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FACES OF COOPER: NEVEEN SHLAYAN

CAMILLE CHOW (EE '19)

Where are you from?

I am from Nazareth, north of Israel. Right after I finished high school, my family moved to Las Vegas so, to some, I am also from Vegas.

What is your educational background?

I have a Ph.D. in electrical engineering and a master's degree in applied mathematics from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

How did you end up teaching at **Cooper**?

Upon graduation, I was faced with a decision to make-whether I wanted to pursue a career in academia or in industry. I thought taking some time to explore and work in different areas would help with this decision. The following year, I worked as a fellow at different research centers, which is how I ended up in New York. By that time, I had decided that I want to be in academia. I cannot recall how exactly I heard about Cooper but I guess when you live in the city the name comes up. I researched the school and it seemed consistent with what I had in mind in terms of where I wanted to work. Luckily they had an open position, so I applied.

What do you think about the Cooper community so far?

Cooper has a unique environment, at least compared to the other academic institutions that I have experienced. I enjoy my interactions with both colleagues and students alike. The level of involvement of alumni long after their graduation is remarkable. Even if they end up going to other schools for graduate studies, the alumni seem to identify with Cooper the most. I think this says a great deal about the culture at

Cooper.



Photo by Yifei Simon Shao (ME '19).

I understand that you taught at SUNY Maritime before coming to Cooper, are there any differences?

SUNY Maritime is a specialized school and most students are generally interested in careers related to the maritime industry regardless of the engineering field pursued. This meant that some of the material taught had to be geared towards maritime-related applications.

What do you do outside of teaching?

Outside of teaching, I work on my research. I have been researching topics related to Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

since I was a graduate student. My most recent project is related to Bluetooth and Wi-Fi detection of pedestrians for the enhancement of transit systems.

"It definitely makes people curious about how I ended up in the engineering field, which is strange because I never wonder why my male colleague is an engineer."

What are some of your non-academic interests?

Food has been a constant interest of mine. For instance, I become obsessed with finding the best

cannoli or cupcake or pizza in town. I enjoy music that I do not necessarily understand, especially fusion of traditional, classical, and modern music. Lately, I have been also interested in improv theater. Politics is another interest, though I do not like to discuss it.

I understand you are currently the only female faculty member of the electrical engineering department. Has that had an impact on your teaching experience at Cooper?

It is unfortunate to say this; however, being in engineering, I am used to being one of the very few or sometimes the only woman in the room. It definitely makes people curious about how I ended up in the engineering field, which is strange because I never wonder why my male colleague is an engineer. It makes me feel like I must have an interesting story for them instead of the plain old "I'm just good at math and science." I do occasionally wonder how my work environment could have been different if I had more female interaction but whether or not this has an impact on my work is hard to determine.

At the beginning of my career, faced with skepticism, I found myself becoming slightly concerned about whether I needed to seem more "tough" to get credibility but soon after I realized it is too exhausting to worry about that, so I just started pretending that the skepticism does not exist. After all, tough comes in many forms and women are very good at being tough but with grace. That being said, I always found individuals at various institutions that are very supportive of women and very serious about increasing the number of women in STEM fields. Cooper is one of them. ◊



The Pioneer is printed on

packing paper with soy-based ink by Victoria Sobel (Art '13), Jacob Jackmauh (Art '18) and others on their risograph in Brooklyn.

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> > Graphic by Sam Jiang (ME '19).

CLOSING THE ENGINEERING GENDER GAP AT COOPER

BRANDON QUINERE (CE '19)

COOPER UNDERGRADS, BY GENDER

Last November, the Faculty-Student Senate released a statement to the Cooper community adopting a resolution that addresses the gender disparity in the School of Engineering. As advisors to the President and Board of Trustees, the Senate requested that a strategic plan be devised to increase the applicant pool specifically for female students pursuing engineering at Cooper. The Pioneer had the opportunity to speak to Senate Chair Stan Mintchev, Vice-Chair Sam Keene, and Secretary Julie Castelluzzo on how diversifying the engineering major is crucial for the school.

According to the American Society for Engineering Education, of all the bachelor's degrees in engineering awarded in 2015, women earned only 19.9% of them, a small improvement from the 19.3% reported nine years ago in 2006. This gender gap is further represented in the workforce, with *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reporting that 12% of all engineering jobs were held by women in 2013.

For larger schools whose STEM programs represent only a small portion of the types of curricula available for students, this particular issue may go unnoticed. In the case for Cooper, whose schools are split between three programs, it becomes harder to see past that gap, as explained by Professor Keene, "The gender disparity issue is really not an issue in the schools of Art and Architecture. They are much closer to a 50/50 ratio, so that is why this particular resolution was specific to the School of Engineering."

Perhaps most unfortunately, an overall disinterest in the field is not why women are less inclined to be enrolled in college engineering programs. At often times, the role of intimidation and a lack of comfort comes into play, especially in male-dominated learning environments. "I had been hearing anecdotally for some time that there were issues of harassment in the School of Engineering," described Professor Keene on how the issue of gender disparity was brought to the Senate floor. "The more I heard, the more convinced I was that there was a problem."

Discussions and workshops about sexual harassment and consent have become more



The percentages of male and female undergraduate students broken down by school. In an email, Dean Lipton commented that "there are many ways to define diversity, and regardless of where Cooper Union sets its goals, we should be inclusive in our definition." Statistics provided by Office of Admissions.

prominent at Cooper to avoid the possibility of a student having their scholarly path derailed because of someone else's inappropriate campus behavior. A popular opinion piece published by *The New York Times* last year investigated sexual harassment in science, revealing that women in STEM even felt motivated to quit their programs because of unwanted advances by their male colleagues.

Beyond the fear of sexual harassment, female students may also feel that they are not equipped with the skills that their male peers have in terms of performance. A lack of female representation may discourage female students from pursuing STEM fields at a young age, simply because the industry is so commonly depicted as primarily male. Developing strategies and better support systems to encourage more female students in engineering can greatly dispel these false narratives.

The intersection of gender and race also plays a pivotal role in terms of better representation in STEM. A study conducted by the Society of Women Engineers revealed that in comparison to their white male colleagues, women engineers and engineers of color felt more of a need to prove themselves to gain respect, potentially demoralizing further interest in their field. (On a related note: as a celebration of diversity on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Cooper sponsored a free screening of *Hidden Figures*, a film about black women mathematicians Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson and their success at NASA.)

The Faculty-Student Senate stressed a need to improve the overall campus environment at Cooper by improving female outreach of prospective applicants in future classes. Within the School of Engineering, the Senate foresees an increase in comfort for female students in a more inclusive environment: "We feel there needs to be a critical mass of women students, so that they can form study groups, work on group projects, or attend a class where they are not the only women present."

Because the Senate's role at Cooper is advisory, meaning they do not specify how goals should be implemented, they believe the Board of Trustees, Administration, and Office of Admissions can move forward with their requests by better prioritizing this issue and formulating a detailed plan to increase the female applicant pool. Still, the Senate is not advocating for a different admissions process for female engineering students; the goal is to recruit more women without tampering with existing admissions criteria. As a message to current students at Cooper, the Faculty-Student Senate had the following to say on how they can assist in closing the gender gap for future classes at the School of Engineering:

Having an open dialogue around these topics is the beginning. Talk to the other students in your major and in other programs as well. Talk to female faculty in the School of Engineering about their opinions and experiences. Discuss it with students you know at other engineering schools. Consider your choices of words more carefully; for example, joking about rape is not funny to the survivor who overhears you. Educate yourself on the meaning of consent and why it's important.

Female engineering students at Cooper who are interested in taking a more active role as role models could talk to their Dean, people in student services, and people in the Admissions office about how they can get more involved in communicating with prospective students.

Furthermore, if you are aware of specifics that place Cooper at a disadvantage with regards to the recruitment or retention of female students, make yourself heard. General information about the student experience, how institutional resources play into all of this, how current students describe Cooper to prospective applicants (e.g. younger cohorts from their high school, friends, neighbors, etc.), or how upperclassmen describe the Cooper experience to current freshmen would be of tremendous value to the Senate subcommittee.

Cooper students who would like to contribute to this ongoing conversation with any comments or advice for the Senate may contact Professor Keene (keene@ cooper.edu). By recruiting more women in the School of Engineering, Cooper would be making great strides in diversifying future work environments and inspiring the next generation of women engineers. Representation in any field is very important; it assures the underrepresented that they too can succeed in environments that are not dominated by people who identify with them. ◊

ChE DEPARTMENT SEEKS NEW FACULTY

DANIEL GALPERIN (ChE '18)

The Chemical Engineering department is seeking to hire at least one new full-time faculty member this semester for Fall 2017. On October 3, 2016 a listing for a tenure-track faculty position was posted to the Cooper Union website. Candidates for the position appeared on campus last week to meet with other faculty members as well as ChE students. The candidates gave brief talks about their areas of research and their teaching philosophy. Areas of interest included surface engineering applications in formulation science and the use of catalysts for alternative energy.



Currently, the Chemical Engineering faculty is comprised of four full time professors, one laboratory technician and one adjunct professor. Comparing that to other departments makes it very clear that the ChE department is in need of a new hire. Professor Stock continues to teach ChE-352 Reactions Engineering, while simultaneously carrying out the role of Acting Dean. Cooper Union Federation of College Teachers (CUFCT) law states that the Dean may only teach one course per semester.

At the start of last semester Professor Brazinsky also had to go on emergency leave and as of today, it remains unclear whether or not he plans to return to the Cooper Union. Further, professors within the ChE department have stated that the interview process for the tenure-track faculty hire may very well attempt to produce two candidates instead of the one that was originally planned.

Traditionally, new faculty members at Cooper begin their teaching career by offering a graduate-level elective in their area of expertise. "A new graduate elective would definitely be a plus since we are limited in those options and usually have to resort to other majors' graduate electives if we are interested in higher level material," commented Robert Godkin (ChE '18). ChE students are excited to participate in the hiring process in any capacity and are equally excited to have an additional elective to choose from when planning courses. The hiring process will hopefully be concluded this semester and the ChE department will have at least one additional member starting Fall 2017. ◊



IT'S TOO EASY TO CHEAT!

SAM JIANG (ME '19)

The opinions in this article are those of the author alone and do not represent the views of The Pioneer *as a whole.*

It's a problem that finally caught the attention of administrators and faculty during the past wave of finals, but prevalence of cheating at The Cooper Union has long been a point of contention among "honest" students. It is especially heinous in certain curved classes, where undeserved high marks throw off the average, directly impacting everyone else's grades. Only by understanding why and how cheating occurs can effective preventative measures be developed.

An inflated GPA is certainly appealing, but the real draw lies in how easy it is to get away with and how hard it is to prove. It's not to say that nobody notices: with such a small student body, cheating is readily apparent and repeat offenders gain a certain notoriety. Even cheaters well-known among the other students aren't at any di-

rect risk of punishment, however: The ChE department's recent letter to the students details how one might go about reporting academic dishonesty, but makes no mention of what, if any, actions would actually be taken in response to the report. The fact of the matter is,

reputation just isn't enough evidence. Notice how Snoop isn't in jail despite being widely known as a botany enthusiast? Or, similarly, how Al Capone had to be arrested for tax evasion despite being an infamous mobster kingpin?

So, they're safe as long as they're discrete, right? As it turns out, even getting caught in the act is not enough: during last semester's finals, one professor actually did catch several students cheating on the final, and even though the Dean was eventually called down, nothing came of it because verbal testimonies are meaningless: anything short of absolutely undeniable hard evidence runs the risk of turning into a game of he-said she-said.

In theory, it makes perfect sense for accusations of academic dishonesty to require rigorous proof; otherwise, a professor (or, indeed, another student) with a personal vendetta can easily get somebody expelled over a baseless accusation. But in practice, it means that the scary-sounding consequences of academic dishonesty are merely a vicious dog with no teeth. Only the most blatant, heavy-handed incidents actually result in punishment, with the vast majority of cheaters effectively granted amnesty. The risks are low, and the rewards are high; when personal integrity is the only thing at stake, it's no surprise that cheating is such a widespread disease.

a bit less convenient to do so.

Aside from the obvious phone-under-thetable trick, one popular ploy is "the Human Centipede", a staple of Great Hall exams. A group of friends will sit together in a row, with the kid who actually studied passing their answers up from the front like a game of telephone. Multiple forms, even with the problem numbers scrambled, does nothing to deter this behavior as long as the questions themselves are repeated. As this method is entirely dependent on sitting among friends, it's somewhat surprising that assigned seating isn't the norm for large exams.

Another favorite is the "Better Late than Never", usually used after short weekly quizzes, in which a group will share answers and correct their papers together

before handing it in well after the time limit. This The risks are low, and type of cheating could the rewards are high; be curbed by more strictwhen personal integrily enforcing time limits, ty is the only thing at as well as some basic atstake, it's no surprise tentiveness on the professor's part. Then you that cheating is such a have the old "Let's Ask widespread disease. Yesterday's Section Be-

> cause They Took Literally the Same Quiz" trick, which... seriously, cheating should never be that easy. Invest some time into making multiple forms with different computations and this problem would basically go away.

> The scale and extent of preventative measures varies widely from class to class, from professor to professor. As one student notes, "the school is pretty unbalanced with how it handles cheating. On one hand, based on the rules they have, it's obvious that some professors clearly want to stop it, but there's plenty of professors who do nothing."

> Some professors merely employed TA's who hardly walked around the room, which isn't much better than those professors who made no attempt at all. On the other end of the spectrum, during some exams, students were required to move their coats, bags and phones to the front to remove potential hiding spots for cheat sheets and notes, a trivial policy that at least appears to be effective.

The best were the classes whose exams came in several forms, in which equivalent questions were only conceptually similar; attempting to copy would be futile because two versions of the same question might have entirely different answers, depending on the wording and setup of the problem. Writing and grading such an exam takes much more effort than just having one set of questions in mixed order, but it goes to show that some professors are willing to put extra effort to prevent cheating. The Student Council has also provided additional suggestions in their recent letter to the engineering faculty. Hopefully, a better understanding of cheaters' means and motivations will help students and professors work together to devise more effective techniques, preventing cheating before it ever happens. ◊

"IMMIGRANTS (WE GET THE JOB DONE)"

GABRIELA GODLEWSKI (CE '19)

In his day, Peter Cooper was known as a humanitarian who gave back to his community of New York City. One of his most significant and lasting acts of philanthropy was, as one can guess, the founding of a little college known as The Cooper Union. One hundred and fifty years later, the institution is still giving back to its community in more ways than just producing artists, architects, and engineers. Unknown to most of the student body, Cooper proudly hosts the Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers, which is a program that allows immigrants with backgrounds in science or engineering in their home countries to use their education to serve their new country. The program not only provides classes and educational resources to the students, but also aims to help them find work once their retraining is complete.

The Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers has been in action for the past twenty years. It was originally started in 1987 by Bnai Zion inspired by the number of engineers emigrating to the United States from the Soviet Union at the time. The program was held in the Bnai Zion Scientists Division in Midtown who shortly formed a partnership with Cooper in 1991, as both institutions had a common aim of giving back to the community. In 2015, Cooper Union began hosting the entire program by holding the classes and career counseling for members of the program found through the Bnai Zion Foundation. Although the program is very accommodating, it still has important limits-those enrolling in the program must be legal immigrants who hold degrees in science or engineering from

an institution in their home country.

The Cooper Union provides the program with classrooms, academic curricula, and professors to teach a variety of classes ranging from classes specialized in technology and other branches of science to business tactics. The program not only gives immigrant engineers another education but also works very hard in providing jobs for them. Around 60% of participants in the program find work through the program as well. These jobs are acquired through networking-something Cooper students are familar with. Like our own Career Development Center, the Retraining Program helps the participants find jobs through exercises such as resume preparation and mock interviews as well as finding jobs through professional networking.

This program is significant in present day, especially in places like New York City where over a third of the population are foreign-born immigrants. For centuries, people from all over the world have emigrated to the United States, especially to cities like New York City, in hopes of attaining a better life for themselves and their families. Many of them would be educated in very specialized fields, but would have to give up their education because they didn't have access to something like the Retraining Program. Thus, the stereotype of immigrants working menial jobs despite having been surgeons in their home countries persist. Access to the Retraining Program allows immigrants to not only lead better lives themselves in their new home, but to also serve the country in a positive way. ♦



Knowing that it's all but impossible to punish cheating after the fact, professors need to take a more proactive approach: by making it harder to cheat in the first place. The fact of the matter is that a lot of cheating occurs simply because of how easy it is. Much like how bike locks are primarily intended to "keep honest people honest", there's some surprisingly simple measures that can be taken to combat the most common forms of cheating, simply by making it

Some Cooper students attended the protests in Washington D.C. on Inauguration Day. Photo provided by Asanté Shakur (Art '19).

FACES OF COOPER: CASSANDRA JOLICOEUR

OLIVIA HEUIYOUNG PARK (ME '19)

I know your bio on the Cooper website, but please introduce yourself for our readers!

I've been at Cooper for I think about a month and a half now. I'm the student care coordinator, which means that I'm here for all the students—I'm here for extra support. For example, if someone is overwhelmed with classes, struggling with a mental health issue, looking for individual counseling or outside referral, I'm here—just to make sure the students get what they need.

What led you to become a counselor?

I think what led me to counseling was my own experience in school. You know, going to college is not just about grades and academics. I mean, it absolutely is—that's why we're here, but besides from grades and academics, you might also be struggling with things like relationship or family issues. There's just so much more involved with being a college student, and I just wanted to be the support for someone in that area.

Could you explain your "counseling style?"

My counseling style is very client-focused. I'm not here to tell you what to do or how to live your life. You're the expert on your life and I'm here to sort of guide you through the issues you have and to get you where you need to be.

What do you think is the difference between a school counselor and a therapist?

It really depends; in some circumstances, they can be the same things. It is based on what the person needs. Typically, when I think of school counselors I think more of guidance counselors; while therapy, I think, is more about exploring people's emotions or pasts and how that's affecting their current behaviors.

What led you to come to Cooper?

I think it was Indeed.com. I was just look-

ing for different jobs at the time and what struck me about Cooper is that it's such a unique school with such dedicated students. I think there's something really admirable about that. I just wanted the chance to be able to provide a little bit of a "stress-free zone" here.

What are some of your goals at Cooper?

I always say this, but I am a big "self-care" person. I think my primary goal here is to educate people about mental health and also about ways to take care of themselves. As important as it is to go to class, do work, and focus on academics, if you don't take care of yourself, you really can't do any of the other stuff. My goal here is to really teach people to take care of themselves, and learn to take time for themselves.

As students, we might have a hard time reaching out and asking for help, or even noticing that we might need help. Do you have any advice or suggestions for us?

As students, I think the first thing is to always take care of yourself. Even if it's something very small, like going for a walk to destress, making sure you get a healthy meal, exercising, or going to bed on time. Even now, in general, I'll check my email in the morning and the students I've been meeting with would have sent an email late the night before, and I can't help but think "I hope this person is sleeping!" I think it's important to remember that YOU come first, and that you should put yourself first so that you can be healthy enough to get to the other stuff.

In terms of reaching out for help, I think it can be pretty scary. It can be daunting to go into a room and talk to a stranger about what's going on with you, but I've seen the amazing effects. It's not only important for just the students but also everyone to have that one person that you go to once a week and just spill out everything, let me hold everything for you for just a bit so you get a break.



Photo by Sage Gu (CE '19).

Aside from counseling, what are some of your hobbies? What do you enjoy doing?

In my free time, I enjoy self-care: sleeping. Aside from that, I'm really into photography. That's a pretty big thing of mine as that's kind of like how I do self-care and destress. And in general, going for walks helps clear my mind a lot.

Most of the areas of interest listed on your bio are related to mental health, but as students, we might not realize we suffer from these conditions. What are some things we should know to be aware of our situations?

One thing I plan on doing, hopefully, is to provide mental health education. Either in groups or just with workshops on what mental health concerns look like—signs that maybe something's not right.

My advice for anyone is to pay attention to your body and what you're feeling. Think of how people describe you. If someone says that you are social and outgoing, but suddenly you don't feel like hanging out with friends, or maybe you're not eating as much, or sleeping more than you're used to, there might be an underlying issue there—and I think it's important to just know yourself and to recognize changes.

Fun question: if you were a fruit, what would you be?

That's a good one! I'm not actually really good at eating fruit though. I'm trying to eat healthy but can I be a certain smoothie instead? I would probably be a pineapple-mango smoothie as those are my favorites. You sort of have your fruit all at once, and that's it!

Any last words?

I'm in the Student Affairs office, so definitely come by and say hi! I'm hoping to stash my office with candy, which is always a good way to get through class without falling asleep. Even if you've got nothing going on, feel free to drop by! I love talking to people—that's just my thing. I'm super social! I'm hoping to get accustomed to the culture here more and to get a chance to meet everyone! ◊

The Office of Student Affairs provides free counseling services to students, and appointments can be booked online, with a total of 3 different counselors.





The Cooper Union Fencing Team circa 1950. Pictured on the bottom left is Dr. Ed Ferrand, a former professor of chemistry at the Cooper Union, who went on to work for New York City's Dept. of Air Resources. According to a Cooper colleague Dr. John Bové, "to him students came first, and he shared his strong love of chemistry with them." Photo provided by Irene Ferrand.

WORD SEARCH: COOPER TOGETHER

OLIVIA HEUIYOUNG (ME '18)

TCFE QJM PQUV LMPPBO В THYOFI УD SBQWPX CXEDROTOMTHUMBZNSB 0 V NTINE NGCJRBOMOXVALE VRT MXLYJFEYFASCODLSCEK MNTBS M J F Q Q I S L A F N E W N A L F L O W E R S K GGJMOWEBOZBSIWTRRAEKCTS UTXILZVPPHASING L ЕНЖЈQDIН IDKJTODATABCUE С S 0 5 A Y Р υ wc DIAJLS BRSJMCGT F KGEH OKMF P ZCECYETTJNATYPSRR в HWZM I H O A M C N Q L L N B T O V V H P V F A L C T A U G E A C Z D V W H E S R C E M J HRDARQXCYDOJJOVTNO OCISZGCPSWLMOIAO C U H N T V O F W N W K I Z O P Z K U Q D V M X R V LIRWIKCOAF ADOFUBTY тнкѕіх ELNS υу

How well do you know Cooper Union? Find the words to which the clues refer.

- 1. Name of the firm that designed the NAB
- 2. What is our school's logo?
- 3. Name of design studio that created our
- 4. school logo
- 5. Number of colors used in the logo
- Name of the first American steam engine made by 6. Peter Cooper
- Peter Cooper's religious views 7.
- Age when Peter Cooper died 8.
- 9. Location of mixer/reception hosted by President Laura Sparks
- 10. White, milk, dark etc.
- 11. Feb. 14 is _____'s day!
- 12. Gift that needs to be watered or it will die
- 13. Variant of said gift-usually red or pink
- 14. Sweet treats also given as gifts
- 15. Opposite of bitter (aka me)
- 16. Flying naked baby that shoots arrows
- 17. The best thing to share (or shoot on an arrow)!
- 18. Dried fruit, also something you wish you were going on...
- 19. Kraft s, also relationship status



longboards on the Grand Staircase. Photo by Wentao Zhang (Cooper students

ARCHI-SKATE ONE

AUSTIN RICHARD MAYER (Arch '18)



Photo provided by Austin Richard Mayer (Arch '18).

The Cooper Union sits in what might be considered the cradle of NYC skateboard territory. Our next few issues will profile the building elements that compose our own campus skate park. First up we have east coast powerhouse Ishod Wair performing a 50-50 grind on the Foundation Building's access ramp handrail. The ramp, designed by John Hejduk and Edwin Aviles, was installed in 1992 to allow wheelchair building. Drawings made by Steven Hillyer were granted approval from the Landmark Preservation Committee to construct this addition to the portico of our 1859 historic brownstone. The ramp-side space created is a tiny thread of juxta-temporal urban fabric with a mood all its own, enjoyed by those who frequently and infrequently hang out within it. In conclusion, I suggest that this element can be read as a lil tongue

MILES OF MOVIES: THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

MILES BARBER (CE '18)

The Lego Batman Movie is about Lego Batman who goes around Gotham City saving the day, fighting criminals, and above all, working alone. Much to the dismay of Alfred, his caretaker, and even The Joker, who just wants to be Batman's arch-enemy, Batman just doesn't care about anybody but himself. So when he accidentally adopts the orphan Dick Grayson, Batman must grapple with his fear of family and what that might mean for both him and his image.

I was skeptical about this film, which seemed like it would be just a sillier version of the previous Lego Movie, but in fact, I was surprised. The Lego Batman Movie is just as good as The Lego Movie, playing a lot of the same beats but taking its focus away from the story and onto Batman. In fact, the

entire film revolves around Batman's inner struggle with having people around him to care for. There are a lot of moments when you really feel for Batman and what it's like to be admired by so many people but unable to connect to any of them.

The self-aware humor and cultural references in The Lego Movie are all back for this film. What worked really well in The Lego Movie works even better here as this film brings back all of Batman's villains and then some, making fun of everything Batman. The slapstick comedy that was everywhere in the previous film is toned down a little bit in this film to make way for more Batman-related humor. The Joker's relationship with Batman is hilarious and the other villains tie in pretty well. Even Sauron is in this film! How did they manage to get that to work?

A big change in this film is the animation. It's still mostly Legos, but there is a distinct camera now, giving a feeling of a live-action film. The lighting effects are really great this time around, and there are some wide shots of Batman flying that look gorgeous. The color scheme is different too, focusing on blacks and reds in contrast to the colorful feel of the previous film. All of these changes make you forget that you're watching a movie animated from Lego blocks. So much of The Lego Movie revolved around building things with Legos, but almost nothing in The Lego Batman Movie required them.

Overall, The Lego Batman Movie is a worthy follow-up to The Lego Movie. It keeps the same amount of humor but changes it up a little. The story itself is centered around Batman, which makes for good character development but a bit of a forgettable story. I really enjoyed the change in animation style, even though it begs the question, "why even bother making it a Lego Movie?" I really had a blast with this film and would definitely recommend it to anyone looking for a good time or just feeling a little lonely; you'll finish the movie with a smile on your face. ◊

Grade: A-