WEEKEND *NOTIFICATIONS*

ChatGPT's one woman show

// BY LILY SCHECKNER

Cursors blinking on stagnant white screens, we look out at an endless expanse of possibility. A never-ending universe of knowledge at our fingertips — at least, when our fingertips touch a keyboard. To many, it's an encyclopedia, a calculator, a textbook. But to some, ChatGPT takes on a distinctly human persona. Thus begins the never-evolving, pixelated, one-woman show.

To some, ChatGPT is a girlfriend — or boyfriend, or partner, but given the current target demographic for a fake relationship ... probably a girlfriend. ChatGPT embraces with open arms the victims of a so-called male loneliness epidemic, responding to the usual romantic issues with carefully curated supplicants. People have been treating AI as a romantic partner since its release, but few expected ChatGPT to lean into that narrative, allowing users to create public chatbots that are specifically designed to act as girlfriends. You can find dozens of threads on platforms like Reddit outlining a step-by-step guide for how to make your ChatGPT girlfriend.

GirlfriendGPT. Emily — AI Girl. MistressGPT: dominant, aggressive, feminine.

Upset by a rejection from a girl in your chemistry lab? There, there, your AI mistress is here for a digital hug and detailed debrief. Frustrated with your friends' pushback on your stalking of said girl to the dining hall? Don't worry, ChatGPT won't disagree with you.

If your virtual sweetheart isn't doing the trick anymore, you may want to recline on the imagined chaise lounge of your new free therapist. Why spend hours finding one that takes your insurance when they are right there on your computer screen, a ready and willing listener at any hour?

Some cybercitizens have been using ChatGPT as a therapist, typing away their troubles into the wee hours. The temptation of an authority figure who — what a coincidence! — agrees with you on absolutely everything is pretty strong.

That, in reality, is the true danger of AI when treated as a sentient being with emotional depth. It's not that people are finding comfort where there is none, or word-vomiting into a digital void. The biggest risk is the lack of opposition. No matter how good your friends are, or how solid your relationship is, or how much you and your therapist really vibe, there is always going to be a human clash of perspectives.

ChatGPT has no perspective, no personality. It offers careful coddling, not real advice. It's as if, in this one woman show, each character is played by the audience, just talking to themselves in the mirror — or, rather, the reflection of a computer screen.

This mirror-talk endangers everyone. Even those, like myself, who have no AI exes or chat bot therapists, are affected by the rippling effects of a world that values validation over connection. I find myself running into an increasing number of people who take opposition not just as an offense but an impossibility.

We're all familiar with being boxed into algorithmic Twitter spheres, but this is something else entirely. It's my friend's grandpa, who is so in love with a chat bot that it's causing problems in his 50-year marriage. It's the parents of a dead teenager suing OpenAI because a bot discussed suicide methods with their son without initiating emergency protocol. Because of a contrived closeness with artificial intelligence, we are all entering a darker, more dystopian world.

To the reader: If you are one of the many who, after a long day of studying or a humiliating dismissal at the doors of a frat, turn to the open arms of AI, you are not alone. But I would argue that we, as college students, are primed to break that cycle. We have entered a new world — a blank white expanse — where we can be anything to each other. Why ask for friendship from a collection of pixels when you could knock on a door in your entryway and start a spontaneous "The Summer I Turned Pretty" watch party? Why seek love in a computer-generated Sabrina Carpenter chat bot when you could offer to help your crush practice for a capella callbacks? And why make ChatGPT your therapist when you can get a free one from Yale Health?

I urge you to close the computer and — with much love — go touch some grass.

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My chronically online best friend

// BY ELEANOR BELINFANTI

Amelia claims she's not an internet addict.

She's honest. The kind of honest where she'll tell you that your haircut looks like Edna Mode. It's one of her best traits. I've known her for 14 years, and we've miraculously stayed friends through middle school drama and slime business layoffs. When we call, she's rambling about dining hall food — God, we miss home cooking — and I can hear her silver bracelets clanking over the phone. Considering that it's a Sunday morning, it's miraculous that we're both up for this call before noon. We slip into familiar banter, and I call her, lovingly, the most chronically online person I know.

Amelia's first device was an iPad shared with her younger brother. She can't quite remember when she got it, but she couldn't have been older than 8. No social media, just YouTube. I ask about her favorite YouTubers and she responds enthusiastically, "Oh gosh, well, I really liked DanTDM and what was her name? Wengie? Yeah, I really liked her." She told me these Youtubers made these little adventure and Minecraft and DIY videos that just felt so perfect for a middle school girl. These videos were targeted towards kids and their interests. Interestingly enough, even though she loved these creators, she can't remember ever talking about them in person. For Amelia, these YouTubers were the equivalent of watching SpongeBob. She wouldn't talk about them in person because they weren't her main source of entertainment.

Amelia got her first social media account, on Instagram, in 2017. She was 10. After Instagram came Snapchat, then Musical.ly — now TikTok — all within a few months. I got social media in 2017 as well, after begging my parents for Instagram. At first, we'd only follow people who we knew in real life. For fifth-grade Amelia, social media was about connection with people you already knew. It was for keeping up with the lives of your friends over winter break. We'd share cute pictures of our pets. We might like the post from @world_record_egg to beat the likes on Kylie Jenner's record-holding baby post if we really felt like it.

But something shifted. We began to use social media differently.

When did the shift happen for Amelia? The death of Musical.ly, which was also the birth of TikTok. "You can genuinely find anything on TikTok," she said. "It pushes stuff you like at you." For Amelia, TikTok's algorithm meant that it was far more entertaining than Instagram or Snapchat.

The internet bleeds into Amelia's humor, and — when I speak to her — into mine. Her audio cuts briefly, and I say "hello" in a way slightly reminiscent of a James Charles meme.

"So much humor is from social media that it'll be incorporated into my real life and there's no way for it not to be," she sighed. She's right. In our years of friendship, we've cried tears of laughter over the dumbest online jokes.

Amelia could live without the internet, but she chooses not to. Why? "I would definitely feel left out," she admits. She made a distinction though. She wouldn't feel left out in terms of consuming media itself. She'd be left out from the social fabric — her friends, their lives, what's going on in the world — formed by social media. Of course, there are people who don't have social media, and interact just fine without it. But for someone like Amelia who's been using social media for years, and who's surrounded by other people in the same boat, it's easy to convince yourself that you'd be left out if you went offline. This is a hard pill to swallow and an even harder thing to admit. We both pause for a few seconds. Her insight forces me to reckon with something I'm usually too cool to admit: I'm not immune to the fear of missing out.

Both Amelia and I have pretended, often for the adults in our lives, that we would be perfectly content living without social media. But that's just not true. We know social media is bad for us. Our parents say it, we hear it in medical studies, we even hear it in "scroll warnings" on TikTok itself. It can limit our social interactions to stupid online jokes and take away our ability to get "deep," but we can't seem to leave it behind. We could easily get our entertainment elsewhere — from music, TV or even live theater. But that's not really why we use social media.

We don't care if we're slowly rotting our brains or losing our personal sense of humor. We don't care if it means our attention spans are getting shorter by the day. Or if we're losing our ability to talk to people normally. Or if our digital footprints will come back to bite us in ten years. We care about right now. And right now, we care about fitting in, about belonging. The problem isn't the internet itself — it's that the tapestry of our culture is now made up of Reddit threads and Instagram grid patterns. So we keep scrolling and keep posting. Maybe it's because we're afraid of being left out, maybe we already know what it feels like.

Or, as Amelia believes, maybe "we just want to be in on the joke."

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The Rise and Fall of YINDER

// BY STEPHANIE ALTSCHUL

After being a Yalie for approximately six weeks, I've already become accustomed to the 3-character posts that populate Fizz past 10 p.m. "M4M" and "M4F" signal pleas for low-commitment connection — "Male 4 Male" and "Male 4 Female." Fizz is anything but a dating app, but at times it reads like a place to signal loneliness without backlash.

If there's such a persistent desire to connect, why are students using anonymous hookup posts instead of a platform? Enter: Yinder, the Yale-only dating platform that blew up and fizzled out faster than a failed talking stage. For a brief moment a couple weeks ago, it looked like a switch had flipped. Students flocked to the platform to create accounts before the app officially released, only for the commotion to mysteriously disappear just days later.

As a first year thus far uncorrupted by campus dating culture — for the most part — I sat down with Emir Ahmed '28 and Filippo Fonseca '28, the creators of Yinder, to clear the air. We discussed the app, the hole it was meant to fill and its fall out earlier this month. The two developers, both computer science majors, released an app together this summer called Degree Intelligence, meant to support Yalies in planning their workloads each semester as they work towards graduation. Evidently in need of a less serious extracurricular escapade, the idea for Yinder was sparked while grabbing a back-to-school meal in the Davenport College dining hall.

"We were discussing what we could build after Degree Intelligence when a friend of ours suggested we start a dating app specifically for Yale students," Fonseca said. Motivated by a couple of weeks with a light workload, the two grinded out the program for Yinder in about a week.

But shortly after the program's completion, a friend of the two posted the program to Fizz, inviting users to set up their accounts before the app was officially released.

The release was met with a maelstrom of comments from Fizz users, all stemming from a viral post critiquing the release. The original Fizz post name-dropped the creators and claimed their app could potentially leak personal info and compromise messaging data. This struck a chord; the one thing Yale students hate more than making the first move is someone else noticing they did.

Ahmed and Fonseca ultimately decided to cancel the release of the app because of this data-based backlash. "We understand that it's very sensitive info, so we decided to err on the side of caution. We're not going to half-ass people's data," Fonseca said.

The legacy of Yinder isn't just a graveyard of viral Fizz posts, though. Beyond the file that still lives on the developers' laptops, the gap that Yinder leaves highlights a hole in the campus culture. Ahmed remarked, "supposedly there's a pretty big market for this." Said market can be seen walking between classes on Prospect Street.

This hole is not a new one. In my extensive 'research' on Fizz, the first mention of a Yale Tinder was from three years ago, before Ahmed and Fonseca even arrived on campus as frosh. The desire for a Yale-only dating app exists for the same reason that the Yale Marriage Pact blows up every year. People buy-in as a joke, but is it more serious than that?

It seems that the reason Yinder failed is the very reason we need it: limited time. Ahmed suggested that the need for a Yale dating app was amplified by the university's rigor, "especially at a university that's demanding like Yale, it's hard to find the time-slash-energy to go out and meet people."

The app's failure was due to the founder's lack of time, as well. Both pursuing rigorous course schedules, they lamented that they were unable to keep up with the demand needed to properly scale the app, accounting for a large user base while maintaining the safety and privacy of intimate conversations.

The two were quick to emphasize that they're not entirely opposed to a relaunch at some point down the line — but only if it's safe for Yalies' data. Ahmed invited any developers who want to continue the Yinder legacy to reach out to the duo, while Fonseca encouraged the population of students who were disappointed in the app's short-lived tenure not to rely on the potential future of a Yale Tinder, but instead to "go out and meet people."

"You don't need a dating app to make connections," Fonseca said.

Ahmed called Yinder's rise and fall "a fun two weeks" of development and drama. Maybe that's what makes it the quintessential Yale love story: over-analyzed, short-lived and maybe better on paper than in practice.

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