



SARAH WILLIE-LEBRETON, COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE

WHAT SAY WOZQ: SURFING THE INTERNET CROWD AT PARADISE ROCK CLUB

THE PRICE OF PARADISE

BROOKLYN QUALLEN '25

Smith students walking by Paradise Pond might have noticed some changes in recent weeks. Almost overnight, the pond appeared to go from full to empty, leaving behind something that looked more like a mud pit than the familiar pond...Then, just as quickly as it disappeared, the water returned and the pond was back to normal.

cont. page 2

JASMINE HANNA '23

The expected hype for a TikTok band clashes hard with the realities of a TikTok audience: the house is full of teens, and I'm sitting on a leather couch next to a mom who's scrolling on Facebook and pounding Truly Lemonades. My best view of the stage is through the phone screens of the people in front of me.

cont. page 7

A TALK WITH INCOMING PRESIDENT SARAH WILLIE-LEBRETON

LILIA WONG '25

After logging onto our Zoom class year. When asked what she call, incoming Smith President Sarah Willie-LeBreton introduced herself to me with a smile as "Sarah." She verified the pronunciation of my name and inquired about my major and

wanted the Smith community to know about her, Wille-LeBreton answered with two things:

She loves being a sociologist, and she loves Rooibos tea.

cont. page 4

GEN Z AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A COMPLICATED LOVE AFFAIR

OPINION BY LOUISA MILLER-OUT '26

There has been an undeniable wave of critical examination of social media that has left many of us with valuable information that shapes our interactions with these platforms. In some ways, being

chronically online has allowed us to recalibrate our understanding of our environment and adapt to the hellish social media landscapes in which we enact so much of our lives.

cont. page 8

WHAT SMITHIES ARE LISTENING TO

SASHA RTISHCHEV '26

page 5 — Spotify playlist inside



PARADISE ROCK CLUB, PHOTO BY JASMINE HANNA '23

Editorial Statement

BY RAINA OKONOGI-NETH '23

We, the members of the 2022–23 Editorial Board, are proud to present the final print edition of our tenure.

On this occasion, I would like to offer some personal reflections. I joined *The Sophian* as an Arts & Culture reporter in the fall of 2019. At that time, members of the Editorial Board spoke ruefully of the previous year, when Work Nights were held in Chuckett Dining Hall with scant attendance. They were proud that *The Sophian* had enough members to return to its stalwart home in the basement of King/Scales. The next year, our meetings, like everything else, shifted to Zoom. When we could again meet in-person, under the 2021–22 Editorial Board, *The Sophian* began reserving spaces in Neilson and Seelye. The reason for this was a general dislike of *The Sophian*'s office, a small conference room with a red-and-beige color scheme, boxes of floppy disks, and

a perpetual mechanical buzzing. But in 2022–23, after an afternoon spent cleaning and decorating, we returned to that space. Now, *The Sophian* Office is one of my favorite spaces on campus. Still, one of the joys of my time at Smith has been watching *The Sophian* grow in readership, membership and resources. To this end, I am excited to announce that, in collaboration with the Journalism Concentration, *The Sophian* will soon be moving into a new permanent home in the Jacobson Center.

We hope that this move will facilitate further growth and the continued integration of *The Sophian* with the rest of campus. We are so excited to welcome the 2023–24 Editorial Board into the new space.

Best,

Raina Okonogi-Neth, Editor in Chief (formerly Managing Editor)

2022-2023 EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR IN CHIEF - RAINA OKONOGI-NETH '23

MANAGING EDITOR - MARS IKEDA AC '24

MANAGING EDITOR - BEA WEINAND '23

NEWS EDITOR - EMILY MESCHERTSON '24

FEATURES EDITOR - PHOEBE RAK '24

OPINIONS EDITOR - ISABEL BIRGE '25

ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR - MOLLY HART '24J

SPORTS & WELLNESS EDITOR - NICOLE PERRY AC '23

PHOTO EDITOR - SHERRY LI '25

ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR - NAOMI SCULLY-BRISTOL '25

ASSISTANT FEATURES EDITOR - ELLA LANGENTHAL '25

ASSISTANT OPINIONS EDITOR - JORDAN FERDMAN '26J

ASSISTANT ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR -

BRUNELLA TIPISMANA URBANO '25

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER - NAOMI SCULLY-BRISTOL '25

BUSINESS MANAGER - NICOLE PERRY AC '23

HEAD COPY EDITOR - BEA WEINAND '23

LAYOUT EDITOR - EMMA SOLIS '23

The Price of Paradise

BY BROOKLYN QUALLEN '25

Smith students walking by Paradise Pond might have noticed some changes in recent weeks. Almost overnight, the pond appeared to go from full to empty, leaving behind something that looked more like a mud pit than the familiar pond. For weeks, excavator trucks pushed the dirt around. Staff and students wore waders and took samples. The pond became a source of conversation — and confusion — for students who didn't know what was going on. Then, just as quickly as it disappeared, the water returned and the pond was back to normal.

This happens every year. Paradise Pond is a section of the Mill River. As the Mill River flows, it picks up and moves sediment. When it reaches

Paradise Pond, it slows down considerably, which deposits the sediment. Because Paradise Pond was artificially constructed by damming the Mill River, the sediment accumulates instead of continuing to move downstream. This causes the pond to get gradually shallower. So, as part of the pond's annual maintenance, the sediment that collects has to be dealt with.

Maintenance takes the form of sediment redistribution, not dredging, which is an important distinction. "Dredging is when the sediment is actually removed and hauled away in dump trucks," said Ph.D. Laboratory Instructor in Biological Sciences Marney Pratt. The pond hasn't been dredged since 2008; instead, since July

2016, sediment that accumulates in the pond has simply been moved. "The pond is partially lowered in both cases, but dredging removes the sediment entirely from the system, while sediment redistribution just moves it within the system, from places where it builds up to places where it erodes, so we can move enough of it out of the pond."

"All we want is a pond that you can have a canoe in without hitting the bottom," said Gary Hartwell, the project manager for pond maintenance operations.

Sediment redistribution is key to that. "Not redistributing the sediment yearly would mean that sediment would build up in various parts of Paradise Pond that would add more

islands and make it difficult, if not impossible, to navigate with boats," said Pratt. "If we want to keep the dam and keep Paradise Pond, then we will need to manage the sediment."

Sediment hasn't always been managed this way. Paradise Pond used to be dry dredged about every eight years, which means that the pond was fully drained and sediment was removed and transported by trucks to the Northampton landfill. The last instance of this was 1998; after that, the state did not issue a permit for dry dredging. Smith then turned to hydraulic dredging, which was "an expensive failure," according to Pratt. "Sediment redistribution is the best option that we can do in the current conditions."



PHOTO BY EMMA FRINGUELLI '23

Sediment redistribution has many benefits. It is less expensive than dredging — Hartwell estimated that in 2008, it cost around \$700,000 to dredge the pond, whereas this year's redistribution operations will cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000. "It's dramatically cheaper," said Hartwell. It is also less labor-intensive and healthier for the river system, as it provides nourishment and habitat for benthic life.

Sediment redistribution also gives professors and students the opportunity to study the health of the river by analyzing the sediment. Pratt focuses on macroinvertebrates — "animals without backbones that are large enough to see without a microscope" — to do this. "These organisms vary in how sensitive they are to pollution or disturbance. Thus, we can use their abundance and diversity as a way to assess how healthy a river ecosystem is," she explained. "If there is a wide diversity of organisms, including many

that are sensitive to pollution and disturbances, then that indicates a healthy ecosystem. On the other hand, if the river is dominated by relatively few kinds of organisms that are really tolerant to pollution and disturbance, then that could indicate an imbalance or unhealthy ecosystem."

However, the project is not without its downsides. "When we drain the pond, the beavers don't like it," said Hartwell. Beavers are not the only wildlife in the pond; the otters, fish and mussels that live in the pond are also affected by the redistribution process, which Hartwell admitted was "mostly inconvenient and possibly deadly" to the animals. Still, "they're never wiped out. They're pretty robust."

The sediment redistribution, especially compared to previous pond maintenance methods, "is the least damaging we can be and still maintain Paradise Pond," said Pratt. She also said that the shift to doing the redistribution in the winter has helped mit-

igate some of that potential damage, since the pond's animal population is more dormant in the winter.

Redistributing the sediment in the pond is not the only option, though. Reid Bertone-Johnson, a lecturer in Landscape Studies, is in favor of removing the dam and returning to a

"I think it is important to interrogate pond maintenance from a perspective of what values are revealed by how we handle it."

natural river system. Letting the artificially-constructed pond become a river again "would be much more sustainable and ecologically sound," he said. Currently, toxins and bacteria accumulate alongside the sediment, which fosters a view of the pond as unclean. Fast-moving river water would wash them downstream; then, said Bertone-Johnson, "I actually believe that more people would engage with it —

dangle their feet in, wade in, you know, experience the river."

It would also solve the problem of the sediment. "If we took the dam out, the sediment would not accumulate," said Hartwell. By lowering the spillway to the level of the original bedrock, the river would "find its natural channel again [and] there would be no regular, on-going maintenance," added Bertone-Johnson. "The river upstream and downstream of the pond demonstrates that quite clearly."

As for the ecological impact of a such a dramatic change to the pond environment, "removing the dam would have a huge short-term impact on the macroinvertebrates and everything else downstream, but eventually it would just turn into river all the way along and the system would return to some kind of healthy stable state," said Pratt.

It wouldn't be a simple process; Smith would need to study how removing the spillway would impact flooding hazards in Northampton, which would then need to be approved by the Army Corps of Engineers. But Bertone-Johnson doesn't think that's impossible. "I think that Smith could make a bold move to align campus landscape management with stated environmental goals and remove the spillway to the dam," he said. "I hold

out hope that Smithies (current students and alumnae) could embrace a well-designed (or even natural) riverfront as being a valuable asset to the campus — especially when educated about the cost and ecological footprint of pond maintenance."

"The pond is lovely. No doubt. It is also expensive and ecologically unsound to maintain it," said Bertone-Johnson. "I think it is important to interrogate pond maintenance from a perspective of what values are revealed by how we handle it. Does doing what we do to maintain Paradise Pond reflect the stated values of Smith College?" •

A Talk with Incoming President Sarah Willie-LeBreton

BY LILIA WONG '25

After logging onto our Zoom call, incoming Smith President Sarah Willie-LeBreton introduced herself to me with a smile as “Sarah.” She verified the pronunciation of my name and inquired about my major and class year. When asked what she wanted the Smith community to know about her, Willie-LeBreton answered with two things:

She loves being a sociologist, and she loves Rooibos tea.

Willie-LeBreton is set to begin working as Smith’s next president on July 1 and be inaugurated in October. Her resume reads impressively: Willie-LeBreton has served as a professor, a department chair and is currently the provost and dean of faculty at Swarthmore College, a liberal arts college in a suburb of Philadelphia. She taught at Bard College and Colby College, other East Coast liberal art colleges. She has participated in two book projects and received a multitude of awards for her academic work.

But experience wasn’t the only reason Willie-LeBreton was selected. “The search committee was extraordinarily impressed by Sarah — because of her academic experience as well as her personal priorities,” said Susan Molineaux ’75, the chair of the search committee, in Smith’s press release of Willie-LeBreton’s appointment.

Willie-LeBreton said that such personal priorities include embarking on a “listening tour” during her first year as president. She plans to attend athletic games, department meetings, classes and house teas — where, yes, she hopes to drink Rooibos tea — but also plans to hear the voices and opinions of students, staff and faculty across campus.



SARAH WILLIE-LEBRETON, COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE

She plans on devoting significant time to this project during her first year as president, and engagement is at the top of her list when she arrives on campus. Willie-LeBreton plans to block time out in her schedule for conversations with members of the community but also hopes that discussions will emerge spontaneously. This way, she said, “we can move Smith in a direction that feels good to everybody.”

Willie-LeBreton said that, in order to do this, she will work with her chief of staff and with her executive assistant to set aside time at least every week to meet with different people. “If you don’t set aside that time, then you can look up and three years later and say, ‘How come I’ve hardly met any students?’” She added that she does not want to enter the presidency of the college without knowing the community, and she believes these relationships will inform her agenda. “I am just completely de-

voted to getting to know people and offering the chance to get to know me,” she said.

She remarked that she is aware of problems that she may encounter during the tour and said that “there are and there are always smaller versions of the issues that are out in the larger world happening on campus.” She does not view college campuses as spaces that are exempt from real-world events, tragedies and discussions. “I think campus is another place where we let the real world in because we’re of the real world, and we bring our generosity, and we also bring our biases to campus with us, whether we’re faculty or students or staff.”

Willie-LeBreton thinks this to be true even in a learning environment like a liberal arts college, which she believes to be intrinsically special. She reflected on what she views to be important in a liberal arts education, highlighting the significance

of relationships that students have with peers and mentors. “There’s something very special about the hope of spending your college time, four years, someplace where you expect to be transformed by it and to come out a different person, and where, as as a faculty member, you expect to participate in that transformation of students knowing that you too will be transformed,” she said.

Willie-LeBreton herself experienced the value of such interaction firsthand during her undergraduate career at Haverford College, where she was subject to a similar liberal arts environment. She said that “there’s something unusually vulnerable and life-expanding about residential education, where the conversations that begin in the classroom can continue into the dorm and over dinner.”

She said that she believes this idea extends to historically women’s colleges such as Smith. She said, “HBCUs, tribal colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions and women’s colleges ... are super important because they’re spaces in which anybody who is subdominant or minority is in the majority, or in a dominant position in terms of numbers,” she said.

During her undergraduate years, Willie-LeBreton spent a semester at Spelman College — a historically Black women’s liberal arts institution — in which this idea rang especially true for her. She said that attending Spelman was an incredibly valuable experience for her. “Coming back from Spelman I had a much deeper groundedness, I had a much deeper confidence. I was much more likely to use my voice in class, much more likely to raise my hand, much more likely to disagree

even if it was politely, with professors or with upperclassmen,” she said.

Reflecting on the experience, she said that one of the reasons why she gained this sense of confidence was because Spelman is a historically Black women’s college. “I had, I think, a clearer sense that I deserved to be there [at Haverford] and that I had something to offer to the conversation. And I do think that was having spent a semester being just surrounded by other Black women, where I did not ever have a sense of racism or classism or sexism playing a role,” she said. “That space allowed me to transform developmentally in a way that I had not experienced before.”

However, when she returned to Haverford, not all of her peers agreed with her newfound perspectives. One of the college experiences that she remembers most clearly came after she returned. Willie-LeBreton was asked to give a sermon at her family’s Episcopal church in Cambridge, MA, that she published at Haverford later that year. She chose to speak about her experience at Spelman. Willie-LeBreton used a passage in her sermon that stated: “A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish” (Isaiah 42:3). She used the passage to compare her experience at Spelman to her experience at Haverford.

“Spelman, compared to Haverford, was that bent reed and that flickering flame that had a lot less money and was less selective, but amazing things were happening there,” Willie-LeBreton said. She wanted to highlight that the

community at Haverford that she had existed in throughout her years in college was doing a “disservice to themselves” by presuming that there was something innately superior about their elitism and selectivity, which she spoke about in the sermon.

After the sermon was published, it was met with displeasure by many of her friends at the time. “I don’t know if they didn’t understand what I was trying to say or they felt challenged by it,” she said. The interactions taught Willie-LeBreton that while we may assume that we share similar values and experiences with our peers, we in actuality may not. “I’m glad that I had come back from Spelman,” she said, “because I kind of had the personal Teflon and heart armor to withstand some good friends saying, ‘I think you’re absolutely wrong, Sarah.’ ... I was like, ‘Okay, well, let’s keep talking.’”

While Willie-LeBreton is prepared to have difficult conversations when she arrives on campus, she is also looking forward to some of Smith’s more lighthearted traditions, especially Mountain Day and Julia Child Day. On Mountain Day, students can expect to see her dressed in plaid, picking apples alongside them. And on Julia Child Day, Willie-LeBreton says that while she is trying to go vegetarian, she will make an expectation for Julia.

“There’s nobody who can beat her recipe for beef bourguignon,” she said. •

What Smithies are Listening To



EMMARIE MILLER '26, PHOTO BY DEVIN HECHT '26

BY SASHA RTISHCHEV '26

The uncondensed version of this article has been posted online at www.thesophian.com.

As Smithies continue to settle into the new semester, their listening habits are adjusting to new routines and adapting to new tastes. Here is a sample of what some Smithies are listening to around campus:

Gaby Lopez '23

What is your current hype-up song?

It’s a remix of Miley Cyrus on Black Mirror, “I’m on a Roll.”

How has your music taste changed since coming to Smith?

I feel like my freshman year I would listen to the same thing over and over again while walking places, that way I was not alone. Now sometimes I don’t like to be listening to music. Sometimes in the dining hall I just like to hear the Smith ambiance a little bit.

Lily Boulter '25

How do you listen to music?

Spotify.

What is a song every Smith student should listen to right now?

“Cathedral Heat” by Kristin Hersch. I feel like nobody knows it, but it feels so New England to me.

What is your current favorite genre?

Any sort of alternative music, especially stuff from the ’90s. That’s kind of always my go-to. And anything a woman writes.

Fiona Lamperti '26

What artist have you been getting into recently?

Indigo De Souza.

What is a song every Smith student should listen to right now?

“What Are We Gonna Do Now” by Indigo De Souza.

What song describes how you have been feeling?

“Existential Crisis Hour” by Kilo Kish.

Minha Virk '25, WOZQ Treasurer

How do you listen to music?

90% of the time I use Spotify, but then there’s a rare moment where I go on Youtube, or — extra rare — Bandcamp.

What is a song every Smith student should listen to right now?

“Chosen to Deserve” by Wednesday. I think we need to enter the era of gross love songs. Not gross like gushy but gross like greasy and grimy. I feel pretty cleansed after listening to it.

What is your current song to unwind to?

“Futile Devices” by Sufjan Stevens, but that’s only because I’m slightly in my morose girl era right now.



Scan to listen to all of the songs mentioned in this article on Spotify!



What is your current favorite genre?

I think we are living in a horse music renaissance. Obviously, we have Horse Jumper of Love, we have feeble little horse, we have Horsegirl. We have some classics from the '90s, too, like Sparklehorse. For the country girls there’s Brandi Carlile. There’s also “High Horse” by Kacey Musgraves. And I think the reason I’ve been listening to Portishead so much is because they talk about horses in some of their songs...

Mia Steinberg '26, Megan Wood '26 and Fiona Park '26

How do you listen to music?

FP: Spotify.

MW: Spotify.

MS: Spotify.

What artists have you been getting into recently?

MS: Liz Phair, No Doubt, Garbage and Beck

MW: Connie Converse and Harry Nilsson.

FP: I don’t really focus on specific artists. I just do my “Discover Weekly.” But I’ve been listening to a lot more Alex G and Field Medic.

EMMARIE MILLER '26, PHOTO BY DEVIN HECHT '26

What song describes how you have been feeling?

MS: “Cannonball” by The Breeders.

MW: “Champagne Coast” by Blood Orange.

FP: Either “I Am Coming to Paris (To Kill You)” by Timber Timbre or “Beach Baby” by Bon Iver.

Laila Smith '25, WOZQ General Department Director

How do you listen to music?

Spotify. I like to put in my AirPods and go for a little jaunt around campus.

What artists have you been getting into recently?

I just entered a Fleetwood Mac era, which is really silly.

How has your music taste changed since last semester?

Last semester maybe I was feeling a little angst... Maybe, I was feeling a little silly, goofy... I’ve just calmed down a lot.

How has your music taste changed since coming to Smith?

That's actually a funny story. So my radio show has a lot of bands that my parents like — my whole life, I've been listening to their music, which is jam bands. I liked it when I was little, and then in middle and high school, I wanted to be different, so I listened to a lot of angsty, feminist, queer music. Not that I don't still listen to that, but I'm not that angry now. So, I came to college, and I started listening to a lot of those bands on my own. I've just been getting into a lot of stuff like that.

Also, I'm breaking my silence. Phish is good music. •

BY JASMINE HANNA '23

The uncondensed version of this article has been posted online at www.thesophian.com.

mehro, a 22-year-old from Manhattan Beach with 3 million monthly listeners on Spotify, kicks off the night. He legally changed his name to his artistic title 'mehro' in all lowercase letters because he likes to be "less spoken." For tonight's show, he's wearing acid wash jeans and a blazer drenched in sequins.

Five children who haven't seen the likes of a high school classroom yet are jockeying for space on the balcony edge when mehro says, "All right, this is my next song, some of you may know it, it's called...whore."

TikTok provided a stage for musicians during COVID: admission is free, the queue is full of openers and each song is 15 seconds long. Still, the brevity blurs the line between music video and commercial. Three bands from TikTok have converged for a live concert at the Paradise Rock Club in Boston: mehro, DWLLRS and Claire Rosinkranz. Bren Eissman and Joey Spurgeon launched their music career as DWLLRS with dreamy aesthetic videos set to their latest songs. They've posted their song "Blue Spirits" with dozens of captions including "we made a song that feels like growing up," "the perfect balance of sadness, happiness, and nostalgia" and questions like, "what do you miss the most about being a kid?"

TikTok isn't just the concert venue: it's the backstage interview. It provides opportunities



What Say WOZQ: Surfing the Internet Crowd at Paradise Rock Club

for fans to ask bands questions such as: "How do you see yourself?" "What are you working on right now?" and "What does it mean to you?"

Eissman and Spurgeon step out on stage in khakis and Vans. They play a little over half of their singles with little introduction, no covers and no straying from their album recordings. Before their last song, Eissman says, "How are you doing Boston? Oh my god, you guys are amazing! I love the Red Sox!"

While the crew resets the stage after DWLLRS, Kill Bill by SZA plays over the sound system; more people sing along to the chorus than they did to any of Eissman and Spurgeon's songs. The expected hype for a TikTok band clashes hard with the realities of a TikTok audience: the house is full of teens, and I'm sitting on a leather couch next to a mom who's scrolling on Facebook and pounding Truly Lemonades. My best view of the stage is through the phone screens of the people in front of me.

It's hard not to wonder: if this concert was on TikTok instead of their camera view, how many people would scroll until they got to the headliner? Claire Rosinkranz is a 19-year-old star launched into Spotify fame with hits like "Backyard Boy" and "don't miss me" recorded in her dad's home studio during COVID lockdown and impossible not to recognize if you were surfing TikTok in 2020. How many people would skip the verses they don't recognize to get to the catchiest parts? At that point, why not just watch TikToks at home?

This isn't to naysay technology or diss these teenagers, who are no doubt excited for this concert. There's a big crowd here tonight, and filling a venue in Boston is nothing to sneeze at. I asked the security guard closest to me, does he know Claire Rosinkranz? He says yes. He doesn't have an account on TikTok, but he scrolls on the For You page and he recognizes her. I ask him, is TikTok music good? He says, "Good is subjective."

I'm interested — does he have any takes on this band or the scene around here? He says no. I get a similar response from the coat check girl, who tells me she doesn't vibe with the usu-

al "normie Millennial crowd" (her words, not mine) but agrees that hers is a pretty cool job. DWLLRS has a pretty cool job too; they're singing songs about Blue Spirit cigarettes to high schoolers, and Eissman and Spurgeon themselves don't even smoke. The crowd, in the end, buoyed any doubts about the music, the bands, the venue — hype begets hype. •

Gen Z and Social Media: A Complicated Love Affair

BY LOUISA MILLER-OUT '26

Older generations (although many of them spend more hours on Facebook and Twitter than they would care to admit) criticize Gen Z's excessive social media usage at every possible opportunity, from family dinners to New York Times opinion pieces. They patronize us relentlessly, asking "Don't you know social media is bad for you? Don't you know it destroys your self-esteem and rots your brain? Don't you know it's just a highlight reel? That it's all fake?"

Your average member of Gen Z would simply reply, "I know. I just don't care."

Many of us have firsthand experience of the detrimental effects of social media. Our older peers are right; social media presents a false picture of reality by which we are prompted to constantly compare ourselves to others, forever feeling inadequate because the targets are set unrealistically high. We even compare ourselves to our past selves, to the point where what we deem to be insufficient likes and comments can lead us to delete underperforming posts and ruminate over what we did wrong. Social media has also taken away much of our ability to be present in a given moment and enjoy life without documenting it. Instead, we think of our lives as a constant stream of opportunities for creating content.

On the internet, boundaries tend to disintegrate between private and public, resulting in oversharing that leaves the user vulnerable to breaches of personal information and a host of milder problems like receiving the unsolicited opinions of strangers. Oversharing also breeds parasociality, in which people form unrequited emotional attachments to people they don't know at all. Some creators choose to capitalize on these one-sided relationships to sell more merchandise and tickets to live events, while others feel deeply uncomfortable with the extent to which their fans idolize them.

shop job at this point, and coming across modified content like this is commonplace. In some ways, being chronically online has allowed us to recalibrate our understanding of our environment and adapt to the hellish social media landscapes in which we enact so much of our lives.

Like it or not, social media makes it easier to maintain social connections formed in person. It's an effortless way to find that one person who said something really interesting in your Ethics class and reach out to them to meet up for coffee or to plan a weekend trip to Boston with your friend group. So-

right intensity of social connection.

Countless members of Gen Z treat social media not only as an easy way to forge new friendships and maintain existing ones but as a digital diary — a collaborative scrapbook of sorts. It's a way to forever enshrine happy memories in a place where all of our friends with whom we shared those moments can see them too. It's also an outlet for artists to share their work, for people to express themselves with fashion and makeup outside of their mundane office jobs or strict high school dress codes, for queer people to find others who understand, love and accept them even though they can't be themselves in their current everyday lives. For all its perils and pitfalls, social media appeals to the gregarious nature of humanity — some of the most introverted among us find kindred spirits on the Internet and derive value from socializing with them, even if it's not socializing in the traditional sense.

Complete abstention from social media in today's landscape is not impossible. For some people, it is easier to cut themselves off from social media entirely as they find any amount of usage detrimental or are unable to use such addictive platforms in moderation. Quitting social media altogether is a completely valid personal choice. However, for the vast majority of users, it is an unnecessary protocol that would do more harm than good. Provided that we are critically informed about the motivations of big tech companies and aware of the disparities between social media and reality, we can use social media strategically to improve our quality of life. Many of my friends and I use social media apps mainly for the DMs; we are essentially just texting with a few added features like easy integration of others' posts for discussion in the group chat.

Even I can admit that scrolling through social media for too long feels viscerally unpleasant. During Zoom school, I would spend hours on end doing just that. I finally understood what my parents meant when they said screens would turn my brain to mush. In order to get the most out of our social media experience, we have to tune into what does and doesn't feel good to us as individuals. Only then can we determine safe limits and practice moderation when using social media. If needed, we can make use of apps designed to lock us out of other apps after a certain amount of time, with no option for manual override. Ultimately, healthy use of social media requires acknowledgement that it has its appropriate time and place. Just remember that nothing is real, life is short and time is an illusion. Stay safe out there. •

Keep Up With Smith College News

UPDATES TWICE
WEEKLY

www.thesophian.com

“Don’t you know social media is bad for you? Don’t you know it destroys your self-esteem and rots your brain? Don’t you know it’s just a highlight reel? That it’s all fake?”

Your average member of Gen Z would simply reply, “I know. I just don’t care.”

These points are nothing new; they have been drummed into our heads through multiple forms of media for years. There has been an undeniable wave of critical examination of social media that has left many of us with valuable information that shapes our interactions with these platforms. We know that Instagram and TikTok are designed to be addictive, and we know that their algorithms favor people who conform to narrow Eurocentric beauty standards. We know that the CEOs of these companies are treating our attention as a commodity to be sold for profit. We know that we are the product, and we know that social media isn't real. Even most young teens know how to clock a Photo-

cial media provides the user with opportunities to meet people with whom they don't usually cross paths and expand their social circles. Furthermore, it takes the pressure off of talking to people and provides a safe incubator for new bonds to form.

It's not that all relationships should start on social media and end up in-person eventually or vice versa. Instead, most of our relationships live in both worlds and fluctuate back and forth depending on our emotional needs at a given time. If you're lying in bed and desperately need to interact with a friend, a coffee shop meet-up or even a regular phone call might not be the best conduit for emotional support. Sometimes, DMs supply exactly the