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Daily OPINION

MITSKI TRANSCENDS YOUR "SAD GIRL" LABEL

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"Townie," "Your Best American Girl" and "Brand New City" were on loop for however long it took the school bus to arrive at Coppell High School Ninth Grade Campus. This was my daily routine on the bus to school and back for months after my older cousin introduced me to my soon-to-be top artist. Since then, Mitski has been my top artist for the past four years: I have listened to all her songs hundreds of times, hung vinyl records and CDs against my walls and have even gone to one of her concerts.

Believe me, I understand the "sad girl" label. There is plenty of sadness to go around in Mitski's songs, and I am hardly above accompanying a depressing moment with her (for the record, listening to Mitski while writing this did not end with tears on my laptop). To deny that sad is an accurate descriptor of Mitski's music would be lying. But it is far from the only descriptor, and it seems that people have forgotten that.

Yes, Mitski is sad, but that is an insufficient description. While sadness might be what many listeners use her music for, Mitski's music covers a breadth of emotion. It explores identity, belonging and the determination to live on your own terms. Sadness can be part of those experiences without defining them entirely.

Take "Townie" (one of my personal favorites!), of 2014's "Bury Me At Makeout Creek." It is a violently explosive song that speaks to youth, rebellion and the longing for radical change through something that even the narrator does not know. Mitski sings, "And I want a love that falls as fast / As a body from the balcony" and to "kiss like my heart is hitting the ground." The imagery is reckless and almost self-destructive, but it is also propelled by the desire to experience something new and overwhelming. You can find sadness in it, but there is so much more than that: hope, longing, self-determination and anger.

Probably the most consistent example of Mitski's music being flattened to the "sad girl" aesthetic, "Your Best American Girl" is a song that conveys more than heartbreak. It talks about the struggle of being a woman of color in America using two lovers, one American and one not.

"You're the sun" represents the other lover, the white man; never seeing "the night" represents not seeing the discrimination that comes with being a woman of color; hearing the "song from the morning birds" represents false representation in the media. "I'm not the moon" — a white woman — and "I'm not even a star, representing what society expects of women of color. But the song moves towards accepting this difference, and embracing being okay with it.

"Buffalo Replaced" belongs to one of Mitski's more recent albums and one that perhaps subverts her "sad girl" label most: "The Land Is Inhospitable And So Are We." "Buffalo Replaced" is a song that explores the clash between industrialization and nature. The song also has a message about personal hope and determination.

Mitski personifies hope as something fragile she carries with her: "I have a hope and though she's blind with no name," later admitting that "sometimes I think it would be easier without her" before declaring that nothing can hurt her when she sees hope's "sleepin' face." The freight train that comes "howlin' out mad and wild," replacing the buffalo that once occupied the landscape, puts that intimate struggle against a world transformed by industry.

The album's country and folk textures give these questions an American setting. Mitski told NPR that she was working through how her different identities coexist with being American, and described love as the connection between its stories. Belonging, tenderness and endurance deserve space in our understanding of her music, too.

The "sad girl" label is especially frustrating when I see emotion overshadowing the artist behind it. In a 2018 Pitchfork interview, Mitski criticized the gendered perception of her songs as diary entries. "'I cry to your music, it sounds like a diary, it sounds so personal.' Yes, it is personal. But that's so gendered. There's no feeling of, 'Oh, maybe she's a songwriter and she wrote this as a piece of art.'"

Mitski's ability to make art capable of conveying deep emotion should earn her credit as a writer. Calling it confession erases the work behind the intimacy of her art. "The sad girl thing was reductive and tired like five, ten years ago and it still is today," said Mitski, responding to viewers in a video by Crack Magazine.

So "sad girl" is inadequate. Mitski's songs are furious, hopeful, tender, restless and deeply deliberate. The stories are not about being sad, but about race, desire, alienation, adulthood, America and becoming. Reducing all of that to sadness flattens the music and the artist.

Besides, Mitski settled this argument more than a decade ago. Her second album title already gave us the answer: "Retired From Sad, New Career In Business."

OP-ED: 'AI FOR IMPACT' AIMS TO PREPARE UCONN STUDENTS FOR THE TECHNOLOGY'S IMPACT ON PROFESSIONS, SOCIETY

by Pamir Alpay
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I appreciate the comments made by The Daily Campus editorial board in its Sept. 14 editorial, "UConn's AI for ImpaCT initiative does more harm than good." I agree with the editorial board's concerns regarding the potential for AI to impact critical thinking and human interactions, the need for AI to be used responsibly and the environmental issues surrounding AI data centers. These are precisely the kinds of issues The University of Connecticut and our communities should address.

I want to clarify, however, the aims of AI for ImpaCT. AI for ImpaCT is not a movement to replace human thinking with artificial intelligence. It is not about encouraging students to rely on AI rather than their faculty, their peers or their own intellectual abilities.

Quite the opposite: AI for ImpaCT recognizes that artificial intelligence is here to stay. The university cannot simply opt out of AI. Our responsibility is to prepare students for a world that is being transformed by AI; not just professions, but our society as a whole.

As a university and as a community, we need to understand what these technologies can do, where they fail, when their use is appropriate and when it is not. We also need to understand AI's ethical, social and environmental consequences.

At UConn, there will be learning experiences where AI can be a valuable tool. There will be others where students need to write, reason, calculate, create, debate and solve problems independently or work in teams to tackle term projects or other assignments. Our faculty will determine how students can best achieve course learning objectives.

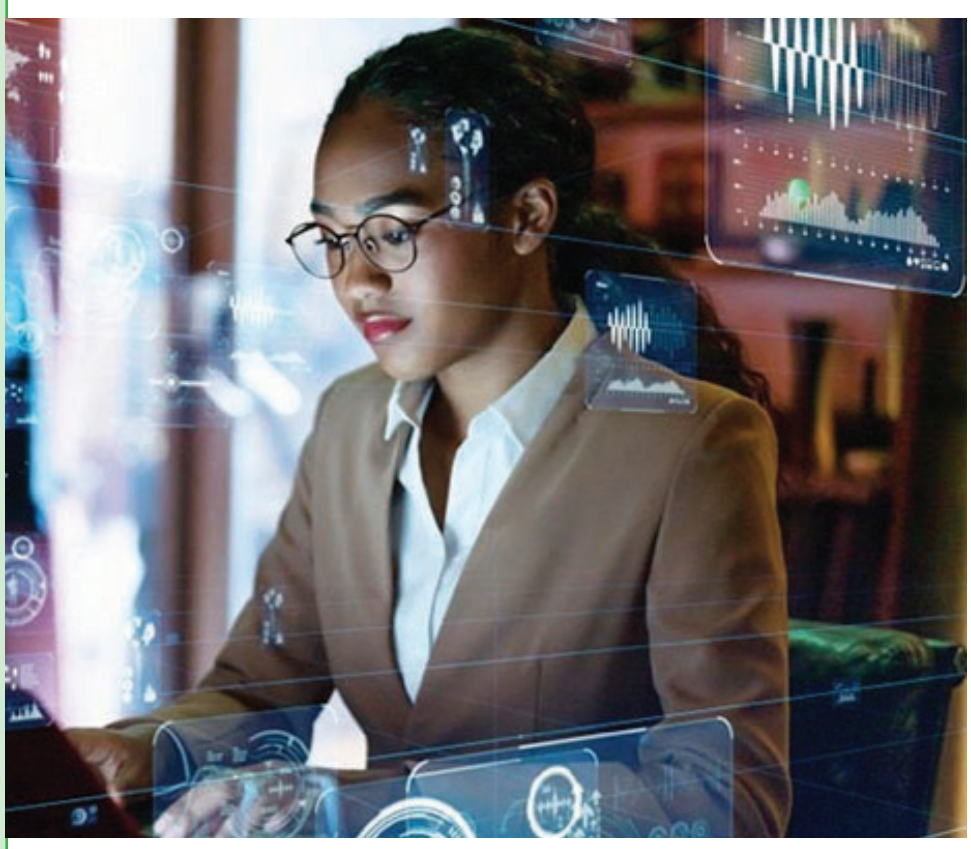
Universities cannot embrace new technologies uncritically nor ignore them. We should study them, challenge them, improve them and learn where best to apply them. We should also help students understand what the technologies are, what they do and their implications for their lives during and after UConn. That's the purpose of AI for ImpaCT.

Pamir Alpay is the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Connecticut.



A cartoon robot solves a science problem. Increased presence and continued advancements in AI has begun to impact various professions and society.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AQUA CLOUD



A woman works using digital technology. AI use has significantly increased, leading to many changes within various professions.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RAWPIXEL.COM