

et Opinions

Quote of the week

"Some infinities are bigger than other infinities."
— John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

Stop glamorizing pregnancy



Illustration by Abbas Soliev.

SHINY CHANDRAVEL
Assistant Opinions Editor

Loss of teeth.

Swollen joints and face.

Spontaneous allergic reactions, sometimes even to your own skin.

Vomiting, nausea and dehydration.

Tumors in the mouth and gums.

If this list sounds like it's pulled from a profile on a rare tropical bacterial disease, it's not. In fact, it describes side effects people have experienced from a condition that's far closer to home, with the potential to affect nearly half of Americans and people worldwide — pregnancy.

More specifically, this list is a fraction of a much larger one created by TikTok creator @Zoomie, also known as "the girl with the list."

The list started as a moment of TikTok virality as the creator accumulated reasons not to become pregnant. She compiled stories shared on the internet of unexpected pregnancy symptoms, which include physical, mental and financial changes. The

list currently has over 100 reasons and can be viewed online.

While some critique the list for spreading fear and misinformation, I find that the list has also inspired a much-needed conversation. In the face of a culture that glamorizes pregnancy, we need to ensure we're having an honest, transparent conversation of what pregnancy actually means for a mother's quality of life. The media plays a large role in this culture of glamour around motherhood and pregnancy. It praises celebrities who immediately bounce back to incredible physiques postpartum. It spotlights influencers decorating their nurseries with aesthetic, monochromatic toys.

Pregnancy has been marketed as this beautiful, miraculous endeavor. However, two realities can exist at once.

While it can be a meaningful journey for some, it can also be physically traumatic. It can cause drastic hormonal changes that have the ability to trigger autoimmune conditions, exacerbate mental health issues and leave individuals under financial strain. Pretending that all pregnancy does is leave behind a "dewy pregnancy glow" is doing women a great disservice and is antithetical to what health care is supposed to look like.

Acknowledging the negative side of pregnancy interrupts how we treat mothers as a whole. While we can praise mothers for their enormous sacrifice in maintaining their postpartum health, work life and personal responsibilities — all while tending to a newborn — it just becomes a cop out.

Applauding mothers for being superhuman only excuses you from treating them as human at all. Women's issues aren't seen as problems, but as an expectation meant to be met. Any side effects that come with pregnancy are brushed off as the inherent sacrifice that "good" mothers make.

The more we tell women that suffering and sacrifice are just inherent to motherhood, the more we let systems fail with little to no pushback.

We can watch the government cut funding from the research that goes directly towards their health.

We let them slip through the cracks of health care after birth — left managing new pregnancy-related complications without a proper primary care provider — despite half of maternal deaths occurring within 42 days post-birth.

We can force them to try to balance work life and postpartum recovery

prematurely without any comprehensive paid maternity leave.

We can brush off the fact that our country has one of the highest maternal mortality rates of high-income countries, affecting Black women most often, with them dying more than three times more often than their white counterparts.

As the United States's birth rate hits an all time low, falling farther from the replacement rate, pronatalist views are becoming more and more common from our economists and politicians.

Vice President J.D. Vance declared at his first address to the United States, "I want more babies in the United States of America!" But encouraging women to have more babies without the structural change to support them falls flat as empty rhetoric.

If we want healthier mothers, we have to stop selling pregnancy as some polished product to indulge in and start treating it as the complex medical event it is. We need transparent education, funding for women's health research and a culture that views maternal suffering as an issue to solve — not some "rite of passage" to womanhood.

Drop the applause and glamor. Mothers need structural change.

Media literacy and mental health go hand in hand



Illustration by Niranjana Rathinam.

URJITA MAINALI
Contributing Writer

There's no escaping the news these days.

The algorithms that shape social media are ubiquitous to today's culture — pushing the news to the front of our feeds. Worse, these algorithms tend to promote the most miserable news because it drives engagement. This incentivizes people

— and even some news networks — to promote the worst headlines, sometimes even making them up. This issue has only exacerbated with the increasing quality of AI generated photos and videos.

Like many students on this campus, I'm personally invested in justice for sexual assault victims and for the protection of women and young girls. My social media algorithm seems to know this. Every feed on every platform has shown me every

update on the Epstein files. Even though I care about this issue, it's hard for me to see and read all these updates due to their explicit and disturbing content.

There's really no "one size fits all" formula for media literacy, in the same way that there's no single understanding of mental health. However, frequent exposure to these updates have left me hopeless and despairing. Despite this, it didn't feel right to me to turn away from media and news consumption entirely — something needed to change.

The ease of access to distressing and disturbing news, information and images has led to concerns about the relationship between news and mental health.

Recent studies have discovered evidence that frequent exposure to news during times of crisis can lead to increased anxiety and poor mental health. This exposure can trigger your "fight or flight" response, which is associated with a rise in stress hormones, according to Mental Health America.

However, these facts exist within the reality that engagement with the news is necessary to remain an informed and responsible member of the community. Understanding what's happening in the world and how it impacts others helps you conduct yourself in a way that is both empathetic and ethical.

That doesn't mean that sacrificing your mental health is the "good" thing to do.

I've seen many people, especially in activist spaces, shame others for not being informed "enough" on a certain issue or

event. However, when people are inundated with bad news — and it's always bad news — people become at risk for burn out or submitting to hopelessness.

It's important to be informed, but it's also important to protect your mental health for one simple reason — when you're feeling well, you can help others feel better.

If you care about an issue — or just people in general — it's easy to feel as though you need to know everything, immediately. This is especially true when it seems like many people online agree that if you don't know every detail, then you're failing morally.

But the reality is that understanding how much information you need to stay informed while still keeping yourself safe is key to successfully creating real change. Knowing where and what the problem is while being well enough to help solve it is the best way to contribute to a movement.

That's where an understanding of media literacy informed by psychological wellness comes in.

Rather than focusing on every new headline or image, it's about understanding what you need to know and see to be informed enough so that if you are called on to help, you'd understand the situation and be able to act effectively.

An understanding of media literacy that considers mental health isn't one that asks you to ignore the news. Instead, it is one that asks you to become both informed enough and healthy enough to actually make change.

Yes, the whitewashing in 'Wuthering Heights' is a big deal



Illustration by Lauren Smith.

KYLIE GRUNSFELD
Contributing Writer

The internet has been abuzz with conversation surrounding director Emerald Fennell's adaptation of Emily Brontë's 1847 novel "Wuthering Heights."

One of the adaptation's larger controversies is Fennell's decision to cast Jacob Elordi, a white man, in the leading role of Heathcliff, an explicitly non-white character.

Fennell is not the first director to make the decision to whitewash Heathcliff; the character has been played by Tom Hardy, Ralph Fiennes and Laurence Olivier in past adaptations. So why is Elordi's casting such a big deal?

First, we have to understand the role that Heathcliff's race and skin color plays

in Brontë's novel. It is not simply a decision Brontë made offhandedly — it is the reason why Heathcliff is treated the way he was and why he eventually turns into the man that he did.

It is Heathcliff's perceived otherness that keeps him and Catherine, the anti-heroine of the book, from each other.

How did Fennell justify the treatment of Heathcliff as "other" if skin color was not involved? She just decided that keeping him as lower-class would be enough.

Fine. The story still works. It starts a far less poignant, thought-provoking conversation, but it works.

But if the issue was finding an actor for Heathcliff that would sell tickets, I find that a lousy excuse. There are plenty of Black and brown-skinned English actors who are widely beloved. They don't

even have to be English like the original characters — Elordi and the lead playing Catherine, Margot Robbie, are both Australian.

If the issue was trying to make Heathcliff as sexy and alluring as possible, I find that a disgusting excuse. Is the implication that Heathcliff can only be a convincing love interest if he is made white?

When asked about Elordi's casting, Fennell had this to say: "You can only ever kind of make the movie that you sort of imagined yourself when you read it."

When confronted with themes of race-based oppression and discrimination crucial to understanding the novel, Fennell still chose to imagine whiteness.

Criticism of Elordi's casting has often been met with an argument that I'm tired

of hearing: "Movies have turned white characters non-white, so why is it an issue if it's the other way around?"

Some examples of this are Halle Bailey playing Ariel in the live-action adaptation of "The Little Mermaid," and Leah Jefferies as Annabeth Chase in the new "Percy Jackson" TV series.

Thousands of people announced their issues with these castings, citing "wokeness" as the cause of the race-swapping. There was even outrage in 2012 when Amandla Stenberg was cast as Rue in the "Hunger Games" movie — a character who was literally described as being dark-skinned in the book.

These lamentations of "reverse whitewashing" don't make much sense.

Unlike Heathcliff, Ariel and Annabeth's skin colors do not play a role in their stories. Casting a Black woman as Ariel does not change the events of her movie. And after all, she's a mermaid. If her being played by a Black woman is more unbelievable than her being half-fish, half-woman, I think that draws some questions.

Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" missed a great opportunity to cast a leading man of color and let him be sexy, unforgiving and himself. Whether or not you like Elordi as an actor or believe that book-to-movie adaptations should be faithful is irrelevant — this casting was rightfully controversial.

There is no shortage of white stories being told. A white main character is not an anomaly.

Had this not been an adaptation of a book where discrimination based on skin color is a central theme, perhaps the conversation would be different. But the fact is that Fennell chose to water down — or take out completely — themes that were explicit in the book. And considering her reach and influence, this cannot be ignored.