PERSONAL ESSAY

How to stop being jaded

// BY INEZ CHUIDIAN

At the beginning of our first year, we entered Phelps Gate wide-eyed and thrilled. We left our dorms each morning with no idea about who we'd see, where we'd go or how long it would be until we returned. We changed majors, shopped classes and reneged on which houses threw the best parties. We marveled at every moment without trying — and as my friends and I have found ourselves saying this year, they were "the good old days."

I've heard that this same air returns come senior year — this time tinged with nostalgia, as we recreate memories that have come full circle. We return to the same restaurant we ventured to in freshman year, close out frats and experience Yale with full embrace and awe. In doing so, our college experience ends with a sense of completion as we return to what we started with.

But what about the limbo in between? What about the sophomore and junior years, when the spectacle of new beginnings has faded but the nostalgia of an ending has yet to arrive? Sophomore and junior years become the middle children of the Yale family that this community forms. Kind of just there.

Now, this piece applies to both years sandwiched between the beginning and end of our academic careers — but it is truly for my juniors. While sophomore year still offers some of the comfort of freshman year, junior year seems to be plagued by a jaded flatness. A stillness that comes from having been there and done that. And there must be a way to circumvent this. Yet even as I write this essay, I gaslight myself into believing I know what I'm proposing.

Because I am jaded. And cynical. I roll my eyes when someone suggests a semesterly tradition that I would, now, be performing for the fifth time. I laugh at any idea that would have sounded dreamy to my first-year self. I crave the freshman wonder I once held for every club meeting I'd attend, only to eventually drop. I miss not having an urge to retreat to my apartment every time I leave for class.

But I wish to approach this junior dilemma using more than a cliché. I don't want to propose that the middle children on this campus merely must "try something new" or "return to the first-year mindset" to feel better. Because frankly, that seems backwards. As nostalgic for first year as we may be, who actually wants to restart? Or find a new hobby? Or leave the house with no idea of what we will be doing that day? Ask many of my friends: as much as we reminisce, you couldn't pay us to be 18 again.

Perhaps it is precisely because we lived so deeply and outwardly in those first years of college that we now feel so distant from such an era, so "washed" in comparison. To go back would be to lose the new retrospective maturity we find ourselves with — the maturity that reconsiders drinking a beer before going to the library, or taking a class completely irrelevant to your major when you have five looming requirements.

There's a term for this in tech and business circles — the Gartner Hype Cycle — where an innovation rides a wave of hype, crashes into a "trough of disillusionment" and eventually settles into something called the "plateau of productivity." A flat era where things pause. I think that's exactly where junior year sits.

In this pause, we don't actually need to restart. Or go back. We don't need a wave of excitement in our eyes that comes with a new beginning. Rather, our sandwiched years at Yale call for a different approach entirely — one rooted in an appreciation for stillness. It looks like deepening our roots in whatever we've already touched over the past two years. Not attending club meetings as a newcomer, but supporting the recruitment process for the one club you actually stuck with. Not chasing something new, but circling back to the freshman friend you lost track of after they studied abroad. Not shopping five different classes hoping one surprises you, but sticking with the professor whose class you already know will kick your ass in the best way.

So really, to be jaded is a privilege — a sign that you've done enough, lived enough, to inevitably feel a little tired from it all. And maybe the junior fix is not to stop feeling jaded at all, but to sit in it. Laugh at the freshmen badgering TAs at office hours. Take the night in. Live the same weekend you've lived for the last two years. There's a degree of seniority that has to be earned to act this way, so we may as well enjoy it while we're here.

Because one day, we'll walk back through Phelps Gate for the last time — not wide-eyed, but aged, retracing our steps to the same restaurant, the same frat, the same everything we once called ordinary. And we'll call these, too, "the good old days" — failing to believe we ever got bored of a place we knew this well.

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