



RACHEL MADDOW

Upstairs in MSNBC's studios at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in Manhattan, Rachel Maddow is practically mainlining the news of the day. Her staff of 20 (women outnumber men and diversity of skin color, gender expression and age is clearly valued) calls out headlines as Maddow scribbles in micro-script on a whiteboard: bombs in Kandahar, pollution in Beijing, idiocy on the campaign trail, a two-star Navy admiral reprimanded for public drunkenness and nudity. "Oh, I love when government and nakedness collide," Maddow says to big laughs.

Of 50-odd story possibilities, roughly six make The Rachel Maddow Show, the nightly news and opinion program with a strong leftist bent that debuted two months before Barack Obama was elected in 2008. With nearly a million viewers each night, it is MSNBC's highest-rated prime-time series and will inevitably boom bigger as November's presidential election draws nearer.

At 42, Maddow isn't like other TV talking heads. She was the first openly gay anchor to host a major news program in the U.S. and has never pretended to be a golden girl. "I once had long, straight blonde hair but then cut it short and came back looking like Rick Santorum," she says. Maddow does not mask her liberalism, but even right-wingers respect how sharp, well-informed and sane she is. Her 2012 best-seller, *Drift*, on America's slide into perpetual war, includes a blurb from Fox News chairman and CEO Roger Ailes.

Maddow grew up in conservative Castro Valley, California, where her former Air Force captain father was a lawyer and her mother a school administrator. By the age of seven she was reading the newspaper; in her teens, she was a standout athlete turned AIDS activist. She went to Stanford University and then to the University of Oxford as America's first openly gay Rhodes Scholar. She holds an Oxford Ph.D. in political science.

Academia could not contain Maddow's enthu-

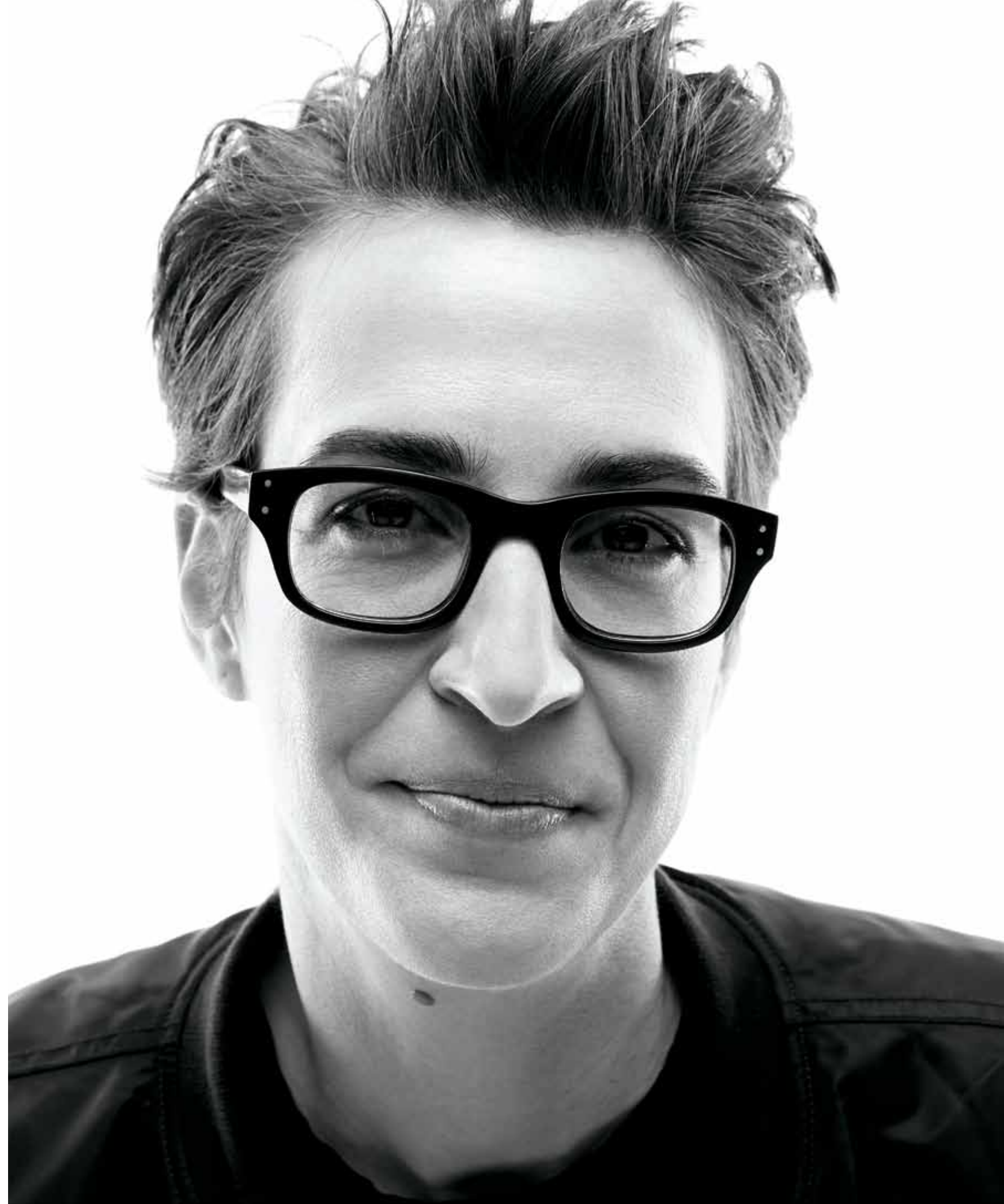
siasm for talk, and she broke into radio in 1999 after an open call at WRNX in Amherst, Massachusetts. (That same year she met her partner, Susan Mikula, an artist; the Berkshires remain their primary residence.) Obsessive about research and with a gift for crystallizing even the wonkiest white papers, Maddow helped launch Air America in 2004 before landing her nine P.M. spot on MSNBC in New York, where **PLAYBOY** Contributing Editor **David Hochman** recently met with her for a couple of days. Hochman has interviewed many pundits for **PLAYBOY**—Sean Hannity, Michael Savage, Bill Maher, Chris Wallace—but had never met an anchor who works as diligently as Maddow. He reports: "She's like the girl in high school who reads every assignment, acs every test, does all the extra credits and still manages to run the yearbook, win the swim meet and get the president of the United States to write her back."

PLAYBOY: After almost eight years of President Obama, we are once again talking about

change. As a liberal, are you still feeling hope? **MADDOW:** Theoretically. But historically speaking, after Democrats hold two terms in the White House, the public picks a Republican to replace them. There are a lot of determining factors in who wins. People say it's the price of gas and the growth in the economy, but sometimes it's the we're-ready-for-something-new thing. There's a reason that, almost without fail, in every midterm election the president's party loses seats. There are psychological cycles in American politics that are pretty easy to read, and in 2016 Democrats are facing one of those cycles in which they are structurally disadvantaged. It's a matter of civic and international interest whom the Republicans pick, because even if they pick a fascist, structurally speaking that fascist or that con man, let's say, will have a 50 percent chance of becoming president of the United States.

I'm a liberal, but the thing that interests me most in American politics is center-right to far-right politics, because (a) it's a laugh a minute

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and (b) there's no stasis. There's no solid core moving forward. You never know who's going to come along.

PLAYBOY: Donald Trump's strong come-on was certainly a stunner. What conditions gave rise to his popularity?

MADDOW: First of all, anybody in day-to-day political coverage who says they saw it coming you can write off for the rest of their life. Trump's explosion was not just improbable, it was laugh-out-loud funny. But it's not like there's no precedent for this. Silvio Berlusconi, the longest-serving Italian leader after World War II, was a zillionaire media guy with *bunga-bunga* sex parties who had no political pedigree whatsoever and just got in there and did a terrible job and embarrassed the nation. But they picked him. Jesse Ventura was elected governor of Minnesota and then didn't really do anything. Arnold Schwarzenegger became a non-consequential governor of California purely on the basis of having had a tough-sounding tagline in one of his movie franchises. People make decisions like this all the time, even enlightened persons.

PLAYBOY: Some celebrity candidates turn out okay. Ronald Reagan did well for himself.

MADDOW: Ronald Reagan was a consequential guy. Al Franken is a very serious and effective Minnesota senator. Former child star Sheila Kuehl does meaningful work for California. That said, to go from being a race-baiting nativist buffoon reality-star professional sexist to being the distant front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, even for a while, says almost less about Trump than about the Republican Party.

It's fascinating how Republicans pick their candidates. Honestly, I think the Republican Party's voters are drunk. I'm sure they're having a great time and they feel euphoric, but you can't eat a ton of greasy food and not feel terrible in the morning. I mean, Ben Carson!

What's amazing is that the conservative movement since the Reagan era has been telling conservatives that government is the problem, which makes experience running government a mark on your record. Having constructive ideas about what government could do makes you a suspicious character. Honestly, the very idea that you would thirst

to hold high government office in Washington, D.C. almost inherently disqualifies you as a Republican. So *everybody* is qualified, and therefore you pick the person who most entertains you. It's a weird thing.

PLAYBOY: Weren't we supposed to be in the middle of another Bush vs. Clinton battle right now?

MADDOW: That was the assumption ever since Obama became the clear nominee in 2008—Hillary vs. Jeb. Now, eight years later we're in a campaign where we've watched Jeb Bush set fire to tens of millions of dollars and get in trouble every time he opens his mouth. At one point he actually said, "You are *look-ing* at the nominee and I am *go-ing* to face Hillary Clinton and I am *go-ing* to whoop her." Come on, Jeb. You actually have to drop a *g* some-

TEN TO 15 PERCENT HATE ME, THINK I'M A MAN OR A SOCIALIST AND WANT ME DEAD.

where if you're gonna talk like an everyday person. You have to use a contraction.

PLAYBOY: Regardless of which candidates are still in the running when this publishes, which Republicans have the most to offer?

MADDOW: The general election is so hard to talk about in the abstract this year, because all the Republican prospects have been so freaky-making. Look at Ted Cruz, who always appears to me as if he's portraying a character rather than being an actual politician. It's impossible to know what he truly believes. Marco Rubio, on the other hand, hasn't really done anything in his life other than be a politician. I just can't figure out how he spends his time. He made this interesting and dramatic commitment at the outset of his presidential campaign that he would not run for reelection to the Senate because he's so confident he'll be president. But

then it became an issue that he doesn't show up to vote. He has the worst voting record in the Senate, yet he clearly takes meetings every time a hedge fund billionaire calls. It's hard to see Marco Rubio supporting anything other than Marco Rubio.

PLAYBOY: Now or in the future, what about Chris Christie?

MADDOW: My Spidey sense tells me he's going to do well in New Hampshire. We'll know by the time people read this. He's a good campaigner. He has charisma. He has the right tough-guy persona he can turn on and off when he wants. Okay, so he has been like Godzilla stomping on New Jersey as governor. A true disaster. Republicans don't care about that. But if Christie makes it to March and April, the problem is the Bridgegate trials will be starting, people will be pleading not guilty, and fingers will be pointing at him.

PLAYBOY: Moving on to the Democrats, what does Hillary Clinton need to do to win?

MADDOW: She has to avoid unforced errors. The political track we've seen a few times with Hillary is that when she's ahead she gets a little loosey-goosey. When people start talking about her as inevitable, she believes she's inevitable and sort of moves on to the next thing. You can't do that. Hillary stops paying attention to the fundamentals of being a good candidate when she's ahead.

PLAYBOY: Carly Fiorina quipped last year that if you want to stump a Democrat, ask him or

her to name something Hillary Clinton has accomplished. What has Clinton accomplished?

MADDOW: She has a pretty good legislative record as a senator. Her time as secretary of state was accomplished. Most of what we did in Libya, whether or not you like it, was orchestrated by her. I think getting China onboard with the climate deal had a lot to do with her. Getting to Osama bin Laden. Improving America's status abroad. But that question is bullshit. Let's talk about Carly Fiorina's accomplishments at HP when she left versus when she got there.

PLAYBOY: Presuming Clinton is the nominee, whom should she pick as a running mate?

MADDOW: Sadly, I feel her running mate definitely has to be a dude, even though there are so many women coming ripe in their political careers who would be amazing. Missouri senator Claire McCaskill would be amazing. Minnesota

HAIR BY BRIAN BUENVENTURA AT MANAGEMENT ARTISTS; MAKEUP BY JUNIKO KOKA AT JOE MANAGEMENT



senator Amy Klobuchar would be amazing. Obviously Elizabeth Warren if you have a more conservative candidate like Hillary Clinton.

Everybody says Clinton is going to pick Julian Castro, the HUD secretary, but I've been trying to start another rumor. Maybe saying it in **PLAYBOY** will finally make it take hold. It makes total sense to me that she'll pick Stanley McChrystal, the Army general who had a bad ending because of a *Rolling Stone* interview in which he ripped into Joe Biden. There's a sort of realpolitik gender issue around Clinton getting the nomination that requires she pick a Grizzly Adams as her vice president. But it can't be somebody who might overshadow her to the extent that people see the man in charge and the woman in a supporting role. It can't be somebody who feels he ought to be at the top of the ticket.

McChrystal doesn't come from a traditional political background, which I think makes a lot of sense. Also, this election may come down to who has the best national security message. The one Hillary has is really different from President Obama's. She told me to my face that she's not as hawkish as people think she is and she won't be a more aggressive commander-in-chief, but I don't believe her.

PLAYBOY: What difference would it make to have a woman as president?

MADDOW: It breaks the glass ceiling, which means the next woman to do it will be the second woman. Not that it always works that way. Britain had just the one; Israel had just the one. You do see when other countries get a female leader, particularly an iconic female leader, it doesn't necessarily open the floodgates. It is unusual that we're this old, robust democracy and pluralistic society, and we haven't gotten ours yet. The gender achievement at the top in every single political representation really sucks. I mean, we're super-psyched that we have 20 women senators. Yay, 20! Um, there are 100. I can do that math.

It's worse in the Republican Party, but in the Democratic Party women aren't hitting the top tiers as fast and as frequently as statistically they ought to be, even when you compare us with other countries. I can't help but think that electing a woman president might speed that pace a bit. Still, if Clinton gets elected, that's about her, and her legacy will be determined

by how good a president she is. Just being a woman gets you only so far.

PLAYBOY: You've spent time knee-to-knee with Clinton and Bernie Sanders. What are they like off camera?

MADDOW: It's fascinating. I did an hour-long interview with Hillary in the studio last fall, right before the televised forum I did with the candidates in South Carolina. We had no ground rules. She had no idea what I was going to ask. When she came in, she listened to me so hard it felt like she was prying my thoughts out of my brain through my eyeballs. Hillary's



got tractor beams. She was so intently focused and had a ton to say about every issue. It's the same way Bill Clinton would give press conferences when he was president and wouldn't want them to end. He'd just be like, "Bring it on." She kind of has that going on. She's not that guarded. She has something to say about everything. She's policy-minded—that to me is a nice form of seriousness in a politician—and has an ability to handle a wide range of subject matter. Very impressive.

But then, a couple of weeks later, at the forum in South Carolina, it wasn't just us and the camera guy in the room. There were 3,000 people, and it was as if I wasn't there. I would ask

her a question and she would physically turn to the audience and answer. I was like, "Yoo-hoo, over here!"

PLAYBOY: Was Sanders like that too?

MADDOW: The thing that's interesting about Bernie is that he is a freaking good politician, and he's aggressive. We had a commercial break in the middle of our discussion because I wanted to have a reset. During that break, Martin O'Malley was hyperventilating. Hillary started playing to the audience again and waving to people like she was campaigning. Bernie was working *me* to ask the questions he wanted for the second half. He was like, "When we come back, are you going to ask me about...?" I was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. You're supposed to be Mr. Socialist."

PLAYBOY: Can you picture him being president?

MADDOW: Bernie Sanders is running this fascinating campaign where he's all about people being angry and dissatisfied and frustrated. He wants you to be disaffected and frustrated about an economic system that keeps you from ever ascending the ladder. That is a great emotion to tap into for a politician but a hard lesson to sell in terms of where people should channel it. If that message works for you, it's cathartic. People love him. They really do feel the Bern. He gets tens of thousands of people to turn out, but that sort of economic populism is a tough sell. The diagnosis is right; the cure isn't easy. My prediction for Bernie: populist hero forever but hard to imagine him still being there at the convention.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about your MSNBC show. What do you say to people on the right who see the lion's share of your segments going after corruption and extreme views among Republicans at a time when we've had a Democratic president for seven years and a Congress in which Democrats have held at least equal power? Is your outrage selective?

MADDOW: I don't think so. I defy anybody to have shown more glee or spent more minutes of airtime enjoying the spectacularly corrupt and profane downfall of Rod Blagojevich in Illinois. I don't know of any other national news coverage for a story like that of Kathleen Kane, the first elected Democratic attorney general in Pennsylvania, who leaked embarrassing racist and pornographic work e-mails of government officials and police officers



that were part of a secret grand jury document. I mean, hello! California state senator Leland Yee, who went down for your standard corruption plus selling shoulder-fired missiles and rocket-propelled grenades. That stuff is gold. I don't want to go so far as to say I enjoy it, but I am enthusiastic about covering profane corruption and extremism when anybody brings it to the fore. But certainly I love covering Republican politics in general more than I like anything else in American politics. It's just my area of interest.

PLAYBOY: Do you think emotions and opinions have overtaken analysis and facts in the American media? Or is it just some collective fantasy that news used to be more objective?

MADDOW: I don't have any animus toward the old news model, but I do think it's facile and reductive to claim news was once unbiased and is now biased. Every time you choose which stories are important that day, you're using news judgment and your subjective perspective on things. I lived through a lot of news cycles as an American citizen before I was ever in the media. Much of the news I cared about was designated as unimportant, frivolous or not worthy of mainstream attention, and that was someone's political decision.

PLAYBOY: Which stories are you talking about?

MADDOW: Well, I'm thinking about the AIDS movement. Growing up as a gay kid in the 1980s and 1990s in the San Francisco Bay Area when that devastating epidemic hit, and it being literally laughed at in the White House briefing room and never treated by mainstream media as anything other than a sidebar medical issue or a human interest story about fags. That was someone's subjective decision. I make subjective decisions too. I just own it.

PLAYBOY: You were an activist before you were an anchor. Do you still feel like one?

MADDOW: There are some connections. As a teenager and well into my 20s, being an activist was what I did full-time. I wanted to be good at it, and in order to be good and to get stuff done, I needed to make great arguments. That's different from being good at being bossy, which I've always been. As I got into AIDS activism

in particular, I consciously sought to build the skills to make persuasive arguments so I could help effect change.

The media side of me is different from the activist side. As a media person, I like explaining things. Most of what I do is take the universe of known information and explain what's important about it, what's new about it and what to watch for next. I find that explanatory work very satisfying. We have this little mantra on the show: Increase the amount of useful information in the world. Explain what's going on in a way that resonates with people and helps them understand what's truly important about it. That's what I try to do. Some people like it. Others can't stand it.

PLAYBOY: What is your hate mail like?

MADDOW: It's interesting. I get a lot of it, but

THE FIRST TIME I THOUGHT I MIGHT BE A LESBIAN, I REMEMBER THINKING: BUT I HATE SOFTBALL.

it has always been the same percentage of negative to positive. The first media job I ever had was in 1999 and 2000. I was on the radio, on *The Dave in the Morning Show* on WRNX in western Massachusetts. I was the lesbian newsgirl sidekick, and part of the shtick was that I was gay and looked like a dyke. That offended some people. Typical hate mail was the same then as it is now: all caps, misspelled, saying that I'm a man or I'm going to hell for being gay or that I'm a socialist. Or "I'm going to kill you." That was 10 to 15 percent. Then I moved to my own show in Northampton, Massachusetts. That was *Big Breakfast*. It was the same thing. Then I got to Air America and had a national platform, and again it was the exact same proportion. Then I get a show on MSNBC, and again 10 to 15 percent hate me, think I'm a man or a socialist and want me dead. Fortunately NBC

security is really good. If you look out that window, you'll see snipers.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of which, have you heard any interesting solutions for gun violence?

MADDOW: Yes, there are good ideas out there, like the micro-stamping of ammunition so you can trace every bullet. Most gun deaths in America are not mass shootings; most are small-scale crimes. Being able to solve gun crimes by connecting bullets to the people using them could really help. We did that with Tasers. A Taser shoots this confetti that helps you identify it. Why can't we do that with guns? Also, smart guns, which they have in other countries, as well as in the most recent James Bond movie. Nobody other than you can fire the weapon. That won't solve everything, but it will help with the day-to-day violence and accidents.

PLAYBOY: What would it take to get the National Rifle Association on board with changes like those?

MADDOW: Raw political force. The power of the NRA used to be that it held sway over Democrats in a way that was unusual for a right-leaning interest group. More and more, the NRA is just a Republican interest group. As recently as the Bill Clinton era and even after, in the George W. Bush era, a considerable number of Democrats used to compete on the basis of their good standing with the

NRA. Democrats now compete on the basis of who is the most aggressive *against* the NRA. That hasn't leaked over into Republican politics yet, but Democrats have really changed. When Democrats win, the NRA loses. It was a brilliant strategy for decades to be able to keep its hold on Democrats, but it just pushed it too hard. I think Wayne LaPierre made them into an embarrassing organization that no Democrat wants to be a part of now. That's really going to hurt them, but it will require raw Democratic political power. If the Democrats use their political might in the 2016 election, within four years the NRA could be effectively dead in terms of strangle-holding those federal issues.

PLAYBOY: We keep seeing videos of police-related shootings, whether captured on smartphones and shared through social media

or released by police departments amid public pressure. Much of the furor is fueled by race. Is the situation as dire as it looks?

MADDOW: I think so. Policing in our country is something in which authority is dispersed in a way that doesn't always lend itself to the kind of stuff you want to see on the news. Obviously I think choosing to be a police officer is an incredibly patriotic and honorable thing to do. But running a good police organization in this country is something for which we don't have high expectations. We expect police departments to have trouble, and we don't give them much help in terms of running themselves in a way that avoids that. It's a management problem and a government-accountability problem that are long-standing. You should expect things to go wrong when you give people guns and the authority to physically control others. But cameras are the beginning of the solution. The more cameras out there, the more incidents come to light. It helps you see the different fault lines, and there are many fault lines in America.

PLAYBOY: The country feels as divided as ever.

MADDOW: We're a raucous, fight-it-out kind of country, and we always have been. America had a civil war. People used to beat each other to death with canes on the floor of the Senate. We had race riots.

You get a lot of happy talk about healing and unity. That can be inspirational, but when fault lines ease, new ones always form. You can see the split by race. You can see it by class. Urban-rural, red state-blue state. Insurrectionist versus statist. The naysayers versus whatever Obama tried to get done.

PLAYBOY: Give us your report card on the president's two terms.

MADDOW: Obama will go down as one of the more consequential and good presidents in American history, mostly because of what he did with what he was handed. Recovering from the Great Recession alone made me glad Paul Ryan wasn't in the vice president's office trying to make economic policy and going, "Hey, we've got to cut taxes for the rich!" In many ways, Obama held the tiller firm and got us through a terrible time.

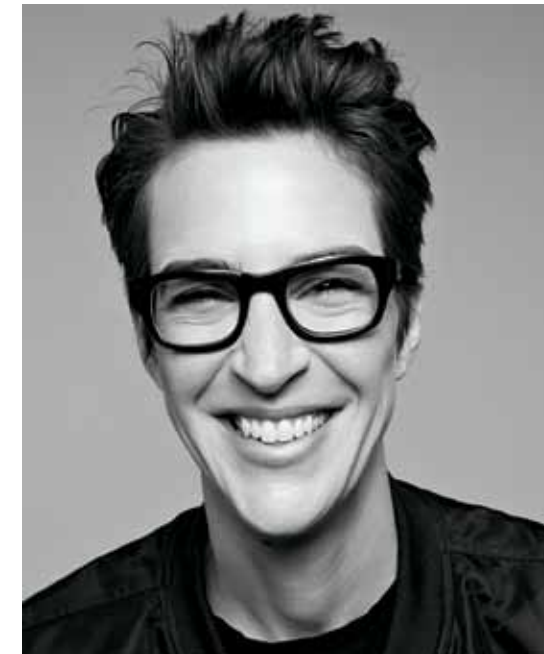
PLAYBOY: Major disappointments?

MADDOW: The amount of war-making he's done. I'm shocked we're still in Afghanistan.



We've restarted the war in Iraq, and now we have a new war in Syria to go with it, and in the interim we had a war in Libya, plus Somalia, plus Yemen. It felt like circumstances drove him more than he drove circumstances. That said, could you do differently?

There isn't an Obama doctrine. The closest we got to an Obama doctrine was what Secretary Clinton articulated in the first term, which was that we're going to remake the world diplomatically. We're going to up our soft-power capability and reshape circumstances that way. That didn't work. Partly it's because Obama wasn't a



progressive. He was a centrist. We need an aggressive progressive national security agenda. Guys like Chris Murphy and Tim Kaine in the Senate have been really good about that. Congressman Adam Schiff and Hillary Clinton are both redefining national security. That's where the vacuum is. The Republicans have nothing to offer on this at all. Nothing. Lindsey Graham is the only one with any sort of foreign policy idea, and it's weird how much the Republicans hate him. He's got so much going on as far as what they supposedly care about. He's like John McCain on steroids in terms of how many wars he wants. He's adorable. But his name is Lindsey and he's not married. Is that

the worry? You'd think he'd have the angry Republican hordes rallying around him.

PLAYBOY: Why is the right so much better than the left at channeling fury? There's really no book industry or talk radio industry for liberals as there is for conservatives.

MADDOW: That's true. The commentary industry on the right makes zillionaires out of these people. That gives them tons of incentive to be outrageous and provocative. Watch Rush Limbaugh, who is really washed up at this point as a radio host. He's been around too long and he says too many of the same things.

But every once in a while he makes a calculated decision to say something to get himself in trouble. It's his little cry for attention. He trolls everybody, everybody's outraged, and people pay attention to him for another week. Then he disappears again.

PLAYBOY: It's a survival strategy.

MADDOW: It's marketing. If you tell people, "Don't listen to anybody else. You can trust only me. Everybody else is out to get you," not only do you get them to listen to you, but you get them to listen to you exclusively. That's how Fox News is so dominant in cable news. It's not that a majority of the country watches it. It's just that it has locked up all the conservative audience. Frankly, that creates real problems for conservative politicians in that their feedback loop is closed in terms of outside information and which stories are relevant, including understanding how their rhetoric is going to be heard. If they only hear themselves reflected back by people who agree with them, they have a hard time dealing with a general-election audience. I think we've seen that with everybody from Mitt Romney on down. We on the left have never made that case: Don't watch anybody else, or everybody else is terrible and part of a conspiracy and lying to you and against you. Maybe we should have.

PLAYBOY: How much money would you need to go head-to-head in a debate with Ann Coulter on your show?

MADDOW: [Sighs] The one rule I have about my show is that, by virtue of being invited, I'm telling my viewers that this person has something to say that you ought to listen to. That's the rule. Ann Coulter would not meet that requirement.

PLAYBOY: Do you see Fox News as an evil empire?

MADDOW: There are people on Fox I respect a lot. I'm friends with Greta Van Susteren. Real friends. She's a good social drinker, she's funny, her husband's hilarious, and she always has great stories about, like, just coming back from Burundi. She's a warhorse. Shepard Smith is awesome. The same way I want to hear Bill Maher talk about his interesting life, I want to hear Shep talk about his. He's a fun-loving guy who's got the tiger by the tail. Because he's on Fox, he's Mr. Gravititas, but he's such a crazed football fan that at some point he will cast a bet on a game that results in a face tattoo. I used to love Glenn Beck on the radio before he went into Fox. He was approaching my hero Howard Stern in terms of how good he was with the medium. But then he went into messianic territory. He thinks of himself in religious terms now, which is no fun for anybody.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever hang with Bill O'Reilly?

MADDOW: I met him once. He's very tall and he has a very soft handshake. When some guys shake hands with a woman, they turn their hands at the last second. You think you're going to get a normal handshake, and then all of a sudden it's like a little garden spade. It's like holding a sock puppet. I don't know if that's a chivalrous thing, but I wouldn't think he'd turn his hand like that with a man. Maybe he thought I was a dude and then realized I was a woman and quick-changed it.

PLAYBOY: Just in terms of appearance and charisma, who's the hottest anchor on TV news?

MADDOW: It is weird to be in an industry where everybody is so good-looking. I do not think of myself as a physically attractive person. I think of myself as a goober. I dress like an eight-year-old with a credit card, and I eat like that too—burritos or pizza or s'mores. That's it. But these ostentatiously attractive people! Thomas Roberts on MSNBC is a golden god.

All those blondes on Fox. I mean, if I worked at a place where they did not allow you to wear sleeves, could you imagine? Or where all desks had Lucite bottoms so you could show your shins. Jesus, I feel very lucky that at MSNBC they're like, "You're fine in the \$19 blazer."

PLAYBOY: By the way, is it true you came

out as gay by posting it on a bathroom wall at Stanford?

MADDOW: I put up a public letter in the stalls in my dorm. I was a freshman and very cocky and had incredible self-regard, as all good 17-year-olds do. I hadn't known I was gay for a long time. I was just figuring it out. There were very few openly lesbian students. Once I was sure, I quickly realized that I did not want to be a closeted person—that that was a weak place to be.

PLAYBOY: Had you dated guys?

MADDOW: Oh yeah, I had high school boy-friends and stuff. But there was an inchoate sense of confusion and brokenness. Boys weren't as thrilling to me as they were for my girlfriends, and I definitely found myself drawn more to the charming young women

NO PUNDIT SHOULD HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE PRACTICE OF POLITICS, EVER.

in my life than to the men.

PLAYBOY: Did you have sex with guys?

MADDOW: Oh right, this is **PLAYBOY**. [*laughs*] It's none of your business! The point is, I stopped thinking of myself as broken when it occurred to me that I might actually not be just a failed heterosexual. I might be this other thing. It was sort of an abstract concept. The first time I consciously thought I might be a lesbian I remember thinking: But I hate softball. Then I went to college and started sleeping with girls and was like, Ah, that's what my body's for!

PLAYBOY: Is it easier to be gay in America in 2016?

MADDOW: It's definitely different. The biggest change is that gay culture is more normative. It was really important to me as a kid

coming out that there was a gay community with physical gay places in the world. People coming out today don't feel they have a specific spot. They don't have to go to a bar. They don't have to belong to gay associations or use gay travel pathways. Kids are coming out on Facebook now.

PLAYBOY: How has marriage equality changed things?

MADDOW: It's strange. Gay cultural expectations around monogamy and long-term relationships and even around what you call each other are following the straight model of marriage. That's fine if you think the straight model of marriage is awesome. [Editor's note: Maddow and Mikula are not married.] Ultimately, I think you'll see the same patterns in married gay couples that you see in married straight couples. As gay people get more integrated into society and are less ghettoized, our lives will be just like everybody else's, and that's sad to me. Sometimes it fits to be mainstream and sometimes it doesn't. I don't want to give up everything that made my community awesome before we were accepted.

PLAYBOY: What's your take on Caitlyn Jenner?

MADDOW: I'm so pop culture illiterate that I did not know there was a connection between Bruce Jenner and the Kardashians. It also took me a long time to figure out that the Kardashians don't have jobs. But the nice thing about Caitlyn Jenner is that America gets to hear from

a transgender person talking about transgender issues. The idea of transgender-equality issues being litigated by the gay community always rubbed me the wrong way. People should be able to speak for themselves on their own terms. If what the media needs to actually talk to a transgender person is for that person to be famous, then let that be step one.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel the same way about Charlie Sheen and the fight against HIV?

MADDOW: Oh my God. The universal through line for AIDS, civil rights, refugees, anti-Semitism, people who are maligned and excluded and denounced as dangerous and insidious—the universal through line for making that better, for curing it and for fighting back is people speaking on their own terms. So it's one thing for Charlie Sheen to

come out and do a PSA saying "Be nice to HIV-positive people." Charlie Sheen coming out and saying "I am HIV positive" is abundantly more powerful.

Coming out matters. Coming out is powerful. It doesn't work only when saints come out. It's about seeing people as fully human entities and having to reckon with whatever it is you don't like about them in nonreductive human terms. That's the magic. That's how the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice.

PLAYBOY: Let's switch gears. What do you do on your rare days off?

MADDOW: I'm a music fan. I'm kind of obsessed with Frank Morgan and jazz guys like that. I've got a Thelonious Monk problem. I also love all country music. I want to be an evangelist for this guy from Oklahoma named John Moreland, who is literally the Bruce Springsteen of our era, though nobody knows who he is. There's a band called Lucero that turned me into a major fangirl recently. So music, a little fly-fishing, and I'm a good drinker. I like my beer, and I can mix a pretty impressive cocktail.

PLAYBOY: What's your go-to?

MADDOW: An aviation is kind of a martini, in that it starts with two ounces of Plymouth gin. I keep the cocktail glass in the freezer while I mix the gin in a shaker with three quarters of an ounce of fresh lemon juice, two teaspoons of Luxardo maraschino liqueur and a bar spoon of *crème de violette*. Add a lot of ice. Stir very quietly. Take the glass out of the freezer, strain drink into glass, marvel at the sky-like color, drink too fast, make another one.

Otherwise, I work 12-ish hours a day, five days a week, 50 weeks a year, and I don't take vacations and I don't have lunch. I eat two meals a day at my desk. I live what I think of as my own life between two A.M. Saturday morning and seven A.M. Monday morning. On weekends, I have a place behind our house in western Massachusetts where I watch football, and there's a hot tub in it. I get to see Susan, who is patient enough to put up with me. Without her, I might not be able to get out of bed on Monday morning.

PLAYBOY: You've spoken about struggling with depression. Is that something you still deal with?

MADDOW: Depression is a very real, very present part of my entire adult life. It doesn't

cure itself and it's not sadness. It's a different thing. I've experienced the full range of emotions from happy to sad, just like everybody else, but for me the way depression manifests is a sort of suppressing of everything, good and bad, and I kind of disconnect. It's like somebody hits the mute button. It's very lonely, and it can be alienating.

PLAYBOY: How do you get through it?

MADDOW: Well, that's the thing I need to be most deliberate about in my life. I can't make the depression go away, but I can be cognizant of it. It helps to be able to talk about it. It's



lifesaving to me that Susan both knows about it and understands it and pays attention to me on those grounds. As I've gotten older, the exact cyclical experience of it in terms of how long it lasts and how frequently it comes changes a little, and I just try to be patient with myself. If it ever becomes permanent, I'll need to treat it medically, but right now I don't.

PLAYBOY: You appear quite chipper on TV.

MADDOW: It's adrenaline. Doing the show is like jumping out of an airplane. Here it comes. It's nine o'clock. This is going to happen no matter what I do.

PLAYBOY: What's the future of news? Will the era of the talking-head anchor go on forever?

MADDOW: Five years ago, if you'd told me we would still be doing news this way, I would have called you crazy. Everybody always predicts we're going away, and yet here we are. Even network news is doing as great as it ever has. I think there's one very simple reason we persist, which is that there are some things you want to watch live. Yeah, you may want to watch on your phone or your tablet instead of your TV, but you need a person who gets information and explains to you what's going on in a way you can visually connect with. Showing you the pictures, telling you what they are. That's

what keeps me in business.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever think about getting into politics? What would a Maddow administration look like?

MADDOW: At the White House? Jesus, no! It would look like me getting sworn in and handing it over to my vice president, Amy Klobuchar, before immediately resigning. No pundit should have anything to do with the practice of politics ever, ever, ever. It would be like taking the average caller into an ESPN show and letting him go, "Snap the ball to Brady." You just don't do it.

PLAYBOY: Humor us a little. What would you most like to fix about this country?

MADDOW: Well, we have some foundational challenges. The fact that we don't have a middle class and haven't for a generation now is foundational to whether or not our government can ever work again. I think the threat of climate change, and what that's doing already, is sobering. I think the apathy and disdain for our own political processes is a real problem, not just because I like our political processes

but because that's the mechanism we have to fix whatever issues come up.

Government works. That's the most liberal thing about me. If we continue to treat government as the problem instead of the solution, we'll never be able to harness the power to fix whatever's broken. We need to restore American enthusiasm for our civic processes, because it's the only government we've got. Whether or not you like the people who are running it, we have to believe in the system of government. It sucks, but it's better than all the others. I'd fix that. Also, pleated khakis and people putting blue cheese in their olives. Those are disgusting. ■