

Tavi Forever

[Culture, Women's Fashion](#)

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June 6, 2014 9:02 am [12 Comments](#)



Photograph by Hendrik Kerstens.

Styled by Malina Joseph Gilchrist. **Simone Rocha** top, \$1,000, [net-a-porter.com](#), and skirt, \$1,240, [modaoperandi.com](#).

Tavi Gevinson is a list-maker. It's one part of her talent for self-help, a process she might refer to as "giving myself therapy" or "being my own best friend." To understand how Gevinson has maintained the integrity of what she calls "a core me," begin with her lists.

In late April, about a week after her 18th birthday, Gevinson had several lists tacked to a wood-paneled door in her bedroom, in her direct line of sight when she lies on her bed, head resting on her mascara-smudged Miranda July pillow. The cluster began with an exhortation in pink watercolor paint: "LIVE THROUGH THIS." "THIS" was the aftermath of her first serious relationship, which had ended two weeks earlier, amicably but sadly. As one list put it:

Loving him now means:

From tween blogger to feminist editrix to Broadway actor, Tavi Gevinson is embarking on her next project: being a grown-up.

Letting him go
Loving myself
Becoming myself

Gevinson might know her “core me,” but she has not yet become herself, at least not the “grown woman” she intends to become. At 13, two years after her fashion blog Style Rookie had introduced Tavi as a creative young person with very good taste, the tiny figure with granny glasses, gray-blue hair and extraordinary millinery appeared at the runway shows as more of a mascot than a human being. She played the dwarf in a Felliniesque array, placed somewhere between a socialite’s teacup chihuahua and the Olsen twins. The perfumed tribe of ethereal beings had adopted her, but that story is over, their images at the bottom of the Tumblr feed.

Tavi asserted her autonomy early on. From a fashion blogger, blocking views with her giant bow at a Dior couture runway show, she morphed into Tavi the 15-year-old editrix of the girl-power Internet nexus Rookie magazine, the print annual of which she edits after school. Last fall, we met Tavi the indie movie ingénue, playing a child who charms adults in “Enough Said.” There is also Tavi the generational spokesperson, joking with Jimmy Fallon or clicking through a PowerPoint presentation on being a fangirl at a “festival of ideas” in Australia. She interviewed Miley Cyrus for the May 2014 cover of Elle. She recently voiced a character on “The Simpsons.”

Today she is a suburban teenager wearing a Bruce Springsteen T-shirt (from “Darkness on the Edge of Town”) tucked into black jeans. Her blond hair is bobbed short, her feet bare. She is still small, but not in the least childlike. Her smallness gives her a sort of authority, like a punctuation mark amid words. Her latest project is theater: In just over a week, she will leave high school for full-time rehearsals at the Steppenwolf Theater in Chicago, where she will perform a run in Kenneth Lonergan’s play “This Is Our Youth.” She will move to New York in August, when the play goes to Broadway. She’s taking a gap year there before college.

Writer, actress and Rookie editor in chief Tavi Gevinson talks coming of age, Kanye and her dream interview subject.

Another list, titled “Just be,” includes:

David Bowie

Patti Smith

Wayne Koestenbaum

Tavi recently cleaned her room, sorting through her vast collection of kitsch, thrift-shop treasures and the tokens of girl love gifted to her by adoring Rookie readers. She pared it all down to the most important things: a piece of the Berlin wall; “rare barrettes” that were merch from a tour of Courtney Love’s band Hole; a matchbook from a kitschy Chicago motel that offers “short-hour stays”; the Lifetouch school photos of her closest friends. She has a shelf of “Sweet Valley High” books; a jacket of psychedelic fabric printed with jokes from “Laugh-In.” Her walls are covered with stills from Salt-n-Pepa’s “None of Your Business” video, drawings from friends and an aerial photo of an island in her mother’s native Norway.



Photograph by Hendrik Kerstens.

Styled by Malina Joseph Gilchrist. **Calvin Klein** dress, \$3,295, (212) 292-9000.

“If I was super-rich I would totally use my gap year to just put a bunch of stuff in a tiny museum somewhere,” she says. She has hundreds of girls’ journals, friendships bracelets and mixtapes in her possession, most of them from a promotional tour for *Rookie* where she asked readers to bring tokens and amulets from their rooms. Few American adults born in the last 40 or 50 or even 60 years wouldn’t suffer some unsettling memory of shag carpets or processed snack foods upon entering Tavi’s. Somehow ageless herself, Tavi has perfected adolescence as an aesthetic experience. Like the child-granny she used to be, she is both her age and somehow above it.

Tavi could become a great actor or a better writer or who knows what else, but her defining talent thus far is her discernment. Aided by her lists and her good judgment, she has already navigated a model path through her own precocity. (Another strategy: drawing self-portraits, “even if you’re not good at drawing,” she says, “and then you manifest what you want.”) Part of her success, along with a talent for self-help, is due to her self-criticism. Without losing authority, Tavi talks about “imposter syndrome,” and of worrying she has not



Clockwise from top left: courtesy of Tavi Gevinson; courtesy of Tavi Gevinson; Paul Morigi/Getty Images for Barneys New York; Petra Collins; Paul Morigi/WireImage/Getty Images; © Rookie, with permission from Drawn and Quarterly. Clockwise from top left: the fashion blogger in 2009; a @tavitulle Instagram of a collection of inspirational photographs; at age 14, with Anna Wintour and Barneys New York C.E.O. Mark Lee; pillow talk with the singer Lorde in late 2013 at a friend's house in Brooklyn; in a characteristically bold ensemble at age 13 at the spring 2010 Y-3 fashion show; the cover of "Rookie Yearbook Two," the second print editor of the popular online magazine Rookie, founded by Gevinson in 2011, which includes contributions from Lena Dunham and Judy Blume.

Gevinson grew up in Oak Park, Ill. with two older sisters. Her dad is a retired English teacher who now serves on the local school board; her mom is a textile artist who tutors kids for their bar mitzvahs. Gevinson might feel the thrill of seeing the former Sears Tower in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," but Oak Park is a different sort of outskirts. It's much more the Chicagoland of sports talk radio, the sidewalks weedy, the lawns not so green. Growing up here, Tavi learned some lessons about the nature of American diversity, the process by which the great mixture of elementary school slowly segregates by the time each generation reaches the high school cafeteria. Over the past few years, as her life has gotten more and more improbable, this anchor of middle-American, middle-class reality has helped center her, but now she is casting herself adrift.

To prepare for New York, she has made a list of "the elements I like about being here and being a teenager that I want to make sure I sustain somehow." It includes keeping a diary and allowing herself time to feel sad. In her new environment, she hopes to immerse herself in her community, the Rookie community, "where everyone wants to feel good and there's no snobbishness."

Tavi might eventually tire of wanting to feel good. She denies that the tone of Rookie will change as she ages

out. If that's true, Tavi seems more likely to become her generation's Oprah Winfrey than its Patti Smith. I remind myself of Tavi's age only when reading Rookie's version of feminism. With its girl power, relentless enthusiasm and celebrations of resilience, it brings to mind Joan Didion's estimation that when what passes for the women's movement is only so many stories of upbeat personal fulfillment and mutual assurance, "the movement is no longer a cause but a symptom." Gevinson, in contrast, paraphrases the Didion of "Goodbye to All That," her awareness that young people are susceptible to "this conviction that what you're experiencing has never happened to anyone else ever before."

Tavi recently interviewed the singer Lorde for Rookie. They bonded over the agony of the question, posed by so many interviewers, "But do you feel 16?"

"I love hearing you fangirl," Tavi said to Lorde. "I'm such a fangirl, I know!" Lorde replied.

Another list, of distractions:

Watch a movie you haven't seen

Listen to records

Listen to new music

Read a book

Draw

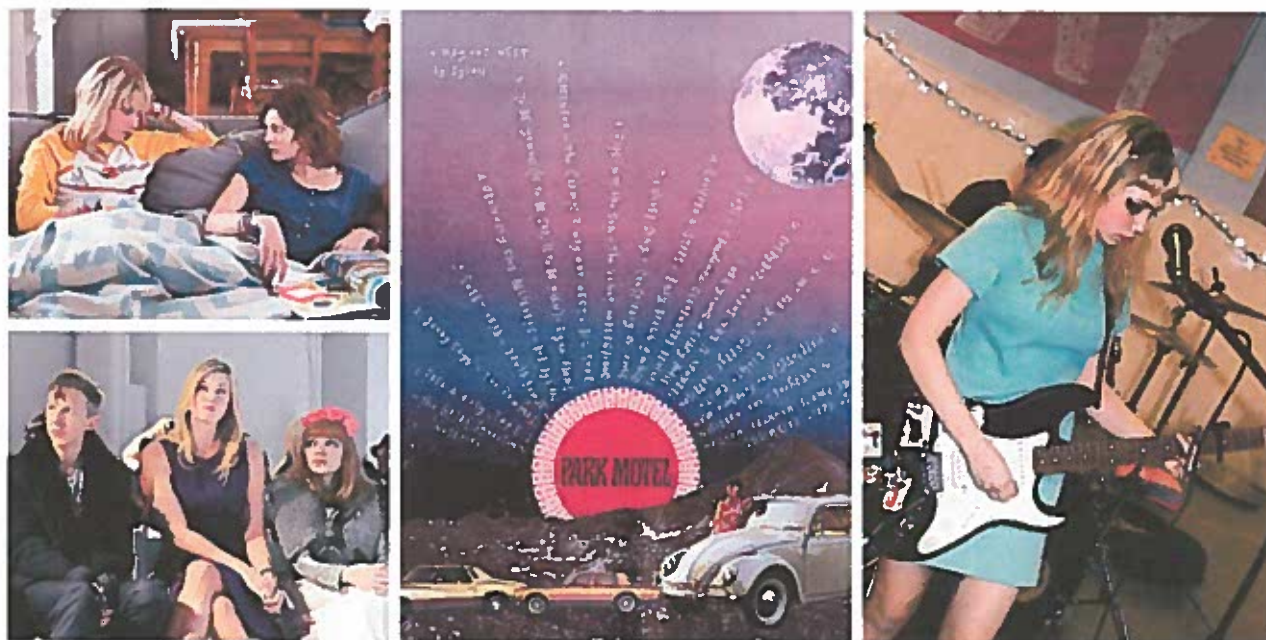
Paint

Play guitar

Write for Rookie

Write in your diary

Take a walk



Clockwise from bottom left: Rabbani and Solimene Photography/Getty Images; Lacey Terrell; © Rookie, with permission from Drawn and Quarterly; Autumn Hartline. Clockwise from bottom left: front row at Rodarte's fall 2012 runway show; her 2013 feature-film debut in "Enough Said," directed by Nicole Holofcener; a page from "Rookie Yearbook Two"; playing with her band at a feminist event.

earned what she has accomplished. She knows the objections to sponsored content on Rookie and what she might sacrifice in integrity when she thanks Urban Outfitters in her editor's note. She indicates her awareness of the privileges afforded by her race, class and upbringing. She understands that some people will see her recent move into acting as the default denouement of earning further name recognition in the United States, the way that Shaq became an actor, or Paris Hilton. She frets somewhat over this perception but quickly becomes exasperated. It's what she wants, first of all, and the people she admires — Tilda Swinton, say, or Kanye West — don't define themselves only by the role that first earned them an audience. One point of guidance came from high school philosophy class. She can't remember who said it, but it was something along the lines that you shouldn't decide on your identity; that you should just live and your identity comes later.

Grown-up luminaries have practically lined up to offer the mentorship she has shown little sign of needing. For her 18th birthday, the screenwriter Kirsten "Kiwi" Smith threw her a party in Los Angeles with cake and dancing. Tavi shows me another important gift: a pair of brown leather gloves nestled in a bed of gold-flecked tissue paper, a birthday card tucked underneath that reads "To: Tavi, From: WR."

"These gloves belonged to Audrey Hepburn, who then gave them to Winona Ryder when she was 18, who I know and who gave them to me this weekend," she explains. It's an anointment. For the adults, one suspects that the imprimatur of such a wise teenager offers some consolation, as only a youth can dismantle the cult of youth. They seem to see her as a protégée and a cause — proof that the kids are all right. What a relief.

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO:

Graduation

Summer

Wearing new clothes

Moving to N.Y.C.

Doing "This Is Our Youth" on Broadway

Rookie crew hangouts

Tavi's mom, Berit, delivers an after-school snack of buttered wheat toast and clementines. She shows me that the plate is decorated with characters from a famous Norwegian children's book, written by the man who translated "Winnie-the-Pooh" into Norwegian. Tavi's mom hasn't read Karl Ove Knausgaard yet, although she reads about him in the newspapers. "He seems," she says, "a little questionable."

We go for a walk around the neighborhood so Tavi can consider some childhood landmarks. Outside her house the tulips have come up amid the unmown grass of the boulevard and a magnolia tree is on the verge of blooming. The family's 16-year-old Jack Russell terrier stares, unmoving, with rheumy eyes, through the chain-link fence of their backyard. We walk past a church where Tavi took piano lessons as a kid, her teacher waiting ominously in the dim light at the end of the aisle, beckoning. We stop and look at the backyard of a gray house, a house where Tavi spent a lot of time in a basement rec room in high school. The graffiti she remembers on the second-floor porch has been painted over; the house is up for sale or has been sold.

We walk over the Eisenhower Expressway, where Tavi once spent a ponderous evening. The walkway is all concrete patched with asphalt, the cars whizzing below towards Madison or Detroit.

One time, in her sophomore year of high school, Tavi sat here with her friend Claire, listening to a mixtape of '60s girl groups on a battery-operated tape player and watching the cars below. An old man in a blue parka passed them going one direction, and then passed them walking back, when he stopped and said, "If I don't see you again, have a happy rest of your life."

Hair by Rheanne White at See Management. Makeup by Rie Omoto at See Management.