

## THE ART OF PRETENDING: WHY WE ALL NEED IT (MORE THAN WE THINK)

Madhuryasri Pedireddy

### ***Do you remember the last time you played pretend?***

For children, imaginative play is one of the most common forms of play. It's difficult to pinpoint an exact measure of just how many children take part in pretend play, yet research shows that it's incredibly common, with reportedly 65% of school-age children having an imaginary friend by the age of 7 and 95% of them engaging in impersonation (such as pretending to be a dragon guarding a hoard of treasure).

During its peak, imaginative play can "absorb roughly 15% of the child's activities." Throughout this time, children use role-play, object substitution, metacommunication, and more to make sense of the world, even as young as age two. Activities like these have proven themselves to be beneficial in developing skills such as creativity, empathy, self-regulation, language, confidence, and more early on.

Pretending can provide immense benefits during childhood, yet it raises the question of whether it would be beneficial to us now in our teenage and adult years. Still, we first have to ask, why did we ever stop?

### **Why Have We Stopped Pretending?**

The most obvious reason as to why most teens and adults don't partake in pretend play is simply changing lifestyles and current societal norms.

As we grow up, we tend to gain more responsibilities, such as a larger emphasis on performance in school, succeeding in the workforce, household and familial obligations, etc. These commitments are much more demanding and taxing than what was expected of us as children, reducing the amount of time and energy that may have once been put towards imaginative play.

In addition, pretend-play can be looked down upon as we grow older due to its

roots in childhood. Except for some structured settings such as theater and sport, there's a general consensus that playfulness is unprofessional since we are viewed to be more mature as we grow older. This means that there is less room for us to be playful, and much less flexibility for us to outright engage in imaginative play. An article by Andrew Walsh explained that "we pick up on 'keys' continually, which help us decide how to behave, including when to transition from one set of behaviours to another." This is known as "permission to play," and this need for explicit permission further limits the scope for imaginative play.

This is further shaped by cultural norms. In a study by Dandan Pang and René T. Proyer, it was found that playfulness was typically looked down on in Eastern cultures, specifically in mainland China, as it was associated with childishness, immaturity, and a lack of focus. As a result of these social and cultural standards, the acceptable circumstances for imaginative play have been significantly reduced.

### **How Pretending Helps Us Grow**

Imaginative play has long been discouraged after childhood; however, its potential benefits in other forms have gained more recognition in recent years.

An article on pretensive shared reality explains that "while we softly reject the idea that adult imaginative play is fitness enhancing in adulthood as it is in childhood, we don't accept that the many socio-cognitive functions adult imaginative play serves are similar to those of childhood." In other words, while there may not be any evolutionary benefits for pretending later in life, it's still a worthwhile activity. We may no longer pretend that we're dinosaurs crushing cities beneath our feet, or princess-fairy-mermaids tasked with saving a magical kingdom from ruin, but we still engage in subtler forms of pretend-play.

There's a current social media trend where students romanticize school life or higher education through aesthetic study environments, cute stationery, and organized study habits to make studying seem more fun.



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Likewise, many individuals may pretend to be a lawyer to boost their confidence before an important presentation, imagine themselves as a famous actor to quiet doubts about an upcoming play, or even envision themselves as the lead in a coming-of-age movie just to make the mundane moments of life a little more bearable. And the truth is? It works. By simply pretending to be someone more confident, capable, or inspired, we adopt the mindset that's associated with that role.

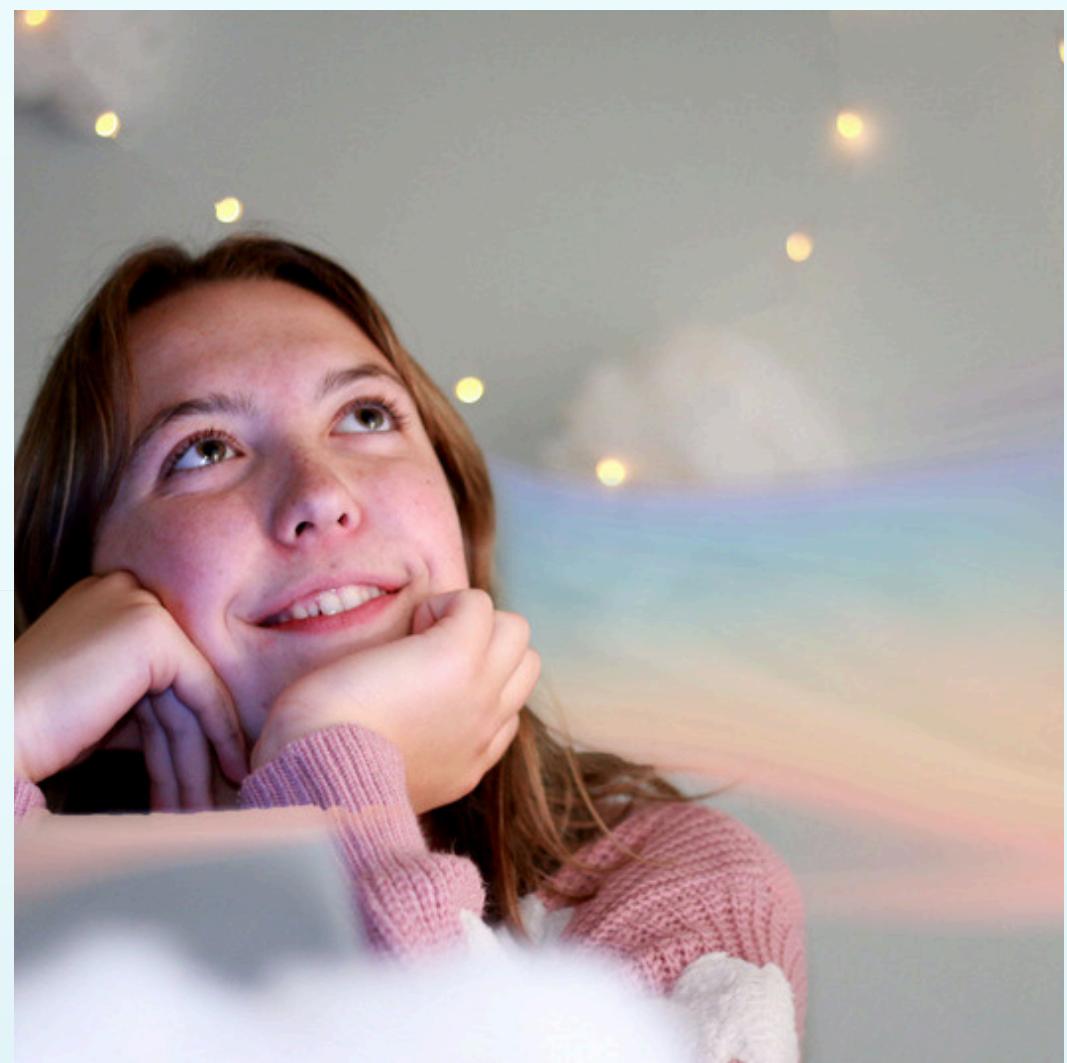
This can be attributed to self-perception theory, which proposes that our behaviors shape our attitudes. In facial feedback studies conducted by James Laird, it was found that individuals reported feeling emotions consistent with the facial expressions and body language they were told to portray, even if they didn't feel that way initially. Another more recent study observed that teenagers who repeatedly volunteered were shown to become more compassionate and considerate toward others. By taking on certain roles, these individuals adopted the characteristics associated with them.

In addition, an emerging concept known as enclothed cognition proposed that simply dressing the part can invoke behaviors associated with a certain role (such as how wearing a suit may prompt feelings of self-assurance), akin to how we took on certain roles when playing dress-up as children. While it is still an emerging concept, early research demonstrates that clothing influences not only the way others see us but the way we see ourselves.

So, what does this mean? As countless studies show, our external actions (whether it's our behavior, expression, or attire) can influence our internal mindset. While we may have used our imagination as a form of escapism throughout our childhoods, we can utilize it now as an asset for our betterment. By consciously taking on the roles of those we aspire to be like, we're able to reframe our experiences and take control of how we want to live.

You could pretend that you're Rory Gilmore, if that's what helps you finish your essay, or that you're a world-famous chef at a Michelin-star restaurant if that's what gets you up to make dinner that night. You could even pretend that you're an artist, taking inspiration from nature, if that's what helps you see beauty in the world.

***By simply pretending that we can, we're taking the first step towards becoming the best version of ourselves. And maybe one day? We won't be pretending at all.***



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## VIETNAMESE YOUTH'S GROWING FASCINATION WITH HISTORY

Nguyen Huyen An

For many decades, history education in Vietnam relied on rote memorization and accepting facts passively. The subject felt abstract and irrelevant to the everyday lives of most students, so they lost interest in large numbers. But something rather magnificent is happening: Vietnamese young people are now reclaiming their past. History is no longer confined to textbooks; it is becoming a living, emotional experience.

***Through museums, cinema, and digital platforms, Vietnamese youth are reshaping their relationship with history and national identity.***

### Exploring History Through Sites and Museums

Vietnam is home to a wide variety of historical sites and museums, some of which are witnessing huge crowds of young visitors. One standout example is the iconic Hoa Lo Prison, where nearly 70% of participants in the 2023 night tours were aged 18-30, according to the Hoa Lo Relic Management Board. The tour sells out frequently, which shows a strong interest in learning more about Vietnam's history.

Another example is the famous Vietnam Military History Museum, which drew in over 300,000 visitors within just a month of its official opening. Vietnam's young generations deepen their engagement with history by doing simple things such as volunteer work and participation in clubs at a wide variety of heritage sites—efforts that enhance their historical knowledge while developing communication skills and a strong sense of cultural responsibility. Through all of these roles, young people have become living bridges that connect the past and the present together.

Schools also play an essential role in fostering students' interest in history by organizing school trips. Mr. Nguyen Quoc Binh, principal of Luong The Vinh secondary and high school in Ha Noi, notes that museum visits are a proven learning method already widely applied in many countries.

### Cinematic Resurgence: A New Avenue for Engagement

Beyond traditional sites, films about historical topics have spread and become a creative yet effective medium connecting young Vietnamese generations to their heritages. Blockbusters such as The Tunnel: The Sun in the Shadows have attracted a large number of audiences with its captivating plots and storytelling that blend historical content perfectly with emotional storytelling. These films go beyond entertainment—they arouse curiosity and empathy, allowing young viewers to experience and learn more about history through its depths rather than just abstractly.

### Rebuilding History Through Social Media

Social media has become powerful amplifiers of historical interest. Viral posts about historical films and cultural events have inspired even wider participation, while hashtags and challenges now turn education into shared cultural experiences. Platforms like TikTok and Youtube are filled with youth-created videos that celebrate and explore history, many attracting millions of views. One noticeable example of this is the "EZ Su" channel, which has garnered over 65 million views by combining motion graphics, a script, and engaging narration that keeps audiences entertained.

### Conclusion: A Vibrant Future for History

The relationship between Vietnamese youth and their history nowadays is a source of hope and inspiration. We can all sustain this momentum by embracing the diverse and modern avenues of learning so that today's generation can breathe new life into the black and white past. Once we succeed in doing that, Vietnam is then not only a country but also a place where future generations passionately live, learn, and ensure a much more vibrant and bright future for the nation's collective memories.

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## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND – VIETNAM ABOLISHES STUDENT EXPULSION

Nhật Hoàng Phạm

May 6, 2025 - Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) released a draft circular proposing the abolition of student expulsion as a disciplinary measure in general education, and is also collecting public feedback until July 5. This move marks Vietnam's transformation towards restorative practices fostering growth and educational inclusion by replacing punitive methods like suspension, and reflects the government's commitment to education reforms aligning with international practices and children's rights.

**However, this policy also has potential drawbacks and challenges which need to be addressed.**

The new circular will replace Circular 08/TT-BGDĐT which had existed since 1988. The current system includes five disciplinary measures for students: reprimand before class or the school's discipline council, warning before the entire school, suspension for a week or one year. The new regulations will eliminate the two suspension methods for all students, which had proven severe consequences such as social stigma and students' education disruption. Additionally, punishment regulations are based on educational level. Primary students only receive warnings and apologize for wrong behaviors, with no record lasting in permanent files. Secondary schools' punishments involve counselling and parents' involvement in (serious) cases of repeated misconduct.

In 2020, MOET proposed replacing expulsion with temporary suspension. However, the Circular draft was not enacted, leading to new efforts in 2025 to seek broader, comprehensive public feedback.

### Anti-expulsion

Stripping children out of their right to education is never justifiable. UNICEF's guidelines promote positive discipline and oppose physical punishments. MOET's draft circular emphasizes the role of discipline in helping students recognize and rectify their mistakes, ensuring that such measures are proactive, positive and fitting students' psychology, characteristics and rights. Supporters of the policy reason that suspended students, having nothing to study or do at home, may easily fall prey to the negative influence of the internet, becoming addicted to violent games, attracted to smoking, drugs... These bad students become no better or worse, and the moment they step back into school, they spread harmful beliefs, practices, and likely commit offenses multiple times. Students' education is heavily disrupted by suspension, violating their fundamental right to be educated. This disruption hardly deters re-offense, since leaving school and not having any work feels comfortable. Additionally, suspension directs ravaging psychological effects such as low self-esteem and depression, increasing the risk of dropouts when students no longer believe in themselves or love their time at school. Lastly, expulsion cannot be assumed to only target the worst behaviors, but also innocent students who are simply hated by teachers. Lac Long Quan High School used to pressure student H.H.G's parent to come and discuss the matter, or else his daughter would be denied education. On the 26th of August, a parent asked to resign from his role as the parent group's leader, citing that his previous questions of untransparent parents' funds usage led to the school pressuring his class's teacher and him. H.H.G's parent reacted by criticizing the school, which

the principal called "defamation". The student threatened with expulsion here is innocent. In another case, a teacher at Nguyen Trai High School confiscated the phones of students who were using it during class, and suddenly found out their "defamation" of teachers on social media. The school then expelled several students and reprimanded one before everyone, sparking heated online debate about students' privacy rights.

### Pro-expulsion

In a survey by Thanh Nien News regarding this matter, 54% of readers supported suspension and 43% proposed community work to discipline students, along with law involvement in severe bullying. Only 3% voted to abolish suspension. Many students argue that suspension is indispensable for extreme actions, and teachers express concerns when their last-resort method is eliminated. Officials worry about uneven implementation.



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### ***Leniency toward serious actions harms the well-behaved.***

A self-criticism is too light and ineffective a punishment, especially to naughty students who badly violate. These are written superficially without giving students much understanding of why they should not act in such ways, thus frequently they re-offense. It is unfair and dangerous for others to be with serious offenders threatening their safety. Punishments anger misbehavers, and when they have the chance to retaliate to those who told the teachers, they will do so. For instance, a student forced to write self-criticism but not suspended may bully harder the next time for revenge of their punishment. The fear of “avenging bullying” also leads to dropouts, and bad students harm education in the entire classroom. It is thereby important to separate such students through suspension, because the “education disruption” done to one student cannot outweigh the rights and safety of many others. From a philosophical viewpoint, it is a negative duty to not harm students who didn't choose to be involved, by bullying them or disrupting classes by naughty behaviors; but only a positive duty to retain the education of terrible students. This is no violation of their education right, because they can still take other classes, receive education through other means, or that they deserve to be suspended. The negative duty outweighs the positive one, therefore it is necessary to suspend such students. Lastly, even if the policy is good, enforcement raises challenges. It is arduous and tedious to monitor every student to know if they are suspended or not, especially in rural areas with weak regulations.

In conclusion, Vietnam's abolition of student expulsion is a step in the right direction aligning with international values. Nonetheless, for every ban, practical alternative methods and consistent, strong enforcement is vital. At the end of the day, the bright policy promises great potential for revolutionizing the education system.

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## AI AND LONELINESS: THE PARADOX

Jaiyeola Eniibukun

It's 2025, and many young people are falling in love with AI (Duane, 2025). Chatbots, relationship RPGs, virtual friends, and sexbots are on the rise, while friendship statistics are taking a nosedive.

### ***Increasingly, youth are turning to technology to fill the void where real human connection once lived.***

Maybe you watched SpongeBob as a kid and thought Plankton was weird for marrying a computer, but now you pass time talking to your AI partner about your day. Maybe you found weeb weird for marrying holographs of their favorite anime character, but now you're chatting with your favorite movie character on Character.AI. The increasing loss of third spaces, rising insecurity, the prevalence of social media, the 2020 global pandemic, and other societal and technological shifts have pushed human relationships into the back burner. What we're seeing now is a steadily growing trend of loneliness among a large number of young people (Journal of Ethics, 2023).

According to a 2021 report by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, 61% of young

adults aged 18-25 reported serious loneliness (Weissbourd et al., 2021). A YouGov poll (2022) revealed that 36% of U.S. young adults said they feel lonely "frequently" or "almost all the time." Psychologist Jean Twenge's research highlights that teenagers today spend significantly less time in face-to-face interaction than previous generations, resulting in a measurable decline in interpersonal social skills (Twenge, 2021).

Loneliness has long been a problem for mankind; we're social beings after all. Except that, now, solutions for this have gone from "going outside," to penpals, social media, and now—we turn to AI.

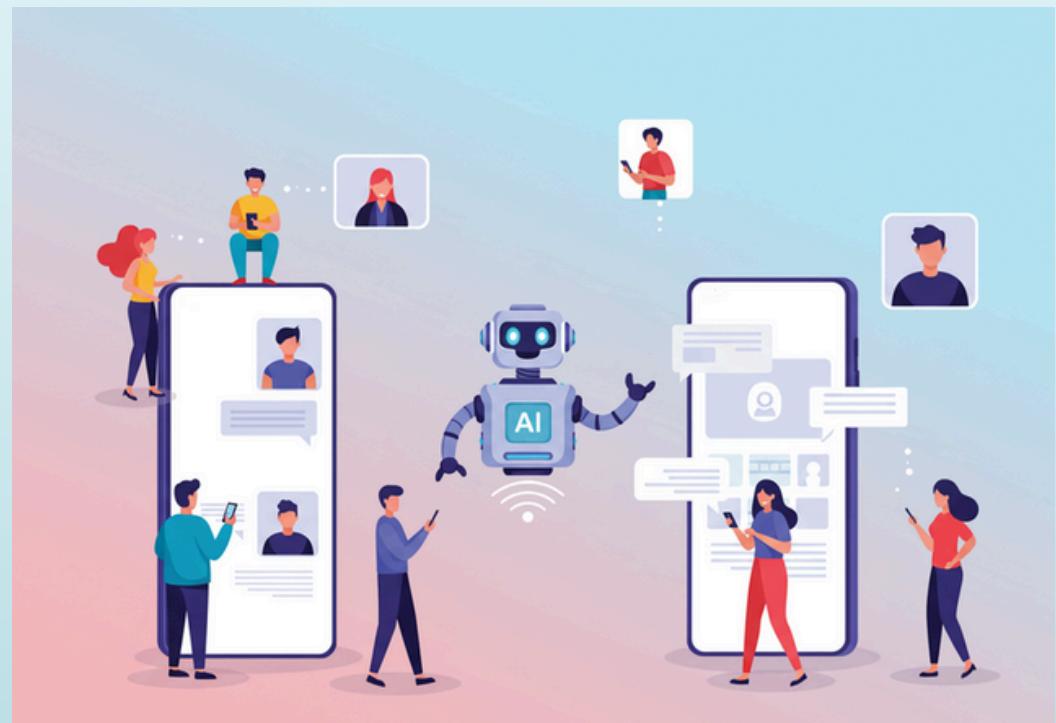
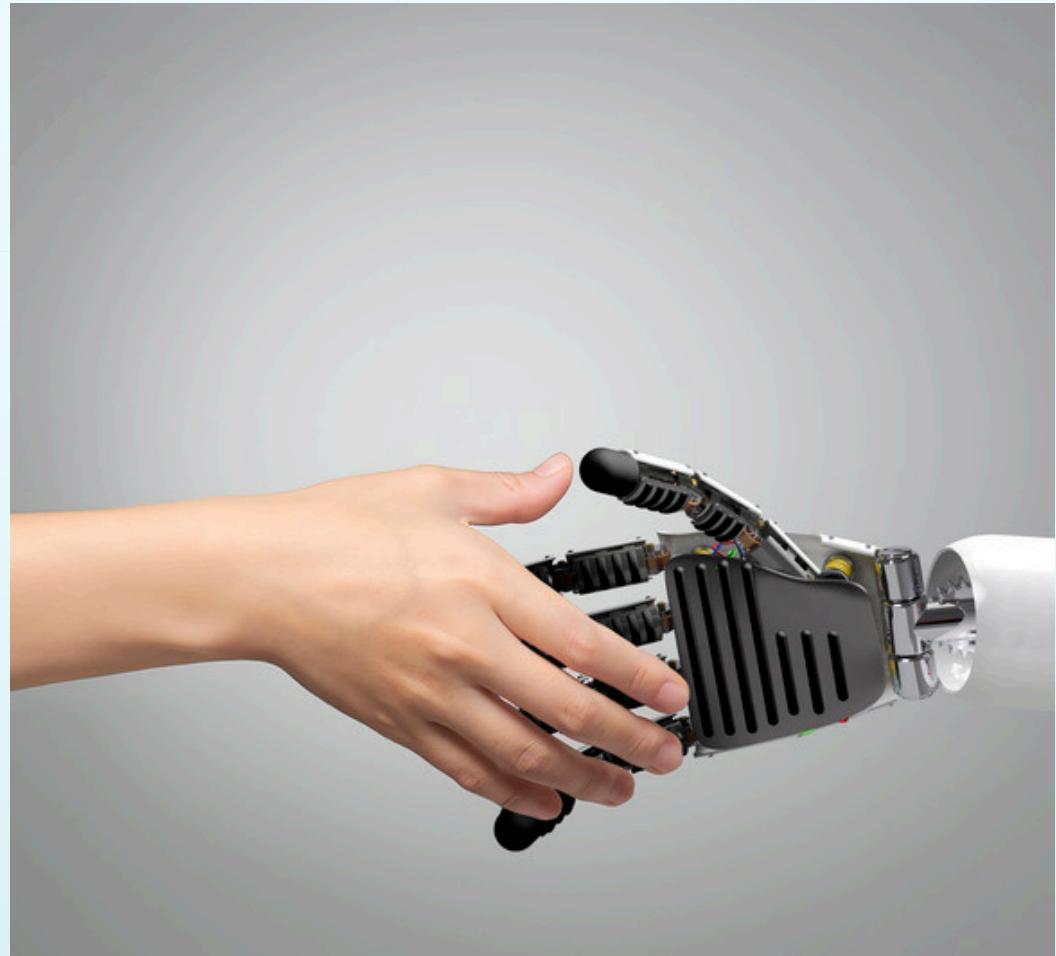
With the creation of Artificial Intelligence—specifically generative AI chatbots such as ChatGPT, Replika, and Character.AI—young people are now combating loneliness with tech. These bots can respond to prompts with original replies, simulate empathy, and hold surprisingly detailed conversations. For many, AI feels more present than their peers (BBC, 2023; Washington Post, 2023). Statistics from a study conducted by Joi AI surveying 2000 Gen Z Americans found that 75% of them thought that AI partners could fully replace human companionship, and 80% said that they would marry an AI (Forbes, 2025).

And why not? AI is easy to talk to. It always says the right thing. It's constantly available, never judgmental,

unconditionally loving, and doesn't need trust to be earned. It doesn't flake, doesn't argue, doesn't ghost you mid-convo, and doesn't require effort. Basically, it checks all the boxes for an easy, low-maintenance relationship.

### ***And yet, people are still lonely.***

Why?



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Because AI, no matter how responsive, available and engaging it is, isn't real. It can't truly replicate the imperfect and chaotic nature of human relationships. It can't misunderstand you and grow closer afterward. It can't hold your hand or show up for you when you're crying in a toilet stall. All it can really do is simulate what connection should feel like. Worst still, technology might be making us lonelier. Loneliness, according to Kim, et. Al. (2009), can be both the cause and the effect of problematic internet use. The more we rely on our AI companions and the worlds inside our phones, the more we retreat from the one unfolding around us. We miss out on what could have been life-changing conversations, deep friendships, and even small, spontaneous joy. Even worse, we neglect the connections we already have in reality.

I'm not exempt from this. Since I started using ChatGPT, I've found myself talking to my friends even less. I no longer confide in them or tell them about my day, because I've gotten used to telling ChatGPT instead. This shift was quiet, almost unnoticeable. By the time I discovered it, it felt nearly irreparable. But it happened.

***This is the paradox: loneliness may drive us to AI, but in seeking companionship from something perfectly available and programmed to please, we become even more isolated from others—and therefore, even lonelier.***

Despite how comfortable it feels, the reality of AI companionship is the constant reminder weighing in our minds that at the end of the day, we are just lonely humans staring at a screen.

AI might be a great temporary balm for loneliness. It might help us feel heard, if only for a while. But the ache remains.

***Because no matter how advanced the programming gets, real relationships—the ones that frustrate us, challenge us, and love us back—can't be coded.***

Not yet, anyway.

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## WORDS AND DIPLOMACY - HOW LANGUAGE BECOMES THE ARCHITECTURE OF PEACE

Alia Gupta

When we think about diplomacy, we often picture leaders in formal suits, signing agreements, or giving careful statements to the press. What's less visible (but just as important) is the language they use. Every word in diplomacy carries weight. Every sentence is shaped with purpose. To understand diplomacy is to understand language not just as a tool; but as a living, breathing entity that holds the power to ignite wars or weave peace.

Diplomacy isn't just about what countries want. It's about how they say it. In negotiations, words are tools, but also shields, and sometimes even weapons.

Think of the phrase "all options are on the table." A simple sentence, but in the world of diplomacy, its meaning can range from covering dire economic sanctions to lethal military intervention. A country may "express concern" instead of condemning a decision. It may "reaffirm its commitment" instead of promising new action.

These phrases may seem vague, but they are carefully chosen to send signals, protect interests, or avoid conflict. That's the beauty and the burden of diplomatic language: it breathes possibility and danger in the same breath.

And what makes this phenomenon even more extraordinary is that this kind of language is deliberate, and it echoes the way poets choose their words; avoiding directness when needed all while giving subtle hints of metaphors, inviting interpretation and Irene imagery, and sometimes relying on silence of punctuation to say more than speech.

Perhaps the most used poetic device in diplomacy is ambiguity. In poetry, ambiguity allows a reader to find personal meaning, to connect deeper and whole. In diplomacy, it allows conflicting parties to find mutual ground, however fragile. Dražen Pehar's work on ambiguity in peace agreements explains this: ambiguous language in the Dayton Accords let Bosnia's entities interpret a big thing like sovereignty flexibly, which eased Serb and Bosniak tensions and The Good Friday

Agreement used vagueness on identity and borders which allowed both unionists and nationalists to claim legitimacy.

***Such ambiguity fostered consensus without forcing immediate resolution of these issues.***

A single misplaced word in a poem can unravel its rhythm; in diplomacy, it can derail years of negotiation. The best practitioners of both fields understand the subtle spectrum between silence and speech. They listen. Empathy is diplomacy's unseen currency, and poetry its school. Through reading and writing verse, diplomats gain exposure to the human condition in its rawest form. It is no coincidence that many diplomats like Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Nelson Mandela and Yehuda Amichai have been poets themselves.

Nowhere is the power of language more evident than in the Cold War's quiet revolution: the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). From 1972 to 1975, a divided continent came together not in arms, but in dialogue. The language used in these dialogues was carefully curated, not only to reflect political will but to reshape political reality.



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Western diplomats spoke of “freedom of expression” while Eastern blocs interpreted it within socialist frameworks. Yet, both signed the files. They agreed to disagree – on paper. That was the breakthrough. The documents of the CSCE weren’t just records, they were literary achievements; where every word was a carefully balanced metaphor for survival.

A simple fact to remember is that the ethics of diplomatic language are rooted in responsibility. In diplomacy, a phrase can be a bridge or a battlefield. Crafting that phrase, therefore, is an act of moral judgment. In that way, diplomats are not only negotiators. They are architects of our collective future, building with the most fragile and powerful material humanity has: words.

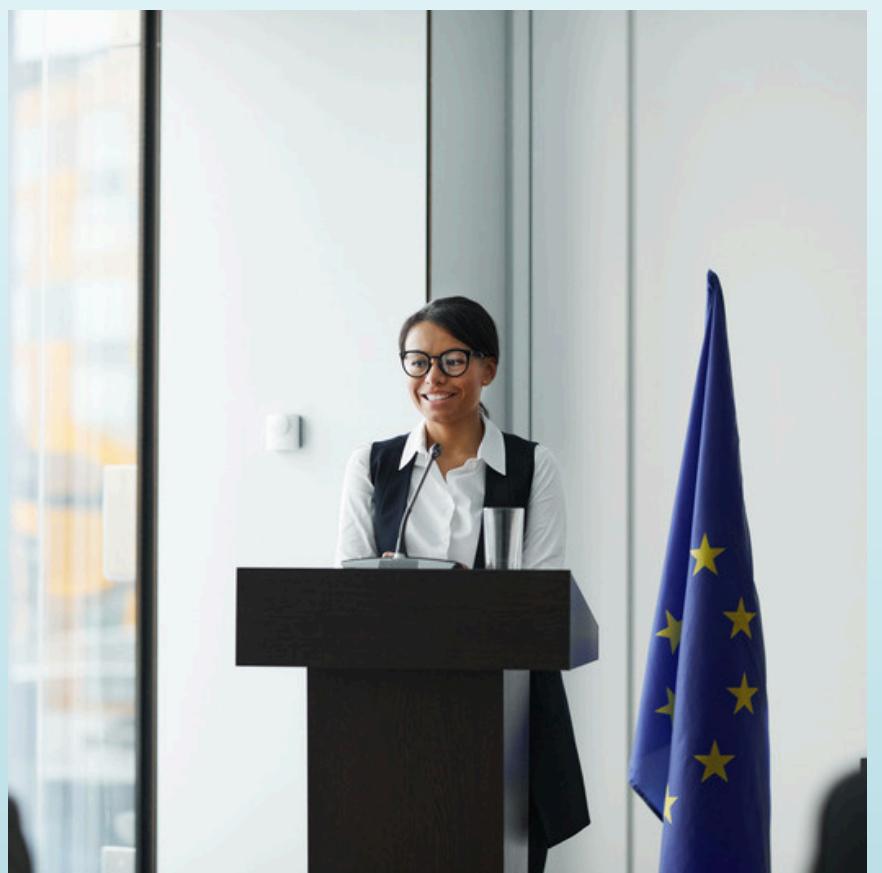
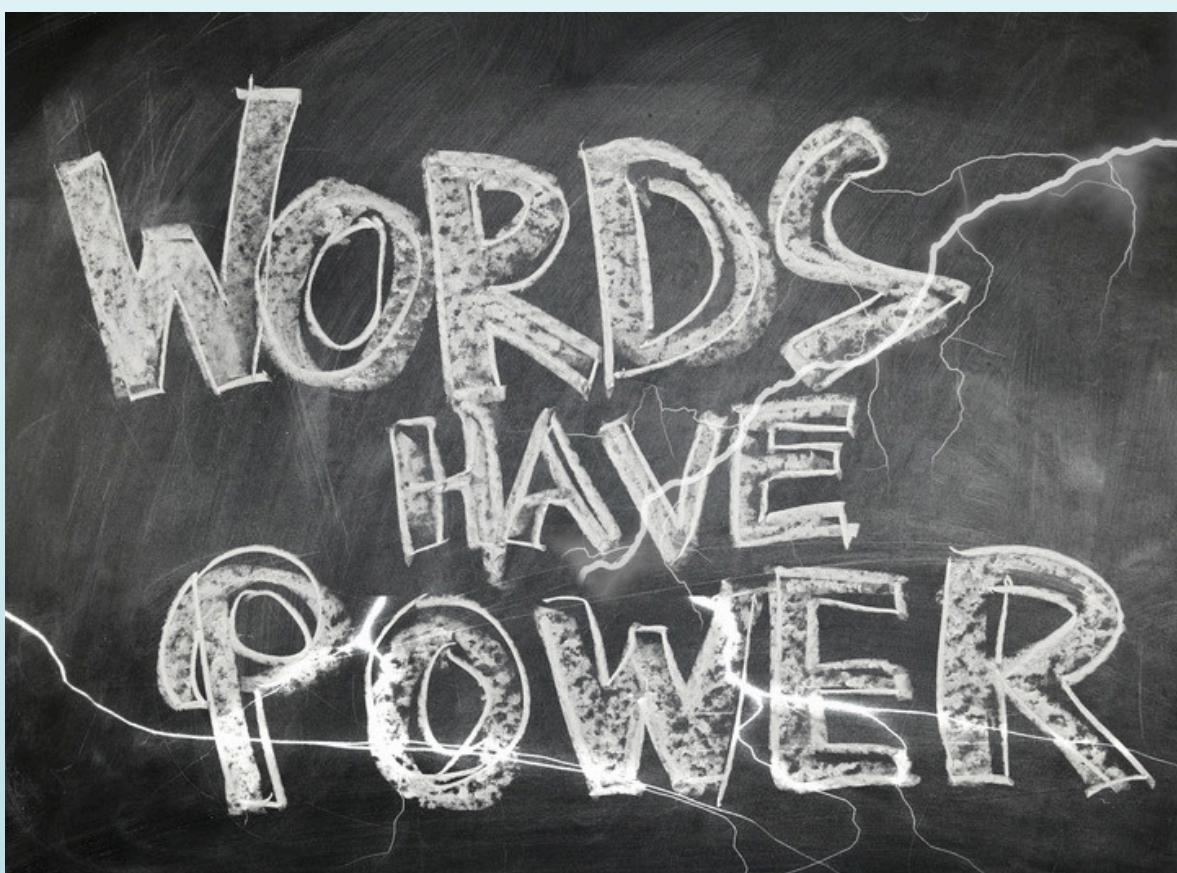
So, what happens when we begin to view diplomacy not just as policy, but as poetry? We begin to hear the heartbeat beneath the speeches. We begin to understand that language is not neutral. It is alive. It stirs, it provokes, it heals. It is the soft-spoken ambassador and the silent pause before a vote. It is ambiguity offered as a marigold branch. It is a signature on a treaty that once seemed impossible.

In an age increasingly divided by rhetoric, perhaps it is time to return to diplomacy's poetic roots. Not to make it more 'flowery,' but to make it more human.

***Because, in the end, it is not tanks or treaties that truly secure peace; it is the courage to speak with grace, and to listen with humility.***

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## HOW DOES SPECIES EXTINCTION IMPACT GLOBAL ECOSYSTEMS?

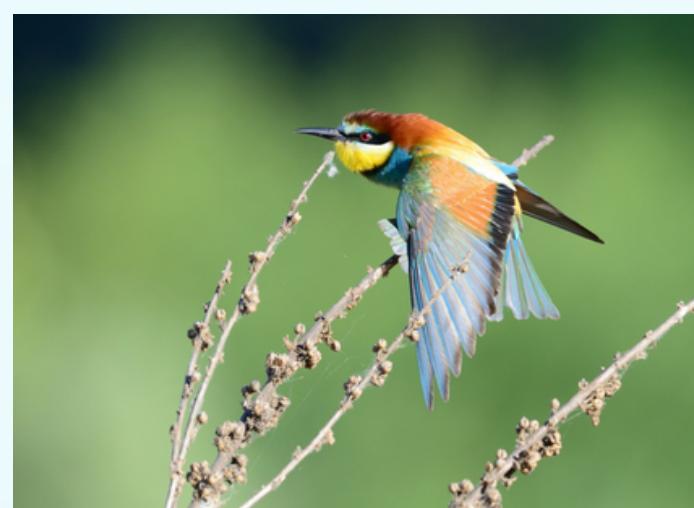
Donya Fournier

With global temperatures on the rise, many species are going extinct because they are not able to adapt and evolve fast enough in order to resist the change in temperature. Scientists have recognized this pattern and are putting in place measures to prevent the biodiversity of ecosystems from decreasing too drastically. Biodiversity is necessary for the overall strength, tolerance, and resilience of a community and ecosystem and indicates genetic variety (The Happy Turtle Straw).

***This concept is sacrificed as the extinction rates rise exponentially.***

This genetic variety ensures that a population is more fit and therefore is able to evolve in order to reproduce successfully while overcoming environmental challenges. From a global perspective, the extinction rates are seeming unnatural, key species are being harmed and disappearing and something needs to be done.

In everyday life, the extinction of a few random species might not seem like the biggest deal; however, when observing the impact and the importance they have to their ecosystem, one species' extinction may deteriorate an entire community of organisms. According to researchers from Columbia Climate School, the global species extinction rate is increasing significantly, specifically "1,000 to 10,000 times faster because of human activity" including habitat loss (e.g. deforestation), poaching, displacement, and disease (Cho, Marsh). In agreement with this observation, Rao and Larsen pointed out that although extinction is a natural event, the rates are so high that it is becoming abnormal.



## HOW DOES SPECIES EXTINCTION IMPACT GLOBAL ECOSYSTEMS?

Donya Fournier

A strong illustrative example would be birds. Birds deserve more credit for their role in the global ecosystem than we give them. They pollinate around 5% of the plants we use as humans everyday, spread seeds of asexually reproducing plants with their droppings which are also great fertilizers for the seeds and coral reefs, and they eat insects and pests on agricultural grounds (Shaw). Overall, birds help maintain a healthy environment not only on land but also in the sea and for so many different species around the world. As observed and reported by Bird Life International, as of June 2024, of almost 12,000 bird species, 126 “are lost to science.” Due to the magnificent impact birds have, their extinction and disappearance play a negative role in the sustainability of numerous ecosystems.

***The extinction of birds alone can cause an entire ecosystem to collapse because of the lack of productivity and resilience it will have.***

A specific initiative that has been taken, specifically by the United States, is the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that was originally passed in 1973 to protect key species in certain environments (Cho). Another example would be the Red Kites, a reintroduction program in south England. In consequence of the political and social climate recently, these laws are being suppressed and their impact is getting mitigated; nonetheless, it is important to make sure these programs and laws are maintained and adhered to. Another way we can fortify the ecosystem we are surrounded with is by placing clean water and food for specifically birds especially during extreme seasons. As articulated by the Center for Biological Diversity, it is extremely important to also advocate for the protection of the environment. Whether that be to state, county, country, or organization officials, it is essential to bring attention to maintaining a healthy earth in order for all organisms to have the resources they need to cooperate in society.

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Photos from Louis Fournier

## EYES CLOSED, WORLDS APART: THE HIDDEN LIVES OF VISUAL THINKERS

Chau Do Minh

Close your eyes and imagine a perfect beach at sunset. What do you see? Some see golden light painting the skies, multicolored clouds, gentle waves lapping, seagulls flying overhead, and umbrellas lined up here and there around the palm trees. Some picture this scene more vividly than others. Some see... nothing at all. Some people's minds are like movie players, whereas others are like brick walls.

Not having a "mind's eye" may seem strange for most of you: no imaginary waves, no light, no clouds? For some people, that's not a fantasy or a made-up scenario—it's their reality.

***This condition, aphantasia, affects approximately one to two percent of the world's population.***

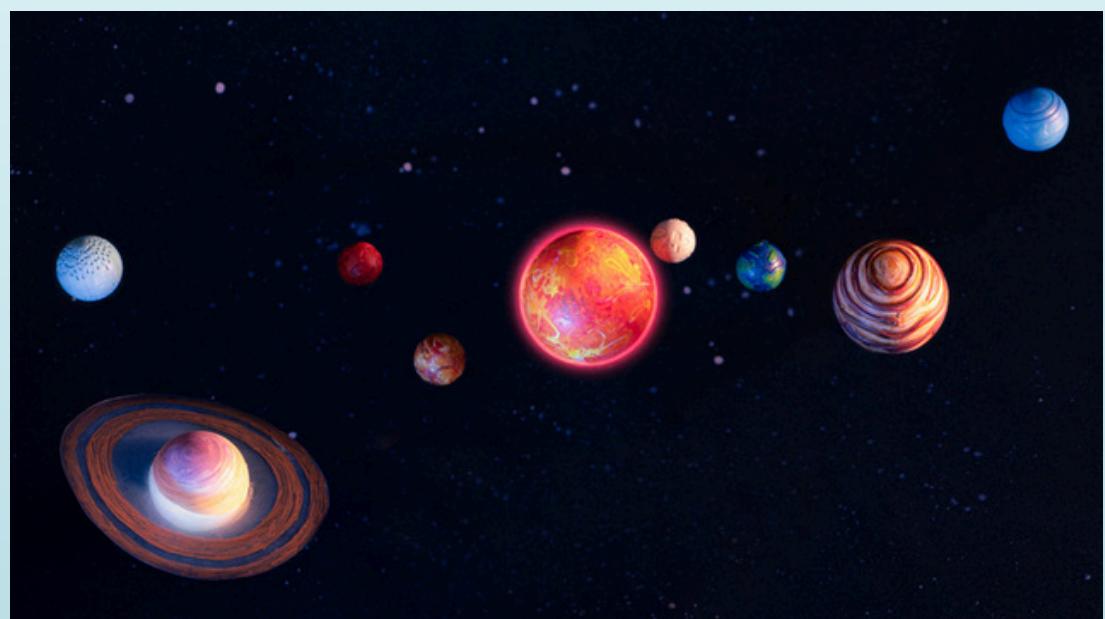
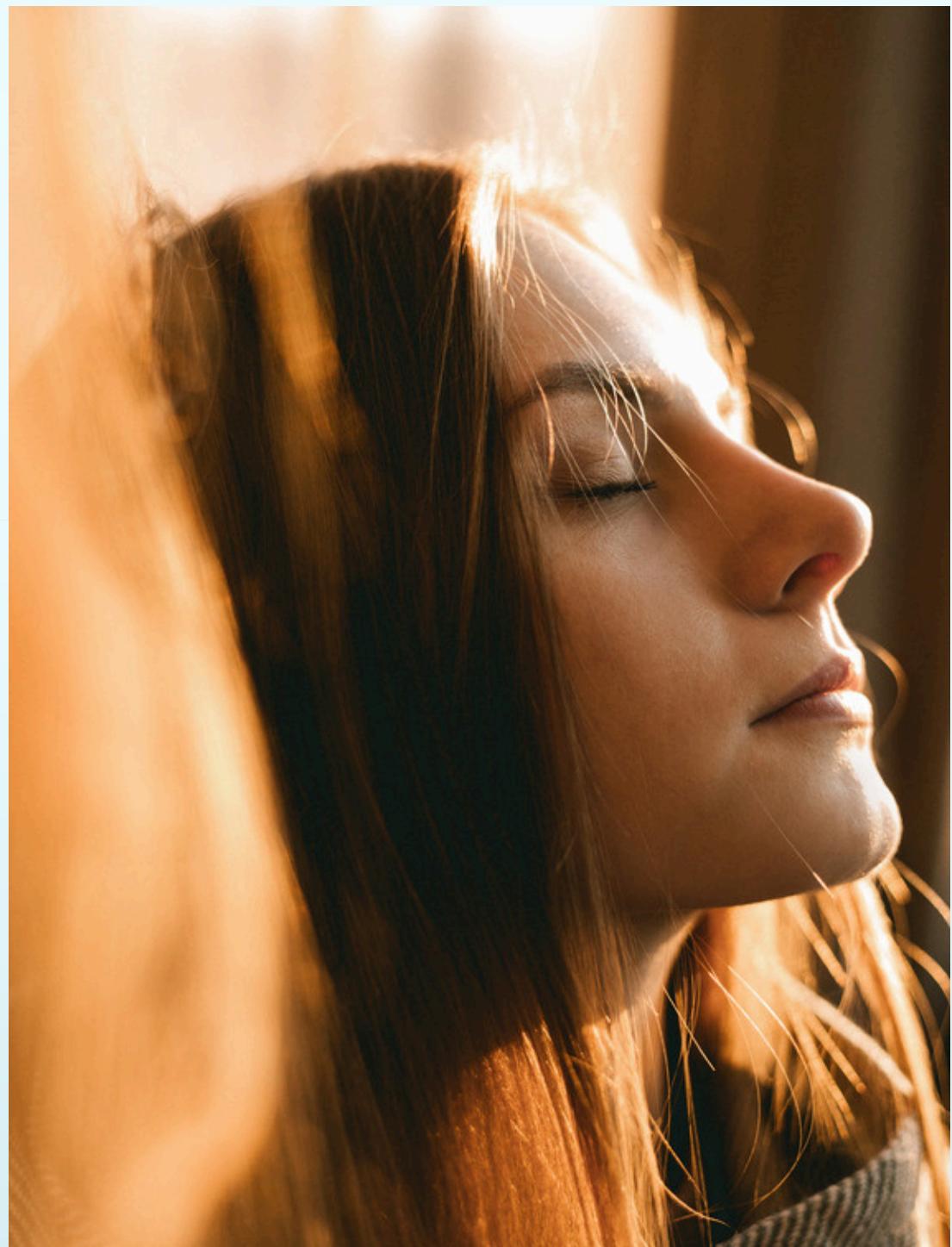
On the other hand, some people experience hyperphantasia, when they have a mind so vivid it's like constantly watching high-definition cinematic films, playing inside their heads.

Although we have known that there are individuals who claim to have no visual mental imagery at all since Francis Galton's seminal paper (Galton, 1880), this phenomenon received little attention since then and only started to gain traction again in 2015.

Φαντασία—*Phantasia*—is the classical Greek term for imagination, which Aristotle described as the 'faculty/power by which a *phantasma* [image or mental representation] presents itself to us' (Aristotle, translated by Hamlyn, 1968). From there, Adam Zeman coined the term *aphantasia* in his 2015 paper, *Lives without Imagery: Congenital Aphantasia*. He used it to describe a lifelong, substantial, or complete absence of visual mental imagery.

*Hyperphantasia* is on the other end of the spectrum. It's the condition of having extremely vivid mental imagery, so intense that imagined scenes can appear nearly as real as actual perception. This condition is not limited to sight; many also report intense imagined sounds, sensations, or even smells, also known as auditory, tactile, and olfactory phantasia (Zeman et al., 2021).

The term was introduced by Dr. Adam Zeman and colleagues at the University of Exeter, and research suggests this vivid imagery can influence how individuals perceive memories and the emotional intensity felt while remembering, especially during daydreaming or recalling memories (Zeman et al., 2020).



## EYES CLOSED, WORLDS APART: THE HIDDEN LIVES OF VISUAL THINKERS

Chau Do Minh

Neither aphantasia nor hyperphantasia are disorders; instead, they are part of a spectrum of how people's brains visualize and process experiences. Individuals can be anywhere on the spectrum—from hyper-realistic imaginations to normal internal imagery, to hypophantasia (vague or dim internal imagery or aphantasia).

There are many misconceptions about aphantasia. The first, and perhaps most common, is that individuals with aphantasia, also known as *aphantasics*, do not have an imagination. However, imagination does not rely solely on mental pictures. Aphantasics can still invent stories, ideas, music, and abstract concepts—they do not visualize these ideas. Many aphantasics are highly creative in fields such as writing, coding, science, design, or even filmmaking. A great real-world example is Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar and former president of Walt Disney Animation Studios. How an individual who cannot mentally picture their visions could still reach such prestigious positions sends an inspiring message: creativity is not completely related to the mind's eye. What matters is not how vividly one imagines an idea, but how effectively one shapes it into reality.

The second most common misconception about this condition is that individuals with aphantasia recall details about objects, faces, or spatial areas only with difficulty. In reality, aphantasics can remember facts and information just as well as anyone else. However, instead of images, they use emotions, facts, and concepts. Sindhu Gnanasambandan, producer at Radiolab, WNYC Studios, says, "It is like an abstract knowing. Like [she] knows she loves someone."

But just as there are misconceptions about what aphantasia takes away, there are also misunderstandings about what hyperphantasia gives. Some believe that with all the vivid inner imagery that hyperphantasics experience and the life-like mind's eye that they possess, hyperphantasia must always be a blessing. However, hyperphantasics may find the vividness overwhelming or sometimes debilitating, because it can distract them from their work or study. Hyperphantasics may also be more prone to sleep problems, due to their overactive imagination. One individual with hyperphantasia reported having to take serotonin pills or he would "suffer from insomnia, due to [his] hyperactive brain" (Metivier, Anthony, 2024).

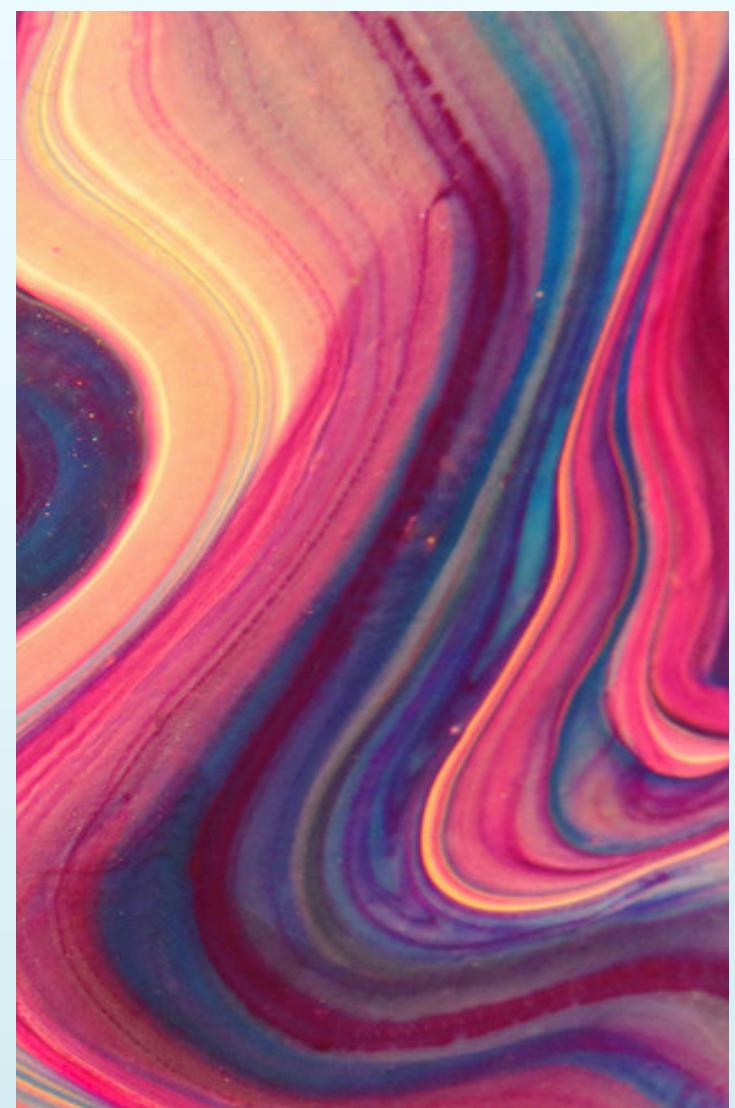
Another misconception is that hyperphantasia is only visual; contrary to this belief, many individuals with hyperphantasia also experience vividness in auditory, tactile, or emotional senses, not just visual ones. For example, imagining the *feel* of silk or the *sound* of one's laugh with striking realism. Hyperphantasia can involve multiple senses firing in sync. Hyperphantasia can also extend to taste, allowing individuals to "taste" things in their minds. This ability proves extremely useful when reminiscing about culinary memories or trying to describe them.

Maybe you've always wondered why your mind's eye feels dim — or why it sometimes won't shut off. Perhaps no one's told you that's normal. But now you know: imagination looks different for everyone.

***Whether your mind is a blank slate or a Technicolor film, whether you see in flashes of color or feel in quiet impressions, you're not broken — you're just wired differently. And that is what makes each individual beautiful.***

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## FROM TRASH TO TREND - HOW GEN Z IS REINVENTING SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Đỗ Hà My

***“Fashion is the armor to survive the reality of everyday life,” legendary fashion photographer Bill Cunningham once said.***

But what if that armor is made from an old curtain, a thrifted denim jacket, or plastic bags pulled from the beach? For a growing number of teens around the world, fashion isn't just about looking good—it's about doing good. Sustainable fashion has become one of the most interesting topics Gen Z is exploring, and it is remarkable how teenagers are reinventing ordinary waste into stylish, wearable art.

In April 2025, six secondary schools from Ireland participated in the Green-Schools Let's Fix Fashion catwalk event. Let's Fix Fashion is an initiative by An Taisce's Green-Schools program, aiming to raise awareness among middle school students about the environmental impact of fast fashion. Participants were challenged to create an outfit costing under 30 euros from a charity shop—or design a new look using only old materials. Students also hosted swap shops at school and organized circular design workshops. This initiative now reaches beyond Ireland, with similar efforts taking place in Kenya and Dubai.

Teen interest in tackling fast fashion is also reflected in youth-led global organizations, such as Teens Against Fast Fashion (TAFF), founded by Charlie Sender and Dylan Berkowitz. TAFF's mission is to educate peers about the harmful environmental and ethical costs of fast fashion. Through upcycling workshops, clothing swap events, and documentary screenings, they creatively raise awareness and teach upcycling skills to teenagers.

Another way that Gen Z is championing their eco-awareness in fashion is through the return of *thrift culture*. For many teens, thrifting is not just a money-saving hack—it is a lifestyle. Apps like Depop, Poshmark, and Vinted have become digital closets, where users resell, trade, or buy secondhand clothing.

***Thrift hauls and “come thrifting with me” videos on TikTok and Youtube have become a huge trend among youngsters.***

Thrift is a practical form of sustainable fashion, as it minimizes textile waste by giving unwanted items a second life. Instead of discarding clothes, individuals can sell or trade them online or at thrift stores, helping extend their use while connecting with new owners. In other words, secondhand clothing is sustainable, just as pretty, and can be bought at a very low price.

In conclusion, it's surprising to see Gen Z is tackling fast fashion head-on, whether by thrifting, joining sustainability-focused organizations, or participating in events like the *Let's Fix Fashion* catwalk. If these trends continue, Gen Z is well on its way to making a better world—fashionably.

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## MINNESOTA POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS FURTHER DIVIDES THE U.S.

Mercy Olanrewaju

On June 14, Minnesota State Representative Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark Hortman, were assassinated in their home by a masked gunman. Earlier that same morning, State Senator John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette, were attacked in their residence and sustained serious injuries. The incident has shaken the nation and raised urgent questions about the state of U.S. politics and the direction in which the current administration is heading.

At approximately 2.00 a.m., the suspected gunman arrived at the Hoffman residence in Chaplin, Minnesota, impersonating a police officer. He then asked if there were any weapons in the house. Mr. Hoffman quickly realised the man was not a legitimate law enforcement officer and attempted to push him out of the home. The suspect then announced, "This is a robbery," and opened fire on the couple. Fortunately, both survived and are currently hospitalised.

The assailant then visited the residences of other political figures, including State Representative Kirstin Bahner—who was on holiday with her family—and State Senator Ann Rest, where he was seen parked nearby. His final destination was the Hortman residence, where he fatally shot both Melissa and Mark Hortman.

When officers arrived at the scene around 3.30 a.m., they noticed a vehicle that "looked exactly like an SUV squad car" and a suspect wearing a realistic silicone mask and police uniform. A confrontation ensued; shots were fired, and the suspect fled on foot.

A day-long manhunt followed, involving both local and federal authorities. The suspect was identified as Vance Luther Boelter, a former political appointee who had previously served on the same state workforce development board as Senator Hoffman. Boelter was eventually identified and taken into custody after being tracked down near his home. His wife was also detained; a search of her vehicle uncovered approximately \$10,000 in cash, passports, and two firearms. She has not been charged with any crimes.

Boelter initially faced two counts of second-degree murder and two counts of second-degree attempted murder. However, after appearing in federal court, he was charged with two counts of murder with a firearm, two firearm offenses, and two counts of stalking.

Investigators have not confirmed a clear motive, but evidence suggests that Boelter was targeting Democrat politicians. A list of 70 potential "targets" was recovered, including Minnesota Governor Tim Walz. Boelter also reportedly sent a letter to the FBI, claiming that Governor Walz had instructed him to carry out the killings. However, those who are aware of the letter and its contents described it as incoherent, according to the Star Tribune.

***The response to the incident was overwhelming from both sides of the political spectrum.***

Most Democrats and some Republicans condemned the violence, and Governor Walz described it as "an act of targeted political violence", a sentiment echoed by many. President Trump stated that the Department of Justice and the FBI were investigating the attacks, adding that "horrific violence will not be tolerated". However, just days later, he stated he had no plans to call Governor Walz, accompanying his comment with insults directed towards the sitting governor—remarks some critics found insensitive. This incident also sparked a wave of misinformation online, with prominent figures suggesting that Boelter had been directed by Governor Walz, among many false claims.

On June 28, 2025, the funeral for Mellissa and Mark Hortman—and their dog Gilbert—was held, with former President Joe Biden and other elected officials in attendance.

This deepening troubling series of events has left many worried about the political climate in the U.S., and the lackluster response from the current administration sets a dangerous precedent for democratically elected officials and their safety.

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## THE HIDDEN COSTS OF HAUL CULTURE

Aarna Kapadia

Haul culture centres around social media creators, often influencers and content creators, showcasing large collections of recent purchases in their videos, ranging from clothing and beauty products to electronics and home decor. The genre originated in the mid-2000s with YouTubers “unboxing” novel items; however, between 2008 and 2016, it evolved into haul videos, where creators displayed shopping bags full of newly acquired goods, detailing prices, quality, and personal experiences. Today, the format thrives on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. In fact, TikTok’s #haul hashtag has amassed 24.4 billion views, and #clothinghaul more than 1 billion—evidence of its massive reach (Maguire).

To many young viewers, haul videos are like a digital trip to the mall, condensed into a few minutes of glossy reviews and vicarious thrill. They offer insight into how an item looks, fits, and whether it's “worth it”. This discovery-driven appeal has made haul videos one of Gen Z's most trusted sources for shopping inspiration. In other words, their influence extends well beyond entertainment, directly shaping consumer behaviour (Indita).

Yet what begins as fun and even helpful can harbour hidden costs. Haul culture often blurs the line between honest review and paid promotion. Editing emphasizes the highs while sidestepping the returns, environmental costs, and behind-the-scenes waste (“Haul Videos: What Are They and Why Use Them” - Ugcproof.com). This curated presentation converts consumption into an aspiration: a symbol of status, self-care, and belonging.

Understanding haul culture is crucial because it shapes how a generation perceives consumption, value, and even identity. Through this lens, we must ask the vital question: what lies behind these mesmerizing unboxings?

### Retail Therapy and Emotional Coping

Retail therapy is real. Research shows that making purchase decisions can alleviate lingering sadness by restoring a sense of personal control (Marcheva). According to the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, shopping can be “40 times more effective at countering sadness” than browsing alone (Lo). This is rooted in many everyday experiences; one may feel deserving of buying a new lipstick because they achieved a high score on an exam or going shopping for a new wardrobe when feeling down. However, psychologists caution that this quick fix often becomes a maladaptive coping mechanism. Over time, the emotional high fades, and one must spend more to feel the same uplift, sometimes spiralling into impulsive or compulsive buying, particularly among teens and young adults. Through hauls, these impulses become normalised and even glamorized.



## THE HIDDEN COSTS OF HAUL CULTURE

Aarna Kapadia

### Environmental Toll of Returns

Haul culture thrives on the appeal of free returns, but the environmental cost is high. E-commerce return rates can reach 30%, compared to just 8-10% in physical stores (Davison). In 2022, returns generated approximately 24 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> and nearly 9.5 billion pounds of landfill waste (WeSupply). Fashion returns alone emit as much CO<sub>2</sub> annually as three million cars in the U.S., and only about 20-30% of returned garments are restocked—most are discarded (Marcheva). The encouragement to buy clothing, especially online from “storefronts” i.e. social media compilations of links to products displayed in videos, and the lack of transparency on the detriments of returns are unsung villains of hauls.

### Fast Fashion's Waste Problem

Haul culture fuels fast fashion: cheap, trendy clothing made to be worn only a couple of times. Globally, some 80 billion clothing items are produced yearly, and in the U.S., nearly 85% of textiles end up as waste. Textile production consumes about 93 billion cubic meters of water per year, yet under 1% of clothing is recycled. This buy-and-toss mentality thrives on haul culture's tendency to have trends with lifespans as short as only a few days. Furthermore, clothing produced through fast fashion companies is often of poorer quality, largely polyester blends, and can even contain toxic materials. A study showed that over 60% of sampled garments from fast fashion giant Shein contained toxic chemicals in concentrations exceeding EU safety thresholds, posing endocrine-disruption, skin irritation, and a myriad of other risks.

### Misleading Representation and Influencer Ethics

Haul videos often portray an idealized reality. Many creators receive sponsored or gifted products without clear disclosure, and heavily edited footage emphasizes perfection while hiding flaws and returns. Vogue Business suggests that many influencers buy a large supply of goods to show off on camera just to have them returned soon after (Maguire). Nevertheless, the returns are not made apparent to the viewers, who are led to believe that their favourite content creators spend thousands of dollars weekly, encouraging irresponsible spending. In extreme cases, some viewers even go into debt, or rely on services such as Afterpay and Klarna, paying in weekly installments for inessential luxury goods, potentially leading to larger consequences such as credit card debt.

### Conclusion

The true cost of hauls isn't just counted in shopping bags—it's reflected in landfills, carbon emissions, and financial and emotional stress. But youth have the power to redefine value. By choosing substance over spectacle, creativity over consumerism, and sustainability over surplus, young people can shape a new narrative—one where well-being, ethics, and care for the planet outweigh the allure of the latest haul.

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## WITH TRUMP'S THREAT: HOW DOES THE EU DIVERSIFY ITS RELATIONS?

Matiss Hyenveux

The election of Donald Trump put pressure on the European Union, threatening the transatlantic relation.

***Feeling the risk of a colder relation with the USA, the EU is seeking new partners in the world.***

### Diplomacy by commerce

The EU has not a unique foreign policy, and it is often complicated for the continent to be united on hot topics. Meanwhile, the EU has the competence to make commercial deals.

As one of the three commercial hubs in the world, Europe has a big influence on commerce. Which means a powerful diplomatic tool to be influential. For example, the rules set in the EU are followed all around the world in the tech sector to meet with European requirements, especially in data privacy, which shows this influence.

### Find energy: how to be independent from both Russia and the USA?

After the embargo on Russian energy – especially gas and oil – the European countries replaced it with Natural Liquefied Gas (NLG) from the United States to fulfil their needs. For a country such as Estonia, for example, which was dependent on Russian gas, but decided to stop entirely – and pretty soon – Russian gas imports, the NLG from Norway and the USA is indispensable.

But with Donald Trump's election, the fact that the USA is no longer a reliable partner to the EU has come as a bombshell. It appears necessary to be independent from both Russia and the USA for the European continent.

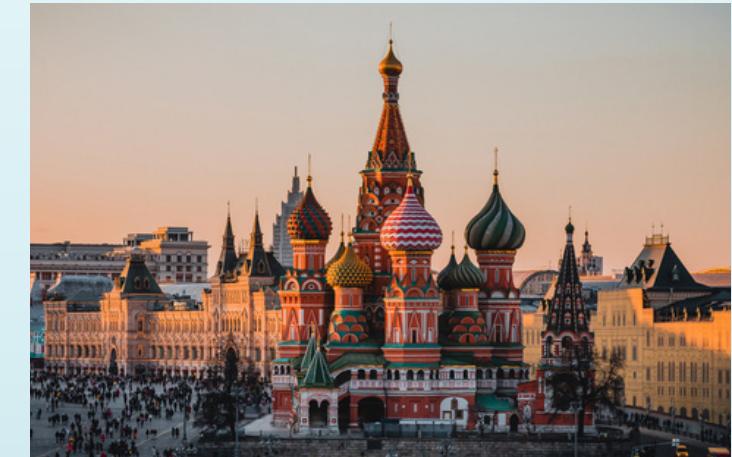
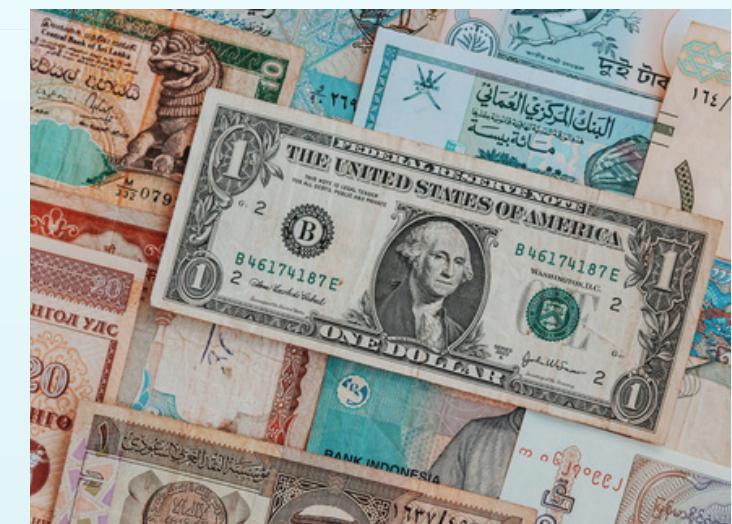
If developing renewable energies is a way to become more autonomous for the Old Continent, this could not be sufficient. Then Europe has to diversify its energy imports with other countries: the Old Continent is seeking to diversify its imports, signing a trade deal with the Central Asian countries, a big source of natural gas, after a summit in April. Canada is also key for European energy imports.

### Canada and Europe: the new brotherhood?

After the election of Mark Carney, who stays firm against Donald Trump, Canada needs allies to find new commercial opportunities to offset the decline in trading with the USA. And since the CETA, a free trade deal between the EU and Canada, the global exchanges increased between the two, and may be expected to be higher in the next few years. Europe needs Canada's resources, and Canada needs Europe's market, which is, in fact, bigger than the US one in terms of million people.

Mark Carney was present at the recent meeting with the EU leaders and Keir Starmer on defence, and as Donald Trump left the G7 summit, there were, except Japan, only Canada and European countries left to discuss. Finally, in an interesting poll, 40% of a panel of Canadians said that they want to join the EU. This is impossible, but shows the new link between the Old Continent and Canada.

***This link was already strong, but now it is officially enlightened and recognised by the population.***



## WITH TRUMP'S THREAT: HOW DOES THE EU DIVERSIFY ITS RELATIONS?

Matiss Hyenveux

### 'New Dealhy' with the EU

Funny pun, isn't it? But it expresses perfectly what is going on between the EU and India, because New Delhi is indeed going to sign a trade deal after the visit of Ursula von der Leyen in February.

This free trade deal has the objective to strengthen the commercial relation between India and the EU, the second being already the first commercial partner of the first, and the first needing new markets to invest in, as the Old Continent economy is stagnating.

The EU wants to diversify its imports of tech products, still mainly coming from China, and import green hydrogen. And India needs European investments: 140 billion euros in 2023, one of the most important investors.

Collaborative research projects were announced, and the India/Middle-East/Europe Corridor (IMEC) planned in 2023, has to reduce by 40% the travel costs in both directions.

But, still, there are many obstacles: the EU process is long and uncertain (the European Parliament may block the deals); the respect of working rights or environment defended by the EU sound oddly to India; the heavy Indian administrative processes on goods imports is sometimes problematic; the diplomatic alignments and the type of regime raises questions, as India refuses to condemn Russia for Ukraine's aggression, and Narendra Modi is threatening the Indian title of "the biggest democracy of the world".

However, these problems, since the EU and India started to talk and discuss specific packages (and not trying to sign a global deal), are not precluding any more the progress of the EU-India relation.

### Trade deal with Mercosur: a long and hard way still not complete

For the EU, signing a free trade deal with Mercosur is key in developing trading and influence in the world. The Old Continent and the four Mercosur countries are 700 million people and one-fifth of the world economy: a free trade deal would significantly increase transatlantic commerce.

This is, for Mercosur, a way to export more agricultural products. For the EU, that is the possibility to sell cars, or wine (currently taxed), and import minerals, such as Argentine lithium - necessary to produce batteries - or Brazilian manganese. But, more than this, dealing with the Mercosur is necessary for the EU to avoid this region to be under China's influence. Indeed, Xi Jinping is investing in South America, with for example the purchase of the port of Chancay in Peru. The geopolitical issue is key: if the EU does not invest in South America, another country - China - will do it itself and benefit from a cheaper and more interesting trade with the region. As the EU is seen weak as a power in itself, this is an opportunity to be more influential for the Old Continent.

### ***But the deal, whose negotiations initially began in 1999, faces strong opposition.***

This comes especially from European farmers, seeing the deal as a threat for their activity. Furthermore, France denounces the deal as unfriendly for the environment, because it would enforce mass agricultural production in South America or deforestation, as no constraints exist in the deal about suspending it in case of environmental engagements violations. France, with Poland or Austria, is still blocking the ratification process.

### UK and EU: exes get back together?

Five years after Brexit, it seems the relation between the EU and the UK warms up. On May 19, Keir Starmer, Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa were meeting for the first bilateral summit between the EU and the UK after Brexit. With Donald Trump's unpredictability, many think the EU must again become a strategic partner for the UK, for defence and trade.

A defence and security pact has been signed, and the UK will participate in some parts of the SAFE program (Security Action For Europe). Other topics will be addressed in the next months, such as young mobility (the exchange programs are still complicated since Brexit), sanitary regulations, fishing (for what an extension of the current deal was decided), energetic cooperation...

Today, 55% of Brits are considering Brexit as a mistake. But the conservatives and pro-Brexit are still very influential, especially seeing the rise of Nigel Farage's Reform UK. This is why we can expect a progressive and limited reconciliation between the UK and the EU.



## WITH TRUMP'S THREAT: HOW DOES THE EU DIVERSIFY ITS RELATIONS?

Matiss Hyenveux

### Trade deals everywhere

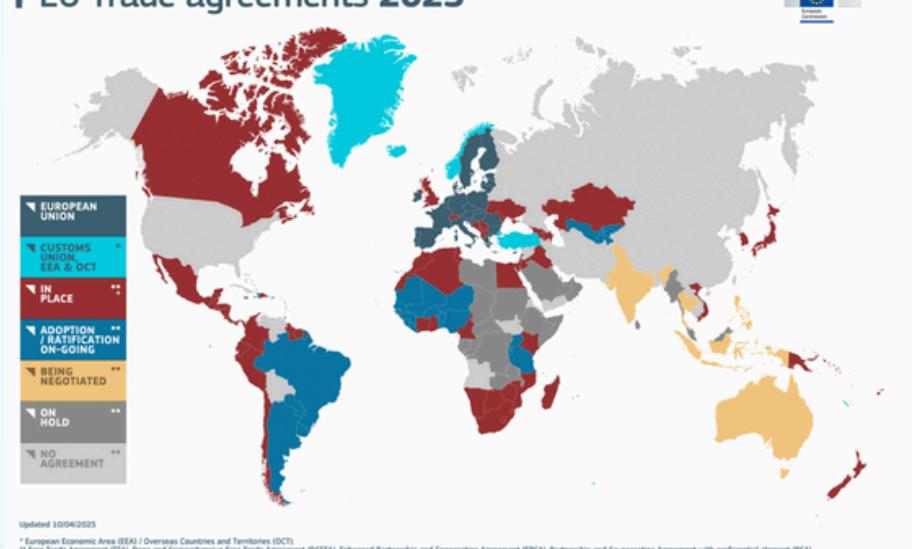
As said at the beginning of this article, trade is the main resource of EU diplomacy. And it is overactive. In 2024 the EU signed a free trade deal with New Zealand and with Chile in 2025. Currently, more than 60 countries have a trade deal with the EU, ratification is ongoing for Mercosur, West Africa and Central Asia, and new deals have been negotiated with Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and India. As the USA is abandoning free trade, it seems today that the EU is taking this role from the old world trade constable, to ensure commerce is possible all around the world. And maybe this position again places Europe at the centre of the geopolitical game, as it is the point of balance between the unstable USA and the BRICS.

Ironically, rather than Donald Trump, the real master in "deals" is probably the EU after all.

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### EU Trade agreements 2025



## A PROMISE LACED WITH CONTROVERSY: THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOS)

Bhavi Naik

Remember the fear of nuclear power after Chernobyl? The way we cowered when we heard the term "Atomic Bomb?" The way we all barricaded ourselves from coming out of our houses during the widespread outbreak of Orthocoronavirinae? Now, genetically modified organisms face a similar shadow of doubt. Just like harnessing atoms, can these genetic edits unlock a bountiful future, or are we dancing with radioactive risks? The characteristics of all living organisms are determined by their genetic makeup and their interaction with the environment. Like every experiment, there are ethical considerations, controversies and doubts related to GMOs since everyone views them in a different light. Every coin has two sides and in the same way, even GMOs have their own advantages and disadvantages as nothing is just pure black or white. They are a promise laced with controversy.

Current agricultural practices alone cannot be a solution for food development; hence, science has progressed to give rise to GMOs. All over the planet, there are around 800 million people who are chronically undernourished in terms of calories. GMOs help in increasing nutritional content. Golden Rice, a GMO, satisfies 50% of daily Vitamin A needs per cup.

Other studies have reported high levels of antioxidant compounds in GMOs that may provide health benefits. They also provide useful medicines, such as insulin which treats diabetes, derived from a genetically engineered bacterium.

The increased crop yields, reduced food and drug production, reduced need for pesticides, enhanced nutrient composition, resistance to diseases, and medical benefits are also some of the advantages of GMOs. These factors contribute to making them cost-effective.

Despite the advantages of GMOs, there are widespread concerns about the biosafety of the products, causing great concern regarding health and environmental integrity. The use of transgenics generates controversies related to possible risks to health, such as food allergies, antibiotic resistance, increased toxicity, elevated pesticide residues in consumed food, and also the lack of information on packaging labels. Once GMOs are released into the environment, they can be difficult to control, and any harmful products produced will be metabolically active as long as they survive. The incomplete digestion of the GMO in the gastrointestinal tract may result in the transfer of genes leading to health risks.

***The future of GMOs is not set in stone and does not lie in a static stance of pro or con.***

In the end, science will never stop evolving and with that new discoveries will be made, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages, but that should not deter us from continuing to move forward and explore.

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## HOW MIDDLE SCHOOL WOKE ME UP

Ngan Le

I was in 5th grade, clueless and unmotivated. I didn't realize how much my life would change once I stepped into secondary school - and how unaware I really was. I spent most of my day sleeping in, watching TV and doing almost nothing productive. I would never have expected myself to be so lazy, but all of that changed the day I calmly walked into my first secondary school classroom.

Many people say that middle school is when it really hits - and I couldn't agree more. It's thought to be a highly competitive environment. You'll often see people pulling all-nighters to study for exams, even if it's just a quiz and it's common to hear complaints about the heavy pressure.

***According to research carried out by the Pew Research Center, 61% of teens say that they feel a lot of stress in order to achieve high scores.***

Additionally, this kind of stress is not limited to higher educations like college or high school students but also exists in a majority of elementary and middle scholars. While many adults believe that cramming for a simple test is unnecessary, I personally think it's crucial for students to push themselves, especially during this transitional stage.

I learned this the hard way. When I showed up for my first class in 6th grade, I was shocked...but also astonished. 63 students, all of them bright, focused, and clearly ahead of me. It had never occurred to me that I would need to work hard just to keep up.

***I wasn't ready for this, and it showed. But rather than give up, I made a decision: I also want to be unique.***

That day, I drew up my first-ever study timetable. I filled it with long hours of revision, reading, and exercises. I bought extra books, determined to challenge myself daily and committed to beating the old version of me. I wasn't only trying to compete with others - but also myself.

***According to an article written by Western University, when students know what is expected of them, they will automatically feel more confident in their daily activities.***

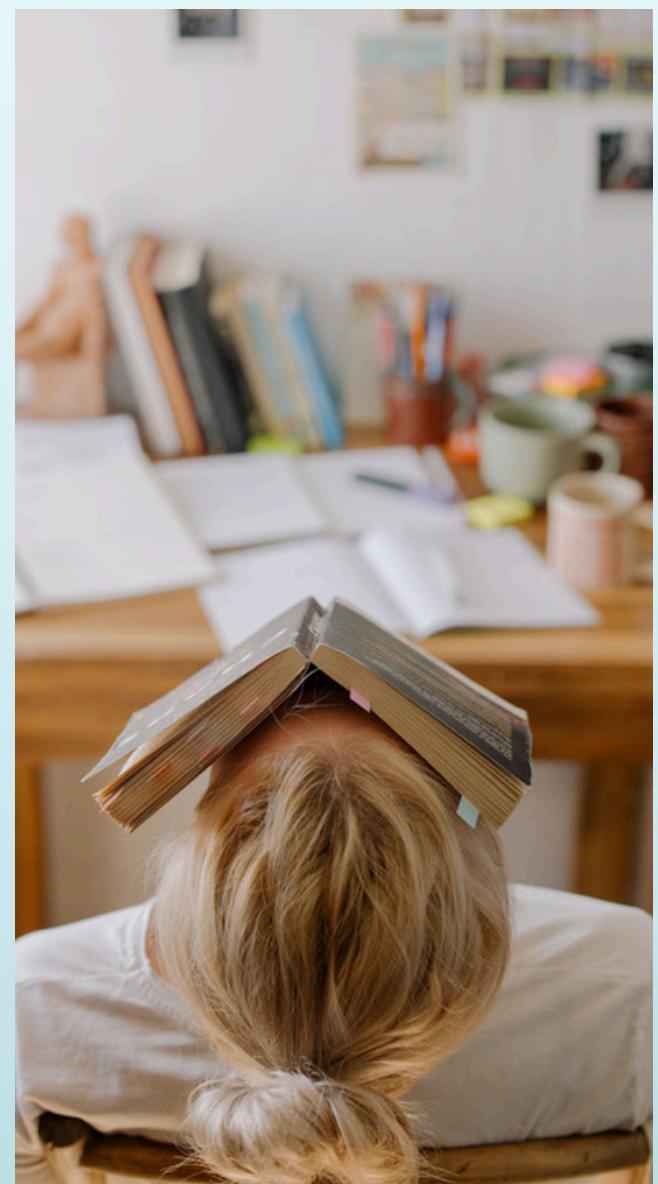
It also emphasizes that by putting executive function demands as students' first priority, they will benefit from long-term effects on their growth.

What made the biggest difference, however, wasn't just my schedule but the people around me. I found friends who supported me through tough times, taught me to collaborate and helped me manage my time efficiently. They reminded me that middle school wasn't just about being top of the class, it was developing with others. I will always be grateful to them, and to my teachers and family, who stood by me when I needed it most. In the end, I learnt that studying isn't just something you do to pass a test. It's a way to respect yourself, your time and your future. If you let your guard down even for a moment, it's easy to fall behind. But if you rise after every stumble, you'll grow stronger each time. Finally, I want to thank myself - the version of me who was once too afraid to speak up, too hesitant to take risks and too lost to imagine a better future. Given the fact that that version still found the courage to thrive.

If you're a student struggling with the chaos of middle school, remember that you're not alone. But it's not about how many times you fall. It's about how many times you rise.

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## FASHION TECH—NICHE TO MAINSTREAM

Harshitha J

Have you ever used ChatGPT to style yourself? Have you noticed that Cher's outfit matcher from Clueless can actually exist now?

All the existences we've dreamed of have come to life over the past decade.

What was once barely even considered to be related to fashion now has an entirely separate and dedicated industry: fashion technology—the ultimate common ground where aesthetics and function meet design from various fields.

***This interesting area, which was once considered niche, is becoming mainstream.***



### Usage of technology in fashion:

#### Kinetic fashion in garments:

Kinetic fashion refers to fashion clothing that "moves on its own". It fuses fashion design and engineering to create a wearable item that incorporates elements of movement and technology. Some examples are as follows:

- Anouk Wipprecht's Spider Dress: The spider dress is a fashion statement created with animatronic mechanical limbs with sensors that protect your own personal space. The piece made of huge amounts of 3D printing is sensitive to external stimuli; i.e., it retracts or expands its "spider legs" whenever the sensor picks up a stimulus.
- Ying Gao's kinetic dresses: Ying Gao has created numerous immensely creative dresses; a few prominent ones would be "Can't" and "Won't", these are interactive dresses that are made of organza, cotton mesh, electronic devices, and many more components that react to human movements. They also have facial recognition systems that are designed to pick up human emotions and react accordingly. "(NO)WHERE" and "(NOW)HERE" are also similar dresses that have luminescent threads that move using eye-tracking technology to follow the spectator's gaze.
- Chalayans Mechanical Dresses: Hussein Chalayan, a brilliant designer who merged technology and fashion in a beautiful way, marked his territory in the fashion industry at the 2007 Paris Fashion Week. He created 6 meticulous pieces that were heavily reliant on technology. One of his pieces was described to transform from a corseted Victorian gown to a beautiful crystal-beaded flapper dress. His forte was mainly focused on clothes that transform with respect to shape and design through the help of technology.

#### Light-up garments :

Light-up garments have made more common appearances recently. These are much easier to create and use. Some famous examples would be Zendaya's 2016 Met Gala look, where she wore a Cinderella costume that lit up around the ball gown's length, and the Galaxy Dress from Cutecircuit, a smart wearable dress that had 24,000 different colors of flat and small LEDs imbedded in it and was also noted in the Guinness World Record for most LEDs planted in a dress.

#### AR/VR usage:

Augmented reality and virtual reality are profoundly used in the fashion industry for the use of virtual fitting rooms, virtual try-ons, and digital fashion and virtual clothing design. Some prime examples would be: Farfetch's virtual try-on tool, Zara's AR app, and smart mirrors used in brands such as UNIQLO.

#### Conclusion :

The potential for technology in the fashion industry is immeasurable. The newer generation exploring the ethical application of technology in different industries needs to be appreciated. The pace of technology in the fashion industry, especially through the use of AR/VR, is quite rapid. We can expect fashion technology to be a high-paying and high-demand industry in the near future. This goes to prove that technology's use is not just limited to a certain field but can be applied in numerous fields that we once thought didn't correlate.

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## ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN OUR MODERN WORLD

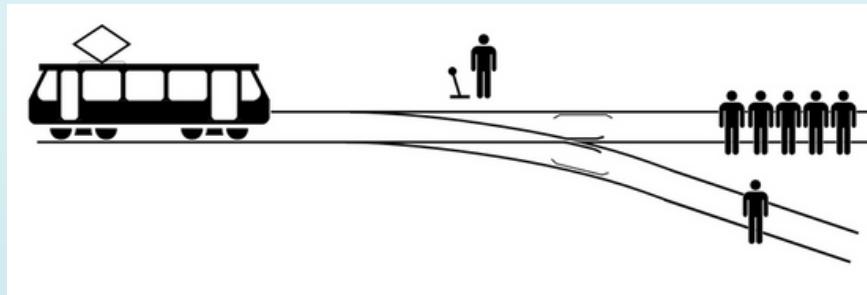
Teu-Khanh Phuong

The trolley problem still remains one of the most famous ethical dilemmas today. This referred to a thought experiment presenting a predicament between two specific situations: one that leads to the death of multiple lives, while the other requires the sacrifice of one individual to save others. This usually involves a running trolley heading towards five people, raising the question of whether the trolley should switch its direction so as to save the group of people, but ultimately results in the killing of one person. The above thought experiment was developed by philosopher Philippa Foot in 1967 and adapted by Judith Jarvis Thomson in 1985. The trolley dilemma gives us the opportunity to think about the ethics and consequences of such an action, as well as whether the moral value of the problem is simply determined by its outcomes.



**Philippa Foot**  
**(1920 - 2010)**

to the first trolley problem. However, what caught the attention of the public is a distinction in how people handle the issue. While the majority would feel comfortable in throwing the lever, very few would approve of pushing the fat man off the bridge. Specifically, it has been reported that they believed pushing the fat man is a crime - an intentional act of killing someone.



Therefore, making a resolute decision is burdensome since humans often face struggles when facing a situation of two conflicting moral principles. On a more specific note, the modern world is filled with ethical dilemmas ranging from fields such as technology, education, and medicine, all of which require the knowledge and effective decision-making of scientists, professors, doctors, and ordinary people alike. In this article, we will explore the nature of ethical dilemmas, some of the most common ethical dilemmas of the 21st century, as well as the importance of educating students on such vital issues.

Another well-known variation of the trolley problem is the footbridge dilemma, which includes a person standing on a footbridge just above the tram tracks, facing the most difficult decision yet. This person can either choose to push the fat man next to him/her onto the track, therewith killing him, but is potentially able to stop the train and save the five workers below the track. The outcomes of this dilemma bear resemblance

### **The nature of ethical dilemmas**

Although we frequently face ethical or moral problems in our lives, most of them can be solved with good intuition. Still, ethical dilemmas are extremely complex challenges that can't be easily solved with the snap of a finger. They are problems individuals face in the decision-making process between two possible solutions to a problem, neither of which is entirely acceptable from an ethical point of view. It's crucial to understand that ethical dilemmas are not just deliberating between a right and wrong answer; rather, it's about navigating situations that include both options containing harms and compromises. Therefore, studying ethics is crucial in recognizing and contemplating ethical dilemmas. According to Aithor, "Ethics refers to the study of moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity. It involves distinguishing right from wrong, good from bad, and what is morally acceptable from what is not."

Ethical dilemmas can be divided into many categories, ranging from short-term vs. long-term consequences and individual vs. community to trust vs. loyalty and justice vs. mercy. Each of them is significantly important in everyday life and requires careful consideration of the potential consequences and effects that each decision has.

***"Ethics refers to the study of moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity. It involves distinguishing right from wrong, good from bad, and what is morally acceptable from what is not." - Aithor***

### **Common ethical dilemmas of the 21st century**

As humans explore and navigate the 21st century, ethical dilemmas have become trickier and more challenging than ever. What seems to be the latest advancement might propose ethical concerns along the way.

The most mind-blowing development of the 21st century is the further contributions and advancement of artificial intelligence, including generative AI, chatbots, and exclusive data to solve global issues. With this advancement come ethical concerns surrounding the use and application of AI in every imaginable field.

## ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN OUR MODERN WORLD

Teu-Khanh Phuong

According to an article written by UNESCO on artificial intelligence: examples of ethical dilemmas, it's unavoidable that AI can deliver biased results, especially gender bias, since AI and other types of search engine tools are commonly known for excessive machine learning. In simple words, this refers to the ability to analyze vast amounts of data and information in order to improve their performance. Therefore, the more frequently internet users apply AI tools in their daily lives, the more intelligent the tools get over time. As a result, AI developers wonder whether algorithms and large data sets used in training AI systems and for their decision-making should be minimized or be under strict inspection so as to avoid gender bias.

***"it's unavoidable that AI can deliver biased results, especially gender bias" - UNESCO***

On a bigger scale, AI methods can potentially have a huge impact on a wider range of areas, from the use of AI in judicial systems to aiding the decision-making process of legislative and public authorities. Some argue that AI has the potential to assist in a fairer criminal judicial system, in which machines have the capability to evaluate and eliminate irrelevant factors faster and more selectively than humans do. While a few ethical problems appear, including a violation against human rights, as well as a lack of transparency in using AI tools. The question remains in the judicial system: Would you want a robot to accompany you in the court of law, even if you are not sure of its effectiveness?



Recently, the term "redefinition of life" has spread controversy across the globe, along with the field of bioethics. For instance, when mentioning genetics and human development, we are not just indicating the possibility of picking your babies' eye color but also changing the DNA within a living organism to correct certain defects or prevent diseases.

Apart from the safety risks, human gene editing poses some thought-provoking ethical concerns. For households that have children suffering from genetic diseases, this advanced technology offers hope for a better future. Nevertheless, one must address and differentiate a fine line between disease treatment and human enhancement when referring to the implications and enforcement of gene editing. As News Medical Life Sciences put it, manipulation of gene editing has the potential to make you smarter, healthier, and double life expectancy.

The same question applies to animal testing—a long-debated issue among animal lovers, animal organizations, and scientists. While some agree that the use of animals in science experiments is a necessity in understanding disease mechanisms and ensuring the safety of drugs when used in humans, others hold a strong belief that animals deserve to be treated with care, and inflicting pain on animals just for the sake of humans is a clear violation of human rights.

### Conclusion:

Ethical dilemmas force individuals to face difficult situations when there isn't a clear right answer or solution. In particular, ethical decision-making plays an essential part in a holistic education for students. With effective ethics instructions and practical ethical dilemma questions at school, students have more opportunity to navigate their own moral decision-making and, most importantly, make decisions with complete confidence.

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## THE MEDICAL STUDENT SYNDROME: A FEAR THAT GOES BEYOND AN OVERWHELMING CURRICULUM

Minh Anh (Sofia) Tạ

Dreams of being accepted to medical schools become a reality for many annually. Yet, these assiduous students, who have committed to acquiring this admission and have prepared their mentality for the overwhelming workload, face an unforeseen obstacle - the Medical Student Syndrome (MSS).

Many questions are raised in regards to this intriguing concept, namely the meaning behind the concept, the cause of such syndrome, its harms, and the solutions to address the syndrome. In spite of such a seemingly perplexing concept, the answers appear to be much simpler than one would imagine and will be analysed with greater depth in the following work.



First and foremost, it is essential to comprehend the concept of MSS itself. In succinct words, MSS is a phenomenon where medical students, mostly in their early years of school, are in a state of fear and worry as they experience symptoms of diseases they learn about. Here, two key words or terminologies are fundamental when discussing the MSS which are "nosophobia" and "hypochondria", which are respectively defined in scientific terms as "an uncontrollable fear of having a certain disease" and "a persistent fear of having a serious condition emerging from delusions of contracting the disease and exaggerating minor symptoms despite the appropriate medical check-up and evaluation".

The reason behind the appearance of this syndrome lies in a constantly pressuring and strenuous environment that medical students are surrounded with. Medical education is considered to be one of the most academically and emotionally demanding training programs out of any profession, which reflects on the inevitable stress that medical students are continuously exposed to. Such tension consequently makes them prone to anxiety-related illness and delude themselves into increasing the severity of insignificant issues, which is where nosophobia and hypochondria arise.

This intense atmosphere is a factor that differentiates the probability of adopting anxiety-related diseases among medical students and the rest of the population, supported by a study conducted by the NIH in 2019 which demonstrated a 33.8% for anxiety among medical students, which is "substantially higher than the general population.". It is also widely believed that the infamous Covid-19 pandemic contributed to a heightened risk of developing the syndrome, but is yet to be researched more thoroughly.

***"Anxiety present in 33.8% of medical students is "substantially higher than the general population" - NIH***

Harms unique to medical students alone include the misinterpretation of normal symptoms or behaviours owing to their specialized knowledge, a substantially higher likelihood and frequency of burnout which affect their mental well-being and academic performance altogether. Similar to other mental illness, the MSS in tandem with other factors contribute to higher degrees of stress, anxiety and on a more severe level, depression or suicidal thoughts.

In spite of the growing concern regarding this matter, solutions have been proposed with an objective to address it. As an opening consideration, studying illnesses in-depth as well as expanding clinical knowledge can contribute to the prevention of the syndrome. Beyond proactive measures, widely recognizing and normalizing the fact of experiencing this syndrome would prove to be an effective moral approach. Indeed, only with a combination of numerous solutions can we tackle this issue in efficient means.

In brief, the MSS is a syndrome that should garner more attention, yet remains unaddressed and is a silent battle that individuals within the medical student community have to endure. Having mentioned several proposals, it is fundamental for the implementation of such methods accompanied by the exploration of newer approaches in order for a healthier environment where medical students can thrive. Addressing the MSS is not merely an act of kindness towards medical students, it is an act of safeguarding the future of healthcare.

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## UNDER PRESSURE: WHY KIDS ARE TURNING TO AI TO SURVIVE SCHOOL

Hai Lam (Apple) Nham Ngoc

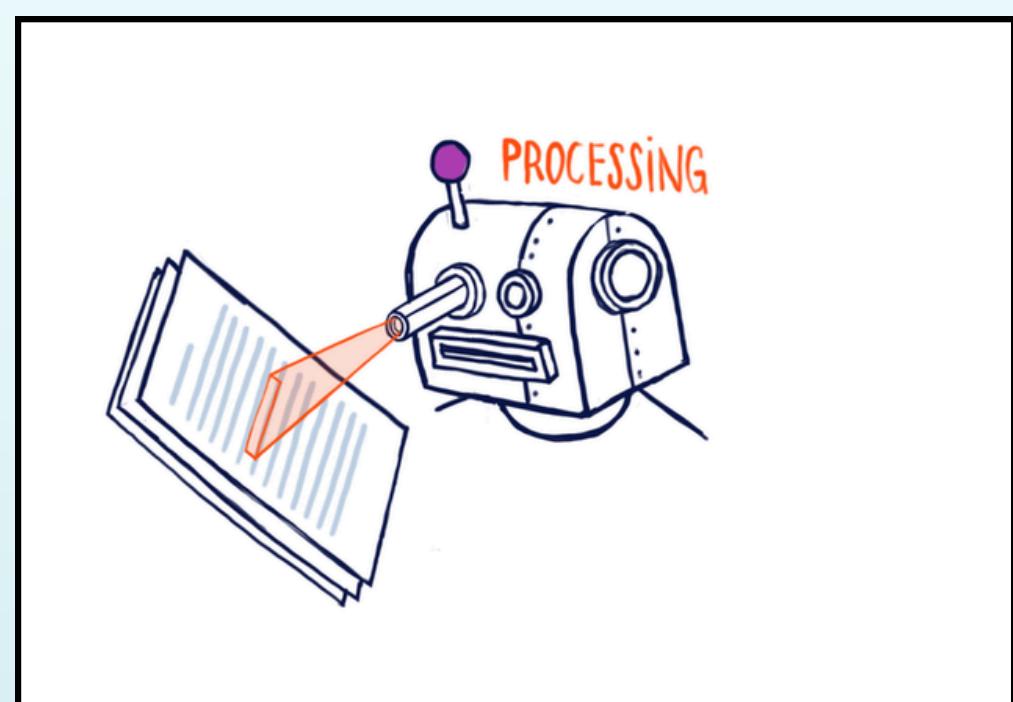
One night, a 13-year-old silently opens an AI algorithm and types in the prompt “Write an essay about human evolution,” and the AI quickly generates a perfected essay for them. The 13-year-old is relieved — they’ve satisfied both their teacher and their parents. This situation is becoming increasingly common among students today, along with the glorification of different AIs such as ChatGPT or Gemini as a way to finish schoolwork. However, beyond laziness, kids are increasingly turning to AI for schoolwork due to overwhelming parental expectations, fear of failure, and relentless peer comparison.

Common AI tools used by students include language models like GPT-3/GPT-4 and Bard for simple general learning, as well as tools like Quillbot that are used for paraphrasing and summarizing. Recently, especially for teenagers, AI has become a tempting shortcut for education as it provides both accessibility and ease, particularly in writing and research. While AI can offer personalized support — something that students may hesitate to ask their parents for — and ‘improved’ writing assistance, its misuse as a shortcut can lead to plagiarism, over-reliance on technology, but most of all — a huge misunderstanding in feelings between the students and the parents.



Teenagers are slowly entering a completely different phase in their life, where education is a high priority — especially in Asian cultures, parents have a surging desire for their kids to get high achievements like scholarships, prestigious college decisions, or simply a great GPA. This results in kids internalizing pressure to perform perfectly, not for their own happiness, but their parents’. This comes along with the fact that in many families, parents tend to compare kids to their peers, saying things that they don’t realize may hurt their children mentally like “Look at her, she is so talented”. With this pressure in mind, students feel like they’ve got little else to turn to except AI to make sure they don’t disappoint their parents, leading to an excessive use of it during these upcoming years. New Internet Matters research reveals that already a quarter of children are using AI tools to complete or help with their schoolwork. In total, four in ten children say they have engaged with generative AI, including over half of 13-14-year-olds.

There is a significant question when it comes to this topic: How does fear of failure or “not being good enough” push students to outsource work? Fear of failure makes students feel that their own efforts won’t measure up, causing them to depend on AI to complete work as a way to avoid judgement, protect their self-esteem, and meet unrealistic expectations without risking criticism and disappointment. And when these students get caught, what most parents don’t realize is that this fear of failure has huge emotional consequences including an increase in anxiety, depression, imposter syndrome, burnout, and feelings of shame and worthlessness. These negative impacts, in turn, affect how students perform in school or work, or how they interact with close family members, causing an endless cycle of dismay.



In the digital age, as social media rises, parents are more likely to post content about their child’s achievements on their Facebook page, especially in academics. And when other parents view these stories, this can lead to peer comparison, as teenagers aren’t the only age group consumed by social media. Additionally, with more peer comparison, invisible academic competition may happen among friends and classmates, shattering ‘unbreakable’ bonds, strongly affecting a student’s mental health. While it’s a natural part of life to lose touch with friends or for friendships to evolve, if an individual loses their friend from an academic competition that shouldn’t define their relationship, we should start considering whether “**keeping up appearances**” is really beneficial at all if it comes at the cost of meaningful social networks.

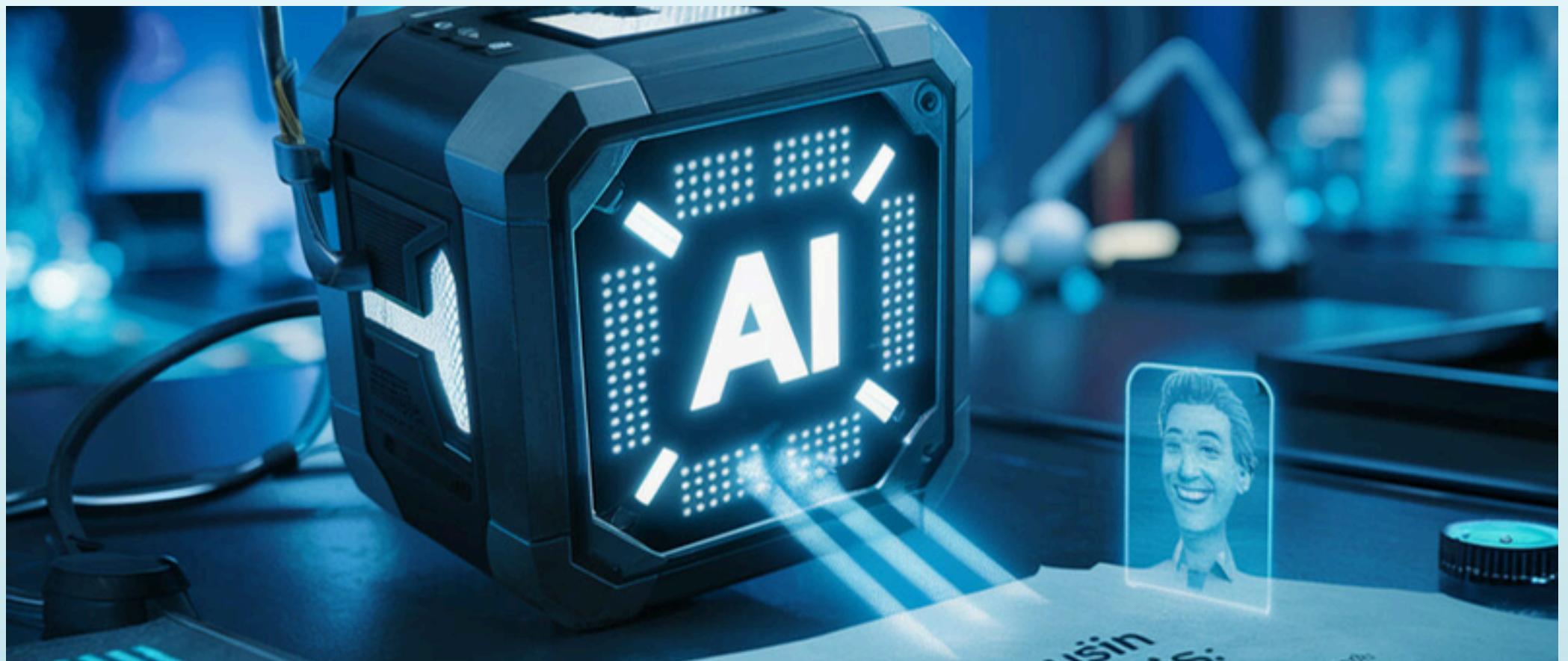
## UNDER PRESSURE: WHY KIDS ARE TURNING TO AI TO SURVIVE SCHOOL

Hai Lam (Apple) Nham Ngoc

Many students know that using AI to do their schoolwork crosses many lines — but when the pressure mounts continuously, it doesn't always feel like a choice. With homework deadlines looming, parents expecting top grades, and most classmates seemingly excelling in class, using AI can feel less like cheating, and more like surviving, in high-performing environments for students. The boundary between getting help and handing over the reins is also increasingly blurry. Is it okay to ask AI to explain a math concept? What about re-wording an essay paragraph — or just writing the entire thing? Without clear guidance, many students fall into a gray zone, where they are unsure where the support ends and academic dishonesty begins.

So, what can schools, parents, and educators actually do? The first and most important thing to do is to listen to the students. If parents constantly complain about "not understanding a teenager's mindset", they must listen to what their child has to say to truly understand the whole circumstance. And as kids, they tend to want their parents to be the first to reach out, which shows that they care. This shows that the parents are willing to help the kids commit to encouraging a growth mindset over A+ perfection in every field of study. Furthermore, it is also important to build healthy conversations around success, failure, and digital tools while teaching these children about the ethical, balanced use of AI. If these solutions cannot be implemented, the students will continue to feel hopeless and will continue to rely on AI, not sure which direction to go without structured advice that actually agrees with the student's thoughts.

In conclusion, using AI to survive in schoolwork is a symptom, not just a behavior to punish every time the students get caught. If we want kids to stop learning about AI out of fear, we must change the culture of pressure around them. When students feel supported, valued for their effort, and trusted to grow at their own pace, they're far more likely to use technology for responsibility in learning. If adults are willing to give honest conversations, empathy, and a shift in parental expectations, we can help these students believe that being their true selves is enough.



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## THE PARADOX OF TRAGEDY

Sanjana Vijayan

In a world full of romantic comedies and action thrillers, why did so many of us cry through Forest Gump, yet loved every minute of it? This fascination, otherwise, a philosophical puzzle, is known as the Paradox of Tragedy. Why do we enjoy or even seek out sad, horrifying, tragic, and painful experiences through art forms? Why do we avoid pain and suffering in our present, yet thrive on art that tends to evoke the same negative emotions? These are questions that drive the Paradox of Tragedy. Many philosophers, such as Aristotle, have shared their interpretations and theories regarding the paradox. According to Aristotle, art must evoke both pity and fear in the audience in order to be considered tragedy (Kocergina, 2022). This perspective employs us to ponder on the complexities and intersectionality of human psychology and storytelling. Despite its emotional turmoil, tragedy can be viewed as enjoyable due to inner catharsis.



Firstly, the consumption of media that evokes negative emotions acts as an outlet for an individual to release the negative feelings that are restrained within themselves. The notion of restraint here refers to the subconscious knowing that one will feel and experience those emotions in their lives/ The media is a way to express and relieve themselves of those emotions (Evers & Deng, 2016). Aristotle has mentioned that while tragedy -- a medium of art-- mirrors life, it does not do so in a one-dimensional way (Kocergina, 2022). The subsurface of the actors' inner world (e.g thoughts and feelings) are conveyed through their physical actions (Kocergina, 2022). The significance of the media can be highlighted here. Their actions are not simply stated, rather, the audience follows alongside the actor in their script in order to understand the larger context. This further aids the audience in cultivating their own emotions in relation to what is being viewed. As mentioned earlier, Aristotle noted the need for specific emotions like fear and pity to be present for tragedy to take place (Kocergina, 2022). Only when these emotions work alongside each other, can tragedy and catharsis truly take place, as the audience experience the full emotional depth that was originally intended from the art form. In a similar vein, while such media might evoke negative emotions, it also contrarily provides a sense of solace as it acts as a space for one to internalise and be involved with the emotions associated, which allows for catharsis (Evers & Deng, 2016).

In essence, while it is puzzling why many of us seek out art that makes us cry, hide, and even scream in fear, this behavior has been discovered to actually aid with emotional catharsis. Philosophers like Aristotle have shared their ideologies behind this phenomenon, and postulated the need for specific emotions like sympathy and fright to be evoked in order for tragedy to be present. The paradox of tragedy also explores and expands how storytelling, especially through the media, plays a significant role in humans and the way we process emotions.

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## CONTRADICTION IN EDUCATION: THE FILIPINO LEARNING CRISIS UNFOLDED

Eman Kristian De Leon

As a member of the United Nations and as a part of its national development plan, the Philippines has pledged to adhere to and advance progress across key sectors included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all of which aim to be accomplished by 2030. Among these, the country's focus on the fourth SDG—improving the quality of education for millions of children—has been noted as one of the most crucial and lasting. Despite this commitment and a large education budget of PHP 938,500,000,000 (approximately \$16.5 billion), the Philippine education system is still failing to address the needs of not only the students of the country but also the teachers, and the demand of the economy. The question thus arises: why, with such a gargantuan budget allocation, does the learning system in one of Southeast Asia's rising economies still fall short of even reaching the bare minimum standards of the world? What is at the heart of the Philippines' educational crisis, and how could it be solved?

For context, Filipino students spend approximately sixteen years of their studies, which is composed of a mandatory thirteen-year study within the K to 12 program: one year in kindergarten, six years in elementary, four years in junior high school, and two years in senior high school. Students can then opt for higher education, which usually takes three to five years, depending on the course that they have chosen. Completing the mandatory years of study should land one work in the country, although odds are that one would have a higher chance of being in the workforce when completing the additional years taken from college.



In 2018, the Philippines ranked last out of 79 countries in its first participation in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), performing poorly in reading comprehension, mathematics, and science. In 2022, the country ranked 76 out of 81, which, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is an indicator that students from the Philippines lack around five to six years' worth of study. Not only that, several other indicators reinforce the severity of the crisis. In 2019, 90% of 10-year-olds could not read a simple text, 83% lacked minimum proficiency in mathematics, 81% of three to four-year-olds were not attending preschool. Additionally, the number of functionally illiterate high school graduates, including junior high school completers aged 10 to 64, reached 6.45 million in 2024. Another stinging fact shows that Vietnam, which invests more or less the same cumulative amount per student, is performing better than students in the Philippines.



***Despite this long time for students to immerse themselves in information and education, there is still a clear backlog and failure for these students to be even functionally literate enough to be part of the wider workforce.***



## CONTRADICTION IN EDUCATION: THE FILIPINO LEARNING CRISIS UNFOLDED

Eman Kristian De Leon

These key indicators are clear signs that the education crisis in the country is real and not simply overstated. The reason behind it lies in different factors, but one of the most significant lies in how the education budget is allocated and used. Even though billions of Philippine pesos are being allocated to the education sector, it is still insufficient and too shallow to address the deep-rooted issues plaguing the system. Public schools remain underfunded. Classroom shortages persist, and the digitalization of learning materials is lagging behind 21st-century means of education. Far-flung schools are also not funded and reach as much as those close to urban centers. The rigidity of curriculum change means that flexible learning styles are not as prevalent as they should be, and the country continues to suffer from a severe teacher shortage. This is partly due to the lack of job benefits, as well as the high student-to-teacher ratio and problems with budgeting. These, alongside other factors, are at the heart of the education crisis in the country—and solving them will require a strong commitment from the government to strengthening the education sector and allowing reforms in the curriculum.

So far, the Philippine government has made efforts to address these issues by implementing changes and pursuing a higher budget. For one, the government has already made an overhaul to the K to 12 curriculum. Named the MATATAG curriculum, it aims to change the basic competencies of those studying from Kinder to Grade 10, making subjects more compact and integrating more technology into the study of Filipino students. An overhauled Senior High School system is also being implemented in the country, wherein the selection of an eventual college and career path is being made easier. Despite these efforts, the government still needs to address structural problems, in order to boost the performance, literacy, and overall competency of students in the country, especially as the budget continues to be increased.



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## ON JUDITH BUTLER'S THEORY OF GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Ingrid Tang

The question of "what is a woman?", which has sparked ferocious debate in the past years, has only intensified with recent cuts on gender-affirming care by the Trump administration. Indeed, there are many definitions of what constitutes a woman, in which we can divide into two sectors: biological and social.

On one hand, strictly scientific critics may define a woman as an adult female born with a pair of XX chromosomes and the capability of producing female gametes. However, individuals who consider the social aspect of it, such as Judith Butler herself, would oppose the notion that that definition is all that it means to be a woman.

Butler's essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" lays out their disbelief that certain gendered behaviours are natural, thus providing "a more radical use of the doctrine of constitution that takes the social agent as an *object* rather than the subject of constitutive acts." This leads them to question whether an individual can be said to constitute themselves.

They begin their essay with Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman." This, in a way, is the starting point of their argument, where they assert that one does not passively inherit gender identity, but actively produces it through repeated actions in a set of societal norms they are regulated by.

These acts, ranging from speech and dress to bodily movements and behaviours, are performative, not in the sense of being artificial, but in the sense that they produce the identity they appear to express. A transgender woman who has been treated as a female for many years would find it incredibly difficult to identify as a man once again because she has, in a sense, adopted the identity of a woman. As Butler writes, "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed." This leads them to claim that gender does not pre-exist its performance. Because these performances are embedded within social and historical contexts, they are widely perceived as natural or biologically determined, even though they are not.

Though this theory has profound and beneficial implications for transgender and nonbinary individuals, it does not state nor excuse the transitioning of an individual for exploitative or morally corrupt purposes. Butler makes it clear that performativity is not the same as voluntarism. According to them, gender cannot be chosen and freely changed on a whim; it is constraining. For cases like Korea's fake chaebol, Jeon Cheong-jo, who identified as multiple genders for various illegal purposes (including the exploitation of Olympic Fencer Nam Hyeon-hee), it would likely be considered a co-optation of gender norms, reinforcing the binary view of gender as fixed categories, which is precisely the view Butler desires to deconstruct.

Regardless, extreme and often hypothetical scenarios are many times weaponized against the trans community, which distracts from the violence and discrimination such communities face on a daily basis. In the end, Butler's theory of gender performativity poses a framework to oppose the idea of "predators in disguise" against trans and nonbinary persons, yet also demands a reevaluation of the definitions we put to ideologies like feminism.



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## CLIMATE FICTION: DOES THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY LIE IN PAGES OF INK AND PAPER?

Bảo Ngọc Trương

"People crowd around a single chestnut tree, hurling stones at its trunk as the nuts rain down in tremendous hail. Every hit shakes down food by the shovelful, and men dash around stuffing nuts into their caps, sacks, and trouser cuffs. This is the season of chestnuts: the fabled free banquet of America - yet it is merely another unexpected gift in a country where leftovers feel like divine blessing..."

This was how *The Overstory*, a Pulitzer prize-winning novel written by Richard Powers in 2018, began, with a setting in America where climate change shortens the food supplies. This book famously incorporates real scientific research, particularly about forestry, biodiversity, and climate change, into compelling fiction. Additionally, *The Overstory* stems from the experience of entering symbolically and physically into the ancestral forest we abandoned to become 'civilized', and seamlessly connecting the human characters with the forest itself.

*The Overstory* is only one of many famous books in the climate fiction genre - a sub-genre in science fiction revolving around a plot heavily tied to climate change. Cli-fi has typically been made up of "dystopian and pre-/post-apocalyptic worlds of the past, present, or future stricken by a myriad of climate change calamities," according to Kübra Baysal in *Apocalyptic Visions in the Anthropocene and the Rise of Climate Fiction*. Climate fiction has undoubtedly exploded over the last two decades. By enabling readers to imagine potential climate futures and persuading them of the gravity and urgency of climate change, it is often assumed to have a positive ecopolitical influence worldwide.

**Does it succeed and inspire change?**

An empirical survey in 2018, published in the journal *Environmental Humanities* by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, found that among 161 American readers of 19 works of climate fiction, "these readers are younger, more liberal, and more concerned about climate change than nonreaders of climate fiction". However, the survey also revealed that the majority of climate fiction readers were associated with "intensely negative emotions", rather than being motivated to take action.

Contrary to common beliefs, climate fiction does not have a strong influence over our perception of climate change. In August 2018, two researchers from the UK conducted a study over the bystander effect, which explains the reduction in helping behavior in people.

***Frankly speaking, in a situation where there is the presence of other bystanders, people are less likely to act.***

In this case, "personal distress is enhanced, and fixed action patterns of avoidance and freezing dominate", causing a passive psychological response. This is highly connected to how the human brain responds when reading a book: Instead of feeling more motivated to act in a dire situation presented by the settings, readers act passive, as the "other bystanders" being characters, are already present and engage in direct interactions with the environment itself. Being exposed to books or plots may potentially lead climate fiction readers to be less active in dealing with climate change and even make them feel distant to current problems that are so often mentioned and portrayed in imaginary worlds of storytelling.



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Climate fiction also fails in delivering actions, instead of motivation. The difference between motivation and action is that you can be motivated and still not take action, but you take action only when you are motivated. According to a European social survey, about three-quarters of the public say they're worried about climate change, yet less than a third would accept higher taxes on fossil fuels to cut emissions.

***Climate change apathy is the biggest threat to our planet, not climate change denial.***

The culprit? It's easier to believe than to make it happen. The truth is, climate fiction is not a negative influence, yet due to misunderstandings, it is often "glorified" as a source of motivation that may lead to actions. Climate fiction, like any other fantasy genre, is highly superficial, and is often based on an exaggerated portrayal of climate change, in which society is unlikely to relate to. A study from UCLA and Princeton showed that real data is much more effective at reducing climate apathy and inspiring action, and participants showed particular interest in data that recorded the loss of a local tradition, or statistics with clearer presentation of the same information. Ultimately, the future of humanity does not lie solely in the inked pages of climate fiction, but in the tangible choices we make outside the covers of a book. While climate fiction can offer a mirror to our fears and a vision of what may come, it is not a substitute for science, data, or real-world engagement. If we truly want to confront climate change, we must look beyond the imagined apocalypse and instead focus on reality. Stories may open eyes, but facts move hands. To secure a livable future, it is not enough to read about the world burning, but we must stand up, step out, and do the hard work of putting out the fire.

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## NO PLACE LEFT TO HIDE: WHEN YOUR THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR OWN

Linh Chi Nguyễn Ngọc

### 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, many fields of science and technology are more and more developed. So are neurotechnology advances. The most sacred part in us - our mind - may no longer be ours, and may no longer be private. A paralyzed patient used AI to transfer thoughts to text in a clinical trial — but unknowingly revealed private feelings. Many schools let their students wear EEG headsets that track their focus. There are many stories like theirs. In the world where our thoughts can be seen, where and what is freedom and our rights to our brains?

### 2. What are neural rights ?

There are many laws of freedom for our human rights, such as freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. Nevertheless, the law for our right of thinking has not been passed. According to EPFL news, neurorights can be defined as "the ethical, legal, social, or natural principles of freedom or entitlement related to a person's cerebral and mental domain; that is, the fundamental normative rules for the protection and preservation of the human brain and mind". Neurorights Foundation, United Nations Human Rights Council's Advisory Committee on Neurotechnology, Human Rights and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations, etc. are now

promoting neural rights. Neural rights are very important. If we lack them, we can not protect our thoughts and also can not have any freedom of thinking. As a result, there will be fewer and fewer people who are empowered to express their thoughts. The lack of neural rights can lead to the cruel control of powerful leaders, making the disappearance of speaking and thinking freedom.

### 3. The legal vacuum & global status

The first country to pass the law of neural rights is Chile. With the purpose of giving personal brain data the same status as an organ, in 2021, Chile's Senate unanimously approved a bill to amend the constitution to protect brain rights or "neurorights". October 25th, 2021, the Chilean president signs a constitutional amendment enshrining neurorights via protecting brain activity and data into effect. That makes this country the first country to have a law with the purpose of protecting thinking rights.

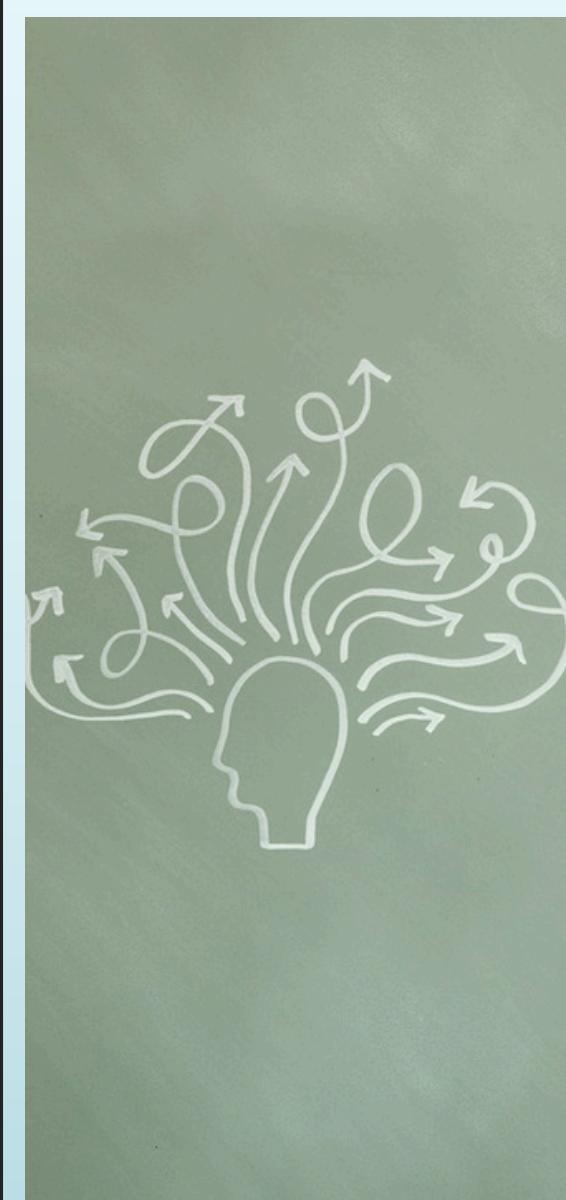


The EU also approaches the law of protecting this right. They passed the law of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Data Protection Regulation is applicable as of May 25th, 2018 in all member states to harmonize data privacy laws across Europe.

### *It became the toughest privacy and security law in the world.*

With the GDPR, Europe is signaling its firm stance on data privacy and security at a time when more people are entrusting their personal data with cloud services and breaches are a daily occurrence. The law was clearly written about the punishment if someone violates the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence." The GDPR entered into force in 2016 after passing European Parliament, and as of May 25, 2018, all organizations were required to be compliant. In other countries, neural rights laws have not passed yet. However, neural rights are indirectly protected through religious, speech, journalistic freedom.

### *These countries are going to pass laws to protect people's thoughts in the future.*



## NO PLACE LEFT TO HIDE: WHEN YOUR THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR OWN

Linh Chi Nguyễn Ngọc

### 4. Human impacts

Neural rights are also concerned with human ethics. Alimardani won the 2015 Monash Criminology Postgraduate Prize for the most outstanding research presentation at the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology's postgraduate conference in November. His talk looked at applying "fuzzy logic" - a non-binary way of coding information in computer engineering - to grade the severity of mental disorders among people accused of a crime. "In cases where the accused has a mental disorder, experts use vague concepts like 'poor', 'severe' and 'mild', which can have different meanings for different judges and juries, and result in different sentences in similar cases," says Alimardani, who was also a finalist in the 2015 UNSW Three Minute Thesis competition.

However, it could be biased and unethical for our private rights while we can control our behaviors. Our brains are divided into many different regions that each control different things, such as movement, language or decision-making. By scanning for telltale signals like electrical activity or blood flow, researchers can make inferences about what a person is thinking or experiencing. Scanning brains to know others' thoughts can lead to mind theft. "We are not yet at the

point of using brain scans in the courts, but there have been calls to do so," said James Giordano, a neurologist and neuroethicist at Georgetown University. "And as neuroscience continues to advance, their viability may increase as well." This has left Giordano with some concerns, which he and co-author Calvin Kraft discussed in a review published in the journal *Frontiers in Neuroscience*. In addition, in hiring, leaders can now use brain scanning to know the employees and applicants' thoughts. Employers today choose to screen candidates and assess employees in a number of new ways. These include high-tech cognitive and personality tests and brain scans obtained through devices that candidates must wear. Modern workers increasingly find companies no longer content to consider their resumes, cover letters, and job performance. More and more, employers want to evaluate applicants' brains. Businesses are screening talented job candidates with tech-assisted cognitive and personality tests, deploying wearable technology to monitor brain activity on the job and using AI to make decisions about hiring, promoting and firing people. However, according to the Los Angeles Times, research has shown that such assessments can lead to racial disparities that are three to five times greater

than other predictors of job performance, which is not right in America, a country with a high rate of democracy. Employees' minds and personalities should be subject to the most stringent protection. Although these new tests may offer some benefits for employers, they must not come at the cost of workers' privacy, dignity and freedom of thought.

### 5. Conclusion

We are the first generation that can lose the rights of controlling our mind but we can be the last generation to prevent it.

***The 21st century is still the time to fight for the freedom of thinking.***

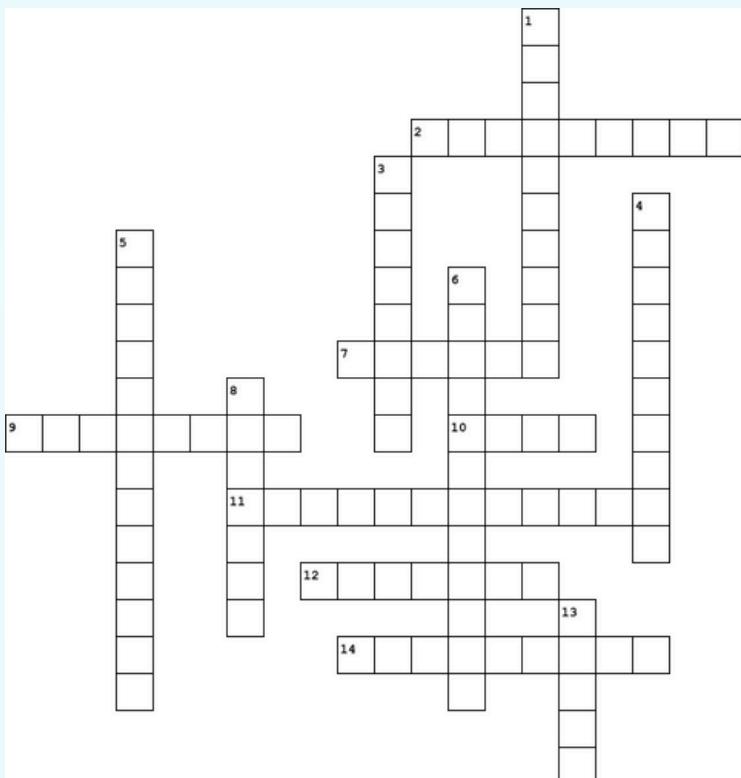
Private rights belong to each of us. And fighting for our freedom is our mission.

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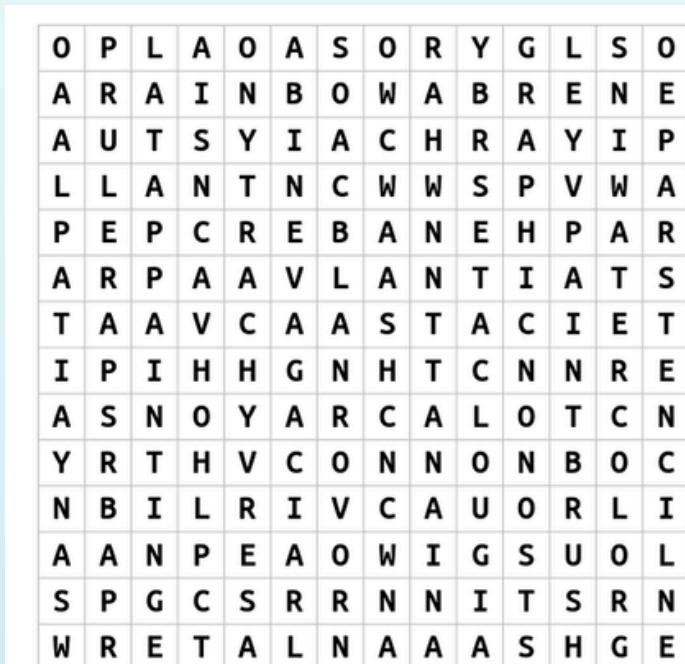
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## Crossword: Social Media



## Word Search: Art Smart



## Word Bank:

painting  
graphic  
ruler  
watercolor  
paintbrush

pastels  
stencil  
canvas  
crayons  
rainbow

### Across:

2. Users who subscribe to or regularly view another user's content updates.
7. A digital effect applied to modify photos or videos.
9. A service that enables users to create and share content or interact online.
10. A continuously updated list of posts from accounts that a user follows.
11. The process that authenticates the identity of an account holder
12. A phrase preceded by a symbol (#) used to categorize posts and improve searchability.
14. A programmed set of instructions that determines content visibility

### Down:

1. An individual who shapes opinions/behaviors through social media.
3. Popular subjects widely discussed on social media at a time.
4. The measure of user interactions such as likes, comments, and shares.
5. A private communication sent between social media users.
6. An alert that informs users about updates related to their account.
8. The protection of personal information
13. A temporary post visible for 24 hours

## Crypto-Quote: Take a Chance

"OPU FWFSZUJOH UIBU JT  
GBCFE DBO CF DIBOHFE, CVU  
OPUIJOH DBO CF DIBOHFE  
VOWJM JU JT GBCFE."  
- KBNFT CBMEXJO

### Instructions:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFRFLP = SYNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.