeks before PLAYBOY’s first issue was due at the printer, Hugh Hefner and graphic designer Arthur Paul set out to create a symbol to represent the nascent publication’s visual identity.

“I wanted it to be something so simple that when you made it larger you could do many things with it,” the late Paul recalled in a 2018 documentary about his profound impact on the relationship between art and publishing. But back in 1953, PLAYBOY’s founding art director had no clue that the sophisticated, mischievous bow-tied rabbit with a cocked ear that he’d drafted in under an hour would become arguably the most recognizable silhouette in the world.

“If I’d had any idea how important that little Rabbit was going to be,” Paul said, “I probably would have redrawn him a dozen times… As it was, I did one drawing and that was it.” One take was all it took. The symbol made its cover debut on the magazine’s third issue (having graced the interior of the first two). And since the 1960s, it has appeared—sometimes prominently, often cleverly hidden—on nearly every cover. (A careful scan of this story will reveal the first Rabbit to hide within ’s pages. Hint: It’s not one of LeRoy Neiman’s Femlins.

The Rabbit’s reach quickly extended beyond the magazine: In 1959, a letter mailed from New York addressed with only the symbol was delivered to Playboy’s Chicago headquarters; by 1964, the Society of Typographic Arts had ranked it among the top logos ever designed in the United States. From Andy Warhol’s immediately recognizable red rendition (opposite page) to Neiman’s delicate expressionist version (above; featured on a 1991 Christmas card and previously unpublished), the Rabbit Head continues to serve as a blank canvas for artists nearly seven decades after Paul executed his “simple” idea.

**TALES**

From Warhol’s Factory to a Texas highway to a research lab at MIT, the Rabbit Head has inspired artists of every ilk from every corner of the globe for 65 years and counting. Here’s a warren of our favorites

**Cover Stories**

1956

April 1956 was the first time PLAYBOY’s rakish ambassador graced a cover prominently and alone (and in reverse), signifying that PLAYBOY didn’t require bare skin or big names to sell magazines.

1960

Paul’s inventive art direction set PLAYBOY apart. Example: This Don Bronstein photo reimagined by an actual puzzle maker inspired a jigsaw series that gave readers a new way to take the Rabbit home.

1968

The art department infused this cover with the spirit of the 1960s—and teased a pictorial called The Provocative Art of Body Painting—by brushing a psychedelic Rabbit onto model Sharon Kristie.

1971

Darine Stern is celebrated as the first African American to appear solo on a PLAYBOY cover. Her Rabbit styled throne inspired a perch for future cover models Lindsay Lohan and Marge Simpson.

1971

“When you got the phone call early in your career it meant you were going somewhere,” one artist said of longtime associate art director Kerig Pope, who co-created this simple, elegant cover.
WHAT IS AVAX HOME?
AVAXHOME - the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
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18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

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In the early 1970s, PLAYBOY asked Salvador Dalí to conceptualize his erotic fantasies, then dispatched staff photographer Pompeo Posar to the small Spanish village of Cadaqués to help the artist realize them. As you can see, our Rabbit—with the support of a blonde quintet—plays a central role in Dalí’s escapist visions. The artist's goal for the exercise, which was unveiled in a 1974 pictorial, was as clear as his fantasies were surreal: "The meaning of my work is the motivation that is of the purest—money. What I did for is very good and your payment is equal to the task."

What do Marilyn Monroe, Campbell’s soup cans and the Playboy Rabbit have in common? By 1986, all three icons had joined the ranks of subjects cranked off the assembly line of Andy Warhol’s Factory. “I’ve got bunnies on the brain,” he said of the assignment for PLAYBOY’s January 1986 anniversary issue. The piece would be one of Warhol’s last major works before his death, and no Rabbit better captures the opulence and commercialism of the decade than the artist’s stylish double-exposed version, which features bold slashes of cotton-candy pink and neon purple colliding on a lipstick-red canvas.

Prolific pop artist Keith Haring brought his abstract renderings of playful characters and progressive social ideas to PLAYBOY’s pages several times in the 1980s. Bunny #2, dubbed Bunny on the Move by the artist, is a rerelease of a never-published cover, part of a series commissioned by PLAYBOY in 1986—four years before the artist’s death.

“Have you ever noticed how your Rabbit resembles a butterfly?” mused Vladimir Nabokov in a 1968 letter to Hef. A drawing by the novelist-lepidopterist led to this cover by pinup artist Dennis Magdich. Award-winning costumer Bob Mackie has dreamed up sequin-drenched gowns for everyone from Cher to Barbie to PMOY Monique St. Pierre, who donned this silver one for our June 1979 cover. Robert Hoppe superimposed the Rabbit onto this dreamy purple-and-platinum specimen of the glamorous art deco cityscapes that made him Hollywood’s go-to poster and set designer. "His paintings are like drugs," Jeff Koons said of mentor Ed Paschke’s creations. "They affect you neurologically." Chicago artist Paschke constructed this neon Rabbit for our 40th anniversary.

Playboy Poland, one of PLAYBOY’s 22 international counterparts, has published at least seven Rabbit Head covers since 1992. This button-pushing digital image graced its February 2011 issue.
The Rabbit Reimagined

CUBIST COLLAGE
British artist Andrew Hewkin created this never-before-published Rabbit for Playboy’s Chicago headquarters in 1991. In addition to a clear affinity for Picasso, Hewkin’s mixed-media interpretation stemmed from a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Vietnam in the spring of 1991. Hewkin tells from his London studio, “I traveled all around and developed a new dimension to my work using collage and works on paper. Hence, the design for the Rabbit Head was influenced heavily by my travels in a war zone that had defeated the USA.”

BAS’S BUNNY
This radiant Rabbit was painted by elusive Dutch multimedia artist Bas van Reek in 1992. It’s undoubtedly one of our favorite fine art depictions, but its backstory is somewhat of a mystery few details are known about the piece or the man who created it.

CHEMICAL BOND
In 2007, PLAYBOY reader John Hart had a big idea about a small thing. As an experiment, Hart, an MIT researcher specializing in nanostructures, created a quarter-millimeter-wide Rabbit Head–shaped carbon nanotube by baking a silicon wafer in a high-temperature furnace containing carbon gas. “A chemical reaction draws up millions of parallel nanotubes in any shape you specify,” Hart told at the time. Hart’s creation, now housed in the Museum of Sex in New York City, is the world’s tiniest Rabbit Head. “The bow ties are about the width of a human hair.”

HINGED HARE
Self-taught American sculptor Ernest Trova spent more than two months creating this seven-by-four-foot stainless-steel Rabbit Head for in 1997, and the heavy hinged hare now greets guests from the lobby of the company’s world headquarters in Los Angeles. The sculpture, which features a flappable ear and bow tie, is the only known kinetic version of the Rabbit.

PLAYBOY MARFA
In the summer of 2013, Neville Wakefield, Playboy’s then creative director for special projects, tapped artist Richard Phillips to create a temporary roadside installation outside Marfa, Texas. Public response to the project, which centered on the world’s tallest Rabbit Head, was decidedly mixed. Countless #PlayboyMarfa selfies flooded the internet, and Phillips made a convincing case for the piece as a visual reconciliation of the brand’s legacy with its future; locals deemed it an eyesore packaged as art. Love it or hate it, the piece elicited an undeniably provocative conversation about the line between art and advertising.
Pop artist and January 1996 Playmate Victoria Fuller created The Power of One after viewing a production of the Pulitzer Prizewinning play Harvey. “The play was about a man who had an invisible friend who was a big rabbit,” says Fuller. “Mr. Playboy, the Rabbit Head and Hef himself are all Hef to me. Today I see this piece as the spirit of Hef and how the power of one man created such an iconic brand.”

Each year from 2007 to 2011, Playboy tapped some choice musical artists to remix its logo for a recurring campaign called Rock the Rabbit. The impressive lineup included Duran Duran, MGMT, Daft Punk, Iggy Pop and dozens more. English electronic band Hot Chip is behind this playful abstract reimagining, which was featured on a T-shirt.

Roger Brown, an Alabama-born artist associated with the Chicago imagists, had a lifelong appreciation for Southern folk art and functional, handmade art objects. He created this five-foot-tall painted wooden Rabbit for Playboy’s Chicago offices in 1992.

Rabbit Relations

**Bathing Beauties**
Our cheeky July 1966 cover (inset) was shot by staff photographer Larry Gordon on a faux beach in Chicago. Forty-seven summers later, the sexy sandy shot inspired Tony Kelly’s aquatic configuration (July/August 2013). It features 25 synchronized swimmers, including Olympians and Vegas performers—to date the most women ever gathered to appear on our U.S. cover.

**Elegant Érté**
The Rabbit kicked off 1987 on a celebratory note with one of the magazine’s most striking covers (inset): an original piece by Érté, the Russian art deco pioneer renowned for his exquisite costumes for Paris’s Folies Bergère (and once, famously, Dutch courtesan and spy Mata Hari). Playmate of the Year Stacy Sanches reenacted Érté’s romantic vision in 1996.

**Human Hares**
Playmate of the Year Donna Michelle—a former New York City Ballet dancer—created the first human Rabbit Head in 1964 (inset). Flash forward four decades to futuristic pinup artist Hajime Sorayama’s version for the September 2003 cover of Playboy Japan. “My longings were not so much carnal as they were an admiration of women as goddesses,” he said of his love of pinup.

**Skin-Deep**
Art Paul and associate art director (and Vargas biographer) Reid Austin designed this faux cutout cover (inset), photographed by Pompeo Posar and featuring Playmate Kathy Douglas, for PLAYBOY’s eighth anniversary issue in December 1961. Playboy Philippines presented a more risqué interpretation of the concept for its March/April 2015 issue.
Kapuso hunk Adhiraj Gaur, popularly known as Addy Raj, finally invaded the Playboy pages.

The Indian national made his career debut here in the Philippines after starting out as an exchange student in Ateneo de Manila University. He did his internship as a graphic designer and also became a part of the athletic team.

People began noticing his strong features and advised him to give modeling a shot, and try it out on showbiz. Addy never took those seriously at that time, because he taught that they are just trying to flatter him.

After two months of internship, he flew back to India for his graduation. Upon finishing college, he planned to represent his country in the Olympics. After all, he was in the right hands training with the third fastest runner in the whole history of India as his coach.

“I was so focused that time, and suddenly I realized that there is still another option: to go to the Philippines and become an actor,” Raj shared.
Addy tried a career that he never dreamt of having. Being an actor and being in the entertainment business is not something he intended. He just wanted to try something new, “I just want to get out of my system. I don’t want to regret that I didn’t try. So I told my parents that I want to be an actor, and they thought I was just joking about it.”

After doing different auditions, Addy became a commercial model. That soon paved the way for his career in showbiz. Though he admitted that it was hard for him at first because he was still learning the Filipino language.

In a span of months of doing workshops and lessons, he managed to get a good grip of the language, and learned the art of acting as well.

But apart from his passion to become an actor, Addy also wanted to break the Indian stereotypes here in the Philippines. According to him, Filipinos tend to have bad perceptions on Indians. And by being an actor, he may be able to lessen and improve the image of the Indian people.

“I am trying my best not to accept roles that would put Indians down.”

Raj also realized that being a celebrity is not just about popularity, it is something that would help you become a better person, “It makes you a nicer person because you’ve got to interact with thousands of people every day. And they all come from different backgrounds, different classes—and that teaches you so much.”

He added, “I’ve met the richest of the richest and poorest of the poor, and because of that, I appreciate life so much more now.”

He shared that when he was young, he used to say that he wanted to become rich. But today, he doesn’t really care about that anymore.

“I’ve realized that money doesn’t necessarily result in happiness,” he said.

Throughout his journey in becoming an actor, Addy had proved to his family that he can stand on his own despite doubting him before.

Riding solo on his new life, he had to surpass the idea of being new and with literally no one to talk to when he was just beginning. But because of his dedication to find his luck in a country which he is a stranger to, he manages to overcome those challenges along his way. He, then, found a home away from home.

For someone who birthed from scratch and now has a whole career and life ahead of him, Addy Raj continues to humbly absorb and take everything in for his personal growth and improvement.

“I’d like to think of myself as a student all the time because I’m always learning something new. Everywhere I go, I always find an opportunity to learn something new.”

“I’d like to think of myself as a student all the time because I’m always learning something new.”

PHOTOS
ATO ROQUEL
It has been nothing but a tight race towards the finale for Playmates Jessa Masarita, Unica Roces, April Season, Kate Gonzales, Barbie Takei, and Joanna David. As this year’s top contenders continue to seize the most coveted Playmate of the Year seat, they are still to surpass what are yet to come: from photo shoots, charity works, mock elections, up to the anticipated Coronation Night.
“We may all be aiming for the title but beyond this competition, by the end of this journey, we look forward to strengthen our sisterhood as Playboy Playmates.”
Game of Thrones, which kicks off its final season on HBO this spring, redefined the TV sex scene. Sex and nudity on television aren’t going anywhere—but they will need to evolve.

When *Game of Thrones* debuts its eighth and final season on April 14, one thing will be glaringly apparent to longtime fans: There aren’t nearly as many naked prostitutes in Westeros anymore.

This is particularly disappointing to Samantha Bentley, who has played three different ladies of the night over several seasons of HBO’s 47-time Emmy-winning series. “I was hoping maybe they’d have me back one more time before it ends,” she says wistfully. “But it doesn’t look like that’s going to happen. It’s a different show now.”

By “different,” she means, of course, less nude. Exposed flesh on *Game of Thrones* has dropped by a staggering 81.8 percent from season one to season seven. This is a pretty dramatic shift for a show that actor Ian McShane, a onetime guest star, once dismissed as “just tits and dragons.”

*Game of Thrones* isn’t a pioneering ratuous nudity on mainstream TV. Naked body parts have been slowly but surely sneaking onto American television since Dennis Franz flashed his butt on ABC’s *NYPD Blue* in 1994. But it’s the first critically acclaimed series to put nudity front and center. The show was once so enthusiastic about rampant nakedness that it inspired new terminology—including *sexposition*, a word coined by TV critic Myles McNutt to explain how *Game of Thrones* uses random unclothed bodies as window dressing for plot exposition.

But the sex seems to have (mostly) disappeared, with no plot-driven explanation. The reason might be that the actors were becoming more resistant. Emilia Clarke, for example, has renegotiated her non-nudity clause with the studio. Or maybe HBO was growing weary of the negative press—one former director claimed he was pressured by producers to do more full-frontal scenes to satisfy the “pervert side of the audience”—and legal battles with sites such as Pornhub, where steamy *Game of Thrones* clips trafficked higher than actual porn.

Whatever the reason, the lack of clothes-less activity in the Seven Kingdoms hasn’t slowed the naked renaissance it helped spawn. Indeed, the boob tube has become, quite literally, the boob tube. The number of TV nude scenes featuring women jumped from 497 on 27 different shows in 2008 to 1,370 on 147 shows in 2018, according to Mr. Skin, an online database of nudity in media. Male exposure has seen a similar bump, from 72 scenes across 16 shows in 2008 to 736 scenes on 149 different shows last year.

The explicit carnality on recent shows can make *Game of Thrones* seem downright tame by comparison. All the tropes that first caused Westeros to appear so scandalous—incest, rape, prostitutes, woman-on-woman finger-banging, sex at funerals—have since played out on shows including *Shameless*, *Harlots*, *The Deuce*, *Vida*, *She’s Gotta Have It*, *Outlander*, *Altered Carbon* and *Orange Is the New Black*. And they’re showing much, much more than anything we witnessed on *Game of Thrones.*
"A lot of scripts don’t have more direction for a sex scene than ‘They go for it.’"

Last year gave us the first semi-erect penis on TV (on Netflix’s *Easy*) and the first nothing-left-to-the-imagination depiction of oral sex (on Starz’s *The Girlfriend Experience*).

Put simply, we’re living in a golden age of TV nudity. But are today’s productions using the same sexposition playbook as *Game of Thrones*, or are they venturing into uncharted territory? Is it just nudity-by-numbers, or are they aiming for something more revelatory than, say, soft-core porn with better dialogue? Karley Sciortino maintains it’s the latter. “The nudity being shot for TV today is much rawer and messier and more improvised,” says the writer and actress who has done full-frontal nudity on Netflix’s *Easy*, including in that groundbreaking boner scene. “They don’t shoot scenes with angles that make your tits look perfect.”

She prefers sex scenes that reflect what actually takes place in the bedrooms of human beings. “Sex is clumsy sometimes,” Sciortino says. “People can’t get the condom on, or they start laughing. There’s a great moment in the first season of *Easy* where these people are having a threesome, and there’s a baby monitor in the room. The baby starts crying, so everybody stops, and they go take care of the baby and then come back. I was like, ‘Yeah, that’s real life.’ ”

On her new show, the Steven Soderbergh–produced *Now Apocalypse* (Starz again), Sciortino works behind the scenes as a co-writer and creator, and the cast isn’t shy about discussing their limits. “There are a lot of conversations on the set about consent,” she says. “They’re not just having those discussions—they’re leading them. Once you create a safe space where actors feel they’re in charge, they’re more willing to take risks.”

That’s very different from just a few years ago, when the climate on TV productions, even at its best, wasn’t about making actors feel safe. During filming for the first season of the HBO series *Westworld* in 2015, nude extras were asked to sign a consent form that warned them they’d be engaging in “graphic sexual situations” that would likely involve “genital-to-genital touching” and posing “on all fours while others who are fully nude ride on your back,” among other acts. When the form was made public, HBO insisted it had been written by a casting agency without HBO approval.

Esmé Bianco, who plays the frequently nude prostitute Ros over several early seasons of *Game of Thrones*—as a refresher, she was featured in the season one tryst coached by Littlefinger—has only praise for how she was treated by the director and producers. But she also has moments of post-MeToo hindsight. “You really had to be your own advocate back then,” she says. “If there was something I didn’t want to do, I’d have to speak up in front of the entire crew, which was predominantly men. That’s really difficult in a job that’s so competitive, and nobody wants to be seen as a troublemaker.”

Today, actresses don’t have to make those difficult decisions alone. HBO hired longtime stunt performer and fight director Alicia Rodis to serve as the network’s first “intimacy coordinator.” Working on shows including the upcoming Watchmen series—the TV adaptation created by showrunner Damon Lindelof, who’s such a fan of on-screen nudity that he claims the vanity license plate on his car reads FERNTL - as well as *The Deuce* and *Crashing*, she acts as a liaison between the actors and the director, making sure the sex scenes involve more oversight than “a cock sock and a prayer,” she says.

But it’s not just about letting the actors have more input on how much skin they reveal. “What looks good on a screen can be very different from what feels good,” Rodis says. “A lot of scripts don’t have much more direction for a sex scene than ‘They go for it.’ But that’s not helpful to an actor. That just means do what you’d do in the bedroom. But what works in the bedroom doesn’t always read on camera. It’s like stunts. You’re not actually going to punch someone in the face. You have to cheat it to the camera in a certain way.”

Her job isn’t just about protecting actors but facilitating more believable sex scenes. “I’m not walking onto a set and trying to get everyone into down jackets,” she says. “I want more sex
scenes. But let’s do them right. It comes down to giving actors better direction, and that can be as subtle as asking them, ‘Could you alter your hip movement to a swivel instead of a pop?’

Sciortino isn’t convinced that what TV sex needs is more choreography. “You have to be careful not to over-monitor to the point where it becomes sterilized,” she says. “Acting needs enough room for spontaneity. These intimacy coordinators are great, but actors should also have the freedom to lose themselves in a moment.”

Emilia Clarke, who has been repeatedly naked as the Mother of Dragons on *Game of Thrones*, has gone out of her way to justify why her nudity on the show is not just narratively necessary but empowering. “It was naked, but it was strong,” she told Stephen Colbert in 2016, explaining why Daenerys needed to emerge sans clothing from a fiery inferno after smiting her enemies.

Jemima Kirke, a regular on the HBO series *Girls* who never shied away from being naked on camera, doesn’t feel so strongly that every instance of nudity needs to be fraught with significance. “Nudity doesn’t need to be sexual,” she says. “But it doesn’t need to be empowering either.”

Kirke’s most memorable unclothed moment on *Girls* involves her casually eating yogurt while lounging naked on a couch, and she’d like to see more of that unremarkable nudity, where actors go au naturel just because being naked is part of being human. “If you’re an actor, then your body is there for telling stories,” says Kirke, who also shot several nude scenes in the recent film *Untogether*. “I don’t think anything should be offlimits. I don’t mind being objectified. That’s my job as an actress. I’m a part of the visual story.”

Sex on TV isn’t going anywhere. If anything, we’ll be seeing even more flesh on the small screen in the coming year. But it’s not about how much square footage of naked skin is allowed or how graphically the sex is simulated; it’s about actors being heard. “We want to keep everyone safe,” Rodis says, “but there’s also an artistry in this. The actors aren’t just props. They should be involved in the decision-making.”

She remembers one of her first days on the set of *The Deuce*. She was sitting with an actress—she declines to name her—who was preparing to do a nude scene. “She seemed a little distracted,” Rodis says. “So I asked her, ‘Are you okay?’ She was like, ‘What do you mean?’ I said, ‘I know this is an emotionally volatile and very sexual scene. Are you okay with all of this?’ She looked at me and said, ‘You know, I’ve been doing this for 20 years, and I think that’s the first time anyone’s ever asked me that.’”
Veered from the bright and glitzy lights of the entertainment stage are these individuals’ creative minds and dirty works.
Avid Liongoren
Director and Illustrator, Saving Sally

“Hindi ako fanciful creative.”

A medley of shawarma, Dante Gulapa, and his dogs can probably keep Avid Liongoren satisfied for the rest of his life. With his pure wanting to navigate and create stuff out of the system and outside what is proven, this UP Fine Arts produce’s only goal in life is to not be stressed while making stuff that he likes. His tiny studio Rocketsheep Studios, fairly composed of five artists and two dogs, is probably the fruition of that said vision. But first, it’s all about getting people to take a look at his works.

Dexter Santos
Theatre Director, Ang Huling El Bimbo (The Musical)

“You gotta saturate possibilities and work towards the edge.”

Dexter Santos never knew he would end up directing. The former choreographer for professional productions fell in love with the beauty of theatre as being highly experiential and ephemeral, making no two shows the same. Thus, he makes sure to make the most out of every opportunity he gets by constantly striving to say something new to the world through his art.
Kayley Carrigan

Stuntwoman, Maria

“I want to make history as a stuntwoman.”

It only takes minutes for Kayley to be able to perfect a stunt, but requires almost a lifetime of discipline for her to master her chosen craft. Risk is also an understatement for this stunt-double as some things are beyond her control, regardless of training and prepping for how many weeks. But it is the adrenaline that comes with every completed stunt that keeps her craving for more.

Marielle Hizon

Production Designer, Mary, Marry Me

“Hopefully, someday may contribution ako sa industriya.”

No doubt, Marielle Hizon has travelled a much farther route from her International Studies program back in college. After developing a taste for the film industry, she found herself in the nitty-gritty side of production. Seven years later, she still finds it very fulfilling to actually see everything pieced together on screen, especially those she makes out of nothing.

JP Habac

Film Director and Writer, I’m Drunk I Love You

“Hindi ko sinusubukang maging quotable quote.”

Laced with his fascination on human interactions and conversations, JP Habac tries to keep people emotionally imprisoned with every realistic scene he creates. With that being said, the film director and writer believes that script development is the most crucial step. It is a matter of uniquely expressing your voice as a storyteller, and trying to turn off your inner critique while doing so. At the end of the day, Habac just has this urge to generate discussion in whatever film he makes.
Robin Sison
Writer, Daddy's Girl

"Hindi mo lahat mapapatawa"

Starting out with literally zero technical knowledge on writing, Robin Sison had definitely come a long way since his first noontime show headlining the APO Hiking Society back in 1996. From the traditional typewriter, floppy disks and fax machines to today’s e-mail and Viber age—he has seen it all. The 46-year old’s writing ripened like a fine wine through time; but he remains to owe most of his jokes and punchlines to the classic street antics and the original comedians of Philippine entertainment industry such as the Dolphy Quizon and Redford White.

Nica Rojo
Voice Actor, Spongebob Squarepants

“We’re just bridges to tell the story.”

Faithfulness to the material is what Nica Rojo believes her core obligation as a voice actor. The Interior Design major discovered her infatuation with dubbing after winning a contest in an anime convention she went to—and the rest was history. She seizes every character both as an immense honor and pressure to hold. What most don’t know, however, is the precautionary measures she takes in terms of translating the material, so as not to disrespect the vision of the creator itself.
When director Rachel Talalay went to San Diego Comic-Con in 1995 to promote her film *Tank Girl*, based on a British comic about a superpowerless woman who, well, drives a tank, the fest was a fraction of the spectacle it is today. Back then, the event was a more honest celebration of comic books, with far less coopting by studios looking to push their movies and TV shows. That’s mostly because movies and TV shows based on comic books were rare. According to Talalay, who now directs for television on shows including *The Flash* and *Supergirl*, another crucial difference between Comic-Con of the 1990s and Comic-Con today was how few women filed inside the convention center. “When I took *Tank Girl* there, I brought in this female audience who had nothing,” Talalay says. “The only women in Comic-Con were the booth babes.”

*Tank Girl* ultimately flopped. Talalay blames executives who, she says, pushed her out of the editing process and turned the film into something nonsensical. Two decades later, much has changed in the comics-based entertainment ecosystem, as exemplified by the March release of *Captain Marvel*—the first film from the Marvel Cinematic Universe to have a female lead. Set in the 1990s, it follows Carol Danvers, an Air Force pilot with special powers who gets embroiled in an intergalactic war. Heading into its release, the film has unprecedented momentum and appeal. *Avengers: Infinity War* ended with a wallop, and it’s clear Danvers and her alter ego will play a substantial role in cleaning up Thanos’s cosmic trauma in the fourth *Avengers* installment, scheduled for May. *Captain Marvel* also has the opportunity to prolong the hot streak Marvel Studios has achieved in its so-called “phase three,” with the critical and commercial successes of *Black Panther*, *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. And with the ascendant Brie Larson in the lead role, *Captain Marvel* is the first Marvel Studios film headlined by an Oscar winner. “It’s going to be one of the biggest movies of the year,” says Paul Dergarabedian, a senior analyst at comScore, a leading media analytics company. “It’s no question.”

Such confidence in a female-led film is a new phenomenon in Hollywood, especially within Marvel Studios and its corporate parent, Disney, which bought the company in 2009. Over the course of 10 years and 20 Marvel Studios movies, female superheroes have served as supporting players (the *Avengers* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* series) or shared equal billing in a sequel (*Ant-Man and the Wasp*). DC Films and Warner Bros. haven’t done much better in their decades-long partnership. Warner has released seven live-action films about Batman, six about Superman and one about them fighting each other. It wasn’t until 2017 that the studio finally put out its first stand-alone female superhero movie, *Wonder Woman*. *Wonder Woman* didn’t just collect more than $800 million at the global box office; it positioned the studio—whether intentionally or not—at the forefront of a culture-defining moment, one informed by the 2016 election and, to be more insular, a lack of enthusiasm for Batman post–Christopher Nolan. “*Wonder Woman* had a particular resonance among female viewers, and even male viewers who wanted their daughters to be inspired by her character,” Dergarabedian says, perhaps referring to the fact that the film inspired women-only viewings.

It took long enough, but with *Captain Marvel* flying into theaters, women are finally getting their fair chance to save the world.
across the country, as well as one of the most popular Halloween costumes of 2017.

With Wonder Woman, DC Films finally delivered to a movie audience that, nationally, is becoming less male and less white. “We’ve known for years that fandom has become more inclusive, more diverse and, frankly, more feminine than ever,” says Matthew Smith, a professor at Radford University and author of *Critical Approaches to Comics*. The record-breaking box office tallies of both Black Panther and Wonder Woman prove Smith’s assertion. “The reality that you would market only products that are tailored to an audience of white males is surprising,” Smith continues. “There’s more money available to you. Why are you not going after that money?”

For comic book enthusiasts, the answer is clearly that for so long, Hollywood didn’t know the formula. Aside from Tank Girl, Catwoman and Elektra, both commercial flops, were released within six months of each other between 2004 and 2005. Halle Berry’s and Jennifer Garner’s films failed for various reasons, including, respectively, divorcing Catwoman from the Batman universe and creating a Daredevil spin-off that no one wanted.

Their poor showings (Catwoman made $40 million domestically and Elektra $24 million) justified to film executives that they needn’t invest in movies about female superheroes, and that line of thinking prevailed for more than a decade.

But Dergarabedian likes to counter that dry-era theory by noting the precedent of commercially successful female-led action movies pre-dating Wonder Woman. He cites Sigourney Weaver’s portrayal of Ripley in the early Alien movies and, more recently, Jennifer Lawrence in *The Hunger Games* franchise, the first film of which established March as a reliable month for launching blockbusters. Following her 2015 performance in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Charlize Theron starred in *Atomic Blonde*, which completed her evolution into a bankable action heroine after *Aeon Flux’s* 2005 failure. Scarlett Johansson carried Luc Besson’s sci-fi action flick *Lucy* to almost $500 million worldwide in 2014. And yet, for almost a decade, Johansson’s Marvel character remained a supporting player. That will change soon; Marvel green-lit a Black Widow stand-alone film last year.

When Black Widow debuts, it will be the directorial work of Australian filmmaker Cate Shortland. Her hiring is an example of how, in the midst of Time’s Up, female inclusiveness is finally registering on both sides of the camera. Catwoman and Elektra were both directed by men; Wonder Woman clearly benefited from the vision of Patty Jenkins, who is directing its sequel, Wonder Woman 1984. Captain Marvel also has a female director (albeit as half of a husband-and-wife team, Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck), and six of its seven credited screenwriters are women.

Even with all the goodwill, Captain Marvel isn’t a sure bet. For one, outside comic book fan circles, the Air Force pilot is a largely unknown figure—as is an earlier incarnation, Ms. Marvel—even though she has been around in various forms since the 1970s. But optimists would argue that this lack of familiarity could work to the film’s advantage. After all, does anyone need to see Bruce Wayne’s parents die yet again? Captain Marvel might make you actually give a damn about the Kree or the fact that the hero glows in the trailers like she’s tripping on ayahuasca. It also might make you wonder what took so long.
SERVING AS THE PERSONIFICATION OF BEAUTY AND BRAINS, MISS MAY ANN ZAVALLA IS THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF AN ALLURING WORKING GIRL.
Born and raised in Sta. Rosa, Laguna, Ann is an affirmation that her province has some of the most appealing ladies in the Philippines. The 24-year-old has been rocking the modeling industry for some time now. "I have been modeling for 10 years already, but I also do event hosting," she explained.

She believes that her move as a Playmate is a monumental step for her career. But other than her modeling journey as of now, Miss May is also currently a law student on her way to serve the courtroom.

Ann is breaking the common misconception that pretty girls are not usually academically bright. Here she is going against the stereotype. But there's no reason to be intimidated by her. She is certainly the type that would make you comfortable with her radiant smile.

Despite being deprived of a complete family, only having her mother to rely on, she remained to have a positive outlook in life. Miss May worked her way to success by graduating as summa cum laude and earning a scholarship to take up law. "I wanted to prove that more than beauty, I also have substance," she proudly said. Ann plans to help the underprivileged by using her legal knowledge, especially when she finishes law school.

Our Playmate for the month of May also shares that she loves spending her spare time alone, drinking coffee. She is enjoying the time to herself while she still can, since this curvy bombshell remains to be unattached.

However, Ann is open to meeting guys. She explained that she does not have a specific preference, but she is naturally attracted to guys who are family-oriented and as equally hardworking as she is. She does not get attracted easily, too, so if you piqued her interest, make sure to make the most of the chance.

When it comes to choosing suitors though, she shared that she prefers to see more on the inside, as physical attributes fade as time goes by.

She also painted us a picture of her ideal date: on the beach, or anywhere near the sea, somewhere she could hear the crashing waves, while drinking coffee or wine.

It is obvious that Ann Zavalla is the ultimate package. Apart from her undeniable sex appeal are her palpable hard work and powerful mindset to achieve all her goals in life. Her adamant personality to attain what she wants also adds up to the many reason why we will not be surprised to see her reaching her dreams anytime soon.

She is already halfway there, and she is not stopping.
“I wanted to prove that more than beauty I also have substance”
Does nudity discredit intellect? That’s the question six female writers of various backgrounds wanted to present in our pages when they approached PLAYBOY last fall. It’s a question that illuminates how views on feminism continue to shift post-#MeToo: what it looks like, who can participate, the greater purpose. In think pieces, academic discussions, podcasts and tweets, society is still contending with women who reject the notion that sexual expression and success must be mutually exclusive. In a time when conversations about sex are increasingly politicized, these journalists, columnists and authors are uniting to speak out on what it means to be simultaneously autonomous, successful, proud and powerful. In a word, free.
From a young age, fascinated by the human psyche and the ability to reach the masses with my words, I dreamed of becoming a reporter. Today, I am one. I visit movie sets around the world, report from the most glamorous red carpets and interview celebrities such as Timothée Chalamet, Gal Gadot and Oprah. My site, Talk to Me Taylor, is a place where I challenge celebrities with unconventional interviews that attempt to go deeper and pull out something more meaningful.

Here’s the thing about being a reporter: People like to tell you what to ask and how to do your job. Ironic, given journalists are supposed to be protectors of free speech, right? VH1 once “suspended” me for being critical of a celebrity in an article. My words have been stifled by publications that claim to be progressive and feminist but are intolerant of views outside their editors’ comfort zones. Last year, The Blast, in a piece called “Morgan Freeman Openly Objectifies Female Reporter During Press Interview,” attempted to portray me as another #MeToo victim. The story was widely reported, but Freeman, though accused of harassment by other women, didn’t make me feel uncomfortable during our interview. I published an op-ed piece denouncing the article.

And so, throughout my career I’ve adopted one consistent message: Don’t tell me what I can and can’t say. In this era, too many people are torn down, devalued and ruined for saying something others don’t agree with. People attempt to silence one another under the belief that opposing views don’t deserve equal consideration. Many probably perceive this very story as something female journalists shouldn’t do lest we risk our reputations, our professionalism.

Yes, we’re showcasing our bodies and inviting you to look. No, none of that discredits our intellect, womanhood, integrity or ability to tell a story. I can no longer feed into a narrative that says displaying one’s beauty, brains and body are mutually exclusive. There’s nothing wrong with aspiring to be a Centerfold or a woman who can bring a story to life with pen and paper. They’re different forms of creative expression. A woman’s ability to exhibit either form, or both, without judgment? That’s freedom.

I hope you see in these photos the beautiful female form in all its glory. Go ahead, call these women sexy. When you do, remember we are all writers, journalists and thinkers helping to shape the world you live in via what you read, armed with nothing more than our intelligence and an unapologetic love for words.

Taylor Ferber writes about pop culture and entertainment, with bylines on Vulture, Bustle, UsMagazine.com and Fandango.

MEGAN STUBBS, MASTER OF SEX
I’ll go out on a limb and say sexologist wasn’t a job anyone considered on career day in high school. Incidentally, that is what I’ve become.
After years of study and obtaining certificates and degrees, I now have the privilege to educate people about sex every day. I’d even argue I know enough to be dangerous.

I’m sure you’ve seen my breasts by now. If not, take another look above—I’m standing there, in the middle, holding the handbag. Nice, right? Has your opinion of me changed now that you’ve seen my breasts? Unfortunately for some of you, it may have. Such judgment originates with critics who don’t want to live in a world where women have nipples and own their bodies. Despite my authority on the topic, this story may reduce me in some people’s minds to nothing more than another woman who got naked for attention. In fact, I’m honored to be featured in PLAYBOY for both my words and my flesh. To be part of this iconic brand, and to have the reach of its platform for sharing my ideas, is truly amazing and affirming.

In a society starved for honest, accurate information about sex, sexuality, relationships and body image, it is my mission to provide a fresh lens through my reporting. Shining a light on complicated topics such as the increase in male infertility and rising male interest in anal sex, being mindful of inclusion and bringing a sensitivity to ethnic diversity rooted in my own complex heritage are at the forefront of my work as a sex educator turned journalist. It’s wrong to relate my comfort with baring my flesh—no, owning it—to my intellectual worth.

As feminists, it’s our right to determine what empowers us. For some, that may be modesty; for others, it may be nudity. Neither is right or wrong. It’s about individuality. If the thought of seeing someone nude diminishes your opinion of his or her worth or authority, I’d encourage you to ask yourself why.

Even with all this said, some will be displeased with me. That’s okay. I’m not here to make you happy. I’m not a problem.

Megan Stubbs is a board-certified sexologist and public speaker who writes about sex and relationships for Playboy.com.

HELEN DONAHUE, FEMINIST FIREBRAND

In late 2017, I became a pivotal voice in the #MeToo movement within the journalism community. At the time, my parents warned me that if I leaned too hard into activism against domestic violence, it might become expected of me; it might become what I was known for in the industry. I fell into a yearlong depression, struggling to comprehend my new reputation as the girl who got raped and decided to speak up about it. I hated being lauded for my bravery. Coming forward was simply the right thing to do, and I happened to have the platform and the freedom to do it. Not all women do.

Most men, I believe, imagine that feminism imbues every fiber of a woman’s existence. Those men don’t understand feminism. It is equality and freedom, but it also allows for imperfection—the ability to be flawed, both clothed and unclothed. I’m now attempting, through my writing, to make feminism more accessible to a Gen Z audience that may be alienated by modern media’s lack of consideration for them. It is important to tell young women today that being a feminist doesn’t mean blindly voting for any woman who runs for Congress. Or any woman who runs for president. Coming into 2019 I’m no longer accepting the role that has tried to confine me since 2017. I have too many components, too many contradictions and complexities. In my teens and early 20s, I struggled with my mental health. At one point I was simultaneously a postgrad academic and a stripper. Today, I’m a writer who has the freedom to publish my thoughts even though my editors know they’ll trigger a backlash. No one will ever be able to identify me as this or that. Knowing myself, I’ll continue to enrage and surprise people. I’ll continue to bring attention to wrongdoing, especially when minorities’ rights are threatened. I’ve abandoned much of the terminology that compromised the 2016 election—SJWisms such as smash the patriarchy—to speak directly to young people, who I hope read my op-ed pieces without pigeonholing them as feminist arguments. We need to let the next generation know that women (and men) are not just falling in line. We’ll speak up, write and report whenever we detect fissures in particular arguments. I want people to see that feminists can be intelligent and not take everything seriously—but take the correct things seriously. We can also choose to be naked. That’s the beauty of it.

Helen Donahue has written for Vice and Quartz and is a contributing writer for Playboy.com. She previously served as Super Deluxe’s social media director and as an editor for Hearst Digital Media.
ANDREA WERHUN, MODERN WHORE

Why, hello there. Welcome to my naked body. Greetings from the lovely lady lumps of this fertile flesh, presented to you without shame in unabashed two-dimensional Technicolor. Groovy. Although “assume” makes an ass of you and me, you may have guessed that I made a choice to show you the truth of these curves—and you, my friend, would be correct. I mean, why wouldn’t I? Look at my tits! Here today, at my bellybutton tomorrow. I might as well immortalize my sexual apex with a tasteful PLAYBOY spread alongside a gaggle of incredible women.

Like the other women featured in these pages, I’m a writer. My book, Modern Whore: A Memoir, published in 2017, is about the two glamorous and grotesque years I spent working as an escort in Toronto. It features 27 short stories that run the gamut from funny and thought-ful to erotic and disturbing, sprinkled with some 60 (mostly nude) film stills of yours truly taken by filmmaker Nicole Bazuin. Come for the provocative pictures, stay for the pro–sex work feminist manifesto.

As a sex worker, I’m no stranger to the argument that I can’t make decisions about my body, especially decisions pertaining to sex and money. My body is literally my business. Sex work is how I’ve made money while pursuing my career as a full-time writer and performer. Sex work is flexible, well-paying and, yes, fun. It’s not for everyone, but it’s ideal for me, and I’m not alone. I’m not an exception to some rule; I’m part of an ever-growing chorus of voices that demands we recognize sex work as work and sex workers as people worthy of love, respect and full protection under the law. I use my privilege to tell my story because so many of us cannot.

So, yes, you bet your ass I consider myself a feminist, and posing nude—for PLAYBOY, for my book or as a sex worker—poses no contradiction. My body is mine, after all. I can do whatever I want with it, which happens to include putting its glorious truth on display for all to enjoy. You’re welcome.

Andrea Werhun is an author, performer and columnist who writes about sex and consent for Playboy.com. She has been featured in The New York Times and The Guardian and on CBC.

SOFIA BARRETT-IBARRIA, PROFESSIONAL SEXEXPLORER

I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t uncomfortable with my body or itching to get out of my own skin. That’s not because there’s anything wrong with it, but because for as long as I can remember, my body hasn’t really been mine. Lingering stares, hags that lasted too long, catcalls and comments from men taught me early on that I was a sexual object before I could understand why or what that even meant. I never had room to define my sexuality, because it had been defined for me. By men. Later, as I attempted to reimagine myself as a sexualized body, I realized such efforts were attempts at emotional survival.

For many women, our entire existence is politicized. Who we have sex with, when we have sex, how often, whether we procreate, whether we take off our clothes for one. I’m a hairy, bipolar bisexual woman with cellulite, stretch marks, self-inflicted scars and some strange moles. I’m not supposed to be in PLAYBOY, but here I am. I was waiting for permission to be sexy and exude sex appeal because then people wouldn’t take me seriously. This caused mental conflict; I knew it was fucked-up. Why did I have to stifle myself as a woman to be accepted?

A turning point for me was remembering when I found a stash of PLAYBOYs in our garage as a kid. I opened up the pages and admired how the Playmates oozed confidence in their bare skin and how unabashed they were about their bodies. Those feelings have stuck with me throughout my life. When I moved into my first apartment, I covered my bedroom walls with photography of naked or scantily clad women because I wanted to become one of those women. Proud. Confident. Sexy. I was envious of their ability to embrace their bodies without feeling they had to sacrifice dignity.

It became obvious to me that I had been waiting for someone else to give me my freedom. I was waiting for permission to be sexy and smart, among many other things. After years of searching for external validation, I woke up. Yes, I can be a multidimensional woman. But the only person who can allow that is me. So I’ve granted myself the ability to explore and exude all parts of me.

Sofia Barrett-Ibarria is a journalist who writes for Esquire, The Cut, Allure, Glamour, Dazed and Broaddly.

BRUNA NESSIF, MULTITHYPHENATE MOGUL

For as long as I can remember, I’ve been fed the limiting belief that I could be either smart or sexy. Never both, because one would discredit the other. So I chose to be smart. I buried my face in books. I became a top student. I graduated with a broadcast journalism degree, pursued writing, became an entrepreneur, launched a website, spoke at the Women’s Empowerment Expo and published a self-help book, Let That Shit Go. Through many of these accomplishments, I continued to internalize, perhaps subconsciously, a narrative that said I couldn’t exude sex appeal because then people wouldn’t take me seriously. This caused mental conflict; I knew it was fucked-up. Why did I have to stifle myself as a woman to be accepted?

A turning point for me was remembering when I found a stash of PLAYBOYs in our garage as a kid. I opened up the pages and admired how the Playmates oozed confidence in their bare skin and how unabashed they were about their bodies. Those feelings have stuck with me throughout my life. When I moved into my first apartment, I covered my bedroom walls with photography of naked or scantily clad women because I wanted to become one of those women. Proud. Confident. Sexy. I was envious of their ability to embrace their bodies without feeling they had to sacrifice dignity.

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Know this: It hasn’t always been easy. Even on set for this shoot, I found myself wondering if I would lose respect and credibility after this issue’s release. But you know what? It became easy to stop caring. I fought to become this woman. I’m proud of this woman. I always wanted to be this woman and by giving myself that freedom to become her, I know now that no one can take her away from me.

Bruna Nessif is founder of The Problem With Dating, a website that covers the dating lives of young people. She’s a former entertainment journalist and editor for E! Online.
LA BELLEZA

DIVINA

DIVINE BEAUTY IS THE MOST MODEST TAG TO ASSOCIATE WITH STUNNING FIL-AM MODEL JENNIFER SILLS.
Formerly residing at Detroit, Michigan, she is now soaking up the Miami sun, imbuing the alluring view of the South Beach, and grasping its Latin culture.

However, the 32-year-old bombshell aspires to reconnect with her lineage by traveling back to her real home, the Philippines. On her attempt to learn the culture, she is starting with her most comfortable way of expression—modeling.

Her skills in the said art form was honed from hard work and training. She started as a model for an auto show circuit at a very young age of 21. In addition to her dedication to the craft was the amount of effort she puts into by working out to be in her best shape, and based from the photos, everything definitely paid off.

It was not an easy journey for her. She also struggled with industry stereotypes and misconceptions models usually encounter such being incorporated with pornography and prostitution.

“There is a fine line between modeling, and pornography and prostitution just crosses the line,” she said. In fact, Sills justified that modeling is one of the strongest form of women empowerment due to the industry’s influence and reach no matter where you are in the world.

Race rediscovery

Her introduction to the Philippine culture gave her a broad view of how Filipina women are.

“Filipina women are less expressive of themselves when compared to women from Florida, who are more forceful especially on their preferences. Filipina women are more conservative which can be traced from other Asian women,” she explained.

Jennifer also added that Filipinas are complex on a certain level mainly because of the rich history of the Philippines. She carefully and precisely expounded that imperialism and colonization has greatly affected the culture of Filipinos. From there on, she has genuinely developed an interest and love for the country and put a grand effort in understanding and learning more about the Philippines and its people.

What most people don’t know about Jennifer also is her dedication to medicine and social work. This prompts the idea of her serving her fellow Filipinos. “I would love to go back to the Philippines and do medical service here.”

Art, passion and exploration above all

However, when asked between art and science, she took a long pause to ponder about the question, then responded by choosing art.

“Art can become bigger than science, you can break boundaries with art.”

Seeing Sills vocalize such amazing ideas proves that she is more than just the voluptuous and striking darling that she is; every bit fierce and passionate about everything she does. She is the epitome of beauty and brains, with a gentle heart. And this is the identity she wishes to portray in the industry; a multi-faceted woman capable of accomplishing anything.

“Versatility is the key,” the model remarked.

When asked about what sets her soul on fire, Jennifer ecstatically answered that it is being on an adventure; and having the drive to understand how things work and how people tick. She has always wanted to feed her curious mind which complements her overall positive outlook.

Apart from those, she is also outspoken about being an advocate for the LGBT community. She believes that you have to recognize people with an equal level of compassion and curiosity, instead of bare judgement.

Sills brings that inquisitiveness to almost all aspects of her life as well. She has a craving for exploration, explaining why she has already traveled to El Nido and Banaue where she met all types of people.

Writing is also her strong suit as she has her own blog. Her choice of interests in itself says a lot about her personality. The genre of music she likes ranges from hip-hop, rap, RnB, to oldies such as those hits from her favorite Michael Jackson, who ironically started out in her hometown of Detroit.

On the subject of attraction, Sills goes beyond the surface, “It is normal to be initially drawn by a man’s physical attributes, but when you find someone who is interesting and can make you laugh, that is what can capture a heart.”

She shared that she is not the jealous type of girlfriend. She had her fair share of heartbreaks to know enough that things should not be forced.

“I don’t let myself get broken again. I’m very chill and very relaxed, and if somebody doesn’t want to be with me, let them go, it’s about letting go if it needs to be let go,” she said.

Thus, right now, it is not her goal to find her “dream man.”

“I’m more focused on being the woman of my dreams—and the woman of my dreams can do anything.”

These words and thoughts are what set her above par. Way past her smoking and alluring hot bod is her thirst for curiosity and adventure, with the right hint of compassion and fearlessness. Jennifer Sills is indeed a beauty, heavenly enough to go beyond the normal and make everybody believe in the supernatural.
"Art can become bigger than science, you can break boundaries with art."
There was no discernible reason for the police to follow Drakeo the Ruler that afternoon. As he later told me, no traffic violations were committed; no weed was smoked. But constitutional questions of rightful search and seizure don’t seem to trouble the cops patrolling South Central Los Angeles, and so a brief drive to the liquor store last winter ended with L.A.’s most original rap stylist since Snoop Dogg handcuffed, accused of illegal possession of a firearm and looking on as law enforcement showed him his own videos and rapped his own lyrics at him. Things only got weirder from there.

Over the next several weeks, other members of Drakeo’s crew, the Stinc Team, were also arrested. The charges ranged from first-degree murder to commercial burglary, enhanced by the threat of lengthy mandatory sentences due, according to Drakeo, to the district attorney’s accusation that the Stinc Team is a gang rather than one of the West

From platinum stars to local heroes, hip-hop artists are seeing their lyrics used against them in criminal trials; here’s a look at a problematic and growing trend through the eyes of the accused

BY JEFF WEISS
Coast’s most popular young hip-hop collectives. As far as evidence goes, his attorney has claimed that the case largely hinges on a jailhouse confession allegedly obtained by an informant. So in an effort to demonize the 25-year-old artist, prosecutors are using Drakeo’s music and flashy, carefully cultivated image against him.

“That’s bullshit. I can say whatever I want,” the rapper born Darrell Caldwell says from inside the Men’s Central Jail in downtown Los Angeles. During Drakeo’s months of incarceration, the judge has refused to grant him bail. “They’re only doing this because I’m a rapper—and a black rapper at that,” he says. “I go hard to make sure that you can interpret my music in 20 different ways, but they’re still trying to use it to paint a false picture of me.”

Since emerging in 2015, Drakeo has developed a diamond-encrusted and cryptic universe with an anxiety-riddled mutation of gangsta rap called “nervous music.” His lyrics are full of comic exaggeration and coded lingo in “nervous music.” His lyrics are full of comic exaggeration and coded lingo in “nervous music.” His lyrics are full of comic exaggeration and coded lingo in “nervous music.” His lyrics are full of comic exaggeration and coded lingo in “nervous music.” His lyrics are full of comic exaggeration and coded lingo. As defined in the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act, a “criminal street gang” is “a group of three or more people which: has a common name or identifying sign or symbol.” In the hands of prosecutors seeking big-name convictions, this can be used to define just about any street rap crew.

Drakeo’s defense attorney, Frank Duncan, considers the case against his client to be flimsy—the result, in part, of earlier burglary charges for which he was never convicted. Drakeo’s lyrics focus far more on small-time burglaries than on murder, but prosecutors tend to leap at the opportunity to scare juries with stereotypes of sociopathic gang members.

“It allows them to poison the jury pool and makes it a lot easier to prosecute; everyone immediately dislikes you if they think you’re a gang member,” Duncan says. “Removed from context, these songs can sound very incriminating. But the reality is that this is L.A. gangsta rap. It has always been about violence and crime.”

The First Amendment’s safeguards have historically done little to shield rappers from obscenity charges or character assassination. In 1989, the Detroit police arrested the members of N.W.A after the group played “Fuck Tha Police” in concert despite a warning from law enforcement. The next year, members of a Live Crew were arrested at a Broward County nightclub for performing raunchy songs from their album As Nasty As They Wanna Be. (A jury later acquitted them of obscenity charges.) In 1992, 2Pac was forced to defend himself in a civil suit filed by the family of a murdered Texas state trooper whose killer claimed that the rapper’s 2Pacalypse Now spurred him to commit the crime. No less than Vice President Dan Quayle demanded that Time Warner Inc. yank the album from stores—mirroring what was done earlier that summer to Ice-T, whose song “Cop Killer” had incited a national furor.

During the past decade, this constitutional right to free expression has been called into question for both platinum artists—including Young Thug, accused of playing a role in a 2015 shooting of Lil Wayne’s tour bus—and obscure aspirants. And as the 24/7 nature of social media and Instagram Live erases the already blurry line between real life and public persona, police surveillance has only increased, imperiling rappers’ ability to satisfy the oft-voyeuristic interest of their fans.

The intractable need for authenticity, the visceral qualities of the art form itself and outright racism have led to rappers’ own words being used against them in courts of law. The injustice is specific to the form, even though, in a culture riven by gun violence and blood-soaked mythologies, rappers are merely the latest in a lineage that stretches back to well before Billy the Kid.
In some instances, attorneys have argued that the creative fictions of rappers are little different from Johnny Cash’s musical boast of shooting a man in Reno just to watch him die. No one arrested Bob Marley for shooting the sheriff. Handcuffs were not slapped on Jim Morrison for the patricide depicted in “The End” (instead, Miami police waited to get him on an obscenity charge).

“There are black kids serving 25 years to life for lyrics that they’ve written,” says Duncan, who is personally aware of the potential for retribution and imprisonment for even creative expression. “They’re only doing this because I’m a rapper—and a black rapper at that.”

According to the Baton Rouge district attorney’s office, Boosie paid a teenage hitman, Michael “Marlo Mike” Lloyding, to murder the brother of his baby’s mother. The authorities successfully petitioned the judge to admit as evidence several songs they claimed had been recorded the night of the killing.

In front of the jury, lead prosecutor Dana Cummings played a cappella versions of two compositions. She cited this passage from “187” as one of the most damning:

Yo Marlo, he got a Monte Carlo
That bitch grey
I want that bitch dead today

Defense attorneys successfully argued that none of the lyrics conclusively tied Boosie to the slaying. Although Boosie used the name of the alleged murderer, his lawyers said the dead man didn’t drive a Monte Carlo—a reminder that art often borrows from real life and even autobiographies may create composite characters, compress time sequences and generally exercise creative license for the sake of the story.

Prosecutors often counter that presenting lyrics can be essential to proving motive, intent, identity and absence of mistake. Yet in Boosie’s case, the jury—intimating they agreed with the defense’s position that his songs were merely reflections of the hyper-violence of Baton Rouge, a city with a murder rate that eclipsed Chicago’s in 2017—unanimously voted for acquittal.

The problem is more pressing than just celebrity cases. According to Dennis, several hundred similar cases exist outside the limelight. Arguably the most extreme example of prosecutorial overreach is that of San Diego rapper Tiny Doo (a.k.a. Brandon Duncan), who served seven months in prison for a crime that, in a sense, no one even accused him of committing. It concerned his 2014 mixtape No Safety, which a district attorney’s office seized upon to test a rarely used California law that says anyone who actively participates in a criminal street gang and “who willfully promotes, furthers, assists or benefits from any felony criminal conduct by members of that gang” can be found guilty of conspiracy to commit that felony.

The case involved a string of shootings that prosecutors claimed were the work of San Diego’s Lincoln Park Bloods. Brandon Duncan had once been affiliated with the gang, but at the time of the crimes he was working a full-time job laying tile. By citing a relatively little-heard album with a cover photo of a pistol with the safety off, prosecutors claimed he was promoting the gang and therefore culpable of any act of wrongdoing by any other member of the gang may have committed. It was only after seven months in prison and significant media scrutiny that a Superior Court judge ruled that Duncan was being wrongly incarcerated simply for lyrically threatening a rival. And the explosion of social media has only made it easier for law enforcement to track every move of the rap community.

According to Erik Nielson, a professor at the University of Richmond and co-author of Rap on Trial, the head of the police gang unit in Newport News, Virginia told him that his officers spend half their time monitoring gangs (and presumably local rappers) online.

“It feels Orwellian, but just as scary as that is the sheer incompetence of people performing these Orwellian functions,” Nielson says. “These people have no idea what they’re talking about. And it’s only going to get worse. Social media offers both a low barrier to entry and the opportunity to get famous without a record label. These artists might write sophisticated raps, but their business acumen and awareness about these issues might not be on par. And the police are watching their every step.”
A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSWOMAN, ASIAN BEAUTY JAJA, PROVES IT'S NOT ONLY ALLURE AND CHARM THAT'LL GET YOU PLACES.
Asian Beauty Janette Hernaez Segundo is at the precipice of her career while being unapologetically beautiful and sultry.

Commonly known to her friends and family as “Jaja,” this 23-year old lass hailing from the northern part of the Philippines, Ilocos Sur, is sure to capture your hearts and have you wrapped around her finger.

Jaja maintains a sleek frame with her vital statistics of 34-24-34, doubtlessly enough to turn heads around the street.

This Asian Beauty loves to cook different scrumptious foods as her hobby and is very much interested in traveling. Her favorite destinations are mainly local as she is a supporter of national tourist spots. Not to mention, her talents include singing and dancing, never-failing to sway you with her charms and quips. Owning a restaurant and bar in Taft, Jaja’s typical day is composed of monitoring it, as well as attending shoots and events, if needed.

Being an honest to goodness sole proprietor, her ambition in life not only includes being a more successful businesswoman, but also to have a close-knit family of her own, to be happy, and to live her life to the fullest.

Jaja describes herself as a self-made woman. Whatever she is today was made possible by her efforts and endeavors. She is aware that she has a very strong personality, and in contrast, a very soft heart. She is the kind of woman that will fight for what she believes in, but will do no harm to others.

This Asian Beauty is that strong girl who everyone knew would make it through the worst; that fearless girl who would dare to do anything; that independent girl who does not need a man; that resilient girl who never backed down.

She shares that like any other model, she has started from the scratch. She was first a part-time car show model and a full-time employee in the BPO Industry before. She also worked in one of the biggest casinos in the Philippines.

Janette believes that what makes her a unique woman, too, is having to work at a startup which gave her an opportunity to understand the ins-and-outs of the industry. She thinks differently when it comes to decision-making especially when her future is involved. She firmly considers this experience as her slight edge over the others.

At first, Janette was in doubt at being an Asian Beauty model. But she realized that being sexy or doing sexy shoots does not make you less of a woman.

“That’s a big no! It doesn’t make you less of a woman. It depends on how people see it,” Jaja shares.

She then accepted being an Asian Beauty as she wanted to get out of her comfort zone also.

“And I am not getting any younger. I want to try the things I can no longer do when I get old. Again, portraying sexy is not a crime, not a sin.

She adds that being part of the Playboy family is one of the best decisions she ever made. Being a model for the magazine feels like home as there is no pressure in the environment.

Jaja’s major turn-ons are consistency, honesty, and respect.

When asked what makes a woman sexy, Jaja responds, “We can’t deny the fact that physical appearance gives us the first impression. Aside from being physically sexy, I think a woman becomes a lot sexier because of her personality in general. If you happen to get to know a woman by interacting with her, like constantly talking to her, then one can say how sexy this woman is.”

On the other hand, when asked what makes a man sexy, she replies, “A guy who is physically fit may impress me as sexy, but then there’s really nothing more to that unless I get to know him. In fact, I know some not-so-physically fit men within my circle of friends whom I think are sexy because of their very good personality. Oh, a guy with good sense of humor is a plus!”
The powerhouse actress and star of What Men Want (who has gone by the name Cookie both on Empire and IRL) is a walking master class on surviving and thriving no matter what.

-by Eric Spitznagel
Once you start talking, you realize that men and women want the same goddamn things.

Q1: In What Men Want, you play a woman who is able to hear what men are thinking. Do you actually want to know what men are thinking?
HENSON: I don’t want that. I have too much shit rattling around in my head already. We shouldn’t need that anyway. If men were just honest and put their shit on the table, we wouldn’t need no voodoo. We need more communication. Once you start talking, you realize that men and women want the same goddamn things: They want someone they can trust with their heart, they want protection, they want security. That’s what we all want as humans. It’s not deep.

Q2: The movie’s premise is that men think they know everything about women, but we actually have no idea. So what do guys not know about women that we should?
HENSON: Women get emotional or upset when we’re pushed. It doesn’t come out of nowhere; it’s provoked. Just because I’m emotional doesn’t make me crazy. Men have to own their part in that. You have to listen, listen, listen to your woman. It goes both ways: When my man drives me up the wall, I try to think about what happened and what I did to add to it. You’ve got to be a grown-up to be in a relationship. It can’t be “I love you as long as you’re doing right by me.”

Q3: You’re getting married this summer to former NFL player Kelvin Hayden. Are you ready?
HENSON: I’m still learning how to be ready. Every day I’m learning how to be better in a relationship. I just found out, in our therapy sessions, that men have fewer words than women. I didn’t know that. They run out of words. Because women are emotional, we want to talk through everything. Of course we have more words; we’re the communicators. Kelvin, he thinks he’s a comedian. Anytime we’re in a disagreement or I’m like, “We need to talk through everything. Of course we have more words. Because women are emotional, we want to talk through everything. Of course we have more words; we’re the communicators. Kelvin, he thinks he’s a comedian. Anytime we’re in a disagreement or I’m like, “We need to talk through everything.” He’s joking, but I’m starting to accept that it’s true.

Q4: Speaking of listening to each other, your next film, out in April, is The Best of Enemies, in which you play civil rights activist Ann Atwater, who forms an unlikely friendship with Klan leader C.P. Ellis. Did making this movie make you want to leave your bubble?
HENSON: I do it through my art. That’s why this movie is so important. Me talking to one person is not going to be as effective as the movie, because it takes a big old mirror and says, “Hey, America, look at yourself.” Although Atwater was on the right side of history, she had the same intolerance as that man. They were both radical in their beliefs. They had to sit across from each other, look each other in the eye to really see themselves. We all need to get to that point with each other. We need to look at the people we disagree with and say, “You ain’t better than me. We’re the same person.”

Q5: Atwater couldn’t be more physically different from you. What was the biggest challenge in that transformation?
HENSON: I knew I had to be padded. When I came in for my fitting, the suit they gave me had these perky little tits. I was like, “Um, I don’t know if this is gonna work.” Physicality is very important to me, especially when I’m taking on somebody who’s real. I needed big breasts. I was like, “Can you all please call Tyler Perry and ask him what Madea got in her boobs?” All the pictures I’ve seen of Atwater, this woman looked like she ate pork chops, ribs, corn bread, smothered chicken, fatback, neck bones. When she sat down for a meal, those titties got to rest on the table.

Q6: This is our Freedom of Speech issue. Is there anyone in the world right now you wish would just shut the hell up?
HENSON: You know who I wish would shut the hell up? He wears a wig and does way too much tanning. [laughs] Just be quiet, just shhh, take a nap. Just put his finger in a muzzle so he won’t tweet anymore. Do they have finger muzzles? [both our phones start blaring] Holy crap, is that the president? Oh my God! [checks phone and sees it’s an Amber alert! Oh shit. I was about to freak out. I seriously thought that was the president telling us to stop talking about him. I was about to change my name and move somewhere. That is funny as hell. I know they’re spying on us. On our phones, on everything. Sometimes I’ll say something and Siri will just come alive, and I’m like, “Bitch, I didn’t call for you!” I’m going to
become Amish, that’s what the fuck I’m going to do. Just get all this technology out of my life.

Q7: Did you ever feel unsafe, or were your parents able to shield you?
HENSON: It was what it was. You acclimate to your surroundings if you want to survive. My mom was robbed twice, and I was with her both times, once when I was six and again when I was seven. I’m sure she was petrified. It definitely traumatized me. But her strength is what made me feel safe enough to leave the house again and not be afraid. She didn’t give me a choice. The next day, she woke me up and said, “Come on, let’s go. Time for school.” I couldn’t believe it. There she was, getting ready for work with a black eye, trying to cover it with makeup, combing over the bald spot where the guy had pulled out one of her plugs. That’s strength. She instilled that in me.

Q8: Did growing up like that give you street smarts?
HENSON: Not really. Listen, not everybody from the hood got street smarts. I know some dumbass motherfuckers in the hood, let me tell you. [laughs] What gave me street smarts was getting out of the hood. Every weekend, my mom took me to a predominantly white neighborhood in the suburbs to see my cousin Kim. I played with Mary Beth and Karen and Josh, all the kids with the suburban names. It made me well-rounded. You could drop me off anywhere, this little girl from the hood, and I could get along with anybody. That’s why I always tell kids, get out of your ZIP code. Education is getting to know other people and other cultures. Most inner-city kids never even get downtown.

Q9: Were you a rebellious kid, or did you follow the rules?
HENSON: I followed the rules, because my mother didn’t play. She did not play. She put the fear of God into me. And that’s what you should do; if you fear your parents, then you ain’t going out in the streets acting an ass. The worst I ever screwed up was in seventh grade. I had some girlfriends over, and we started calling phone sex lines. It was a 999 number. We thought it was like 888—it’s free! So we called these numbers, and then a week later my mom got a phone bill for $600. That’s more than she paid in rent! I thought she was going to murder me.

Q10: You grew up idolizing comedians like Carol Burnett and Richard Pryor. What made their comedy so relatable?
HENSON: I think it’s because so much of comedy comes from trauma. That’s what drives me sometimes. I’ve had a lot of trauma in my life. You gotta laugh to keep from crying. It just felt so important to watch this stuff when I was younger. I remember begging my father, “Please, take me to see Richard Pryor: Live on the Sunset Strip!” I was 11. He said, “Okay, but if you tell your mother, this never happened.” We got in there, and my dad had a beer and fell straight asleep. I’m sitting watching Pryor talk about dick and pussy. I was mortified. I had to process that shit.

Q11: On Empire you play a character named Cookie, which was also your nickname in college. How were you first christened as Cookie?
HENSON: One of my dearest friends in the world, Guinea Bennett, and I started this group called Soul Nation, which later became the Dallas nonprofit theater Soul Rep. We were kids who came of age in the 1970s and were proud of it. When we were at Howard University, Guinea and I and all our friends bought our clothes at thrift stores and wore bell-bottoms. We gave each other new names, like Leroy, Tyrone, things that sounded like the 1970s. Mine was Cookie. The full name was Cookie Gwendolyn Jones. I don’t know why they picked Cookie for me. I think it’s because I reminded Guinea of her aunt Cookie, who was a spitfire. When I got the job on Empire, I called all my college girlfriends and told them, “You will never fucking believe this. I’m Cookie again!”

Q12: You moved to Los Angeles after college with an infant son and 700 bucks in your pocket. Was that as terrifying as it sounds?
HENSON: It wasn’t really. In your 20s, you’re not scared. You feel invincible. I was an artist with a dream, and now that I was a mother I felt like it was do or die. Being a parent is what kept me focused. I didn’t go to the clubs, even though they say that’s how you’re
supposed to network. I have common sense, and nothing about that seemed right to me. What networking happens at a club where people are inebriated? Tell me, what contracts are being signed? That’s stupid. I knew what I had to offer; I just had to find somebody to hear me. Anytime I felt scared, I’d call my dad.

Q13: What would he tell you?
HENSON: He would be like, “Don’t you dare give up!” He would just be continuously sowing seeds. He used to tell me I’d get an Oscar someday for playing Diana Ross. [laughs] That was his dream. And I believed him. Not about playing Diana Ross, but being an actor. He knew I could do it, and he wanted it so bad for me. Just by example, he showed me that nothing can hold you back. He was homeless for a while, but he didn’t hide that from me. He’d drive by my school in the van he was living in, give me 50 cents and tell me everything was going to be okay. “Watch me, I’m going to bounce back,” he told me. “I’m going to get a motorcycle. I’m going to get a house with a garage in the back so I can work from that.” It was proof that he never doesn’t kill you make you stronger. If you fail, you just get back up. That’s what he did. And in the end, he got his house with the garage and his Harley.

Q14: Did he live to see your dreams come true?
HENSON: He saw Hustle & Flow happen, and he saw it get the Oscar nominations. He was like, “You’re just getting started. You haven’t seen nothing yet.” He was gone by the time I sang [the Oscar-nominated song “It’s Hard Out Here for a Pimp”] at the Oscars. He died just two weeks prior. I was with him in the room when it happened. He was spitting up blood, and then he died. So that was fresh in my head, and I didn’t really have time to process it. I compartmentalized that pain and sort of numbed myself out. I went through the motions. It was surreal being at the Oscars and looking at all the faces out there, Helen Mirren, Nicole Kidman. And I’m up there singing about bitches and hos, trying not to think about my father’s face. [pauses as eyes water] As soon as it was over and I went backstage, I just turned off. I had nothing left. They were trying to take me to parties, but I was like, “No, just take me home.”

Q15: Why do you keep the middle initial in your name? Is the P meaningful to you?
HENSON: My publicist used to tease me about it: “Not to be confused with Taraji S. Henson or Taraji C. Henson.” I was like, “Shut up!” Most people feel like their middle name doesn’t mean anything, but mine actually does. The P is for Penda, and together with Taraji it means “hope and love” in Swahili. How could I not keep it?

Q16: It’s hard to think of another actress more deserving of her own superhero movie. Have you ever been tempted?
HENSON: Oh my God, yes! I want to do that so bad! Do you know anyone we can call? There’s got to be somebody reading this who can make it happen, one of those superhero movie producers. Hello, I know y’all read PLAYBOY! I don’t care what the character is, I’ll take it. Just give it to me. I don’t give a shit what she looks like; she don’t have to be sexy. She can be the bad girl. I don’t have to be the hero. I’ve played a lot of heroes; all my characters are heroes. Cookie is a hero. She’s tough, she says the shit you can’t say, she stands up for everybody. So I wouldn’t mind playing a bad person—like the Joker. They’ve had like six guys play the Joker already. Time to give a female a chance at it.

Q17: How are you similar to Cookie? Is there a part of you that could bust up a studio with a baseball bat if somebody crossed you?
HENSON: My clothes are too expensive, honey. I’m not breaking my nails for that. No, if I’m that mad, I’ll see you in court. Or better yet, bye. Just bye. I’ll start new and fresh. I don’t need the drama. But there’s a lot about Cookie I can relate to: I understand her fight for her family, I understand her love for her boys. I have a son. If someone tried to hurt him, I would find the strength to knock you through a brick wall.

Q18: Your son has struggled with depression, and your dad had depression and PTSD. What gets you out of the emotional quicksand?
HENSON: I get depressed sometimes, but for me it’s not excessive. It’s the normal amount of sadness, I think, when there are some days you just can’t deal. When I feel it coming, that’s when I need to attack my craft. I deal with so much in my performances. Some actors lose themselves in their characters and use it to cover up what they’re really feeling. But for me it’s just the opposite. Every role, I’m constantly dealing with me, with my issues. It’s how I relate to these characters and make them more truthful. It can be very therapeutic. After 20 takes of the same scene, when I’m dealing with these things that are troubling me, it lifts those dark clouds. You go, Wow, I think I’m over that now. I used it and dealt with it, and now it’s good. I can move on.

Q19: Have you ever had a role that nearly killed you emotionally or physically?
HENSON: I can already tell that the hardest one I’ll ever do is playing Emmett Till’s mother, and I haven’t even finished reading the script yet. John Singleton wrote it, and it’s just brutal. Every page is making me ugly-face cry. What’s so daunting is you know the outcome. The way John has magically and beautifully written his story, you get to know this kid, and that makes it worse. Why did they have to do this to a child? What threat was he that they had to mutilate him like that? What’s so hard is that it gets me thinking about Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown and that nine-year-old kid in Brooklyn a white woman accused of touching her ass. That’s what got Emmett Till killed! We’re in 2018 and that shit is still happening. I don’t know if people are ready for this movie. I don’t even know if I am.

Q20: Do you worry about cultural responsibility? Even if a role is meaty, what if it’s perceived as insensitive to the African American community?
HENSON: What if it’s too “hood” or “ghetto”? Yeah, I get that. I worried about that with Cookie when I first got offered the part. I was scared of her. I was like, “What are people going to say?” You have to put the judgment aside. When that fear comes up, it’s usually judgment. Everybody may not like these images up on the screen, but, baby, they exist. We didn’t pull it out of the sky. If you feel moved by it, go do something. Go to the hood, donate your time so maybe we can start seeing some changes. If people get offended by my characters or feel they’re reflecting something back at them they don’t want to see, I did my job. I did it so well that it hurt your feelings, [laughs] But don’t beat me up. Don’t kill the messenger.
PLAYMATE OF THE MONTH

Sofia David

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OWEN REYES

WORDS BY SHAIRA SAN MIGUEL
MAKEUP BY MICKO CEQUEÑA SANGKAL
STYLING BY OLIB PABUSTAN

DID YOU MISS HER? BECAUSE WE DID.
Summer is not over yet for this hottie Playmate Sofia David to flaunt her body and be a role model to many. The charming, confident, and strong, independent woman is back on track to give you a definition of art.

She entered the world of modeling when she was 16 years old. She also joined a beauty pageant way back her teenage days in her own province, Iligan. From then, she is already used to doing photo shoots where she feels most comfortable with.

Driven by her enthusiasm, Sofia proved that doing sexy shoots is her definition of art; it is where she can express herself. And for her, every woman’s body is an art.

That’s why it wasn’t a surprise that she has come a long way since her Asian Beauty stint at Playboy before. Sofia had just fulfilled another dream of hers—becoming a Playmate. And she makes it a point to be a role model, and at the same time, an inspiration especially to women.

“To become a Playmate is one of my biggest dreams. Too good to be true. And now, I wanted to be the voice to every woman out there who is not confident with herself. A voice that will give her the courage to show her true self, embrace her flaws, and learn to express herself.”

More than just her sexy curves, Sofia can turn you on with her sense of humor. Isn’t it exciting and fun to have a woman like her who can make you laugh all day and make you fall with her charm?

Truly, behind every photo of hers is a revelation of what art holds.

**Getting to know Sofia**

“I love to dance since I was a kid. I love cooking, but I’m not good at it. I also want to learn how to play some musical instruments. As much as you want to know me, I also love meeting new people and getting to know them even more.”

**On being a Playmate**

“My favorite thing about being a Playmate is that I gained friends—more like, sisters—and a second family.”

**The humorous Sofia**

“Everybody is unique. But I can say that there’s something in me that makes me very different, and that is my sense of humor.”

**Her kind of man**

“I like my man to be so hot, and with a little bit of a bad boy style. But he has to be sweet, and has to know how to support and love me with all his heart.”

**On classic dates**

“My kind of dates is simple but classic, like having a nice conversation, long walks on the beach, and star gazing. His presence, and how he treats me are the most important to me.”
“To become a Playmate is one of my biggest dreams. Too good to be true. And now, I wanted to be the voice to every woman out there who is not confident with herself.”
“It’s funny when an interview starts and you suddenly realize you’re talking about stuff you’ve never talked about with anyone,” Ezra Miller tells me. The Hollywood It boy, who lately has been busy blurring the boundaries of masculinity in men’s magazines (including this one) with his enthusiasm for gender-bending, has just shared with me his first-ever sex dream, a memory from the age of four of a witch imprisoning him on a waterspout. “It was tantalizing and delightful,” he says. He points out how appropriate that dream now is, given his role as Credence Barebone in the bankable Fantastic Beasts films, a big-budget franchise that is certainly cinema’s witchiest and also its queerest, thanks to its buzzy exploration of two wizards’ gay romance.

The 26-year-old New Jersey–born actor and musician, who earned his cred in 2011’s We Need to Talk About Kevin and has since graduated to blockbuster top billings, also playing the Flash in DC’s big-screen universe, says that being in PLAYBOY has been his “dream for a while now.” (To be frank, it has also been our hope to feature more men who are comfortable posing the question, What does the future of masculinity look like?) His comment about stumbling into deep personal revelations pertains to almost everything we discuss after his playboy shoot, in which he flaunts Bunny ears, fishnets and size-14 heels. This includes: his crush on a boy in kindergarten that led him to ask his older sisters if he was gay; his painful adolescence due to “weird bones” in his arm, chest and neck that still cause soreness, and a childhood stutter that he conquered through singing; and his companionship with a group of sexual partners he calls his polycule—a portmanteau of “polyamorous molecule.”

Highly spiritual, energetic and loquacious, Miller delivers these stories with nods to history, philosophy and political theory. He’s attracted to men and women, he says, and is a “sexual being,” though the roles of love and sex in his life can vary. It would be reckless to suggest his career hasn’t impacted those realms. “I’ve been attacked by fucking bigots,” he says. “And then in the industry? Of course I’ve been in auditions where sexuality was being leveraged. It’s important to acknowledge the diversity of voices who have experienced this shit. Everyone is victim to it. Everyone is a survivor of it.”

As he enters a new phase, one in which some of this country’s most masculine magazines are inviting him to become the face of the new normal, and when a children’s tale about wizardry embraces homosexuality, Miller’s queerness seems to balance him—as does his drive. “I’m trying to find queer beings who understand me as a queer being off the bat, who I make almost a familial connection with and feel I’ve been married to 25 lifetimes ago from the moment we meet,” he explains. Tearing up, he adds, “If I didn’t have art, I’d be so fucking dead, so long ago. I probably would have done it myself. Art—that’s all I know.”
Hey, Miki!

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANA DIAS
International Woman Miki Hamano grew up in rural Japan—but as you’ll see, this free spirit is as American as they come.
When you’re young, you can do anything.

I came to the United States as an exchange student when I was 19 years old. Until then, I had never been outside Japan. I first went to Palm Desert for three years, then I moved to San Francisco and got my business degree. It was really difficult because I didn’t speak any English—but at the same time, it was an adventure, so I loved it. I learned so many life lessons and I’m much stronger mentally. Still, I don’t think I could do it now, so I want to say “good job” to my younger self.

People ask me, “What do you want to do 10 years from now? What do you want to be?” I don’t know. I don’t make life plans. I live each moment as it comes. What’s meant to happen will happen. Maybe you don’t know why now, but you will later. I think super positive thoughts; I constantly say, “This is going to be good.” It’s all about your brain. It’s all about how you think.

I used to be hard on myself—a result of comparing myself to other people. All the girls in L.A. are so gorgeous, I thought I had to be like them. I worked out constantly and did all these injections, which are gone now. I felt like I was trying to be somebody else. Now I know there’s freedom in being in your natural state. That’s why every one should be allowed to speak their mind and express themselves without fear. Being comfortable in my own skin doesn’t mean I want to be objectified; it means I’m loving myself and embracing who I am.

The technology we have access to now makes it easy to share our ideas, and good ones are being shared a lot faster. It’s amazing to see strong women, and men too, from all over the world speaking up for what they believe in and making a huge impact on issues that have existed for probably every generation before ours. I’m thankful I live in a time and place when people can express themselves so freely. It’s relatively recent that people started talking about feminism. We have a long way to go; it all takes time.
Mindy grabbed the knife. Practiced this she had not. They hadn’t rehearsed anything because Benjamin, Benny, was hopeless. If he so much as sneezed it sounded fake.

The Singers had set out a brisket, sliced and everything nice, with the carving knife sticking out at a help-yourself angle. Little pots of different World Market mustards sitting around the platter. The perfect witnesses: the Singers, the Goldblatts, the Futters, the Hartzogs and the Taubmans. That girl, that Myra, from the yoga place, she was there for whatever reason. Mindy waited until Leo Hartzog pointed his camera phone recording Ilene telling some cockamamie story about pitching something to Google. That’s when Mindy wrapped her fist around the knife handle. Some stainless steel German job. A Wüsthof brisket slicer. She’d downed only the one dirty martini Len Futter had handed her.

She yanked the knife out of the brisket. Too hard, obviously. Adrenaline would do that. Too fast, to judge from how the brisket toppled. Toppled and rolled, a slab of dead meat batting aside little pots of mustard, ramekins of chopped onions, the brisket escaping the platter and greasing a path across the limed oak table. From West Elm? From Pottery Barn? Before taking a plunge—blat—onto poor Yael Singer’s cowhide accent rug. A juicy splat that piqued everyone’s attention until Mindy swung the serrated blade toward Benny’s neck.

She brought the knife down, the dull side not the honed edge, chopping his shoulder. With no more force than an Arthurian queen bestowing knighthood upon him. Reddish Chinese mustard and yellow-brown honey mustard all over the white collar and sleeve of his Perry Ellis dress shirt.

His cow-eyed, slaughterhouse expression—here was something her husband could’ve faked never had he lived to be Methuselah. With her free hand Mindy caught his wrist and twisted that arm behind his back. Held the knife against the bobble of his Adam’s apple and sawed it back and
forth. Against the little dots of Benny’s shaved beard. She held him the way she’d play a hairy cello. No one noticed, what with mustard on the blade, how she was pressing the dull side of the knife against his windpipe, harmless — messy but harmless. Bowing him like a cello. No, no amount of rehearsing could’ve brought these tears to Benny’s eyes or made him keen the way he did. Like a dolphin he sounded, or like some killer whale, keening.

She screamed, “Rape me again, you dirty, penis-stinking bastard, and I’ll kill you!” And to Ben’s credit he played along with her routine. For his crying, he’d later blame the horseradish. Mixed in some mustard it was, held so close to his tear ducts.

Even in that moment, with the camera phone rolling, Mindy had to wonder who’d served Dylan Thomas those 18 shots of whiskey at the White Horse Tavern. Wondering: Was whoever poisoned Dylan Thomas someone helpful? Or maybe some bartender who yearned to see dead the preeminent Welsh poet of the age. That’s where Mindy’s head was at: disassociation. Hers was a classic case of disassociation.

Mindy worked the serrated brisket slicer against her husband’s throat with the goldblatts and the Taubmans and the others watching, and she delivered the line they’d agreed upon. A second time, quiet, almost hissing, “Rape me again, you bastard....” This wasn’t improvisation. She’d been warning him since Noah’s attack. Their performance was all about Noah’s attack. And finally Benny recognized his cue.

To his credit, Benny wrapped his strong, sober hand around hers and choked her wrist, twice, against the Singers’ silk wallpaper, until she let go. The knife diving to stab the wood floor at their feet. Chili-infused mustard spattered, mustard on the blade, how she was pressing the dull side of the knife against his windpipe, harmless — messy but harmless. Bowing him like a cello. No, no amount of rehearsing could’ve brought these tears to Benny’s eyes or made him keen the way he did. Like a dolphin he sounded, or like some killer whale, keening.

The scene, like some old-world saying, was a trick. Like Alexis Colby chopping off Krystle Carrington’s head on that one episode of Dynasty. “Yael,” Benny said when she brought the coats. He regretted the wallpaper, silk handwoven with green parakeets, from China. He’d told her, “The brisket was delicious.” His shirt smelled so good Mindy had to swallow. On the way home, she made Benny stop for takeout at Arby’s.

With the red-brown smears on his cheeks and nose, Benny looked like their Noah had. Like father, like son. Like Noah had looked coming home from school.

In all honesty her Benjamin, Benny, he wouldn’t rape a fly.

Their next act should be her filing a restraining order against him. Subpoenaing hostile witnesses and the like. The first parents to pull this stunt, they were not. Checking into a shelter for abused women, Mindy should be. They needed to build a narrative, she argued, but Benny put the kibosh on her women’s sheltering.

Oh, the injustice that her Noah, her baby boy, should be compelled by cold geography to attend the school he did. An institute of higher learning that boasted a Prison Skillz Track. A verified course of matriculation. A public academy that offered a sex worker track. A prizefighter her Noah was not. No more than his father could act his way out of a paper bag. For the steep taxes they paid, their Noah should go to school to be a punching bag?

A boy of such rich talents? Gifted how he was, this boy was wasted on Ansel Park, where when he wanted to go was Delmar Fields, a magnet school. Japanese immersion they had. So what if Delmar Fields was three districts over?

Who the animals were, Noah wouldn’t say. Who’d beaten him bloody, they were juveniles. For any low-life animal boys to see another boy so gifted by fate, these less fortunate would understandably go crazy jealous. Especially seeing how they’d tested too low to be anything in life, and Noah, here’s Noah excelling in Computer Lab and seeing a girl Mindy couldn’t remember the name of except this girl was an angel from what Noah told people.

Already families like the Brumes paid for schools, plenty. Paid for the free breakfasts and free hot lunches for such animal vermin who’d send a child home with almost a broken nose. At issue was the principle of the thing.

Driving home from the Singers’, Mindy had said as much. “Stop by the Arby’s,” she’d said. “I want you should see the big picture here.”

Mister Social Justice. Mister Make-Everything-Right, Benny wanted they should foot the bill for private school. Was he crazy? He was crazy. A family should pay twice over, through property taxes and private tuition, for getting their only son not beaten to a pulp?

Benny she told to butt out. Waiting in the takeout line at Arby’s, Mindy said, “Don’t take this the wrong way, Benjamin, but you are a weak man. A very weak man and a terrible father.” She ordered two beef-and-cheese sandwiches. The melty kind. Telling Benny, “No offense.”

If she’d managed to hammer anything into Benny’s head, it was the fact that he had serious limitations. That he lacked all imagination was chief among them. Their son walks home from school with his eyes beaten purple as two prune Danish, and his nose like a squashed eggplant, and a chipped tooth, his blood all down the front...
of his shirt, and all this boy’s father can say is, “Noah, we’ll look into it.”

A reaction like that, no father should feel proud of. No, placid Benny could go to his office. Benny could watch the market and type out his buy and sell orders. Starting with the knife at his throat at the Singer’s party and her making accusations of rape, it was Mindy who got the ball rolling. As her boy’s only mother she was planning to rescue him from further assailment. What would it hurt if she saw her own situation improve? Why couldn’t Noah’s salvation throw a little good fortune her way? In the car, she checked for napkins in the bag of Arby’s. Folded on top of the hot sandwiches were paper napkins. “Okay, drive,” she told Benny.

She lifted a sandwich from the bag and spread a paper napkin across her Bill Blass. “You only have yourself to blame,” she said. She talked while chewing, she was so hungry. “I told you not to wear the Perry Ellis.”

It was decided theirs would be a marriage in trial separation. What Winchell always called a don’tinvitem. With Mindy renting a cheap studio apartment in the vicinity of Delmar Fields, each day she’d leave the house in Ansel Park, sneaking out early so as not to be seen by Yael Singer. Even if she were seen, would it look so bad to be caught apparently still trying to save her marriage with furtive sex? She’d drive Noah to his new school, then spend her day painting in the apartment. Every afternoon she’d dress up in a uniform from a store that sold uniforms, and leave as if to work the night shift somewhere. She’d eat Arby’s melty sandwiches every lunch. Day’s end, she’d collect their boy and spend the nights at Ansel Park.

Nights, over the dinner table, Benny would ask, “How’s the painting business?” Noah would be immersed in his Japanese, and she would have a fabled room of her own. That’s not to say the Ansel Park house didn’t have rooms more than a family of three could use, including the indoor sports court no one ever set foot inside, but a cheap apartment Mindy could move her old college furniture into, her posters and music on compact disc, her paints and easel.

She tried to see the stained grout and splintering cabinet doors the way the future would. The way pilgrims would: as sanctified. Not as shabby, but as a place a revolutionary artist had set out to conquer the world. Mindy Brume’s garret. The scuttling brown spot along the baseboard, be it a small mouse or a mammoth cockroach, it only added to her street credibility. Future scholars would marvel over this chipped paint. Lead-based paint. Brain damage waiting to happen. In this neighborhood of fetal alcohol everything.

The edges of asbestos tile peeled up from the cracked concrete floor. To think so many future masterpieces would be painted in the presence of these spiders. That made her think of Charlotte’s Web. And that, those spiders, made her smell the barbecue from the Arby’s down the block.

After a fascinating morning spent applying for social welfare benefits and sketching her fellow applicants, who should she meet but her next-door neighbor. In the parking lot, he was, the neighbor. Crawling out from under a car. He smelled, but like a soft cheese, like one of the very expensive artisan cheeses, like the free-trade ones packaged afloat in sterile urine sealed within a food-grade pig bladder. Like her Unka always said that she couldn’t remember, but that translated to “A nose is the best judge of character in buying eels.”

The stranger popped a beer and handed it to her.

Mindy took a swig. Looked at the can. “I really shouldn’t be drinking.”

He asked, “Are you expecting a baby?” No male model, his beer belly stretched the front of his T-shirt. Fat he looked, but in that way that made a grown woman feel more feminine. Where the T-shirt rode up in front, his skin showed. Scars were all it was, that skin. Little red train tracks like from staples, like from surgery after being gutted by a land mine. Shiny, red train tracks crisscrossing his belly.

Mindy laughed. Took another swig. Shook her head. Beer for lunch. She was already blending in.

Dripping plastic faucets and overloaded aluminum wiring that made every light switch feel warm to the touch. She pictured Georgia O’Keeffe in her adobe hut communing with rattlesnakes. Emily Dickinson in her sooty attic isolation.

“So you’re not pregnant?” Her neighbor wasn’t convinced.

She raised the can in a toast. She shook her head. Beer for lunch. She was already blending in.

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she could see his watch. "Not since..." she noted the time, "two hours ago." His wrist felt solid and hairy. She twisted, and he let himself be twisted by scruffy, weak her.

Still, he didn't understand.

"I'm pro-choice, but I didn't get to choose," she stressed. "My old man...." She let her voice trail off.

He looked away as if embarrassed or ashamed on her behalf.

She pressed on, "He didn't want it." She took a long draw on the beer can, then forced a tragic smile for her fake dead baby.

This would become the pattern of her days: She’d leave Ansel Park each morning and drop Noah at his new magnet school. A kiln, they offered. Portuguese immersion. A person could do worse. All that, and Noah had tested as the smartest from his cohort. While he was in school, she’d pretend to live at the apartment. Noah, Mister High and Mighty, he wouldn’t show his face at the apartment, he hated the place so much. Chess Club he took after school, and Rocket Club, to help his college applications but actually to avoid the spiders and her painting.

gonorrhea in her mouth one time and had let it go too long, and after that she had this voice, different than before, deeper on account of her vocal cords being scarred. It was a test. She was shit-testing him. The stranger never looked away or flinched. Because he was unfazed or because of the language barrier, she wasn’t certain.

Gonorrhea wasn’t likely the first word they taught in ESL so talking to him felt nice, relaxed, like talking to a nice dog, like a retired pit bull, you could fantasize having reckless afternoon sex with. The exact words didn’t matter.

She looked at his scarred gut. Looked long enough to let him see that she was looking. Someone had tortured this man cruelly and Mindy kept waiting for that cruelty to surface in him.

She remembered Gauguin’s bare-breasted Tahitian women. Toulouse-Lautrec’s ghastly parlor-house whores. All the women turned into art by men and then forgotten. All the detail maybe no one except a true artist would note. All of those forgotten women she would avenge. He would be her muse. For smaller bruises he’d catch a racquetball against the concrete wall, close his eyes and step into its return path. A mouth guard, he wore, like from boxing. God bless him. For smaller bruises he’d catch a racquetball in the face.

When Benny got home and found Mindy with both eyes blackened and a swelling on her forehead so tight it looked to split the skin, and that a fat lip, with racquetball bruises on her neck and collarbones, she assured him it was just to keep up appearances. To placate him she brought up how much she’d be getting in food stamps and rent assistance. The government was practically paying them to send Noah to a better school.

On Noah, the bruises did the trick. His name was Ivan, her neighbor. He accepted her life as a prostitute brimming with diseases and still kissed her hurt mouth. He seemed to appreciate that she wasn’t starved to prison-camp thinness. Not like that Myra from yoga everyone said was so perfect. Ivan would lay claim to big handfuls of her and marvel over her skin. Beautiful she was, merely by not being scarred by barbed wire and dog bites. His smell she got acclimated to, and he wore a fresh condom every time without her having to ask which put him a notch above Benny on the gentleman scale.

Such a man she’d never met. Ivan wept over her bruises. Kissed them, he did and swore to end the life of the whoremonger who beat her so savagely. A Fifty Shades of Grey situation it was, except she had to beat herself. This too seemed like progress as gender relations went.

Noah on the contrary, her genius,
shaped up to be her problem child. Driving back to the house one night he announced that his angel, his Natasha, her parents had relocated to Burien. Such a gifted, talented boy he was, Noah wanted to transfer back to Ansel Park. Forget the kiln and Japanese immersion. This, after Ivan had bought her a car, a Ford, so a prostitute riding the bus she’d stop having to be. Such a romantic, that Ivan. Driving her clunker Ford back to Ansel Park, she asked Noah, “You want I should tell your father you beat yourself?”

It sounded dirty, but he knew what she meant.

What she didn’t say was how proud she felt. Her Noah hadn’t inherited his father’s talent for lousy acting. Benny with his always-smiling, Benny couldn’t hold a candle to Ivan in the sack. But as her Unka was fond of saying, not that she could remember, but in English it came out as, “No good eel doesn’t get stale.”

Not that she told Noah, but she was glad to be fake-reconciling from her fake-separation for fake-spousal abuse. She’d only ever told Ivan her name was Liana. Her Arby’s bag on the counter while she’d AABB her uniforms hanging in the closet, her keys on the apartment counter and pull the door shut, locked behind her. Ivan wouldn’t have a clue where to look.

Their last afternoon in the sack, Mindy looked around at the mildew. Her way to say good-bye was by giving Ivan an Arby’s sandwich they could share in a bed she’d never have to make. Dirty sheets she would leave behind. Disappear she would, step into her Jil Sander slacks and catch the bus to her fake sex workplace. She’d told Ivan the Ford was idling rough, dying at stoplights, so he’d hauled out his toolbox to make repairs. Not the truth, Mindy’s story, but reason enough to abandon the car. Give it a week, two weeks, and the landlord would show Ivan the unit with her uniforms hanging in the closet, her dirty Arby’s bag on the counter while she’d be vanished Amelia Earhart-style.

Right during sex someone came honking, some car, into the parking lot. From the window she looked to see Benny pull in. Benjamin, who’d collected Noah from his last day at Delmar Fields. Happy smiling like a dog he was. Like a golden something dog, he stepped out of his car and called up to her window, “So this is where you live? What a dump!”

Before she could answer, Ivan happened. Tell Benny to run, she wanted to, but Ivan burst out of the apartment door wearing only boxer shorts and his scars. Ivan snatched up something from his open toolbox beside the fake-broken-down Ford. The whatever tool it was, Ivan ran up and backhanded Benny with it. Swatted Benny across the face. One of those knives it was, like from cutting carpets with a sliding-out razor blade. Mindy could see because Ivan flung the knife away and disappeared sprinting down the street.

Benny, that Benny, he had her going. He truly did, the way he put both hands over his throat and hot Chinese mustard from Williams-Sonoma came gushing out between his fingers. But gallons it was, pouring out. Red-brown mustard that must cost apartment window Mindy filmed with her camera phone and shouted, “Bravo, Benjamin Brume!” And, “You’re not fooling anyone, mister!”

And like maybe they took acting lessons together, but their Noah jumped out of the car in slow motion and fell, skidded and fell in his hurry, crawling across sharp gravel on his hands and knees he did. Noah crawled to his father to fake a tourniquet around his father’s neck using only his bare hands, shouting, “Dad! Don’t die, Dad!” even as they’re both hammering it up in a flood of Chinese mustard.

Yael Singer, Mindy half expected to jump out from behind a tree, this looked so phony. The Goldblatts and the Futters and that Myra, all watching to see Mindy get what’s coming to her. With sirens, yes ambulance sirens even her Benny had paid to come screaming closer and closer for added realism. Benny who’d thought of everything, such a stage manager he was. Her Benjamin, whom she’d married and given a son, and who rewarded her by fake-going limp in the arms of their Noah in the dirty
Playboy Philippines, represented by its President and Chief Executive Officer Sam Cu, Vice President Billy Ann Abeleda, Creative Director Owen Reyes, Video Director JJ Maghirang, Art Director Aj Jose, Accounting Leonora delos Reyes, and former Creative Director Raymond Saldaña, graced Playboy Conference held in New York City (NYC) last February 26, 2019.

The gathering’s main objective was to enlighten the international franchises of the company from all over the world with regards to the new direction of the brand.

An after party at the Playboy Club NYC soon followed the event.
Chief of Global Partnerships, Cooper Hefner welcomes international delegates to the Playboy Publishing Summit.
Playboy Philippines team seizes their time in NYC after the 3-day summit; visits the most iconic places in the city.
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