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## M\*A\*S\*H | Opinion | The Harvard Crimson

*The Office of Career Services*

4-5 minutes

For the most monastic undergraduates, it might have seemed that salvation had come last week in online form. Suddenly, thanks to the guerilla computing of one Kirkland House sophomore, students could log onto an open website and compare the facebook photos of almost all their peers, choosing the better-looking of an infinite, randomly-generated sequence of paired mugs. A peculiarly-squinting senior and that hottie from your Medieval manuscripts section—click! Your blockmate and the kid who always glared at you in Annenberg—click! Your two best friends' respective significant others—pause...click, click, click!

Witness the glory, the range of Ivy-League neuroses soothed by this simple electronic formula: We Harvard students could indulge our fondness for judging those around us on superficial criteria without ever having to face any of the judged in person. On the "facemash" website, we were all masters of our own domains of rejection and approval, and we never had to deal with anything more socially challenging than a parade of nameless, awkward registration-day snapshots.

For a moment, the possibilities seemed endless. Why not expand the system to a more comprehensive array of superficial attributes by which to judge our peers? Facemash.com could do wonders for the campus hermit's pained heart, but how much more hypercritical fun could be had with GPA-Mash.com, Parents'-Income-Mash.com and Elite-Summer-I-Banking-Internship-Mash.com! Perhaps Byerly Hall, long taxed by ever-increasing numbers of applicants, could use the decentralized 21st-century model to whittle down the Class of 2008—Eager-Harvard-College-Applicants-Mash.com might be just around the corner.

Alas, such self-important dreams were not to be. No matter how suited the site's particular brand of judgmentalism seemed to Harvard students, the same campus that ardently embraced Friendster this summer quickly and rightly condemned the facemash as hurtful and demeaning—not to mention illegal under a number of University regulations. The thrill of rating our fellow students and the chance at being named the third-hottest guy or girl in all of Leverett House were not, in the end, as powerful as the urge to protect privacy and defend ourselves against the potential injury such public judgment could cause. Within hours, the facemash's sheepish lord had taken the site down and had posted apologies to offended individuals on a number of e-mail lists.

Much of the trouble surrounding the facemash could have been eliminated if only the site had limited itself to students who voluntarily uploaded their own photos. Instead of the shock of seeing your awful first-year image broadcast to the world at large for open competition, such a site would have brought joy to attention-seekers and voyeurs alike. A site that allows us to succumb to the guilty pleasure of judging our friends and enemies in an e-Darwinist free-for-all would be acceptable—and hilarious—so long as its targets all choose to opt themselves into the spotlight.

Given the harsh reception that met its IPO, however, it seems unlikely that the facemash will "pull a Napster" and rise from its electronic grave. And perhaps that is for the best: As midterm season puts us at the mercy of our TFs on a daily basis, it's starting to become apparent that we may already have enough arbitrary judgment in our lives. Being humiliated for "creative" choices in our short-essay answers is bad enough. Being humiliated for our "creative" Freshman Week grooming decisions somehow feels worse.