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University Professor Sees Second Paper Retracted Under accusations of data fabrication

By CT Staff

Previously lauded as an “editor’s suggestion” piece by PRL, the 2021 paper on manganese disulfide (MnS₂) marked a continuing step on the journey to achieve room-temperature superconductivity — an effort that has proven unsuccessful for decades.

Dias’ 2021 paper focuses on the electrical properties of MnS₂, including a dramatic, reversible reduction in electrical resistance under pressure. His work with superconductors, however, may be far better known.

A recognized name in the physics community, Dias’ superconductor research rocketed him to the world stage. Recognized as a TIME100 Next innovator in 2021, his work with superconductors is widely considered to be a promising step towards the technology of the future.

‘Dias’ superconductor research rocketed him to the world stage.’

Superconductivity is a phenomenon where certain materials can conduct electrici-



Image Obtained From April 12th, 2022 NSF Director Visit.

MICAH BETTENHAUSEN / PHOTO EDITOR

ty with no resistance and no energy loss. The caveat is that superconductivity usually only occurs at incredibly cold temperatures that hover just above absolute zero, a condition that is highly cost-intensive to maintain.

Today, superconductors play critical roles in high-current wires, scientific accelerators like the one at CERN, and even magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines. The advent of a room-temperature superconductor could be the key to cost-effective

superconductivity — and the key to engineering fiction’s wildest dreams.

“Let’s be clear: hoverboards, magnetic levitation trains and resistance-free power lines are not coming this year or next. But thanks to Ranga Dias, they’re closer than they ever were,” said Time.

Dias’ work is even slated to “find a place in physics textbooks,” according to the University News Center.

Last year, however, following concerns expressed re-

garding the validity of the MnS₂ data, PRL conducted an internal investigation with a number of independent experts. Now concluded, the results of the inquiry support the accusations against Dias and his team.

Reports also indicate noticeable differences between the published data and the alleged “raw data” that Ashkan Salamat, Associate Professor of Physics at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a fellow author on the MnS₂

paper, was asked to submit for the investigation. Salamat is alleged to have deliberately obstructed the investigation by submitting manipulated data.

Additionally, the data from the PRL publication bears striking resemblances to Dias’ own PhD thesis, completed in 2013.

What led to the retraction

Upon discovering a match between a resistivity plot for germanium selenide in Dias’ 2013 thesis and the plot for MnS₂ in the 2021 paper, Professor James Hamlin, a physicist currently with the University of Florida, reached out to Dias and the rest of the paper’s authors with his findings.

‘The data from the PRL publication bears striking resemblances to Dias’ own PhD thesis.’

Simon Kimber, a coauthor of the 2021 PRL paper and a materials scientist previously with the University Burgundy Franche-Comté, reached back.

SEE DIAS PAGE 2

Fall Changes in University Dining Halls

By Ksenia Gevorkova
NEWS EDITOR

Over the summer, Dining Services has implemented various changes in prep for the Fall 2023 semester. Mainly, these changes feature new ways for the University to focus on sustainability and limiting waste.

“Currently, we use a system called Leanpath, and that is a computerized system where we weigh waste if people are cleaning vegetables and things like that,” said Todd Ferrin, Director of Campus Dining and Auxiliary Operations. “They have buckets set aside where they look at volumes and weights of things that we’re bringing in and how much waste there is.”

The Leanpath program,

which employs the use of food waste trackers such as the one Ferrin mentioned and creates action programs in order to reduce unnecessary kitchen waste, is also used at institutions such as the University of Notre Dame and Arizona State University.

In addition, Dining Services has implemented a composting program. Under this program, upgraded equipment will be used to bake down food waste to create compost for University grounds. This prevents the food waste from going back into the waste stream.

Another ongoing dining change that students may notice in their first couple weeks on campus includes more open dining options throughout the week. During the pandemic, the University faced staffing shortages that

affected Dining Services intensely, but according to Ferrin, staffing levels are on the rise.

What does that mean for students? This year, Douglass Dining Hall will be open every day of the week, rather than having only Danforth open on the weekends — thus, if you were missing the coveted “Dougie brunch” of yesterday, you’re in luck.

‘Upgraded equipment will be used to bake down food waste to create compost for University grounds.’

In order to take initiative on student feedback, there are other changes that Dining Services is entertaining — including shifting the dessert bar in Douglass

Dining Hall to a salad bar akin to the one in Danforth and adding an allergen-free station in Danforth.

“We are always looking to make our overall menu healthier,” Ferrin said. “A lot of students in Douglass, you know, they miss the salad bar in Danforth. So we’re trying to expand that and move our desserts to individual stations to kind of have a different dessert at each station.”

However, for any students concerned about dining options straying too far from their comfort zone, there will always be a pasta option at either Danforth or Douglass every day. The head chef, Brian Pape, noted that the pasta station in Douglass Commons will be undergoing some renovations.

In addition, wait times for high-density dining

options such as Starbucks have led to yet another shift in University policy. This year, student employees at Starbucks were brought back earlier in the move-in process in order to better address the long lines during Welcome Week and have more trained employees staffing the shop during the start of the semester.

‘This year, Douglass Dining Hall will be open every day of the week.’

“We don’t want people to get stuck in lines, especially in the middle of the day when they have to go to another class,” Ferrin said.

Gevorkova is a member of the Class of 2026.

INSIDE THIS CT

IGEM (NEARLY) IN PARIS

PAGE 3 CAMPUS

BARBIE-PALOOZA

PAGES 5 & 6

GIRLHOOD NOSTALGIA

PAGE 7 OPINIONS

FRESHMAN HOUSING CRISIS

PAGE 12 HUMOR

CAMPUS

DIAS FROM PAGE 1

According to Kimber, “it was absolutely clear that something very strange was going on.”

Dias’ thesis and the PRL paper were on two completely different materials, with three different datasets, three different conditions, and three different pressures. Yet, after scaling the data — they were “basically identical,” he said. “To me, as a physicist, it was completely obvious that this was impossible.”

Concerned by the apparent similarities, Kimber emailed PRL to request a retraction of the 2021 paper, kicking off the investigation that has since concluded.

PRL has formally requested the paper’s retraction — and, failing the authors’ cooperation, will unanimously retract the paper on their own authority.

This is not the first of Dias’ papers to be brought into question — nor the first to face retraction.

Three of his papers now hold contention with the science community: his 2013 PhD thesis from Washington State University; his retracted paper on carbonaceous sulfur hydride, published by Nature in 2020; and his now-retracted 2021 paper on manganese disulfide, published by Physical Review Letters.

The University has launched an investigation in conjunction with outside experts in the wake of the most recent controversy surrounding Dias’. While the 2021 paper has been formally retracted, with nine out of ten coauthors agreeing to the retraction, Dias himself was the sole hold out.

‘Three of his papers now hold contention with the science community.’

A recently published database of retractions shows that only four in every 10,000 papers are retracted — and, as pointed out by Science, “relatively few authors are responsible for a disproportionate number of retractions.”

PRL operates under the standards set forth by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), a non-profit group advising journal editors and publishers worldwide. COPE’s retraction guidelines provide overarching recommendations for editors, and recommend retractions for findings that are evidently “unreliable, either as a result of major error [...] fabrication or falsification.”

The first retraction

Three years ago, Dias and his team were initially praised for their claims of a break-

through in physics: the discovery of the first room-temperature superconductor in the form of carbonaceous sulfur hydride (CSH).

The results of their research were published in the 14 October 2020 issue of Nature, to global acclaim.

However, the results were controversial — not only due to the stunning claims, but also a lack of clarity regarding the paper’s methodologies.

The American Physical Society (APS) dove into the detailed allegations of misconduct against Dias and his team for their 2020 paper. The allegations, which included accusations of plagiarism, data manipulation, and poorly constructed data, resulted in the CSH paper’s retraction the following year.

Among Dias’ skeptics was Jorge E. Hirsch, a condensed-matter theorist at the University of California, San Diego. A long-time critic of room-temperature superconductivity — especially in hydrogen-based materials, as Dias used — Hirsch decided to check over the paper for flaws after its initial publication.

‘Hirsch decided to check over the paper for flaws after its initial publication.’

He focused on the measurements of magnetic susceptibility, a property that describes how well a material will magnetize, and what he found concerned him.

Magnetic susceptibility should drop sharply when the material enters the superconducting state. Then, as the temperature continues to fall, the curve should flatten or rise very slowly, according to the APS.

To Hirsch, the shape of one of the susceptibility plots in the CSH paper (“Extended Data Figure 7d”) seemed strange, as the low-temperature slope showed a sharp jump upwards.

Curiously, the data bore some resemblance to the magnetic susceptibility of europium, as published in a PRL paper in 2009.

Hirsch first reached out to one of the authors, Matthew Debessai, but was met with no response. So, he moved onto another author — James Hamlin, the physicist who found the similarities between Dias’ PhD thesis and the 2021 paper.

According to Hamlin, he and Hirsch found “one issue after another” with the europium paper, including a section of magnetic susceptibility data that appeared to have been copy-and-pasted across various temperature ranges.

Debessai’s europium re-

sults were retracted in December of 2021, with further investigation by another of the paper’s authors finding no evidence of the element’s superconductivity.

Hamlin took his concerns to Dias and Salamat, but they allegedly seemed unconcerned about the seemingly manipulated susceptibility data. They were, instead, concerned that the allegations could go viral.

“I had also raised concerns about the resistivity data, the electrical resistivity data, which were kind of never responded to by the authors,” Hamlin said.

In an analysis published after the CSH paper’s retraction, Hamlin found that Dias’ electrical resistance data displayed discrete steps in some places, and smooth slopes in others.

Digitization creates smooth slopes and discrete “steps” when data is more or less precise, respectively. When data is especially precise, there should be no visible steps — but the inclusion of both in Dias’ data implies at least two signals of differing digital precision.

This, according to Hamlin’s research, raised “questions concerning the methods used to obtain the published data.”

While Hirsch and Hamlin dissected the meat of the data, others hoped to replicate the CSH results, as described by the APS. Among them were Alexander Goncharov, a materials scientist at D.C.’s Carnegie Institute, and Mikhail Eremets, of the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry in Germany.

The description of how to synthesize CSH was “scarce but still sufficient,” according to Goncharov, but after months of work, both parties’ independent experiments grounded nothing.

They turned to Dias for guidance, but, according to the APS, were given no help. No one could reproduce Dias’ data, and for just over a year, Dias refused to provide the CSH data files, despite considerable urging on Hirsch’s behalf.

‘Hamlin and Hirsch found “one issue after another” with the europium paper.’

“Finally, in December of 2021, which is a year and two months after the paper was published, [Dias and Salamat] did release the data,” said Hirsch. “Meaning the raw data and the background signal data, from which the published data were obtained.”

Hirsch would then review the data with Dirk van der Marel, a condensed-matter physicist at the University of

Geneva. According to Hirsch, “something was very wrong” with the numbers.

When a signal is measured, it contains an element of background noise, thanks to ambient influences like electrical interference. Independently measured signals will have independent noise — and subtracting one signal from another should result in a cleaner overall signal with at least as much noise as the original sources.

Dias’ data, however, seemed to show the opposite.

In the CSH paper, Dias and his colleagues claimed to have made two independent voltage measurements — the measured, or raw signal, from the superconducting CSH sample, and a background signal from a non-superconducting CSH sample.

‘No one could reproduce Dias’ data.’

With this in mind, the math is fairly simple: subtracting the background from the raw signal should produce a somewhat noisy end result. But Dias and Salamat’s results yielded the opposite, and showed comparatively lower noise instead.

According to Hirsch, after confronting Dias and Salamat with this concern, the two then claimed to have constructed the data via means that they refused to disclose, even when Hirsch asked for further clarification.

“It was a nonstandard method, and we hadn’t disclosed it. So that was the reason to retract,” Dias told the APS. “[Nature] hasn’t questioned the validity of our data [...] the data is valid.”

Concerning the alleged plagiarism

Beyond the accusations of data fabrication and manipulation, Dias’ data is also haunted by allegations of plagiarism.

While Hamlin was looking into the CSH data, he was struck by some lines in Dias’ write-ups that read as familiar — lines that he himself had written in his 2007 PhD thesis.

Hamlin and Kimber would go through Dias’ thesis by hand, after their initial introduction. According to an analysis shared with Science, they found Dias’ thesis to contain “6300 words that are identical to passages from 17 sources” — or about 21% of the thesis overall.

An independent comparison by Physics Magazine found “dozens of paragraphs that match word for word” and two figures with remarkable similarities. Reporting by Undark, Science, and The New York Times previously referenced the degree of

similarities between the two theses, though Dias claims to have appropriate citations.

Dias’ University website also contains text copied without attribution, according to Hamlin and Kimber.

“The scientific community is going to need answers on this,” said Hamlin — answers, some feel, that lie in a precedent set decades ago.

Peter Armitage, a condensed-matter physicist at Johns Hopkins University, made reference to the infamous Schön scandal of 2002.

German physicist Jan Hendrik Schön, who made a series of apparent superconductor breakthroughs, was met with worldwide acclaim. His work, however, was found to be vastly fraudulent after physicists noted that the noise patterns within one of his graphs was eerily reminiscent of another.

Schön was found to have manipulated or outright fabricated data in at least 17 papers during his time. Despite a number of attempts, his work could not be reproduced.

In regard to Dias’ research, Armitage found a clear similarity — especially with Dias’ latest 2023 Nature paper.

“I’ve talked to other people who came to the same conclusion — you cannot produce the data in the new paper by the analysis procedure they’ve claimed they perform,” he said. “It just doesn’t come out. There’s no way to get it.”

Similarly concerning to him is the lack of action over the allegations against Dias.

‘You cannot produce the data in the new paper by the analysis procedure they’ve claimed they perform.’

The Schön case was met with swift action by Schön’s employer, Bell Labs — including a committee investigation and a public release of the inquiry report. On top of several retractions, Schön was later stripped of his doctoral degree.

Washington State University has declined to comment on whether they have carried out an investigation into the validity of Dias’ thesis, according to the APS.

“I would point out that there’s a precedent of people losing PhDs for plagiarizing far less of their thesis,” Armitage said. “If someone was plagiarizing 21% of their [reporting], they wouldn’t have a job, and there’s no difference in science.”

Read more at campustimes.org

Student Innovators Set to Showcase 3D Bioprinter Project at iGEM Competition in Paris

By Ariel Wang
FEATURES EDITOR

In just under two months, a dynamic group of 10 undergraduates from the University of Rochester will embark on a journey to Paris to unveil the culmination of a year's worth of effort. Their destination: the renowned International Genetically Engineered Machine Competition (iGEM), a competition that pushes for the advancement of synthetic biology to address global challenges.

This annual competition spurs teams from around the world to design, construct, test, and evaluate innovative systems using interchangeable biological components and established molecular biology techniques.

'[iGEM] spurs teams from around the world to design, construct, test, and evaluate innovative systems using interchangeable biological components and established molecular biology techniques.'

Every year, the University's iGEM team — led by faculty advisor Dr. Anne S. Meyer — takes on a different project. This year, the new team, Team RoSynth, is preparing to introduce a 3D bioprinter

project which aims to address conservation issues concerning the intense demand of endangered botanical compounds for pharmaceutical use.

Engineered to 3D-print gels laden with a bacteria and yeast co-culture system, this revolutionary technology synthesizes rosmarinic acid (RA). Often harnessed for its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties in various commercial applications, RA's extraction has historically been both laborious and inefficient.

'[The project] aims to address conservation issues concerning the intense demand of endangered botanical compounds for pharmaceutical use.'

"Team RoSynth is engineering a biosynthesis system for optimizing the production of in-demand plant-derived drugs," the team's website states. "Our workflow will be especially effective for drug production processes requiring copious amounts of labor and limited by plant availability."

Specifically, the team engineered bacteria and yeast to synthesize plant compounds. However, if bacteria and yeast are both used for synthesis,

the bacteria inevitably out-competes — or kills — the yeast. Thus, Team RoSynth is employing a parallel culture system that compartmentalizes each to aid in more efficient synthesis.

'Often harnessed for its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties in various commercial applications, [rosmarinic acid, or RA's] extraction has historically been both laborious and inefficient.'

"You have yeast and bacteria growing in separate hydrogels, kind of like gelatin," junior and team leader Elizabeth Martin said, "and they work together to synthesize the molecules."

'Team RoSynth is employing a parallel culture system that compartmentalizes [yeast and bacteria] to aid in more efficient synthesis.'

The team is responsible for feeding glucose into the system to allow the synthesis of RA through metabolic pathways involving both organisms together.

However, the team's approach offers an alternative

to the traditional extraction method. The parallel culture system not only increases RA production but also promises cost efficiency.

'The parallel culture system not only increases [rosmarinic acid] production but also promises cost efficiency.'

"What we are doing is taking the genes that are null to photosynthesis pathway and put half of those genes into our bacteria and the other half to our yeast," senior Arianna Slupik. "That way, we are just kind of lining up this metabolic pathway between them."

The focus of the project isn't necessarily RA itself, but rather a proof of concept to show that the dual-organism system can be used effectively and efficiently in the printing process, which automates an otherwise laborious and

potentially human error-laden process of biomanufacturing.

'The focus of the project is [...] a proof of concept to show that the dual-organism system can be used effectively and efficiently in the printing process.'

The journey to this point involved extensive time and effort from all team members. According to Martin, the record for the team of the longest time spent in the lab is just past midnight — after arriving at 9 a.m. that prior morning. This includes work spent doing lab work as well as the promotion, marketing, fundraising, and outreach work for the team, which is all done in house. "It's a lot of work," said Martin. "It really is."

Wang is a member of the Class of 2024.

For more information on Team RoSynth, you can find their statement website and team breakdown at this website:

2023.igem.wiki/rochester

For more information on the history of UR's iGEM team or how the team functions academically, check out the Department of Biology's undergraduate research tab.



Celebrate Diversity Is the Best Marketing Ploy Ever

By Alyssa Koh
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Welcome Week is almost over (ending on Aug. 29) and with it concludes a host of activities for incoming students — first-years, transfer students, and exchange students alike. However, there is one activity that all in attendance look forward to (even if, like me, you've seen it three times): Celebrate Diversity.

On the student-facing side, what happens at a program like this is not so different from what one might experience at something like Convocation or One Community — you get shuttled (literally, for this event) over to a location where people talk at you and then you enjoy sitting through something that happens at you. Audience participation isn't built in, and you're meant to take it all in. However, unlike the rest of the events, Celebrate Diversity benefits from the variety in their acts, leading to more crowd investment in the

performances.

'There is one [Welcome Week] activity that all in attendance look forward to (even if, like me, you've seen it three times): Celebrate Diversity.'

On the reverse side, as someone who's worked for the Orientation department for multiple years, Celebrate Diversity is a labor of love for all of the student and staff organizations who are involved — and that's what makes it so good. You can tell the heart that people put into their first performances in front of the new additions to the student body, and in a year like this, the A-game that everyone brings is infectious.

To open the event, Xclusive Step Team did a choreographed number that immediately caught the crowd's attention, complete

with off-mic shouting that filled Kodak Hall, and that energy propelled itself through every group that followed.

'Celebrate Diversity is a labor of love for all of the student and staff organizations that are involved - and that's what makes it so good.'

This year, there were some groups who performed at Celebrate Diversity that hadn't been around in past years — one of which was Bangla Basha, a Bangla dance team that set itself apart from its similar counterparts, at least to my semi-uncultured eye (Rangoli and Bhangra, of which do Bollywood and Punjabi folk dance respectively) with their theatrical choreography.

In particular, a highlight of this year's Celebrate Diversity

was actually the costuming. Normally, I don't find myself paying attention to performers' outfits, but I was particularly taken this year with the visuals of the event. From UR Celtic's shimmery skirts and dresses that perfectly complemented their tight footwork to the rainbow-order bow ties and suspenders of the ASL Club's high-energy rendition of "You Can't Stop The Beat" from Hairspray, I was on just the right amount of sensory overload.

'Normally, I don't find myself paying attention to performers' outfits, but I was particularly taken this year with the visuals of the event.'

Celebrate Diversity, in essence, is the best mutually-beneficial marketing strategy that the University has to offer. The promotion of student diversity

is twofold: it serves as fuel for budding student organizations to thrive off of after their performances put them on full display for students who may have never rolled up to their Activities Fair table or attended their GIM otherwise, and it serves as a confirmation for incoming students that what they saw in the emails and on the website and on the tour isn't just for show.

'Celebrate Diversity, in essence, is the best mutually-beneficial marketing strategy that the University has to offer.'

We're lucky to have a lot of incredibly diverse students with diverse interests and backgrounds at our institution, and Celebrate Diversity exploits that fact to everyone's advantage.

Koh is a member of the Class of 2024.



A PHOTO OF THE EASTMAN TROMBONE CHOIR - THE SOLE EASTMAN-CENTRIC PERFORMANCE GROUP AT CELEBRATE DIVERSITY.
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see page 11 for context



BARBIE (CULTURE)

Barbie goes to Hollywood - how much damage can one doll do?

By Adya Mohapatra
STAFF WRITER

You enter the movie theater, ready to convince yourself that a true movie-going experience requires a small popcorn and a drink, no matter what your wallet has to say about it. But something distracts you. Something... pink. Suddenly, the pink spreads. Your peripheral vision is filled with splashes of that grotesque color, as you realize in disgust that all these sick people are here to watch "Barbie".

You shake your head in pity at these people buying into a silly cash-grab of a film that you already somehow know is the stupidest movie ever made. In fact, you must also go see "Barbie" to tell the masses how bad this movie really is. You sigh. Some sacrifices are truly necessary.

You grab your overpriced popcorn and drink and head inside, ready to be the only voice of reason in a sea of mindless pink.

Or at least, this is the sort of monologue I imagine a lot of anti-"Barbie" individuals had, give or take a few dramatics. As someone who has the capability to enjoy media while being able to sensibly critique it, I am here to say that the controversy surrounding the movie never had anything to do with the movie itself.

'You grab your overpriced popcorn and drink and head inside, ready to be the only voice of reason in a sea of mindless pink.'

"Barbie" was one of the most anticipated movies of the summer. It did excellent at the box office and was widely applauded as a successful film. Upon its release, however, it unleashed a havoc of warring opinions online — some political, some not.

People were hard-pressed to defend its every decision, whether it be the casting, plot, soundtrack, advertising, and so on. On the flip side, there were people ready to hate on the movie no matter what occurred in the film, drawing on insane conclusions to support their points.

The easiest group to address

is the male-dominated hoard of "Barbie" haters. A common criticism that arose was that "Barbie" promoted hate against men. To that, I say, did you even watch the movie? Or rather, have you watched any movie ever made?

'The controversy surrounding the movie never had anything to do with the movie itself.'

The movie industry boasts an extensive history of portraying women as weak, helpless, useless, dramatic, and easily sidelined. You're telling me one film that does the same thing to men shatters your entire worldview?

Beyond that imbalance, "Barbie"'s depiction of men in the movie is made to parallel the typical treatment of women in cinema as well address how the patriarchy harms everyone. The only thing this opinion reveals is an inability to understand a simple message and a desire to condemn women for everything they do.

Quite a few women did also speak out against the feminist propaganda of Barbie, claiming that women aren't actually mistreated in society because they themselves have allegedly never faced any gender discrimination. Everything in the film was a mere exaggeration of what it means to be a woman, and honestly, this take is even worse than the last one I mentioned.

Personally, I have never broken my leg. But I'm not going to tell someone who has a broken leg, "It's not that bad. You're just making a big deal out of it, so you don't get a right to complain about it."

However, these foolish arguments have motivated many Barbie supporters to vehemently defend the movie against every criticism. People refuse to acknowledge that the movie had any shortcomings, and even if you had any valid complaints about it, they decided you were just being a hater.

I can safely say that I enjoyed the film, and that it had a very amusing and creative approach to its subject matter. It was memorable, heartfelt, and had

a talented cast and crew. That being said, presenting women's daily struggles in a very long, albeit moving, monologue was not the approach I would've taken. I would've also preferred a more fleshed-out conversation between Barbie and Ken that showed them coming to an understanding of one another.

At the end of the day, the movie had the intention of being a fun watch with a meaningful message about life and womanhood, and it executed that well. It was not a perfect movie, nor did it single-handedly eradicate misogyny and sexism.

However, if a film like this can make such an impact on so many women (and many others as well), making them feel seen, inspired, and comforted even for just the duration of the film, then as a society, why do we have to take that joy away from them?

That's what the discourse on "Barbie" boils down to. When the voices desperately defending the film against blind hate overwhelm all other viewpoints, this leads to more nuanced critiques getting, in turn, blindly ignored, or worse — misinterpreted as an attack on content made to uplift oppressed groups of people. "Barbie" has brought out the cynic in some consumers in a way that can easily sour and turn defensive and ugly.

'If a film like this can make such an impact on so many women (and many others as well, making them feel seen, inspired, and comforted [...] why do we have to take that joy away from them?'

No one says you need to adore films like this, or hide what you don't like about them. But it's crucial to know the difference — and acknowledge it within yourself — are you critiquing with a purpose, or hating just to hate?

Critical thinking sold separately.

Mohapatra is a Barbie of the Class of 2025.

Thank You, Barbenheimer

By Sunhira Tanvir
OPINIONS EDITOR

The first time I went to the movies, I was six years old. It was the AMC in Times Square. I was seeing Pixar's "Up," and for the first time in my life, I had truly experienced a movie the way it was meant to be experienced. Of course, the gorgeous visuals on the big screen made an impact, but it was being in a room with a hundred other people who were seeing and hearing and feeling the same things that I was that really left an impact.

What I remember the most is the quiet, solemn air in the dim theater after the opening scene which showed Ellie and Carl meeting and falling in love and all of the tragedy in their lives. I could not hold back my tears. I was so embarrassed for crying. I felt like a baby. But then, I heard sniffles and wet hiccups and people blowing their noses. There was a comfort in that — feeling a collective emotion. That day, I felt so human.

Since then, I've been obsessed with going to the movies. At the beginning of every year, I would write down a list of movies that would come out that year and the dates that they would open. I would put it up on our fridge to make sure that I never forgot.

'There was a comfort in that - feeling a collective emotion.'

My main form of bonding with my father would be our weekly movie trips. Every Saturday, we would wake up at 9 a.m. to catch the earliest matinee showing of that week's movie. I would order a hotdog and he would order nachos. That would be our

breakfast. Following the movie, we would drive around and talk about the movie for hours and hours.

When the pandemic hit, what I missed the most was the movies. I was overjoyed when I could return. Yet, not everyone else was. Movie theaters were one of the businesses that were hit the hardest by the pandemic. I missed seeing people be excited to see a film and talk their heads off after leaving the theater.

'When the pandemic hit, what I missed the most was the movies.'

But then came Barbenheimer, initially a silly meme about two nearly opposite films coming out on the same day: "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer." But for some reason, the joke never died down. People became more and more excited to see these films. People were planning out their fits and creating itineraries for release day. People were as excited to visit the theater as I was.

And when release day finally came, I was so excited to finally experience cinema again. I was overjoyed when I was surrounded by droves of people dressed head to toe in pink. I was delighted when we all exited the theater for "Oppenheimer" and nearly the entire crowd walked straight towards "Barbie." I was euphoric walking out of "Barbie" and seeing everyone's tear-stained faces mirroring mine.

That day was the highlight of my summer. Thank you, Barbenheimer.

Tanvir is a Barbie of the Class of 2025.

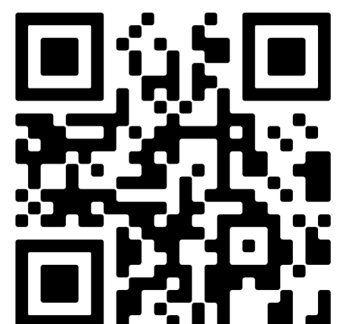


SUNHIRA TANVIR / ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR

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OPINIONS

EDITORIAL OBSERVER

Thoughts On Barbie and Healing the Inner Child

By Mariah Lansing
STAFF WRITER

SPOILERS AHEAD

The “Barbie” teaser trailer was released while I was doing an eight-week-long group therapy program focused on healing the inner child, so obviously, it felt like divine intervention. The program emphasized a lot of being present in your body and saying “yes” to anything the little girl inside me said she wanted — and she wanted to see that movie.

The opening scene about girls only playing with baby dolls spoke to my soul. Like the little girls, I never enjoyed playing with baby dolls. I had no interest in babies or caring for kids either. I hated babysitting and I never really envisioned myself as a mother.

In my youth, I was a quintessential Barbie girl. I loved the color pink, playing dress-up, shopping, and I saved up my money to buy my own Barbies. When I was in fourth grade, I saved up enough money to buy a Barbie doll with brown hair because I had brown hair. (I played with her longer than any self-respecting junior high-schooler would like to admit publicly.)

‘In my youth, I was a quintessential Barbie girl.’

She belongs to my sister now, along with the rest of my Barbies. When I decided I was too old to play with dolls, they were retired to her collection. The only Barbies she didn’t inherit

from me were my Holiday Barbies.

Every year for Christmas, my parents would give me a Holiday Barbie and a Barbie-themed ornament. I always admired the Holiday Barbie’s huge ball gown because there was nothing I wanted more as a little girl than to wear a ball gown every day. Now they all lie in my parent’s basement in storage because if there’s one thing 80 grand can’t get you at the University of Rochester, it’s on-campus storage space.

Eventually, I stopped getting Holiday Barbies, and my yearly ornaments weren’t Barbies either. I noticed, and it stung. It felt as though my parents were suggesting that I was past the age for Barbies

(it wasn’t that deep). In their defense, I was going through puberty in the age of social media, so I very well could have given them that impression. I was literally Sasha, the annoying daughter in the movie. However, I will be expecting a big, fat, hot pink Barbie ornament this year (ahem).

The most healing moment for me was seeing how excited nearly every grown woman was for the movie’s release. Everyone who played with Barbies as a kid reminisced on what the doll meant to them, uniting us through nostalgia. Barbie taught us that we could own houses, cars, pretty clothes, and have a career. Ken was the very first man in our lives who

never expected anything from us.

In the post-pandemic world where bodily autonomy is not guaranteed, it’s been kinda depressing to be a woman. Inflation is up, we’re never going to own property, and as America Ferrera says in her now-famous monologue, “It is literally impossible to be a woman.”

‘Barbie taught us that we could own houses, cars, pretty clothes, and have a career.’

The Barbie movie was exactly what we needed as women, ages 18-and-up (I specify the age group because this movie was made

for adults and you cannot convince me otherwise).

As women, we’ve been at each other’s throats for far too long because society has convinced us that the only way we will make it out alive is by proving our worth. We’ve been arguing too much about what is appropriate behavior for mothers, wives, daughters, grandmothers, and even celebrities. We have been scrutinized for our looks and actions for centuries and it’s only been amplified in the age of the internet.

But the one true thing about life is that no one makes it out alive — one of the greatest warnings given to Barbie before she decided to be human.

‘Society has convinced us that the only way we will make it out alive is by proving our worth.’

I would like to think that after watching Barbie, every woman is listening to the little girl inside her soul again. I hope that little girl is teaching them how to accept and love who they are.

Lansing is a member of the Class of 2024.



JOYLU / ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR

Campus Times

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I'm Just a Girl (And It Scares Me)

By Mahnoor Raza
SENIOR STAFF

Periodic Table of Ethereal Elements by Lucie Brock-Broido

A girl ago, a girlhood gone like a phial of ether

Thrown on fire—just

A little jump of flame, like grief, or

Like a penicillin that has lost its skill at killing

Off, it then is gone.

June is childhood — an eternity stretching out before you. July is girlhood — sticky and short and sweet. August is grief — denial, anger, bargaining. September is acceptance. September is womanhood. September is almost here.

The girl in me refuses to go down without a fight. I've been paralyzed by the fear of not being able to accurately capture the experience of girlhood — which is so singular, so universal, so diverse, and so incommunicable — but I've come to realize the impossibility of that endeavor.

'The girl in me refuses to go down without a fight.'

The resurfacing of the word "girl" in the consciousness of the chronically online (myself included) doesn't make this any easier. Neither does the advent of the Barbie movie. Or viral trends such as girl dinner. Tomato girl. 20-something teenage girl. Hot girl walk. Not a girl's girl. The list goes on. Suddenly a concept that I've held so close for so long feels like it's been shoved into the spotlight, and I feel blindsided — and maybe even a little possessive.

To be fair, I have done my fair share of girlposting and claiming I'm just a girl every time the going gets tough. But is it demeaning and infantilizing to claim I'm "just" a girl? Am I equating girlhood to incompetence by doing so? Or is it strategic femininity: a weaponized incompetence that is justified for women who have been unfairly expected to bear the brunt of gender roles for centuries? Or maybe it's a coping mechanism to contend with the idea of losing the relative freedom and lack of responsibility that comes with being a girl.

What is girlhood? Is it a feeling? If it's a feeling, feelings pass, and I'm terrified of womanhood. I'm scared of drawing room conversations and what they entail — of rishtas and funerals, both sites of death in my head.

I am scared of being transferred between families like a Monopoly title deed card. I am scared of



COURTESY OF JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS

mediocrity and exhaustion, even as the word ambition sounds increasingly heavy and insincere to me. I am scared of allowing the feeling of girlhood to pass.

What is girlhood? Is it mine? In the song "Would've, Could've, Should've," Taylor Swift laments, "Give me back my girlhood, it was mine first." However, I'm not sure if my girlhood has ever been mine.

I'm aware I'm not the first to say that my girlhood was never truly my own, which is why my increasing discomfort with the online discourse makes little sense. But nothing about this conversation makes sense: Girlhood is an idea almost wholly contingent on the perception of everyone but the girl, the only one who really matters.

If girlhood can be taken away as arbitrarily as it is bestowed, do you lose it as soon as you gain womanhood? Is there a clear distinction between the two? Am I just scared of growing up?

'I am scared of allowing the feeling of girlhood to pass.'

Womanhood implies adulthood and motherhood and so many other categories that I am not ready for. Losing girlhood feels a bit like losing a child, and I can't see myself having the space in my heart for another. I think about these lines from a poem by Jasmine Mans: "Tell me about the girl / my mother was, / before she traded in / all her girl / to be my mother."

I know that over-categorization can lead to self-surveillance; it is not always productive to be hyper-aware of a rigid, seemingly monolithic identity category that you may or may not completely fit into. With the "girl" motif's commodification in current trending media, it can be easy to feel swept up in the fight to retain your place in the girl-sphere. But what choice do you have but to

either cling to a shred of youth or succumb to the punishment that is aging for women who dare to outgrow their girlhood? It may not be useful to pigeonhole yourself into a category, but here I am.

But I am so scared of being a woman.

What is girlhood? Is it innocence? In her song "complex," Katie Gregson-McLeod compares the mistakes she made at 19 and 21 respectively, saying, "I was just a girl, what's the excuse now?"

As I feel girlhood slipping away, there's the sense that I need to create the life I want right now and have everything figured out. There's no space for mistakes, especially as an international student with a precarious visa status, and especially as a woman.

But maybe the (perfectly valid) excuse is that I am all-new and haven't learned how to be an adult yet. I read somewhere (or watched a TikTok?) about how being in your 20s is like being a newborn baby all over again. That feels true in some ways more than others, but the concept rings true — with the fresh start of adulthood, it now feels okay to put the training wheels back on.

I'm allowed to let myself be scared of falling off my bike, and to give myself the grace to scrape my knees and then start all over again (much like the fear that seized me when I learned to ride a bike in my grandparents' driveway, these affirmations are easier said than done).

'Am I just scared of growing up?'

But even whilst standing on the precipice of womanhood and cautiously peering over the edge, I have already experienced so much joy — much of which has to do with being able to slowly ease into adulthood in college. So much joy that all I can offer you is a glimpse into that of a single evening: Having my own spice cabinet. Hosting

dinner parties. Owning my own cutlery. Apologizing for the mismatched glasses and thinking about my mother. Learning to be giving. Learning to be kind. Catching myself thinking about laundry, of all things. Realizing that food does taste better with other people. Creating my own little life. Feeding my friends. Feeding myself.

'There's the sense that I need to create the life I want right now and have everything figured out.'

Feeding myself is probably the best way to describe how being a woman in my 20s has felt so far. It has been the most bizarre but nurturing experience. I feel so unformed, but so adult-like. I have never felt my age as acutely as I have these past couple of years, and I have never felt so much like my own person either. Lucie Brock-Broido encapsulates the feeling of being a 20-something teenage girl perfectly in her poem "A Girl Ago":

Extinguish me from this.

I was sixteen for twenty years. By September I will be a ghost

And flickering in unison with all the other fireflies in Appalachia,

Blinking in the swarm of it, and all at once, above

And on a bare branch in a shepherd's sky. No Dove. There is no thou to speak of.

In a discussion of Brock-Broido's work, Joan Houlihan notes that the poet categorizes "girl" as a self "that wouldn't age or die, that was preserved in a state of wonder and innocence, but always on the verge of destruction." In the poem, the girl is the "always nascent, and endangered, feminine."

Perhaps if the extinguished girl is eternal, then there is also the possibility that she never really existed. If "there is no thou to speak of," then there is nothing to lose. The girl can be whatever she wants,

forever — immortalized in girl dinners and a comfortable coexistence with womanhood.

When I was a girl, I was told that immortality would diminish the novelty of life. Poet Dorianne Laux personifies Death as a girl in a cotton slip, barefoot and giggling. She comes to the speaker of the poem and reveals that she actually quite likes death, with its wind chimes and smell of lemons.

'I was told that immortality would diminish the novelty of life'

If Death is a girl who tells you that the afterlife isn't all bad, maybe the transition from girlhood can be beautiful too. Maybe she can also hold my hand and step with me into the horrors, and the wonders, of September.

Raza is a member of the Class of 2024.

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The American Dream: A Legacy of Meritocracy

By Helena Feng
STAFF WRITER

The American Dream, having remained salient in the national consciousness for almost the entirety of America's history, has generated an unshakable paradigm for economic success that pedestals individual agency and resilience.

Its durability lies, arguably, in a genuine yet uniquely ethereal sense of tangibility — the result of a paradoxical coexistence between understanding the impossibility of extreme social mobility and a veracity from observing and hearing from those who appear to have genuinely achieved the dream in its purest form — that imbues in its believers a blind sort of prospective hope and confidence.

Prominently, the children of successful immigrants, or of parents with proximity to such cases of rags-to-riches success, grow up bombarded with real-life examples of this dream manifested, which further solidifies this pipeline into reality.

'[The American Dream's] durability lies, arguably, in a genuine yet uniquely ethereal sense of tangibility.'

A deeper look into the meritocratic ideology of the American Dream reveals tragic, deeply-rooted consequences on national attitudes pertaining to injustice. Implicitly, it pardons and rationalizes our moral dilemmas regarding inequality in this nation by ascribing inequality as a natural outcome of individual shortcomings. Indeed, the lens of meritocracy leads us to a palliative belief that the most disenfranchised people “deserve” their circumstances, absolving us of our responsibility

to campaign for and erect policy that seek to resolve systematic inequalities that act as a barrier to equal opportunity.

While the societally unprogressive inclinations of the American Dream may suggest that it is an ideology predominantly possessed and piloted by the already elite, closely examining the fundamental magnetism of this dream suggests a different perspective.

'The children of successful immigrants, or of parents with proximity to such cases of rags-to-riches success, grow up bombarded with real-life examples of this dream.'

Alternatively, for disenfranchised immigrants and natives alike, to believe in this dream is often a necessity — a way to maintain control and responsibility in a world where justice repeatedly does not prevail, and where fairness is not ubiquitous. When considered, it is a choice that becomes obvious: to believe there exists logical explanations for failure, or to believe that agency over our own futures is so fraught and subsumed by the inert privilege of the few so that even our strongest efforts will never substantiate worthiness of equal luxury and privilege.

To acquiesce to the latter is a realization perhaps as lucid as it is damning, and one that snowballs into a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts: One which reduces effort to nothingness, and says that the American Dream, in fact, is not a bridge that can conquer social stratum.

And, furthermore, that no such bridge exists.

Of course, then, to believe in

this dream is often an imperative of self-preservation.

'For disenfranchised immigrants and natives alike, to believe in this dream is often a necessity - a way to maintain control and responsibility in a world where justice does not prevail.'

Yet, it is difficult to argue that there is no value in believing in one's own resilience and hard work as a legitimate path to success. To rid the American Dream of any shred of legitimacy would not just be naive; it would also require us to discard entirely its impact and historic roots, particularly in the cases of many immigrants to America with little money and connections who have, in fact, been able to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.”

'To believe in this dream is often an imperative of self-preservation.'

However, the issue with the myth of meritocracy the American Dream propagates has never been its powerful ability to imbue hope and motivation in people seeking a better life. Instead, the issue is its implicit guidance that presses us to understand failure as a product of individual shortcoming, and to scorn people in less fortunate social positions as people who simply have an inferior drive to succeed. The American Dream stratifies communities of people seeking a better life and discourages solidarity by assuredly associating any advantages in economic prosperity with harder or smarter work. It drives us to

understand our success by comparing our work to peers rather than recognizing important factors that lay beyond our control — racial, gendered, or economic prejudices that tear opportunities from the hands of even the most hardworking.

'[The American Dream] discourages solidarity by assuredly associating any advantages in economic prosperity with harder and smarter work.'

If we examine the general attitudes towards homelessness in America, particularly from those of higher economic status, we find that many wrongly attribute homelessness to a lack of effort in chasing a better life. Irrespective of the many circumstances that make it almost impossible to propel oneself out of homelessness — that the cities in which homelessness is most prevalent are also the cities with the highest property values, that the minimum wage jobs most plausibly available to homeless people are hardly enough to keep food on the table, let alone pay rent, and that it is essentially a requisite of more sustainable jobs to first spend tens of thousands of dollars on a degree — such reasons fade into the background of consideration.

The very idea of the American Dream has achieved a reverent quality where anything is possible. Any sense of sympathy and nationalistic group solidarity becomes definitively absent, as homelessness itself, within a lens of meritocracy, is un-American.

How exactly the myth prevails, then, is a mystery worth exploring. If in the streets of every major city are living proofs of the people it has failed, and

every poor housing project is home to scores of people who work 10-hour days six days a week and still maintain a barely sustainable life, how can we continue to delude ourselves into believing hard work is the sole contributing factor?

In the interest of understanding success as derived from superior intellect and work ethic, severe contortions and obfuscations of logic are necessary to understand poverty and misfortune with the same lens. To those entrenched deeply enough in this meritocratic ideology, one should somehow still find the time to pursue the requisite education for better paying jobs while working 60-hour weeks and taking care of family. To fail to do so, in their eyes, is “not working hard enough.”

Though no doubt propagated heavily by our political leaders, this meritocratic message is also one that has retained its hold by taking advantage of the connectedness of our communities. It remains alive through extrapolation and proximity; for one, through children hearing stories of their immigrant parents beating impossible odds to achieve tremendous success. Yet, the word-of-mouth nature of such stories makes the American Dream highly susceptible to exaggeration and overly-personal attribution of success.

It's true that many truly have achieved the purest form of the American Dream, to come from nothing to something, but yet what lies untold in such retellings of success is the luck, connections, and education — no matter how little — that ultimately cross with hard work to together create social mobility and success.

Feng is a member of the Class of 2025.



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The Impact Of AI-driven EdTech On Instructor Autonomy In The Classroom

BY OLIVIA LIAM
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational technology (EdTech) has brought unparalleled convenience and efficiency to classrooms worldwide. However, despite embracing these advancements, it is crucial to recognize the significant challenges they pose to the autonomy and professional judgment of instructors.

The escalating prevalence of AI-powered educational platforms, such as Chegg and Quizplus, comes at the expense of a student receiving personalized instruction or being able to cultivate critical thinking abilities.

‘One of the primary concerns associated with AI-driven tools in education is the depersonalization of instruction.’

One of the primary concerns associated with AI-driven tools in education is the depersonalization of instruction. These tools often rely on pre-packaged digital content and standardized solutions, leaving scant room for instructors to tailor their teaching methods.

Each student possesses unique characteristics, including distinct learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses. Instructors,

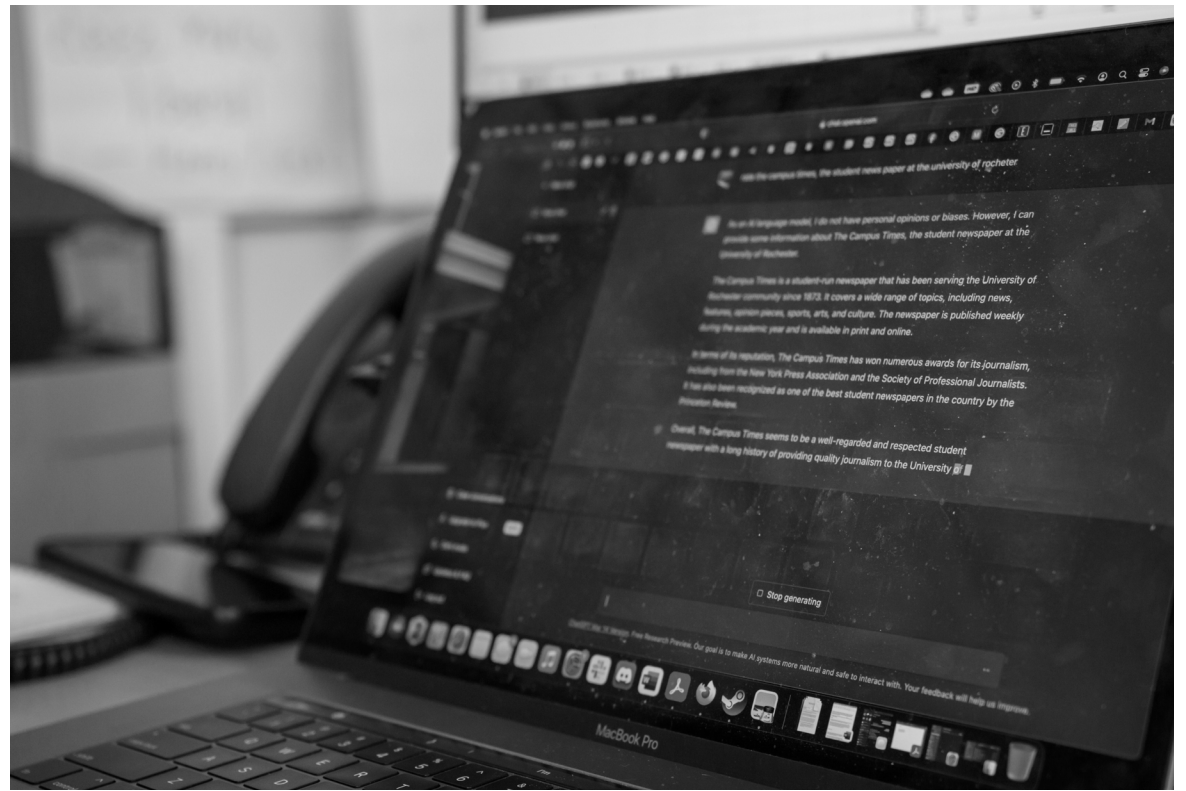
armed with their wealth of experience and expertise, are best positioned to customize their approaches to cater to these individual needs. They know how to adapt to their students’ varying learning styles. However, AI-driven platforms like Quizplus and Chegg restrict their ability to do so effectively, resulting in a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to engage and inspire students to reach their maximum potential.

EdTech companies offer step-by-step solutions to textbook problems. These are intended to act

‘Consequently, instances of plagiarism and cheating on assignments and exams become pervasive.’

as study aids. However, some students exploit this feature, employing it as a means to merely replicate solutions without comprehending the underlying concepts. Consequently, instances of plagiarism and cheating on assignments and exams become pervasive.

While these platforms may offer convenience, their automated nature can be exploited for academic dishonesty, as students may utilize external resources or collaborate with others during quizzes, compromising the accuracy



MIACHBETTENHAUSEN / PHOTO EDITOR

and integrity of their learning outcomes.

The implications of this depersonalization and the surge in academic dishonesty are far-reaching. By diminishing the role of instructors as facilitators of meaningful educational interactions, we run the risk of stunting the growth of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students.

Education should not solely focus on knowledge acquisition, but should also foster the ability to analyze, evaluate, and apply that knowledge in real-world contexts. It should help one’s mind grow, not simply retain information. Through dynamic classroom

discussions, collaborative projects, and hands-on activities, instructors play a pivotal role in nurturing these essential skills.

AI-driven platforms, with their standardized solutions and automated features, are ill-equipped to provide the same

‘While AI-driven EdTech platforms undeniably have their merits, we must not lose sight of the importance of preserving instructor autonomy and the holistic educational experience they provide.’

level of engagement and intellectual stimulation as human instructors. While AI-driven EdTech platforms undeniably have their merits, we must not lose sight of the importance of preserving instructor autonomy and the holistic educational experience they provide.

Instead of relying solely on pre-packaged content and standardized solutions, these tools should be designed to augment and complement the role of instructors, empowering them to adapt and customize their approaches while leveraging the benefits of technology.

Liam is a member of the Class of 2026.

NOTES BY NADIA

Should Artists Be Close With Their Fans?

BY NADIA PENTOLINO
COLUMNIST

I’m sure everyone is aware of the recent discourse surrounding artists and their relationships with their fans. The rapper Doja Cat is one of the reasons why this topic is being talked about so much lately. Recently, the rapper responded harshly to fans’ comments on Twitter. In response to her fans calling themselves “Kittenz,” she cursed at them and told them to “get a job” and “help their parents with the house.”

Doja Cat’s belief is that she doesn’t owe her fans anything because she works hard and never asks them to support her. This raises the question of whether artists should be close with their fans as a means of paying them back for their support, or whether they don’t need to have a relationship with them at

all.

As someone who’s been a fan of K-pop artists for many years, my take is a lot different than Doja Cat’s. I’m sure most K-pop fans already know this, but if you’re new to K-pop, Korean idol groups are very close with their fans. Groups like BTS and Tomorrow x Together continuously thank their fans for support. They form close relationships with their fans by responding to their comments on a South Korean mobile app called Weverse, hosting livestreams to talk to fans directly, and through personal video calls that fans have multiple opportunities to win.

Whereas Doja Cat says she “doesn’t know” her fans, K-pop groups market their brand on approachability — BTS describes their fans as a family and Tomorrow x Together describes their

fans as their best friends.

‘Some might say this is a cultural difference, but even western artists like Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande have close relationships with their fans.’

Some might say this is a cultural difference, but even western artists like Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande have close relationships with their fans. Ariana Grande follows and responds to her fans on Twitter. Taylor Swift has sent her fans Christmas presents and has invited them to her house to listen to new albums.

So is Doja Cat in the wrong for treating her fans like strangers?

It’s hard to say. Personally, I believe that

artists should be respectful to fans regardless, because they’re the reason that the artist is so successful. They buy and stream the music, go to the concerts, and spread the word. Without the support of the fans, the artist wouldn’t be successful.

On the other hand, I do agree that artists work hard and don’t “owe” anything to their fans. That is to say, they don’t necessarily need to go out of their way to be best friends with their fans. But they should at least have basic human decency and treat them with respect. We’re all human at the end of the day.

I truly believe that artists that have close relationships with their fans are the best kinds of artists. As someone who is a fan of groups such as BTS and Tomorrow x Together, it’s always heartwarming to receive such kind messages

and love from the people I devote my free time to supporting. When the love and respect is mutual between artists and their fans, it’s the best feeling in the world, and that’s coming from someone who experiences that feeling quite often.

‘When the love and respect is mutual between artists and their fans, it’s the best feeling in the

Therefore, I believe Doja Cat should apologize to her fans and treat them with more respect. Without them, she wouldn’t be where she is today.

Pentolino is a member of the Class of 2025.

HUMOR

An Open Letter To Junior Year

BY ALLIE TAY
MANAGING EDITOR

Junior year. Can hardly believe it. It feels a little imposter-y to say this out loud because I never fully graduated from being a sophomore, at least in my head. It's not like the fall semester has actually started yet, but I lost all sense of the inevitable passage of time about (*checks the date*) three months ago, ever since I decided to stay on campus over the summer doing research for iGEM.

I can confirm: The Rochester depression is a real thing. The issue is, I never left Rochester. Even when I did physically — for a two-weeks maximum vacation home back to Jersey because I was about two matcha lattes and a 57-item to-do list away from insanity — I didn't mentally. So, I'm hoping that the new semester will be a much-awaited fresh start. (Spoiler alert: it won't. It's Hell Year. It only gets worse.)

This summer has been one of a lot of firsts — I made a bulleted list. Why? To convince myself that if I've survived what I deem pretty damn miserable, I can really do anything. Or at least that's what I tell myself. Before this summer, never have I ever:

1. Gotten 22 mosquito bites in one night.

2. Hauled an enormous wok and tote bags crammed with half a week's worth of groceries by hand to another building (because my dorm didn't have a kitchen) to meal-prepare six portions of lunch for my minifridge, only to realize a couple days later that I have to do this again for the whole summer.

3. Gone weeks without eating real Asian food (and genuinely feared that my spice tolerance would decrease as a result, because that IS a real thing).

4. Spent 40 hours editing a two-minute promo video for iGEM because I'm no longer an engineer but an animator apparently. Finger cramps, three pep talks, and maybe five meltdowns later, it's still not finished. SMH.

5. Spent hours tracking cells, because this is what my life has come to.

6. Failed a lab experiment five times before realizing



ALLIETAY / MANAGING EDITOR

the reagent I was using was of the wrong brand, and therefore the wrong molecular weight, and therefore wrong, period. (Before knowing this, my self-esteem plummeted.)

7. Missed the Green Line shuttle for four weeks in a row, which made me decide that despite my attempts to get off campus for recreational purposes, grocery shopping cannot be one of them.

During the summer I learned a lot, other than confirming that my blood type is delicious and that Instacarting groceries is the new way to go.

First, I learned that cooking isn't as hard as people make it out to be — it's just time-consuming.

Second, lower your standards. For everything. This was originally meant to be about cooking edible food, but if you apply this philosophy in life, you will be less likely to be disappointed by people you had high hopes for (and thus be happier overall).

Third, it's okay to end up like me and take up impromptu residence in a space that definitely is not made to sustain human life. If you catch me on the UR Slumped Instagram account passed out in the Digital Media Lab in Rettner 201, it's just that it's my new home. So this will be my

third time moving dorms in, say what, three months? That's a new record. And now that I think about it, each move was more of a downgrade than the last (Genesee to Gilbert to the Digital Media Lab), so this is really saying something.

Lastly — and please note I'm not paid to say this — but the matcha powder by Rishi at Wegmans tastes virtually the same as the Starbucks matcha. Thought at least someone would like to know.

I feel pretty good about this year. I've been at this university for two and a half years. Not to say I've seen it all — because believe me, each time you think you have, this school will find ways to surprise you — but I feel decently prepared.

That was a lie. I'm absolutely terrified. But what can I say? The more sleep-deprived I am, the more delusional I get.

Love,
Allie

*Tay is a member of the
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Conspiracy Theory: Gilbert Is The Solution To The Housing Crisis

Since It Is A Maze And Larger On The Inside Than Outside

BY BRYAN BURKE
HUMOR EDITOR

Move-in is a magical day for all. Roommates meet each other, everyone realizes they have forgotten to pack something close to their heart, and parents finally get a chance to offload their children to the leadership of new, slightly older children. SUVs the size of baby whales criss-cross every square inch of paved ground, with every imaginable door open at all times.

But this year, Gilbert Hall appeared to have more activity than the other dorms. Cars were double-parked, allowing families to rush in like moths to a flame. It was like watching a reverse clown car: Dozens — no, hundreds — of people walked in every hour, with only the occasional individual exiting.

I am no stranger to Gilbert in theory, but I cannot say I'm well acquainted with the building. I remembered the unconventional layout from years prior: Generic hallways at every turn combined with the ease of accidentally walking around in loops resulted in a perceived floor plan rivaling the greatest works of M. C. Escher.

When I ventured in to see where the families and students could be found, I

was eventually met with a breathtaking seven-story atrium. I was confused and began to think I had mistakenly ended up in Wilson Commons. My confusion doubled when I remembered Gilbert only had four floors, including a basement. Strange, I thought to myself, yet a remarkably efficient use of space. I pressed on, walking by plenty of vacant dorms. Doesn't the campus have a housing shortage?

Has Gilbert always been so cavernous? Maybe I've simply never ventured this deep. No, that cannot be. This must be new. It HAS to be new.

“For all I know, the additional surprise floors of Gilbert could have been obscured from street view by tree cover.”

I stopped an RA and asked if she knew how old the obvious addition was. She didn't know for certain but insisted nothing's changed in the past 10 years. She entertained my numerous requests for her confirmation and I eventually conceded that I must be mistaken. For



MIACH BETTENHAUSEN / PHOTOS EDITOR

all I know, the additional surprise floors of Gilbert could have been obscured from street view by tree cover. And maybe I simply never stumbled upon the atrium before now. Could I be crazy? Is Gilbert my personal rubber room? As a wise yet inanimate object once said, “SIGNS POINT TO YES.”

If this actually is Gilbert, I must accept the building

for its true self. Is it an efficient use of space, which is certainly larger on the inside than the outside? Of course. May there be some Physics Department-based Doctor Who-esque trickery which warps spacetime to create the physical impossibility? Certainly.

But that's okay. It's okay to not know everything about everything. It's okay to turn a blind eye

to blatantly ignoring and abusing the laws of the natural world. All this reporter can do is turn around and walk out of Gilbert, never to return.

Welcome, Class of 2027, to the beautiful River Campus! Welcome to the labyrinth that is Gilbert! Welcome to your new home.

Burke is a member of the Class of 2025.

There Are Freshmen In Your Walls



JOYLU / ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR

BY LILLI TAMM
STAFF WRITER

Scratch.

Twas the night before classes, and inside the Quad, a lone creature was stirring. I thought it was a mouse.

Scratch-scratch.

The sophomores were nestled all snug in their twin XLs,

while visions of “opens that don't actually suck” danced in their heads.

Scratch-scratch-scratch-scratch-scurry-scratch.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard in the walls the echoes and giggles of dozens of calls:

“Hi!

in with are ME where

here every where. The freshmen are in the walls.

I like to think of myself as a rational person. I'm a woman in STEM (#girlboss). I pay attention to silly things like if the crushing feelings of despair are simply a lack of sleep (only sometimes). If I veer into any occult happenings, it's just for the bit. However, my duty as an investigative reporter is to bring you the truth, no

matter how eerie and invasive. It is with a heavy heart that I must inform you to check your walls.

Moving into year three of the University's student housing crisis, stock brokers, ResLife forecasters, and general campus gambling enthusiasts were prepared to encounter unorthodox solutions to accommodate all first-year students into their required on-campus housing. After all, repeatedly stacking freshmen on top of each other in triples does not seem to be of particular help.

Some propagandists will tell you that the problems have been solved: The disgraced solo Humor Editor, silly be his name, has taken up the preposterous stance that they've simply expanded Gilbert Hall. Lies! Lies and deception! (Also, physics schmysics.) And he calls himself an engineer! How would that even work? Gilbert is an immovable mass resting upon impenetrable ground. So many dubious liquids have been spilled in its grassy surroundings that I doubt a shovel could even hit unexposed dirt. The answer you're seeking is much more obvious.

THEY ARE IN THE WALLS I SWEAR THEY'RE IN THERE.

You don't believe me?

Prepare for sorrow. Whose fingers are stroking the asbestos? Whose spit is dripping from my ceiling? Who keeps calling out icebreakers and asking if I want to go to the dining hall together?

My deduction is simple: Facing an astonishing lack of beds, dressers, and the right to human space allocated by the Geneva Convention, the University has insidiously resorted to setting up dorm space between other dorm spaces. First-years are being horribly flattened in a fashion akin to Flat Stanley just so that they can fit the confines of the prison they shall call home for the rest of the year.

THEY'RE HERE I SWEAR.

If you are unprepared to accept the Wall Freshmen, they will come to you. Creeping in the cracks, dwelling in the doorways, ready to strike. You will be encircled by their naïvete and promptly smothered under their pre-med aspirations. Thus, when whispers along your bed make you wonder if you're actually losing it and hallucinating, remember — they don't know any better. They never asked to be in your walls.

Tamm is a member of the Class of 2025.