OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

EMILY HETTINGER

Are Yalies liberal in words alone?

Over the last few weeks, there has been heated discourse in the News about whether or not Yale is ideologically diverse and whether or not Yale should be making more of an effort to admit conservative students. But thus far, no one has questioned the premise that Yalies are, on average, deeply liberal. Now, I will concede the point that the average Yalie likely identifies as a Democrat, and an overwhelming majority probably voted for Harris in 2024. However, professed beliefs — and even voting practices — do not tell the whole story. When I look at the companies my peers are headed to after graduation, I can't help but wonder: are we liberal in words alone?

Let me pose a thought experiment. Imagine asking every Yale student, one by one, whether they would work for Immigration and Customs Enforcement upon graduating. ICE pays well, so the number would probably not be zero. But I believe it would be exceptionally low — maybe between 1 and 5 percent. Now, imagine asking every Yale undergrad whether they would work for McKinsey & Company upon graduation. Given that McKinsey is the second-largest first employer of Yale students, after Yale itself, that number would likely jump to 30 or 40 percent.

The difference between these two industries? One is bigger, a little more cross-sectoral, and a lot more prestigious. But until 2018, both built systems to detain and deport undocumented immigrants. And one — hint: not ICE — proposed such egregious cost-saving human rights violations that leaders in the other agency started protesting their involvement in the project.

McKinsey has also reduced worker safety, consulted for authoritarian regimes and shares responsibility for thousands of deaths in the U.S. opioid epidemic, as Walt Bogdanich and Michael Forsythe reported in their book "When McKinsey Comes to Town." Sure, they also do pro-bono projects for non-profits and the like, but that doesn't erase their other work. The No. 3 first employer of Yale students, Goldman Sachs, played a major role in the 2008 financial crisis and is one of the biggest investors in fossil fuels, according to Bank Green. And things don't get more liberal as you travel down the list: Boston Consulting Group (No. 5) designed a ploy that displaced Palestinians in Gaza, and algorithms used by Meta (No. 9) helped Donald Trump win the presidency in 2016. Whether or not you agree with the ethics of each of these employers, they clearly do not align with the views of the Democratic party, much less the views of the far left.

If we are so woke and liberal, why do we move in droves to work for the organizations that many of us protest? Rob Henderson '18 might call it luxury beliefs — we have performative liberal views to gain social status but don't act on these views because we benefit from the power hierarchies of the current status quo. As Yalies, we have the privilege of entering fields that are prestigious and well-paying but also give us a degree of separation between ourselves and the things we disagree with; we don't have to abduct people on the street because, for triple the salary, we can design recruitment fairs for the people who do.

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There is some validity to this argument, but I don't think it tells the whole story. To me, sociologist Musa al-Gharbi's explanation is a little more complete. In his book "We Have Never Been Woke," al-Gharbi claims that our "wokeness" might not be performative, but it seems to accept the weak equity strategies of the broader U.S. elite as standard; we think it's enough to have two-hour diversity training in our New York City highrise offices instead of actually questioning our own positionality. If our commitment to liberalism were more than just words, we would have to do the uncomfortable work of sacrificing our wealth, prestige and power. I don't think most of us are ready to do that.

So yes, we have classes about interracial friendship and postcolonial theory. And yes, there are people, myself included, who take these classes and drift further to the political left as a result. But let's be honest about who we are en masse: our most popular class is in introductory economics and a lot more people try to join the Undergraduate Consulting Group than the Endowment Justice Collective. If "liberal" means voting for Kamala Harris and then working in a field that contributes to climate change, proliferates wealth inequality and supports displacement both domestically and abroad, then I want no part of it.

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GUEST COLUMNIST

UMA SUKHU

You should try the curved treadmill

The crowd at Payne Whitney Gymnasium, or PWG, notably ignores one machine: the curved treadmill. It purportedly burns 30 percent more calories. It's non-motorized. And, it's really, really hard to use. These machines are treachery exemplified. They're wolves in sheep's clothing. And I am convinced you need to try them.

Our pair of machines sits comfortably between the standard treadmills and the manual treadmills in the Israel Fitness Center. I first saw them upon arriving at PWG at 4:30 p.m. on a Tuesday, a tactical error so egregious any seasoned gym-goer might be tempted to call me new to this whole exercise thing. Every treadmill was taken, as was every Stairmaster. Accessing the weights machines was unthinkable, and the free weights were decidedly not free. The curved treadmills alone were forsaken.

The machine is bizarre. New technologies vying for adoption must be immediately familiar and intuitive, or have some other draw that justifies making a switch. The curved treadmill is simultaneously streamlined and bulky, intimidatingly elevated and interestingly curved. In a regimented schedule of insert-body-part-here days, adding a new, untested machine is extra mental labor. Resistance to change is natural, and we've all heard the saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Still, humans are notoriously curious and risk-taking. The issue could be the reality that most people hate embarrassing themselves. Investigating a new machine might seem low-stakes, but the gym can feel like an arena — looking or simply feeling incompetent on a machine is a no-no.

But I had no choice. I was already dressed and ready to run. I would not be held back by a gentle curve. I hopped onto the plastic planks and began to jog, allowing the small screen a chance to light up and display my statistics.

The sensations of this machine are indescribable without a play-by-play. The planks move like an airport moving walkway — until they don't. Responding to your attempts to get up to pace, the belt will begin to glide. You'll feel like you've hit a patch of black ice. As you slow, the machine seems to push your feet back, instructing you in your unworthiness. The treadmill demands your energy and refuses to accept it. That the treadmill seems to punish effort feels unusual and unexpected.

Machines aren't supposed to make us feel less than them. Artificial intelligence is meant to be useful, not just impressive. Machines are tools for human use, just as clearly as chairs must bear our weight and soles of shoes must be worn down. Things occasionally give us their comeuppance, like when you stub a toe, but such moments aren't intentionally designed.

I'm not arguing for the end of the built environment, but all this convenience is dangerous. Fast food is unhealthy, only ever walking short distances is unhealthy, talking to people online instead of in-person is unhealthy, scrolling is unhealthy and asking AI to do your homework is also unhealthy. These choices are not always made consciously, but complacency is easy because our surroundings are shaped to accommodate us.

This is where the curved treadmill comes in. It is a machine designed to be useful, no doubt, but it is decidedly not servile. Figuring the machine out takes trial and error, and even then the belt's behavior is mercurial. The curved treadmill isn't your friend, and it makes you wonder why you think it should be.

Technology doesn't need to be antagonistic — this would certainly be unprofitable — but the occasional square peg

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reminds us how things could be. There was once a time before AI summaries and self-driving cars. Let us remember that life used to require struggle and failure. It still does.

Exercise is already the art of regulated pain; the curved treadmill makes that discomfort feel uncontrollable. It's a rare privilege to experience helplessness so immediately — and to be able to get away so easily. So try the curved treadmill, even if just for the relief of stepping off.

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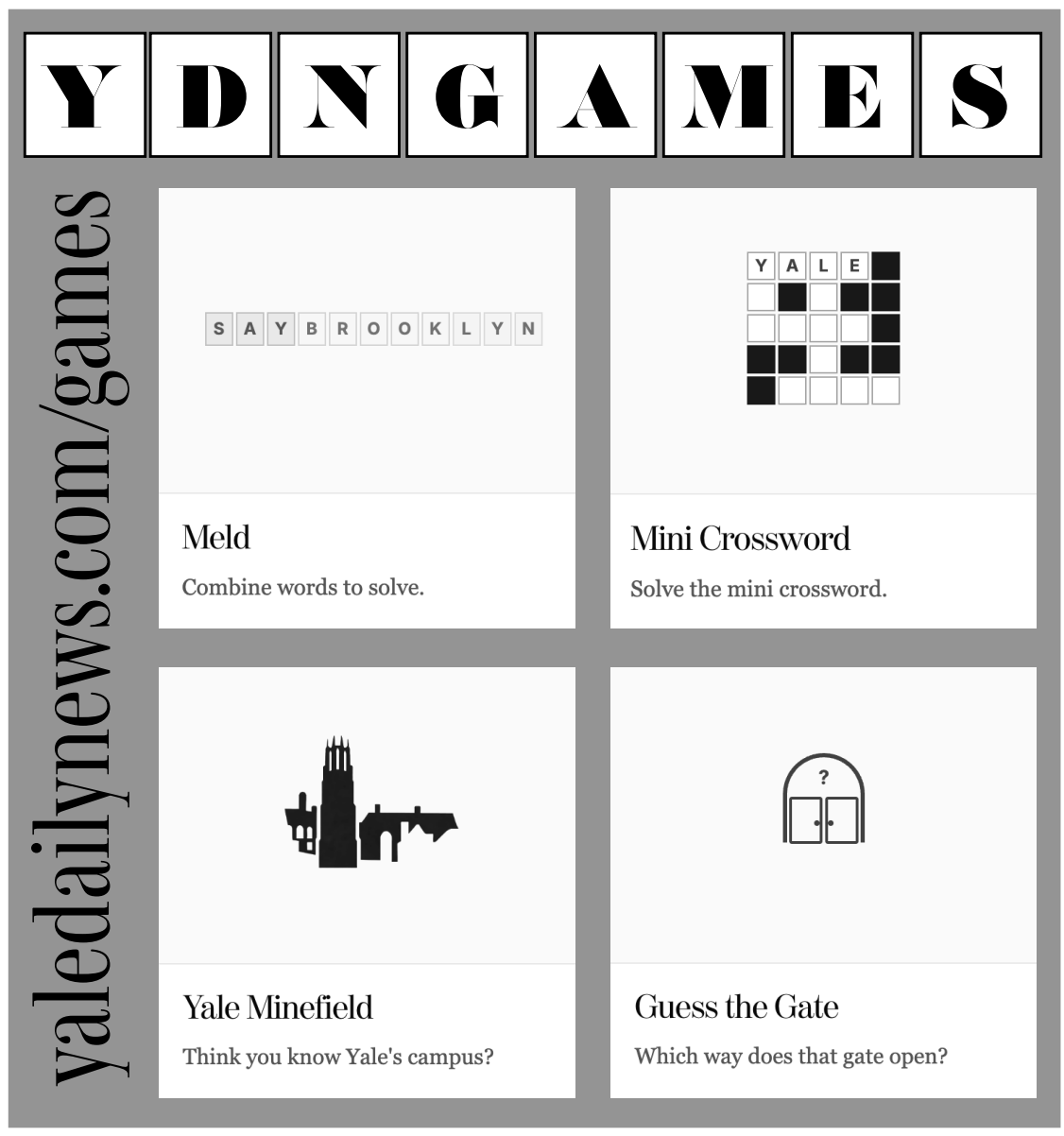

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