

Pandora's Box

Fletcher Soul Traveler

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Intro



I am the mother of all on this earth. Many of the indigenous people around the world still have a connection with me. You call them primitive yet they are highly advanced.

You may have advanced technology yet your spiritual and emotional growth is stunted.

For thousands of years, you have been fighting wars with one another. You are sawing the branch that you sit on. Look at how you treat me. You have no respect. I'm not judging you. I just call a spade a spade. You are in midst of one of the greatest transformations anywhere in the universe. It is happening right before you. Millions of people are waking up from their slumber.

You are beginning to realize who you truly are. We are in the game together. You and I are one.

I have been around for billions of years and so have you. Yet today you are still sleeping and are totally focused on getting by in life. Your ways are backward.

They don't work. Your mirror is cloudy. Every step you take you are walking with me yet you are oblivious to this.

Your entire society is presently beating a drum that is out of tune. You think everything is well yet you have forgotten our connection. You have forgotten your true essence.

Anger is so pervasive today in your world. Everyone is angry with each other. It seems like in America people are polarized. They don't listen to each other.

Many people have a tremendous amount of hate towards each other. I have a love for all. That is my nature. I am patient and tolerant. I am kind. This is my nature.

You have forgotten your true essence. Presently you are a mixture of light and dark. You are going from darkness to light. I am trying to remind you how

incredible you truly are. What if you had an earth Mother who has been here since the dawning of time? I hold you in my arms yet you don't realize it. You think you are alone.

Because of this and your free choice, you have at times tremendous pain. It's hard to be truly happy when your happiness is external. You are like leaves blowing in the wind.

You are happy and then you are sad. You get angry when you're in a traffic jam. The wise man would see a traffic jam as an opportunity to meditate and be aware with his eyes open. One would feel gratitude and remember our divine connection.

You see without being connected to your true nature you will have a hard time navigating this world. You really won't be in harmony with me and the universe.

Need I say more? Take a look at the world around you. Is it in harmony with nature? You have a President who is going backward in time undoing all the environmental goods He is totally out of synch with me.

You see a strong ego can be quite damaging. A man must develop kindness and humility to gain true wisdom. True wisdom comes from within. You know when to smile in the face of adversity. You have nothing to prove.

I am what I am. I do not judge. I will give sincere and honest opinions. You may not agree with me. That is your choice. But I am your Mother.

Remember there were probably times when you didn't listen to your worldly Mothers advice. At some point in time, you did something and you thought I wish I would have listened to my Mothers advice. I wouldn't be in this certain situation.

Well, life is a series of beautiful lessons to learn. We will never stop learning. Listen to the various message I have for you. I'm speaking directly to you. You are on the verge of waking up from your slumber.

Pandora's Box



Pandora's Box is an artifact in Greek mythology connected with the myth of Pandora in Hesiod's Works and Days.

In modern times an idiom has grown from it meaning "Any source of great and unexpected troubles", or alternatively "A present which seems valuable but which

in reality is a curse".

It took me many years to embrace a cell phone. Mind you I have been a software engineer for over 35 years. Yet just like a pager in the eighties,

I didn't want to be tied down to my job 24/7. I didn't come down to earth solely to work. I love a work-life balance. Today it's almost next to impossible to achieve that.

I've been thinking for over 15 years that the cell phone is one extra layer between us and our true nature. Before the pandemic, I would sit in a restaurant and see entire families absorbed in text messaging and on Facebook.

It didn't take much to see that our society was addicted to it. Yet I didn't truly know to what extent.

My twin brother John told me about this documentary called The Social Dilemma. It was an eye-opener. It took me to such a deeper level of how deep this problem is. I was just skimming the surface.

Social media and cell phones truly opened up Pandora's Box. In the beginning, both started simple. I remember when the WWW first came out it was a cute creation.

It was simple. Since then it has developed into a huge beast that knows every step you take. It knows your likes and dislikes. Day by day it captures every step you take. I mean almost literally. If you are interested and go to a site to buy something it will capture that information. When you go to Facebook ads will appear out of nowhere for this company.

Every like and dislike is being captured. It's like millions of supercomputers are learning about you. In the beginning, it wasn't that way. Here's the funny part.

This is done for social media companies to make money off of you. A funny and sad part of the movie is they mentioned only two types of users exist.

They are drug users and there are social media users. I find that quite fascinating. Both of them are extremely addicting yet we can't see the forest from the trees.

An addict doesn't know he has a problem. Our entire world is being manipulated without us being aware. All for the sake of making money from advertisers. They are making billions off you.

They have built a business model where you get addicted without knowing it. They have intentionally done this on purpose. They know they are selling drugs more powerful than heroin.

Yet this drug doesn't come from the outside. It comes from your own chemistry set inside of you. How ingenious and frightening? You are addicted to something that exists inside of you.

It can't be traced to the opioid epidemic. This is where the drug manufacturers got you hooked to make billions in profits.

Stanford university even has a course on this. The sad thing is that social media companies hire the brightest and best in all fields to manipulate you. Now that's the scary thing.

Imagine the complete computer network is hard-wired to control you. All for the sake of the almighty dollar. Where are we going? What can we do about this? This book will hopefully help in understanding the problem and the necessary steps we can take.

Gathering Wisdom



I think that we will never stop learning and growing. We gather wisdom on this incredible journey of life.

We can never clap our hands and say well now I know everything. I have reached my destination. To be honest I don't think there is a final destination. Even if you meditate for a trillion years there is more to learn on this journey of life.

To be honest that blows my mind. Just think that the incredible power of love exists inside of you. Yet today I see so many people walking around with their cell phones in their hands.

They are crossing the crosswalk and staring at their phones. They are completely oblivious to their surroundings. I like cell phones yet at times I think they are one more extra layer that we create between us and God. Not only that but we are losing touch with the earth.

It's sad to go to a restaurant and see families staring at their cell phones. None of them are communicating with each other. I feel at times where are we going? Technology can help guide us to discover the vast wisdom of the universe or it can bind us more to our ignorance. It is our choice.

We are like a parrot sitting in our cages. The door of wisdom is open all the time. Yet we refuse to fly out of our cage. Wait I just received an important message. Johnny is going to go on a date with Sally. Wow, that's important news.

Lately, I have been saying that scientists say we see only 1% of the light spectrum. This means that we are missing almost completely the picture of life. The light spectrum contains the wisdom of the universe.

Imagine the quantum field exist everywhere yet most of the time we are playing the same tapes from the past. We live our lives in survival mode. We don't call it that. Yet we don't live in the center of the hurricane. The winds of the mind blow us all around.

True wisdom occurs when humanity starts to be aware and conscious of the jewel within. When mankind realizes that the subconscious controls 95% of our actions and learns how to reprogram them we are one step toward going in the right direction.

This is the video game of life. We are at the level where science and mystics are both talking about the same thing. Millions of people are advancing to the next level.

Millions of people are learning how to be proactive beings. Millions of people are gathering precious wisdom. They know that the vast universe exists inside every one of us.

We are becoming great explores. Not only physical but internal. We send satellites into the sky and they can only go 15,000 miles per hour. Just think we have to go 186,000 per second and travel two years to reach the closest star.

We are traveling going put put into the vastness of space. Yet we have to start somewhere.

Imagine there are civilizations out there that can travel anywhere in the universe in less than a second. We have a lot of wisdom to learn. Ponder this over. What are you doing to discover yourself? After all, this is your true nature.

Behavior Modification Empires



This is from Jaron Lanier.

I have been reading this fascinating book by Jaron Lanier. The title is called Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts.

<https://www.amazon.com/Arguments-Deleting-Social-Media-Accounts/dp/125019668X>

I have spent a huge chunk of my life studying ways to maintain a balance between the mind, body, and soul. You could say I'm fine-tuning myself just like you would fine-tune a guitar. This life is an incredible journey.

For the past 10 years or so I've been interested in the works of Joe Dispenza and Bruce Lipton. I'm interested in the evolution of man.

Jaron Lanier provides a deep discussion on the effects of social media which he calls behavior modification. He calls these companies behavior modification empires instead of social media giants. I agree with him. Social media has come a long way.

The founders knew from day one of the implications it might have on the world. If they were thinking properly and acting out of integrity we might not be in the mess we are in.

The pursuit of making the almighty dollar wins. Ethics and morals go out the door. You may say what does this have to do with me? Everything. Did you know that in every single moment you are being tracked and monitored? Facebook knows all your likes and dislikes. Behavior modification is running the show.

Bruce Lipton, Joe Dispenza, and all the healing arts around the world teach you that you are your own chemistry set. Only you can change yourself.

When I grew up in the fifties I heard that at movie theaters they would put in the movie autosuggestion on the screen like buy popcorn or buy a coke. It would appear so fast you wouldn't even see it. It worked so great that the FCC banned it.

Yet today we have these behavior modification empires that have no governmental controls whatsoever. They have been extremely sophisticated. Imagine the Opioid epidemic is kindergarten compared to these empires.

Imagine they are programming your subconscious and life without you even knowing it. They hired the brightest and best behavior modification experts in the world. They know exactly what they are doing and raking in billions along the way.

They control you. They understand the mind and body connection and use it against you. They are playing around with your chemistry set and making you addicted.

You are just like a drug user yet a drug user at least knows that he is the one who is responsible to quit or not. These behavior modification empires know how to deliver drugs to you without ever giving you an actual drug. Your brain produces it.

This is what is so sinister about this. The entire world is programmed to make billions for these companies.

Just think they use all the tools to get you hooked. Likes and dislikes. All different sorts of emojis. They want you to be addicted. The longer you stay around the more money they make.

What kinds of effects does this have on the world? Look at these companies today. What do they stand for? Making a profit above anything else. Ethics and morals are out the door. Social media contributes to flamethrowing, and get angry at others who have a different opinion than yours. They actively encourage this so they can make more money. Remember there are no ethics involved here. It's just a business for them. Even misinformation is encouraged.

They make billions off of it. I laugh when they say they can't filter it out. They can capture the entire world and know exactly your likes and dislikes. It's custom-designed exactly for you.

Yet they don't know how to filter this. You can probably answer this question yourself.

Playing With Your Chemistry Kit

We are all playing with our own chemistry kits.

Unfortunately, we aren't aware of it.

Many people blow themselves up without realizing it.

In every moment thousands of chemicals are being released throughout your human body.

Mankind is spinning out of control.

We are drinking our own poison.

We get angry at someone or a political point of view.

In the meantime, we drink our angry poison.

We then wonder why illness arrives on our doorsteps.

The wise man understands the repercussion of negative thoughts and emotions.

Moment by moment one plays this video game of life with awareness.

One tap into the infinite ocean of love and compassion.

This is our true home.

My advice is to learn how to change your own chemistry.

Remember you are the master chemist.

Only you are playing with your chemistry kit.

Ponder this over.

This could make your life so much easier.

Your body Is Your Drug Store

The art of Taoism has been around for thousands of years.

I find it quite fascinating that they talk about the elixir of life.

This elixir is not an herb or any external substance.

This elixir exists inside of us.

In India, they talk about the nectar from God that flows within.

Yet here we are taking drugs for our ailments.

Each drug has a huge side effect.

Now I'm not saying don't take drugs.

I'm saying maybe there is a better way.

For example, in China, you pay your doctor when you are healthy.

You don't pay when you are sick.

Mind you in modern-day China this isn't always the case.

But the point is that you focus on balance and harmony.

In our culture everything is fragmented.

We don't focus on the harmony of the mind, body, and soul connection.

When I was young I heard about the concept of being in harmony with the universe.

To be quite frank I had no idea what they were talking about.

Here's an example of being out of balance.

In my junior year, my parents took our family to Yosemite.

It's probably one of the most incredible places on the planet.

Yet I couldn't see the forest from the trees.

I was miserable.

Why because I missed the ocean.

Now that is out of balance.

Before we can begin to be in harmony with the universe let's try being in harmony with the planet earth.

Currently, man has divorced himself from our precious earth.

We pride ourselves on the technology that we have.

Yet we are totally emotionally immature with the earth.

Where am I going with this?

Imagine if man was in absolute harmony with the earth.

Can you imagine the wisdom that it has?

It might tell you that your body is your drug store.

Every thought whether positive or negative secretes over 1400 positive or negative chemicals.

Currently, most of America is totally out of balance.

Look at all the problems today.

I used to work for the USDA.

I saw my friends taking up vaping.

I couldn't believe how much smoke came out when they exhaled.

It was at least 5 times the smoke from regular smoking.

No wonder there is such an epidemic.

Imagine drugs existing inside of you that are dormant.

To receive them you must be in balance and harmony.

In every moment we have the opportunity to be conscious and aware.

Currently, we are playing the same tapes over and over again.

I can guarantee that these elixirs of life will work better than any physical drugs.

Your body has the intelligence to produce these for you.

How many people listen to their bodies?

How many people monitor their thoughts?

How many people dive into silence?

How many people monitor their actions?

You see this is a moment-by-moment conscious event.

When we are unconscious chaos exists.

Look at the world around you.

Does it seem to be in balance and harmony?

The question is do you want to change?

Are you content with the current conditions?

This isn't just Richard on a soapbox.

I'm asking real questions.

What do you think?

You are your savior.

Nobody is going to save you except yourself.

All the scripture point the way but you must walk on this path.

This human body is hardwired to find God within.

We are on this incredible journey to discover our true nature.

We are out of balance and yet we can learn how to be in balance.

These are exciting times.

Millions of people are waking up.

Behavior Modification Empires 2



I'm still completely flabbergasted that this is still under the radar. Why isn't the world at large talking about this? One of Google's employees talked about this a few years ago. It caught the attention of the entire company.

Yet a month later the dust was swept underneath the carpet. Just think for thousands of years people have been talking about discovering your true nature and yet very few people have done so.

Yet within the last 15 years, these companies have been able to completely control us without us knowing it. Even the governments around the world are ignorant of this fact.

I wish we could use technology to promote kindness for all. Technology should be used to unite us not divide us. Behavior modification companies are making us addicted just like drug users for profit.

We are just as addicted as drug users except we don't know it. Both of these users are addicted to dopamine. This chemical is produced by the human body. It is highly addictive yet the more one experiences it the more the body gets addicted to it. It's like you need more of the drug to get high.

Scientists like Bruce Lipton and Joe Dispenza teach people that they can control their chemistry sets. I've been meditating for almost fifty years. Yet I've noticed the addiction mechanism of social media. I couldn't quite pinpoint it until I started to research this subject.

I am completely blown away by how these companies get away with this. As I said it's completely under the radar by the world at large. These companies are making billions of dollars and have no intentions to change.

Yet your life is being programmed by them without you being aware of it. They are consciously programming your subconscious mind. Remember ninety-five percent of your life actions come from your subconscious mind while only five percent comes from your conscious mind. These companies have hired the best

and brightest behavior specialists in the world. They know what they are doing. Their goal is to make you addicted so they can make more profit. Imagine thousands of supercomputers being used to track your every action.

You are being tracked and programmed every second. Unfortunately, it's done behind the scenes. This is one of the reasons we should unplug from these social media platforms.

Sure there is plenty of good things about it yet the bare fact they use this to control you and make you addictive so they can make huge profits. The day they have a different means of making money this madness will be stopped.

Being a Bully



What is it that being online brings out the negative in people? Ever since CompuServe and before there were bullies out there. I had my share of bullies when I was young. I didn't know at the time that bullies are highly insincere.

That's why they are bullies. It's a way to hide all the pain and hurt that lies inside of them. Even 30 years ago I saw this time and time again. Even if you were trying to solve a problem in the coding world there would be bullies. Unfortunately on social media, there are plenty of bullies.

People will mock and make fun of anyone. We even have a President who will bully anyone through his tweets. It's only one-sided. Anyone is fair game. To be quite frank I've never seen anything quite like this.

For the last four years, every day has been an adventure of what he is going to say next. Look I'm not being political about this. I'm being a human being and saying what I see. Twitter should have shut down his account years ago.

For example, he knows President Obama was born in the states. Yet he still to this day spreads these lies. I must give him credit if you spread a lie and say it over and over again people will believe it.

The same goes for his falsehood of the election was rigged. He was saying this way months before the election. In each state, both republicans and democrats said there was no evidence of anyone tampering with the elections.

At stake is the foundation of our democracy. If the American citizens don't believe in the integrity of the voting system democracy will be eroded.

Yet the President still refuses to concede. He knows he lost the election yet he continues his ways. You can tell the character of someone who loses graciously and someone who is a bully.

Yet President Biden hasn't received a letter from the GSA due to the President holding it back. President Biden can't even receive the daily security briefings which are the highest security conditions in the world.

I think Twitter should delete his account. There should be a policy if someone is a bully and spreads lies his account should terminate. He has said over 25,000 lies since taking office. If I told you just five lies you would probably never talk to me again.

His words and actions have provided a means where telling lies and being a bully are acceptable. We are saying to this world that a bully and a liar are acceptable to US citizens.

Look politics is much more than making laws. A person's ethics and morals are part of the job. I wrote this book Conscious Politics a few years back.

YouTube



PDF



I believe that in any given situation change roles. If you perform an act and if the other side did the same act and this act was wrong don't do it.

For example, when President Obama was in office he tried to get a judge nominated to the Supreme Court. Yet the other side said this was an election year so they nominated against this. Ok, no problem. The Republicans said they would accept this if the roles were reversed.

Yet just about one week before the election the Republicans voted for a new Supreme Court judge. They should have waited until after the election. Look I don't think we should vote with party lines.

I think both sides of the aisle are acting like immature adults. Both sides can't get along with each other and hate each other. That is no way to lead a country.

Yesterday over 160,000 innocent people got the Coronavirus. We have a President who said that Biden was weak for wearing a mask. The President even started a movement of people against wearing a mask and believing in the scientific community.

Now if the democrats did such a thing the Republicans would be in an uproar.

I'm saying we should stop our petty fighting and get the job done. We need to compromise and bow and bend. We need to see that both wings are necessary for the eagle to fly.

Some of my friends say that democrats are evil. Let's face it we all want a better future for our children and the world. It's time for us to wake up. It's time for social media companies to ignore their profits and do the right thing.

If someone is being a bully and spreading lies give them a few warnings. If they continue to yank their account. The world must stand against bullies and people spreading misinformation.

They know exactly what they are doing. These media companies are responsible for allowing this over and over again. They are making billions and know that this is wrong and unethical.

Our democracy as we know it is at stake. Do we allow the bullies and people who lie to lead the world? Do we allow social media platforms' sole goal to make billions of dollars supporting these policies? It's time for reform at all levels.

Misinformation



Misinformation is prevalent in this world. Every day we are inundated with bits of information. Some are true while some are made up.

The soviets are very good at this. They even have departments that specialized in this. During the past two elections, we were inundated with all sorts of false information.

In fact, they are geniuses when it comes to this. The average person including myself doesn't know what is true or false when reading it. Unfortunately, many media companies get paid billions to promote this activity.

The owners of these companies say they don't have the means to filter it out yet they have the means to custom-designed information for every one of us. Once again when the bottom line is profit over morals and ethics all sorts of unethical behavior occur.

For example, Roger Stone started a movement against voter fraud in 2016. Since then the President and he have promoted this. Both the Democrat's and Republicans' voting officials deny such claims.

Yet the President continues to add gasoline to the fire. Unfortunately, many people believe in this and are acting upon this. Delivering misinformation is a way to convince people of an untruth is a truth.

If you say the same untruth over and over again people will believe it. The current administration has done this over and over again.

Yesterday I saw on NBC news that over 160,000 people got the corona virus. That's just in one day. Over a thousand people died. Yet not one word from the current administration.

They still don't promote masks and social distancing. More than 130 Secret Service officers have got the virus. Most of them got these at the Trump rallies being held recently. Inside the White House, more than fourteen individuals

contacted the virus. Let's turn this around. If the previous Democrat administration did this the Republicans would be in an uproar.

Yet we become so blindsided when our side does it. We lose discrimination. We must be able to see both sides of the coin. We must see the forest from the trees.

We must go beyond holding on to truths of the party line. As a nation, we must go beyond it. Both sides are wearing tinted glasses. I'm right and you're wrong. We must take off our glasses.

Only then can we cross the bridge to the other side. When we think the opposite side is the enemy we are doomed as a nation. We should only vote for those who want to truly help the American people. If they talk trash about the other side don't vote for them.

When we as a nation start behaving like mature adults we can solve this problem. This nation is angry towards one another with no end in sight. We are acting like spoiled brats. Both sides are vindictive towards each other. They intently perform actions to irate the other side.

They start spreading rumors is misinformation that isn't true. It seems to me that falsehood is more dominant than the truth in our society. When we were young we were taught to get along.

Unfortunately today we are divided and don't respect each other. We want everybody to think just like us. A mature being can listen and be respectful towards others.

He is emotionally mature and doesn't have to get angry when someone has a different point of view. This seems rare in our society today. Yet our foundation is built on immigrants from all around the world.

This is the melting pot. We must welcome diversity and embrace it. We are so narrow-minded in our thinking. Somehow we never grew up. Many bullies from the playground spend their entire life being bullies in the playground of life. We see it so evident today in our society.

This life is so precious yet we don't see it. Our anger is a lens through where we will never see the truth.

A person who spreads misinformation is bringing more darkness upon the land. The light doesn't exist in falsehood or misinformation. Many wars have been started by this.

Only you can change your attitude. Nobody can do it for you. Unfortunately, common sense is uncommon.

Be kind – Don't be a flame thrower

1

How Everyone is a Performer in the Social Media Circus

Are you a flamethrower or a firefighter?



Photo by [Elijah O'Donnell](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Have you shared any information or personal thoughts about this COVID-19 pandemic with anyone?

Did you get any information about this latest crisis via any source of media?

¹ [How Everyone is a Performer in the Social Media Circus](#) | by Kathy Brunner | Publishous | Medium

Billy Joel said it ever so poetically in his song, [“We Didn’t Start the Fire”](#).

The truth is someone *HAS* to start the fire but often we never really discover who that is. I think it’s because once the flame thrower lets loose, more people are interested in fanning the flames than attending to the thrower.

Isn’t that really what a good storyteller does? Don’t they fan flames to make the story a page-turner?

And who doesn’t love a great story?

So, while we might agree the media is too biased, too liberal, too purist or too controlled, it doesn’t stop us from watching, reading, seeking, and following.

We are more busy looking at what others have said, written, posted, commented on, twittered about, pinned, or shared than we ever have been before.

Our access to instant media is digital cocaine.

The media is often the source of our information, advertisement, education, and socialization.

We turn to Google before we seek a real person.

We depend on the media for economic, health, political, and environmental information.

And we want our media instantly and conveniently. We can't even imagine living in a time where a rider on a horse knocked on doors announcing the "*The British are coming!*" Those were some great stories too, but obviously Fairytales!

We just ask our *Siri*, *Google*, or whoever our friendly digital minion is to serve us up our weather, directions, menu, news, and music while requesting they adjust our temperature, turn on our water and lock our doors.

Everything is right at our fingertips.

The spectacle of the circus media became our entertainment.

In the age of "want it now", we have allowed flame throwers, jugglers, and media magicians to infiltrate our everyday lives.

Remember the old telephone game? One person whispered something in another's ear, they shared it to another, and another and by the time that information got to the end of the line, the message may have been quite different than what was originally said.

Perhaps we aren't just innocent bystanders watching the circus.

We might just be the performers as well.

If you have ever posted, reposted, pinned, commented on, hashtagged, or shared you have participated.

Most of us never think of ourselves as media flame throwers, but if you have ever voiced an opinion you have been one. That's a good thing! Sometimes the only way to take a stand is to hold on to your ideals.

But, if your opinion causes someone else to feel uncomfortable that flame gets a little more out of control. Maybe no harm was done but nevertheless, now we have a bit more heat than we might have been prepared to handle.

And, if someone takes that opinion and embellishes it in a way you had not intended now you might be the victim of another person's flame-throwing.

Your opinion might now be more racist, political, or insensitive than you ever planned.

No, you didn't start the fire, but you might have lit a match.

What is controversial to someone may not affect another in the same way.

The recent pandemic experience demonstrates this so well.

You have people protesting the shut-down while others beg for the country to stay closed.

Why such opposite reactions?

Because when it comes to any media there will always be flame-throwers and firefighters. There will always be two sides to every story and if it was anything less, we would certainly be a country far more restricted in freedom of speech.

Flame throwers do not necessarily start rumors or gossip. I was a media flam-thrower myself this week. I saw a [YouTube](#) video that made me question many things. Sent to me by a long time friend, I passed it on to others. I don't know if everything I saw and heard is accurate. I reacted because it mattered to me.

Have you heard some media flame-throwers lately? Some told you to shelter in place and some have told you to just live your life.

Some flame-throwers have shut down businesses and others have opened them up. Now, some media flame-throwers are sharing

that a higher percentage of people hospitalized due to the virus have been those who actually were sheltering at home!

Flame-throwers have strong opinions, bold reactions, and decisive resolutions.

That doesn't mean they are right or wrong. It means this is how they respond.

Firefighters come into a crisis and try to control it. Sometimes they can and sometimes they can't.

When they can't it doesn't mean they didn't do their job. It just means the result was not what they hoped for.

[In a recent article](#), I wrote about how easy it is to not recognize yourself in this current pandemic crisis, but something I realize more is maybe during a crisis we actually become who we always were meant to be.

Maybe a crisis brings the raw out in us; the transparency, the deepest of thoughts and feelings.

Maybe in a crisis, we find that part of ourselves everyday life has jaded and worn down.

Perhaps authenticity really metamorphs from a crisis.

So maybe we need to “break” in order to truly rebuild.

Maybe that’s really why they call it, “Breaking News!”

We didn’t start this fire but I bet we have started some.

Maybe they were tiny fires that burned out on their own or maybe they were larger ones that affected us throughout our lives.

Flame throwers don’t necessarily start fires to be destructive although some can turn out that way.

I recently watched the movie, [Richard Jewell](#). While I have read the director and producer took liberties with the script, there is no doubt the media threw a flame that ruined a life regardless of what actually was finally revealed.

I know these times are unpredictable and constantly changing but I think our easy access to information and over-the-top media has created a bit of a flame thrower in all of us.

In an attempt to get the most current and updated information we often succumb to half-hearted research and minimal discernment.

I have heard several controversial pieces of media lately. I have shared some and held onto some.

The ones I have not shared don't make me a firefighter. They just make me less affected by the heat.

Firefighters don't always save people either. They may mean well, but sometimes people can't be rescued.

Maybe you fanned the flames of a media story or tried to censor its popularity.

Maybe you have done absolutely nothing, but just because you don't watch the news, read the articles or share your opinions doesn't make you any more a firefighter than wearing a cowboy hat makes me Billy the Kid.

We are stuck with the media we have. Some true, some false, and some a combination of both.

We have spent weeks watching, listening to, and reading the opinions of experts with highly respected degrees working in exceptionally regarded institutions.

But degrees and expertise do not make one either a flame-thrower or a firefighter.

When people hear information, they mull it over and come to a conclusion. Sometimes they convict and sometimes they forgive.

How have you been handling the constant barrage of media on every subject from COVID-19 to the crumbling economy, the political candidates to the body bags, the lockdowns to the letdowns?

Did you decide to convict or forgive or is the jury still out?

Obviously anytime we tune in to any media we get some story. Sometimes you are asked to create the other half of the story. Sometimes we only get the introduction. Maybe it seems like that now.

Maybe it seems you are reading a story that you never would have chosen to read, in a genre you have little interest in, with characters you can't relate to.

How do you do truth, when every time you believe you have discovered it, it moves somewhere else?

The generations alive now have a story to tell. It may not be the story we wanted to tell or one we ever thought we would need to tell.

But we do have an obligation to make sure that the history we are living now gets heard; the flamethrower's side and the firefighters' side.

Because there are two sides to every story and if we are censored and cannot share them, then there is no story to tell. It will be as if this never happened.

Yes, the media lies, but it also has truths.

The media has facts but it also has gossip.

The media has blackouts but it also has clarity.

The media is both a flame thrower and a firefighter and again as Billy Joel says, “...It was always burning since the world was turning.”

I write what I think. I speak what I feel.

I hope you write and speak what you think and feel as well and don't worry about what others think about you.

It's your story. They have their story.

Wouldn't life be boring if there was only ever one story?

We must share all of this. Every idea. Every thought. Every word.

What about the social media circus has made you a flamethrower or a firefighter?

WRITTEN BY

Kathy Brunner

Entrepreneur/Business Coach, People Watcher, Firestarter.

Create your encore career and go from Burned Out to Fired Up!

<https://kathybrunner.com>

Tweet Lies ²

Trump's tweets have become increasingly impotent but his lies are getting bigger by the day



President Donald Trump departs after speaking about the 2020 U.S. presidential election results in the Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House in Washington, DC, November 5, 2020. Carlos Barria/Reuters

- **President Donald Trump's lies-via-tweet have become more audacious since Election Day and his loss to President-elect Joe Biden.**
- **Trump continues to push baseless claims that Democrats rigged the election, among other disinformation, as he refuses to concede.**
- **But weeks have gone by and no evidence of widespread fraud or irregularities has been discovered, and the Trump campaign's legal challenges have resulted in multiple losses in court or failed to alter the outcome of the election in any states.**
- **Trump's tweets are becoming increasingly impotent. He's yelling louder than ever, but fighting a losing battle.**
- **[Visit Business Insider's homepage for more stories.](#)**

President Donald Trump's tweets have never seemed more feeble and desperate than right now, even as his lies grow bigger by the day.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has wielded his Twitter account like a political sword. Trump's tweets have moved markets, put pressure on GOP lawmakers to bend to his will, and exacerbated a slew of domestic and global crises. But since his loss to

² [Trump's tweets increasingly impotent as his lies grow bigger by the day - Business Insider](#)

President-elect Joe Biden in the 2020 election, Trump's tweets have become more and more impotent.

"Trump is becoming increasingly irrelevant," former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, a Democrat, [tweeted](#) on Monday.

"Yes, he still poses a threat and we must remain vigilant. But, for the most part, we can ignore his tweets and petty outbursts," Reich added.

"Trump and his tweets are already drifting into irrelevance," Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics, [tweeted](#) on Sunday.

Biden also appears to be unfazed by Trump's barrage of tweets, describing the president's refusal to concede as more "embarrassing" for the US than debilitating to his ability to move forward with the transition process.

Though recent polling suggests [many Republican voters have been swayed](#) by Trump's baseless claims of mass voter fraud, no amount of all caps tweets falsely claiming the election was stolen will succeed in overturning the outcome.

America's democracy is far from infallible, but the US electoral process has proven to be a relatively immovable force when up against the relentless tide of Trump's disinformation. Trump may have [eroded numerous democratic norms](#) while president and research shows he's [pushed the US in an autocratic direction](#), but he has not succeeded in killing American democracy itself.

There is absolutely no evidence to back-up Trump's unsubstantiated allegations that Democrats "rigged" the election against him.

The Department of Homeland Security last week released a statement calling the 2020 election the "[most secure](#)" in the nation's history.

[Election officials across the country](#) representing both major parties have fervently rejected the notion voter fraud or irregularities impacted the outcome of the election.

[An international delegation invited by the Trump administration](#) to observe the election applauded the way it was handled despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Leaders across the globe](#), including major democracies and key US allies, have overwhelmingly accepted the results of the election and congratulated Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. This includes world leaders considered to be closely allied with Trump such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Trump campaign's many legal challenges to the election results have [resulted in multiple losses in court](#) and so far failed to alter the outcome of the election in any states.

But Trump continues to carry on as if tweeting nonstop and escalating the scale of misinformation he spreads will change the result.

"I WON THE ELECTION. VOTER FRAUD ALL OVER THE COUNTRY!" Trump falsely declared to his nearly 89 million followers on Wednesday morning. Most of Trump's post-election tweets have been along the same lines — uniformly detached from reality.

Virtually every recent tweet from Trump has been flagged by Twitter for containing misleading information, including tweets that have [attacked Republican officials](#) who contradicted [the president's groundless voter fraud claims](#).

Even as Trump's tweets increasingly fade into irrelevance, they do not come without consequences.

Americans are continuing to contract and die from COVID-19 at an alarming rate. Trump's time spent on Twitter spreading disinformation is time lost coordinating with Biden on how to mitigate the spread and distribute a vaccine.

And a recent [study conducted by political science researchers](#) from Stanford and five other universities found that exposure to Trump's tweets that undermine the legitimacy of the 2020 election "erodes trust and confidence in elections and increases belief that elections are rigged" among the president's supporters.

[Fake people you think are dishing out great advice](#) ³

[Fake Friends on Social Media: Discussions for Parents to Have With Their Kids](#)

Your child spends a lot of time on social media. You've heard about the dangers, but you monitor what she's doing online and you watch for warning signs that may indicate a problem, such as sudden changes in behavior or poor performance at school. Besides, she has thousands of followers, so at least she's popular, right?

Not exactly.

³ [Does Your Child Have Fake Friends on Social Media? Parent's Info \(netsanity.net\)](#)



Now, there are some exceptions: some users only have one social media account and they keep it strictly private for use among their actual family members and close friends. This, however, is rare, particularly among teenagers.

More often, we have dozens (or hundreds) of acquaintances with whom we share access to social media profiles. These are the friends of friends we met at a wedding, the co-workers we greet in passing, and the people we knew in middle school.

Not only that, we follow people we don't even know in real life: sometimes these are famous professionals, sometimes it's a handsome stranger or someone who seems funny based on the posts she shares in a social media group you both belong to. Maybe you connected via a group because you're both parents or lacrosse players or gardeners. Maybe you like that he likes your posts, so you return the favor.

Some of these people probably are true friends. Some may become true friends (even in real life!) after you get to know each other online. But most are just faces on the screen: they know nothing about you aside from what you choose to share on your profile.

Jay Baer wrote [this article](#) after the death of online personality Trey Pennington. He was "friends" with Pennington, but upon his death, Baer realized he didn't really know him at all. "Social media forces upon us a feeling of intimacy and closeness that doesn't actually exist," he wrote.

"As my own networks in social media have gotten larger, I've ended up talking about my personal life less, because a large percentage of that group don't know me, or my wife, or my kids, or my town, or my interests. I don't want to bore people with the inanities of the everyday."

That is one adult perspective and explanation for why our social media profiles look so little like our real lives. But what about the kids?



[This article](#) says we're turning into a fake generation thanks to social media. We allow people we don't like (that frenemy from high school, that passive-aggressive co-worker) to remain on our friends list. We comment positively on their photos and status updates while we silently curse them. They return the favor.

Meanwhile, kids and adults alike try to paint a picture of an ideal life. We share our highlight reels: vacations, fancy meals, and loads of laughter while ignoring the reality of dirty dishes and loneliness, for example. Your kids may

do this without realizing it; they may also fail to realize everyone else is doing it, too.

How to Talk With Your Kids About the Shallowness of Social Media



The time to talk with your kids is now. Don't wait until they're older. If they're using social media, they're old enough to have these discussions. Create an environment that encourages open dialogue: ask your kids about their social media lives the way you would ask them about school. Bring up the topics you see in the news. Inquire about new apps and means of communication. And don't forget to touch on these important topics to help your kids understand just how shallow and fake social media can be:

- **Influencers:** Kids need to understand that many popular Instagram stars are paid to promote certain products, or they receive the products for free in exchange for posting about them. Some of these influencers are responsible enough to promote only products they actually use and believe in; others are not. A naturally thin model may claim, for example, that a certain product is responsible for her physique, when in fact she may not actually use it at all. Make sure your children understand this and tell them to look for hashtags like #sponsored, #ad, or #promotion, keeping in mind that not all influencers may be disclosing their affiliations the way they are legally required to do.
- **Photo Retouching:** There are dozens of apps (and filters!) that make photo retouching a breeze. Kids can easily remove blemishes or make themselves look thinner with a couple of clicks. We're so accustomed to seeing these retouched photos; it's easy for a child to look at his own real photo and feel like he doesn't measure up.
- **Buying Followers and Likes:** If you see a user with thousands of followers but only a few likes per post, there's a good chance those followers were purchased. Yes, you can do that.
- **Fake Accounts:** Lots of kids (and adults) [start fake accounts](#) where they can pretend to be someone else, or where they can share feelings they're not comfortable sharing on their real page. They may seek advice (or attention) via these fake accounts. Even if your child doesn't have a fake profile, she may be following several of them. This is why if you use a monitoring app that requires you to have your child's

password [you just may be monitoring only the accounts they want you to know about.](#)

- **Fake News:** Teach your kids to [identify fake news sites](#) and made-up stories. [FactCheck.org](#) has great tips: read beyond the provocative headline, check the source, check the author, and run the story by Snopes or FactCheck. If a headline claims that watching a video will change your life, or that you won't believe what so-and-so did, it's probably little more than click-bait.
- **Why Is Someone Sharing This?:** [This article](#) brings up a good point: "...social sharing of information is often not actually about sharing information. It's about the sharer letting everyone know that they are knowledgeable or right-thinking or caring." Many people don't even read articles before they share them. Teach your kids to read (and think!) before they share so they don't spread false information and encourage them to examine their own motives for sharing something.

If you don't feel like your child is ready for social media, you can always block those apps on your child's device using [trustworthy parental controls](#). Or maybe you prefer he limit his attention to one or two sites; in that case, simply block the rest. You can also limit the amount of time she spends online by disabling internet access during certain times of the day; less time online limits your child's exposure to the artificial world of social media and helps keep her perspective in check.

[Divide us versus them](#)

'Us Vs. Them' In A Pandemic: Researchers Warn Divisions Could Get Dangerous ⁴

May 15, 2020 7:02 PM ET



[HANNAH ALLAM](#)



A protester attends a demonstration over Michigan's coronavirus restrictions on Thursday at the state Capitol in Lansing.

Paul Sancya/AP

As the pandemic moves from public health crisis to partisan flashpoint, the debate over the coronavirus response in the U.S. is becoming increasingly nasty – and, in some cases, [violent](#).

It's not just the clusters of [gun-toting protesters](#) at state capitols. In sporadic incidents across the country, disputes over emergency measures have turned

⁴ [Researchers Say Pandemic Is Adding Fuel To Political Divisions : Coronavirus Updates : NPR](#)

into [shootings](#), fistfights and [beatings](#). Stories abound of intimidation over [masking](#).

And armed right-wing groups have threatened contact tracers and people who they say "snitch" on neighbors and businesses violating health orders.

Researchers who study the links between polarization and violence stress that these incidents are still rare and extreme reactions; [polls show](#) that the majority of Americans support and are abiding by distancing measures.

But there are fears that the pandemic — especially landing in an election year — has the potential to inflame divisions to dangerous levels if left unchecked. "If we don't intervene as a nation, as citizens, to begin to correct this identity-based polarization, then the erosion of democratic norms will go even further.

And that's the threat of potential social unrest," said Tim Phillips, head of the Boston-based nonprofit [Beyond Conflict](#), which tracks polarization and supports peace efforts around the world.

Article continues after sponsor message

Researchers cite leadership as a key factor in the struggle against polarization. But President Trump draws support through identity politics and has signaled repeatedly that he'll play to his base even in a national health emergency. Take, for example, Trump's [refusal to wear a mask](#) despite the advice of his own health authorities and recent coronavirus infections among White House staffers.

Trump has said, with little elaboration, that donning a mask would "[send the wrong message](#)." [Rachel Kleinfeld](#), who studies polarization and violence at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said the president's decision not to wear a mask is calculated.

"Trump recognizes that by talking about masking in a certain way, he can play on an identity," Kleinfeld said. "And it's an [identity of virility](#) versus fear, an identity of urban versus rural, an identity of race, even, given who's being hit by the virus, and he can do all those things by triggering something that was not polarizing before, which is whether or not you wear a mask in public."

Polling shows that masking brings [the starkest partisan breakdown](#) of any protective measure: 76% of Democrats say they wear a mask when leaving home, compared with 59% of Republicans, according to a survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Phillips said Beyond Conflict, in conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania, will soon release findings that show Americans are indeed polarized, just not as badly as they think.

He said news coverage and social media have led to both sides imagining deeper divisions than actually exist — a point to remember, he said, when looking at scenes of pandemic-related violence.

"When we see the armed militia in Michigan, when we see people sort of defying the police — not just mayors and governors — to open up their stores or open up other locations, we tend to think that that's representative of the other side, that they must all think that way," Phillips said.

"And yet there's polling in the last two weeks, last week, in the United States that across the Republican-Democratic divide, the majority of Americans recognize that there's a public health crisis and we have to do something about it."

I'm right your wrong

I'm right, you're wrong, and here's a link to prove it: how social media shapes public debate

October 12, 2016 3.06pm EDT

Author



Collette Snowden

1.

Senior Lecturer, School of Communication, International Studies and Languages, University of South Australia



Politicians and their staffers are now highly attuned to the power of social media. AAP/Lukas Coch

Social media has revolutionised how we communicate. In this series, we look at how it has changed the media, politics, health, education and the law.

Once upon a time different political perspectives were provided to the public by media reporting, often through their own painstaking research.

If an issue gained attention, several perspectives might compete to inform and shape public opinion. It often took decades for issues to make the transition from the margin to the centre of politics.

Now, within minutes of any event, announcement or media appearance, we are able to get those perspectives thousands of times instantly via social media. There are constant reactions and debates, often repeating the same arguments and information.

It's the communication equivalent of being at a football match compared to a dinner party. While meaningful exchanges between individuals are possible on social media, there's so much noise that it's difficult to make complex arguments or check the validity of information.

Social media is a superb medium for immediacy, reach and intensity. This makes it a great asset in situations where timeliness is important, such as breaking news. But it has serious limitations in conveying tone, nuance, context and veracity.

The pros and cons of social media

The ability for people to engage in arguments at a distance on social media has revealed an appalling lack of civility in many deep pockets of misogyny, ethnic antipathy, and general intolerance for difference.

These are attributes of users, not the technology, but social media gives them a volume that they otherwise would not have. But these loud, often angry, voices also prevent many more people from taking advantage of its participatory potential.

The level of hostility encountered in many debates is a powerful deterrent for many. Nonsense and profundity, truth and fabrication, have equal rights on social media. It can be a frustrating and bewildering place, and a great waster of time.

Nonetheless, with the dedication and commitment of a few passionate supporters, small and more marginalised groups are able to create a public presence that previously would have required years to establish through community meetings, lecture tours, fundraising events and lobbying.

A group like the Free West Papua movement, established in 1965 but outlawed by the Indonesian government, has successfully used social media to generate global support.

Other cause-related issues – such as animal-rights activism – that were previously confined to the margins of public attention have benefited from the greater reach social media allows.

Communications technology has also enabled social media to amplify many debates about long-standing issues, such as domestic violence, by allowing people to share their stories and engage in debates. These in turn can place pressure on politicians to act and contribute to critical offline discussions.

Just how powerful is it?

The influence of social media on politics and public perception is indisputable, but the extent of that influence is yet to be determined.

While social media was initially dismissed by some politicians as trivial, few make that argument now. Social media analytics are scrutinised with the same intensity as polls, and politicians and political parties follow social media exchanges closely.

But while political organisations and the media emphasise the volume of emotive, ephemeral and instantaneous messages produced for social media, they increasingly overlook context, complexity and causation.

So, the Australian election result, for example, was a surprise, particularly the level of support for One Nation. Similarly, the UK referendum result on its membership of the European Union was a shock. The US election is covered as though the tweets of candidates are providing the policy settings for an entire administration. The outcome of a referendum in Colombia was a surprise.

These outcomes are not directly *caused* by social media – they’re far too complex to make that claim – but social media is a powerful contributing factor.

But we should be aware of its limitations

There is a clear danger in focusing on social media as the primary agenda-setting medium for public debates while ignoring the deeper, complex social roots of conflicting ideas or positions.

While social media may create awareness, real political change requires actual decision-making, which takes time and reflection.

Social media debates on politics quickly devolve into binary positions, between which repetitive messages bounce back and forth, often without resolution. The marriage equality issue in Australia is an example of an issue that has benefited from social media communication. But without a strong political will for change, the issue has stalled as real politics have come into play.

Politicians and organisations now devote considerable time to social media. Shouting at each other, and exulting in the ability to gather followers, be liked, retweeted or shared, the danger is in being oblivious to the people who either do not use social media, or use it sparingly or infrequently.

Consequently, social media activity gives a greater illusion of impact precisely because of the attention it is given by people spending so much time on it.

News, gossip, and political debates occur in all human societies. Whether it's tribal councils (so creatively co-opted for reality television), the Roman Forum, Town Hall debates (now televised to global audiences), the public bar, [the coffee shops of Europe](#), and so on, social communication about politics is hardly new.

The need and desire for people to discuss decision-making and power, share news, pass on jokes, lampoon their leaders, provide information and so on is a defining characteristic of our species. Social media is the most obvious contemporary manifestation of this characteristic.

The [recent power failure in South Australia](#) showed the best and worst aspects of social media. It allowed people to communicate useful and important information quickly in the midst of the storm, but a political debate began almost immediately, and just as quickly devolved into binary positions. A complex issue was reduced to a slanging match, and the real issues were obscured.

Where to from here?

Social media is another form of communication that adds to the many we already have. How we adapt political debates and decision making to it is a work in progress.

One response would be a greater focus in education on logic, statistics and rhetoric to make social media communication more reliable, effective and hopefully, more civil.

For now, perhaps we could start with an algorithm to determine how many thousand posts on social media are equal to one conversation in the bar or coffee shop. Or develop a pearl of wisdom filter based on the quality of the message, and thereby boost national productivity by saving hours of time scrolling through 10,000 posts that essentially say the same two things.

Numbness ⁵

Have You Become Emotionally Numb on Social Media?

[Jul 4, 2019](#) · 3 min read



⁵ [Have You Become Emotionally Numb on Social Media? | by Journal of Beautiful Business | Journal of Beautiful Business](#)



News move fast. Since this email was drafted on Friday, the horrific Sri Lanka attacks occurred and raise the same issue we tackled here, prompted by the fire at Notre-Dame: how to mourn and express empathy on social media. Some reflections...

Do you remember when the news broke last week and your feeds filled up with posts, tweets, and live streams of #NotreDame and #ParisIsBurning?

Did you post something yourself? Or hit “like,” “retweet,” or “share”?

What made you do it, and how did you feel afterwards? Better? Worse? Indifferent?

Let me tell you how I felt.

I sat with a couple of friends, all of us scrolling through our feeds, ooh-ing, sighing, and occasionally showing each other pictures of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris — in flames. It was awkward, and yet somehow, not unusual. The day after, I had a lingering sense of unease, not because I care so much about this cathedral, but because of the in-the-moment-overflow of sensationalism, the cries for #onehumanity, the #throwback posts to “back when I visited Paris last summer.”

I was aware of both a sense of actual compassion, mostly for the French people (and maybe because I have a strong emotional connection to fire and the sense of loss it brings), and feelings of disappointment about the comments being made by my circle of friends, who were almost making fun of the social media buzz.

I asked my colleague Jaimie, who lives in Paris, how the event and associated buzz were making her feel. This is how she responded (quoted from her essay [When the Smoke Clears](#)):

I actually cringe when I see people, en masse, jump on the [disaster porn](#) social media bandwagon. (...) If crying is an interpersonal tool, an [evolutionary capacity](#) unique to humans

that allows us to signal to one another when we need help or comfort, then I'm willing to consider posting to Instagram or Twitter a 21st century extension of that human function. Let's say the posts are like digital tears shed all over the world. I get it, sharing is caring. And yes to sharing. Yes to caring. Yes to solidarity and to empathy. But, there's something sleazy about the gamification of feeling on social media, where there is "liking" involved, where social capital is gained by posting.

Do we really think that expressing our compassion, our caring, and our empathy by simply tapping on a screen in the midst of a rapid-second scroll is appropriate, justifiable, or even desirable?

Think about it. And then, give this a try.

Next time you feel the need to express a reaction on social media:

Pause for a minute. Pause for a minute. Think about whether this "like" will make a difference in how you feel right now.

Ask yourself what intention is behind your reaction, and don't trick yourself. Do you honestly care about the topic? Do you just want people to agree with you?

To "like" you for the fact that you posted an old photo that will end up in an ocean of digital tears that will be washed away by next Monday?

And then, make a decision. If you do care, maybe you want to reach out personally to friends, or to the people and organizations involved.

Maybe you'd like to start a discussion with your co-workers about how they feel and what they think. Maybe you'd like to take some kind of action in response, on your own, or with friends.

Every time you catch yourself operating on autopilot, reacting unthinkingly, take a second and pause. It's the smallest thing. Do not accept the numbness.

What are you really feeling? Trace your thoughts and reactions back, and think about what it is that you really want to communicate before sharing.

I will try my best, too. Let's check in in a couple of weeks and see if anything changed.

Good luck,

Monika & the House of Beautiful Business team

Politics gone astray ⁶



Analysis by [Gregory Krieg](#), CNN
Updated 1:57 AM ET, Sun November 22, 2020

Now Playing Judge dismisses Trump...

Judge dismisses Trump campaign lawsuit in Pennsylvania 02:32

(CNN) President Donald Trump's attempts to overturn his election loss are plunging deeper into incoherence.

On Saturday night, the Trump campaign requested [a second recount in Georgia](#), a day after top Republican state officials certified his defeat following a statewide audit. This one will be done by machine and is even less likely to reverse his fate. Hours earlier, a federal judge [rejected](#) the Trump campaign's latest effort to disenfranchise millions of voters -- this time in Pennsylvania.

All around the country, Trump lawyers and loyalists are seeing their baseless allegations of systemic voter fraud treated with increasing contempt by disbelieving judges. Even now, with a wave of [certification deadlines](#) about to crash down, the President and his opportunistic enablers are injecting doubt -- and anxiety -- wherever they can.

The returns, though, seem to be diminishing. This time around, it was Judge Matthew Brann, a Republican, who in tossing out a Trump-backed lawsuit felt compelled to underscore, with a literary flourish, the absurdity of the campaign's assertions.

"This claim, like Frankenstein's Monster, has been haphazardly stitched together from two distinct theories in an attempt to avoid controlling precedent," [Brann wrote](#). His decision prompted another Republican, Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey -- who is not running for reelection in 2022 -- to do the bare minimum in breaking ranks with party leaders and acknowledging [Joe Biden as the President-elect](#).

⁶ [Donald Trump's attempt to steal the election unravels as coronavirus cases surge - CNNPolitics](#)

But even as Trump's brazen bid to subvert American democracy keeps gobbling up headlines, it is his appalling handling of the pandemic that seems poised now to etch itself more lastingly into the history books.

The United States surpassed 12 million coronavirus cases on Saturday, adding nearly 200,000 more to its staggering count. Trump has made no mention of the terrifying milestone. Rather, he spent part of the day [golfing](#).

It was just as well.

Trump's petulance worsens pandemic pain

When the lame duck president speaks about the pandemic, he only further undermines scattershot efforts to contain it. That Trump skipped out of a side-session focused on pandemic preparedness with world leaders at the G20 virtual gathering on Saturday surprised no one.

It's unlikely he was missed. All the while, states and cities around this country reported record-high numbers of infections as hospitalizations mounted -- setting off alarm bells over a collapse of an overwhelmed health care system. And that's before millions of Americans begin their ill-advised holiday travels ahead of Thanksgiving this week.

[More than 255,000](#) are already dead, millions out work, and the administration and its Republican allies in the Senate seem determined to deepen the despair -- while, in the process, undermining Biden's efforts to right the ship when he takes control on January 20 of next year.

By blocking Biden's team from accessing sensitive government information, complicated operations like the distribution of a vaccine are likely to be delayed or made more cumbersome.

Some nine months after the coronavirus first gripped the country, there is still no unified plan to combat it. And measures taken by Congress to mitigate the pain are lapsing. The expanded federal unemployment benefits extended as part of \$2 trillion package passed earlier this year are due to run out just after Christmas, affecting an estimated [12 million Americans](#).

There is, for now, little to suggest a coming renaissance of negotiation on Capitol Hill, where Senate Republicans have refused to take up a new aid package passed by House Democrats and Speaker Nancy Pelosi rejected potential piecemeal deals floated by the GOP in the run-up to the election.

The trickle down effects of inaction in Washington, DC, are being felt most acutely at the state and local level, where even officials who acknowledge the extent of the crisis are hesitant to take bold action and implement the kind of drastic measures proven to help curb the spread of the virus.

"You shut nonessential workplaces or indoor dining, you're basically putting a bullet in them," New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, said on Friday about the absence of federal aid, suggesting that something like a "two-week pause" is effectively out of the question without a capital boost from Capitol Hill.

Sara Nelson, the international president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, ripped Senate Republicans over their hesitance to act -- a contrast with the body's relatively swift passage of the initial \$2 trillion package back in March.

"With more than 12 million cases, over a quarter million Americans dead, more than 60 million unemployment claims filed since March, 8 million people have been pushed into poverty, and over one hundred thousand businesses shuttered, the same exact Senate has recessed without even the notion of hope of relief for Americans destined to die more likely from homelessness than a raging pandemic," Nelson said. "Anyone musing politics makes inaction explainable better just resign now and let the patriotic essential workers take the reins."

Even within congressional ranks, the number of Covid cases is steadily rising. Just this week, Republican Sens. Chuck Grassley of Iowa and Rick Scott of Florida tested positive. On Saturday night, Georgia Sen. Kelly Loeffler, a Republican campaigning ahead of a runoff for her seat, announced that she, too, [returned a positive test](#), bringing the total count to more than three dozen lawmakers from both parties.

The twin crises of Covid and Trump's antidemocratic machinations collided over the last 48 hours, when two leading Michigan GOP lawmakers emerged from a meeting at the White House by stating, again, that they [had seen no evidence](#) to suggest Biden did not win their state fair and square. Instead, state Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey and Michigan House Speaker Lee Chatfield apparently used at least part of their time with the President to deliver a letter pleading for more federal aid to fight the virus.

"Months ago, Michigan received funds through the federal CARES Act, and we used that funding to quickly support front line workers, improve testing, ensure adequate PPE, provide additional support to out-of-work Michiganders, and deliver assistance to local businesses that are struggling through no fault of their own," the Michigan Republicans said in a joint statement. "We once again face a time in our state when additional support would go a long way to help those same residents who need our help."

Trump retweeted the statement on Saturday morning, but ignored the request for help and focused on pumping air into his deflating campaign to upend the election.

"This is true, but much different than reported by the media," Trump said. "We will show massive and unprecedented fraud!"

But with a handful of local and state certification deadlines early next week, it has become plain that -- like with so many other promises -- Trump's pledge to reveal some kind of massive, coordinated fraud will never materialize.

Shortly before news of the Pennsylvania case's embarrassing defeat began to spread, Trump retreated to more hospitable territory -- the Wild West of social media -- to engage in

a round of coronavirus whataboutism. He pointed to the toll of the pandemic on other countries and attacked the media for not reporting on the efficacy of emerging therapeutics.

"The Fake News is not talking about the fact that 'Covid' is running wild all over the World, not just in the U.S.," he wrote, before referencing, presumably, the portion of the morning's international summit he took part in. "I was at the Virtual G-20 meeting early this morning and the biggest subject was Covid. We will be healing fast, especially with our vaccines!"

Those vaccines, though promising, are still months away being made available to millions of desperate Americans, tens of thousands of whom are projected to die before they arrive.

Trump allies out to undermine Biden

In the meantime, Trump's Treasury secretary appears to be doing his best to starve the distressed business community of a key lifeline. On Thursday, Steve Mnuchin [requested](#) that the Federal Reserve return some \$455 billion in so-far unused funding that the central bank insists has -- and will -- continue to be crucial in preventing further economic woes.

Mnuchin himself, in a letter to the Federal Reserve, acknowledged that the lending programs "clearly achieved their objective."

But he still demanded the return of the nearly half-trillion dollars, a move that brought objections from corporate leaders -- hardly a hotbed of anti-Trump resistance -- and the Fed, which said it preferred "that the full suite of emergency facilities established during the coronavirus pandemic continue to serve their important role as a backstop for our still-strained and vulnerable economy."

The reasoning for the decision, some experts said, appeared to be a bid to hamstring the incoming administration.

"This appears to be a political move by Team Trump to limit what President-elect Joe Biden can do next year to boost the economy," Jaret Seiberg, financial services and housing policy analyst for Cowen Washington Research Group, wrote in a research note, "especially if Congress fails to pass a big stimulus."

And with the balance of the next Senate currently up for grabs, with Democrats needing to sweep the January runoff elections in Georgia to win control, the prospects for a package sizable enough to match the needs of the country are, at best, uncertain.

So too is it for Biden and his transition team, which remains locked out of the agencies it is poised to take over after the inauguration, and cut off from information that could help in planning its way out of the current shambles. Emily Murphy, the Trump appointee who heads the General Services Administration, has given no indication of when, or if, she plans to exercise her power to acknowledge Biden as the "apparent" winner, which would open up crucial lines of communication and avail the President-elect's team to millions of dollars in federal funds.

With Murphy stalling, Biden's transition team is now seeking to effectively [crowdsource its efforts](#). On Friday it sent a fundraising email to supporters as it weighs legal options.

"The nation faces too many challenges to not have a fully funded and smooth transition to prepare the President-elect and Vice President-elect to govern on Day One," a transition official told CNN.

But no amount of money can buy access to the classified briefings typically granted within days to election winners. Biden -- and the country -- appear condemned to wait for Trump to set aside his wounded pride and concede to reality.

The wait continues. The surge of death and despair does, too.

Helpful hints for awareness ⁷

Be More Mindful: 7 Tips to Improve Your Awareness



My question to you is: Is it “business as usual” this year? Is everything working the way you’d like, or are you making changes?

Many of us are hoping to fulfill numerous plans – wanting “more” and “better” in the job, health, money and/or relationship departments. While there’s nothing wrong with wanting “better” and “more” in these areas, the pursuit can leave us feeling like a dog chasing its tail. It can be exhausting!

Author, speaker, and mindfulness coach Diane Sieg says that becoming more mindful of how we proceed through our day is the antidote to feeling like we’re running in circles. “It’s so easy to be on auto-pilot in your life – procrastinating or not getting enough sleep

⁷ [Be More Mindful: 7 Tips to Improve Your Awareness | Ellevate \(ellevatenetwork.com\)](https://ellevatenetwork.com)

or exercise,” Sieg says. “Mindfulness is about being more present and aware of your behavior in each moment. It can help you change habits that are no longer serving you.”

Sieg, who is also a registered nurse and a yoga instructor, has made it her mission to help others slow down and “stop living life like it’s an emergency.” “Working in the ER for over 20 years, I saw the effects of stress – the diseases and injuries that resulted from it,” Sieg explains. “With today’s stress levels, we need mindfulness in our lives more than ever.”

Through her online programs, *[Your Mindful Year](#)* and *[The 30-Day Mindfulness Challenge](#)*, Sieg provides step-by-step guidance and support around [living life with more calm and awareness](#). She suggests these 7 tips for bringing more mindfulness into your life:

1. Meditate. Taking even just 5 minutes to sit quietly and follow your breath can help you feel more conscious and connected for the rest of your day.

2. Focus On One Thing At A Time. Studies have found that tasks take 50% longer with 50% more errors when multi-tasking, so consider “uni-tasking”, with breaks in between, whenever possible.

3. Slow Down. Savor the process, whether it’s writing a report, drinking a cup of tea, or cleaning out closets. Deliberate and thoughtful attention to daily actions promotes healthy focus and can keep you from feeling [overwhelmed](#).

4. Eat Mindfully. Eating your meal without the TV, computer or paper in front of you, where you can truly taste and enjoy what you’re eating, is good, not only for your body, but for your soul as well.

5. Keep Phone and Computer Time In Check. With all of the media at our fingertips, we can easily be on information overload. Set boundaries for screen time – with designated times for social networking (even set an alarm) – and do your best to keep mobile devices out of reach at bedtime.

6. Move. Whether it’s walking, practicing yoga, or just stretching at your desk, become aware of your body’s sensations by moving.

7. Spend Time In Nature. Take walks through a park, the woods, mountain trails or by the beach – wherever you can be outside. Getting outdoors is good for body, mind and spirit, and keeps you in the present.

As you pursue [your goals](#), I hope you can incorporate Diane Sieg’s tips for more mindfulness into your life. You give yourself a real gift when you can remember to take things one step at a time and savor each moment.

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[Caroline Dowd-Higgins](#) authored the book "This Is Not the Career I Ordered" now in the 2nd edition, and maintains the career reinvention blog of the same name. She is Director of Career & Professional Development at the Indiana University Alumni Association and contributes to AOL Jobs, CNN Money, the British online magazine – The Rouse and More Magazine online. She is producing a webisode series called [Thrive!](#) about career & life empowerment for women and she hosts the international podcast series [Your Working Life](#) - check it out on iTunes. Follow her on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Google+](#), and [Twitter](#).

It's Been There All The Time

It's been there all the time.

What are you talking about?

What's been there all the time?

You are the universe.

You just don't know it.

There are about 7,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (7 octillion) atoms in
your body.

All our billions of years old.

At the deepest level, you are the universe in human form.

Wow!!!

Isn't that incredible?

On top of that, you are hardwired to discover your true nature.

The signpost of God is all around you and inside of you.

Yet we are talking on our phones while driving down the freeway of life.

The greatest miracle of life is keeping you alive.

You are magnificent.

Every single cell of your body is custom-designed by God.

You are infinite.

Your body will someday die yet your true essence will go on forever.

You have the opportunity to discover your true nature.

Behind your breath lies the answer.

What is keeping you alive?

All the great masters have said to be aware of the essence of your breath.

Behind your breath lies your true nature.

Infinite kindness, love, and compassion.

This is the water that will put out the bonfires of anger and hatred upon this land.

The sun is appearing on the horizon.

Mankind is waking up from his slumber.

We are going from darkness to light.

Darkness has nowhere to hide.

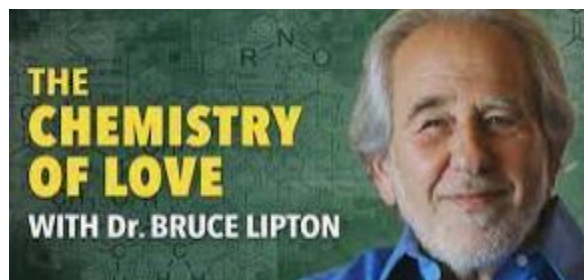
Discover your true nature.

It's been there all the time.

Ponder this over.

It's been there all the time.

The greatest game is being played right between your eyes.



We are all custom-designed by God. Yesterday I heard an interesting interview with Bruce Lipton.

He is a scientist and has a fascinating story to tell. He wasn't interested in God, religion, or anything spiritual. His passion

was science and biology.

He was studying the structures of cells. One day he discovered that our cells have antennas embedded on the surface of the cells. We have trillions of cells and each cell had an antenna. He thought to himself.

Mind you I'm paraphrasing what he said. He asked himself what these antennas are for. For what purpose do we have for them? In the real world, he thought of a TV set.

You have an antenna that receives signals from a broadcast. You can change the channel and a different TV program will appear on the screen.

At this point, it gets extremely interesting. Somehow he has an epiphany that our awareness and consciousness are being broadcasted from God or the quantum field.

Each one of us has a unique signature. He realized that the body will die yet our essence is always the same. We can never die. Our essence is eternal.

To his amazement, he discovered that God exists inside of us. The treasures exist inside. We are hardwired to discover the universe within.

Imagine all this took place within five minutes. From that point on his goal was to discover his true essence. The clues are there in plain sight. Bruce then as a scientist begins to use the lab within to discover his true nature.

In the interview, Bruce said that some Jesuits said gave me a child for seven years and I will tell you how the child will grow up. For the first seven years, a child will pick up the good bad, and ugly.

A child's brain wave is theta in which everything external gets sucked in from 0 to 7 years old. This goes directly into our subconscious. Now imagine that we live our lives 98% of the time from our subconscious. Our subconscious drives our life.

This means that our lives are being driven from our early childhood. Without pursuing ourselves and discovering our true nature we live most of our lives driven by our subconscious. We react like leaves blowing in the wind.

Our body is so entwined with our subconscious that we react automatically without being aware.

Imagine our subconscious is like a hard drive. It has tons of data stored for the ages of 0 to 7. When an event occurs the subconscious will go instantly to the hard drive and it knows how to react.

Notice we are oblivious to what's going on. This is mankind to a tee.

We have been fighting forever. The world is on fire. People flame each other on Facebook. We have a President who tweets whatever comes to his mind.

Humanity is on the verge of a breakthrough. The signs that we were built to discover are all around us. We have all the instruments inside of us to discover our true nature.

We are about to go from me to we which is the title of this book. Imagine every single person on earth is hardwired to discover we all came from the same place. We are all family regardless of race, color, or creed.

Our true nature is kindness. Our true nature is love and compassion. We are all a spark of the divine. We are the universe. We just don't know it. These are exciting times. You hold a piece of the puzzle of life inside of you.

You can change and discover your true nature. Millions of people are waking up. Recently science and religion are really talking about the same thing. Discoveries that Bruce saw are major scientific breakthroughs for all of us.

Bruce saw in a flash of light that we are being broadcasted from the quantum field. We have our name that God knows and the universe knows. Every human life is special.

With our free choice and free will, we can moment by moment be on a conscious journey to discover our true essence. Ponder this over.



Let's continue how a human being is hardwired to find God. Many scientists think that a part of our DNA is multidimensional and quantum.

We contain the blueprint of God inside of us. From this blueprint, a human being is created. We are created in the image of God.

When I was young I loved to study the great wisdom of India. I still do. The Indians have a theory that everything we do and say is recorded into an energy frequency.

This energy frequency can be read in some part of the time in the future. Some people have fine-tuned themselves to be able to read the Akashic record from another person.

Now recently many people think that in our DNA we have multidimensional DNA which contains the blueprint of God. Now imagine in this blueprint contains the entire essence of the universe and the essence of your soul journey in the universe.

You are eternal. You can never die. Your body will. Many people are discovering this concept and are learning how to mine the Akashic record for themselves.

Can you imagine how incredible that would be? It means that you could stop any disease from coming your way. You would be in tune with God and listen to the wisdom that lies within.

You could bring back all the positive attributes you have learned on your magnificent journeys in life.

A person could tap into the future and bring back wisdom such as inventions that would help our fellow man.

From that state, it would be easy to go from me to we if you could consciously tap into the oneness and blueprint of the universe.

As you can see the car is sitting in the garage gathering dust. The car is meant to be driven on the freeway of life. Moment by moment we can drive our car and gather a greater understanding of why we are alive.

We spend most of our lives in a survival mode. We spend most of our time living by our habits and subconscious. Imagine we are hardwired to discover our true essence. Yet so many humans are oblivious to this fact.

You see we have free will and free choice. The entire universe lives by this law. At times I think well maybe human beings shouldn't have free choice and we would come into this world and never forget our true nature.

Peace would always prevail on earth. Anger and war would not exist. Heaven would be on earth. Yet life is a grand adventure. We come into this world to discover our true nature and to help transform this world from darkness to light.

It is a cosmic game. This isn't the first time this game has been played. For time immemorial this game has been played through this universe and countless other universes.

The entire universe is watching us and cheering for us. They are rooting us on. We have incredible coaches that help and assist us.

Yet they can't take a single step for us. You see each of us has to play the game without any steps taken by another being.

These are exciting times. We as humanity are going from me to we. For thousands of years because of thinking it's all about me we have fought countless wars.

We are living in an era where this is changing right before our eyes. Ponder this over. You are hardwired to discover God. You contain within your DNA the blueprint of God.

Tip Of The Iceberg



This is just the tip of the iceberg. The entire human body is hardwired to find God. We need to discover how to transform ourselves.

One of the people I truly admire is Dr. Joe Dispenza. He is on the cutting edge of the fusion between medical science and the methods to discover our true nature.

In a nut shell, this is his discovery and discoveries from millions of people all around the world.

The world in general is stressed out. Billions of people aren't connected to their true nature. At the brain wave level, this stress is high beta. You have heard of the flight or fight response.

In the old days of our ancestors when we saw a tiger, we would run for dear life. All sorts of chemicals would kick in and a rush of adrenaline would occur.

Well in our present-day life so many people are so stressed out that they don't know how to turn off the facet of this adrenaline. Consequently, all sorts of damage occur. Look at the opioid epidemic today. It is affecting all over America. Thousands of people are dying each year.

Yet we are hardwired to find God and this is our present state in current affairs. This state of mind has been upon us for thousands of years. We are reactive beings. Look at the political post on Facebook and you will see what I mean. People are flaming each other.

If kindness is our true nature how do we discover it? Did you know that your life is governed by your subconscious mind? This is the driving force in your life. From age zero to seven your active brain wave state was in theta.

Theta accepts the good, bad and ugly and stores them in your subconscious. It's similar to a hard drive.

As we get older our brain waves go from theta to beta. This is the current state. A healthy individual beta state will make a person alert and ready for the day. Unfortunately, most of us are like leaves blowing in the wind.

Meditation is a process where we can discover our true nature. We learn how to go into deeper levels of brain wave states to change ourselves. The goal is to identify ourselves with our true nature.

We are the universe. We just don't know it. As humanity, we are in a state of kindergarten emotional maturity. Look at our politics today and you will see what I mean.

Joe Dispenza has discovered when the pineal gland and pituitary gland are active over 1500 incredible chemicals are released from the brain into the human body.

These chemicals wash the mind and body and over time make the human whole again. You become a kind man.

The goal is to identify yourself once again with your true nature. You can become the sun, moon, and stars and still be walking around in a human body. This is your true nature.

As humanity, we will witness a great transformation occurring in mankind. Yes, this will take time but millions of people are waking up from our slumbers.

You see it's only by your will alone can you open the inner door. The car is locked up in your car and gathering dust. Only you have the remote control to open up your inner garage door.

Then you can take your car for a divine spin. You see you have the keys yet they are sitting on your kitchen table. They have been there so long that you have no idea what the key is for.

Meditation is the key to discovering your true nature. Joe Dispenza is researching for the last 30 odd so years to build a scientific and spiritual bond with each other.

When I first started to meditate I would see a few articles about the science behind meditation. In the forties, Paramahansa Yogananda published his autobiography and it contained scientific wisdom. It was like sweet music to my ears.

Since then thousands of papers were published. What I like about Joe Dispenza is that he has around a thousand people come to a week retreat. In the past, he saw

great breakthroughs occur on the fourth or fifth day. The seminar was only five days at that time. So he added a couple of extra days.

In my eyes, I love to see that there are practical scientific tools we can use to discover our true nature. As I said this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Mind and Body

What came first the chicken or the egg? The body and the mind are so tangled with each other. It's like a huge bundle of string. Imagine for each thought you have a series of chemical reactions get released into your bloodstream.

The Buddhist has the following saying. Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. You see each time we get angry a series of harmful chemicals gets released into the body. Some people are so out of sync that the facet never gets turned off.

Even if they want to it takes time, patience, and effort. Our subconscious is driving the show. If someone says something to you that you don't like you will automatically get angry.

The anger is wired directly into your body. By the time we reach the age of 35 our body is hardwired directly from the subconscious. It is driving the show. We are on auto-pilot. Habits good and bad are hardwired directly into our bodies. We are like leaves blowing in the wind.

Each morning we get up. We do the same thing over and over. It's like in the old days listening to a record and the album is scratched. It will play the same thing over and over and over.

This is our life. Even if we want to change we have to start to rewire our circuits consciously.

In order for that to happen, one must be able to break away from a beta state to change. You see a beta state of mind can't reach the subconscious. So if you say an affirmation to change it can't reach the subconscious to rewire the circuits.

This is where meditation comes in. A person who meditates learns over time how to connect to the quantum field. The stronger the connection you have to this field the more capability you will have to rewire the human body. The scenarios are endless. It's up to your imagination. You have free will.

The quantum field doesn't judge us. Yet changing and rewiring your circuits require you to be in sync with love, kindness, patience, tolerance, and compassion. This is why it's so important to meditate. This is why it's so important to be conscious and aware of every moment.

The wise ones in the past would monitor their thoughts and actions. If they were in a situation where the person would say something to make them angry they would simply smile.

Why put gasoline on the fire. They understood that by getting angry they are drinking their own poison. Yet this is difficult to do. That's why it takes constant training.

We have people in office who will Twitter whatever comes to their minds. They don't know how to stop, look, and listen.

To be honest this was never taught in schools. Look at our nation today. Both sides are pissed off and can't work with one another. This is an emotionally immature society.

For the world to change for the better one must take responsibility and learn new ideas to discover their true nature.

We must all ponder over the state of mind we are in. As a society, we must discover ways to become mature adults. We must help those in need. We can do this. Millions of people are waking up from their slumber.

Emotions



Emotions can be scattered all over the place. Most of us are reactive beings. As you probably know by the time you are thirty-five your personality is usually set in stone.

Your subconscious is running the show. The body and mind are so ingrained. Our habits are driven by our subconscious. It's like we react without being aware. Our subconscious has taken over.

Yes, that is a good thing and yet at the same time, it causes many problems in our life.

When we go through a traumatic experience in life it creates an emotional scare in our subconscious. All of us have traumas that have occurred in our lives. Many people may ask why this guy is so angry all the time.

Most of the time it was some event that happened years ago and never got resolved. The circuits are still hardwired to that event.

Humanity has been trying for years to learn how to go beyond our emotional issues.

Quantum field theory (QFT) extends quantum mechanics from single localized particles to fields that exist everywhere. These fields represent forces that permeate all of space and time.

In the quantum field, there is no trauma. In the quantum field, there is no anger, hatred, and negative emotions.

We are trying to solve our emotional issues using matter over matter. By using the quantum field to heal we are using kindness, love, and compassion to heal and transform ourselves.

We are using our free will to tap into the quantum field and rewire our nervous systems and our body.

Mystics have done this for thousands of years. Modern-day scientists are using the tools of mystics and combining them with scientific instruments and protocols.

These are exciting times for humanity. We are on the verge where it will be a common everyday practice to rewire our brain towards quantum awareness. We are only moments away. Yes, it will take time but the sun is rising.

Man will soon realize the harmful effects of negative thinking and negative emotions. They will see the practical evidence of how it has put a man in a downward spiral in life. We have been fighting for thousands of years. Need I say more?

Humanity is stuck on the merry-go-round of life. The mystics have declared there is a way around this mess that we created.

This is a divine video game. Once a person understands the rules and why the game was even created in the first place this person will simply smile.

We have free will. The message in this book is you are the universe. You just don't know it. Think outside of your box. The quantum field exists everywhere and that includes inside of you.

New Thought



Did you know that in every thought you have there is a chemical reaction to your thoughts? Your thoughts create who you are. They create your habits your personality and state of mind.

Your subconscious is driving your car in life. Most of us have put the car in the remote control. We aren't aware of the power that is keeping us alive.

We don't realize that we have a genie within. Every thought we have enforces our views on life. We are a collection of all our thoughts since we were born.

We contain the blueprints of all our thoughts. Our thoughts are where we stand today. It's kind of amazing that most of mankind has forgotten the power of thoughts.

We never ponder over what we think we become. We haven't put two and two together. I think without meditation mankind can't truly see the forest from the trees.

We are so much focused externally that we don't even know about the internal world within.

I don't have to say what happens when the world at large does this. We have been fighting for thousands of years. Many people think that man's nature. Well, it is if we as a world only focus externally. Need I say more?

Did you know that meditation over time will help slow down the mind? Many people have a hard time falling asleep. It is a major problem all around the world.

When the facet of adrenaline can't be turned off and you're in a high beta state of mind it's difficult to fall asleep.

The chemical melatonin can't be released. This chemical is responsible for telling the body to fall asleep. Many people take drugs to put them to sleep.

Unfortunately, the drugs will put them to sleep yet they are extremely harmful and over time causes tremendous damage to the body. Yet the drug industry is interested in making a profit.

Meditation brings one to the awareness of the quantum field. When one meditates one begins to tune in to a field of kindness, love, and compassion.

When one becomes kind this person will have over time kind thoughts. Life is like a tuning fork.

Whatever you think you vibrate at that frequency. If your thoughts are anger I can guarantee you will be in a state of anger.

You will enforce your anger into your subconscious. Over time this becomes your habit and this becomes your personality.

Many years ago I heard the Dalai Lama would go over his entire day when he was going to sleep. He would pay attention and think about how he could improve his thoughts and actions.

He would ponder over and consciously progress to be a better human being.

At that time I truly didn't understand it and see why it was so important. Years later I see it as a foundation for humans to transform. If we as a society become kind in all areas of life the world at large would change for the better.

So yes mediation is the key to helping transform our thoughts. When one begins to be aware and conscious of the quantum field the mind slowly begins to transform.

This is the ultimate brainwashing. You are learning how to clean the clothes of your mind. This is how true healing takes place. Because we are unconscious we live our life that is not in harmony. Consequently, our world at large is in chaos.

I remember I worked for a short time for a company that has a software program for heart surgeons. This program would guide them in certain heart procedures.

I remember asking the owner of the company why the health care industry didn't promote preventive medicine. His answer was the American public does not want this.

They expect doctors to heal them and not to take responsibility for their health issues.

This is how far off we are. A society that doesn't understand and know the quantum field is an immature society. Look at our political system. We want to

build a huge wall. The quantum field builds bridges. The quantum field does not judge. The quantum field is never angry. The quantum field does not know about war.

Because we are totally out of touch with our true nature this is where we stand today.

New thoughts will arise when humanity becomes to embrace the quantum field. All the wisdom to solve any problem lies in that field of intelligence.

You can only think based on your emotional maturity. The universe will only show and help based upon your awareness in life.

The more humanity taps into its true essence the more our world will transform. In the future, we will see that presently humanity is in a kindergarten state of awareness. We think we are at a high level.

We have these cell phones and think we are so advanced. But we use them for texting while we are driving our cars. We think we are so advanced. Our society thinks the indigenous people aren't civilized.

Yet they have been in harmony with Mother Earth for thousands of years. We are sawing the branch we are sitting on and are so smug in thinking we are superior.

Our egos have to lead us astray. Ponder this over. You are a piece of the puzzle.



I'm sorry to say but many people are locked into their boxes. Many people can only think inside their box. Take a look at American politics today. They are in shambles.

One side can't talk to the other side. Both sides say the other side is to blame. We are locked by our subconscious minds and we do the same thing over and over again. Our concepts of who we truly are are limited. They are archaic.

We are so focused externally that we have forgotten our true nature.

It's like we can't see the forest from the trees. We must be open to new concepts and ideas for society to progress to the next level in the video game of life.

Many people get stuck at a certain level in the video game and call that life. They have no idea that you can be aware and conscious of the quantum field.

The sun is about ready to come up for humanity. It has been a roller coaster of a ride for thousands of years. War has been going on, it seems like an eternity.

Yet millions of people are waking up from their slumber. A new dawn is occurring for mankind. Man is slowly evolving into a kind man.

When humanity understands that we are the universe incredible transformations will occur on this planet.

You see with greater transformations comes new concepts and ideas that will be developed and implemented on this planet. Take for example kindness. Many people think that kindness is weak yet the entire foundation of the universe is kind.

Slowly over time kindness will manifest in all areas of life. Take a look at politics today. The way politicians campaign today is to slander their opponents. We have politicians today who mock anyone who has a different point of view. Both sides of the party only vote on issues that support their party.

When true kindness comes into the picture people no longer will support anyone who is not kind to their opponent. They may have different points of view yet kindness allows a person to see through the other person's eyes.

Kindness leads to love and compassion. Kindness allows a person to think outside of the box. Kindness can solve any problem on earth. Every problem has a solution. If you are stuck in your belief system you will not be open to a practical solution even if it's staring you in the face.

For example, the quantum field is all around. You are the universe you just don't know it. Humanity must learn how to think outside of the box. We must learn how to be tolerant of all.

Light is winning the battle against darkness. Darkness is the absence of light. Currently, we are seeing chaos all around the world. Darkness has nowhere to hide.

New concepts and ideas are being presented all around the world. Millions of people are looking at life's problems and thinking about how to solve the problems on earth.

Each one of us holds an individual piece of the puzzle. What good would a puzzle be if the entire puzzle was put together yet your piece was missing?

Ponder this over. Learn to think outside of the box. Go beyond your comfort zone in life.

PDF



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New Wiring



Mankind is on an incredible journey. We are going from darkness to light. We are on a journey to discover our true nature. As I said we are hardwired to find God.

We have everything set in place. The car is there sitting in our garage. God is sitting patiently in the passenger seat. All it takes for you to use your remote control and open the garage door within.

You see it's only by your will alone can you open the garage door. Nobody will open the door for you including the one in your passenger seat. You see the law for human beings is free will. You must make the practical decision to use your will to open the door within.

Well, what does this have to do with new wiring? Our subconscious is running the show. Almost every action we take is automatic. We go to bed. Our alarm clock goes off.

We use the same hand to shut it off and go back to bed for five minutes. The alarm goes off again. We shut off the alarm. We stumble out of bed and go to the bathroom. We brush our teeth.

We are trying to wake up. Off to the kitchen, we go to brew some coffee. It's time to head off to work just in time for rush hour traffic. We make a few phone calls along the way. Some of us text when the cars are stopped. We make it to the office and do the same dull routines. I could go on and on.

Our daily routines in life are hardwired. We party on the weekends to release stress and wake up in the morning with a hangover.

Day by day, year by year we continue this routine. Our subconscious picks this up and reinforces it in our everyday life.

Our wiring is complete. This is our being and personality. You are a combination of all the thoughts you have ever had. Mankind is locked inside of his box.

So what is this new wiring you are talking about? Imagine you are the universe. You just don't know it. What if I told you that slowly you could rewire your circuits to understand and experience your true nature?

What if your true nature is part of the quantum field? It is part of the universe and God. What if I told you, you are magnificent?

Meditation is a way to directly rewire your circuits within. It is a way to slowly reprogram your subconscious. You are a computer programmer for your subconscious. You can transform and change into a butterfly.

I have said before the mind is like a tuning fork. Whatever it focuses on it will vibrate at that level.

Meditation allows one to tap into the quantum field which is infinite love, kindness, compassion, and tolerance. These are just a few traits.

The more one meditates these traits are rewired into our circuits and create new wiring within. One learns to stop, look, and listen to live. Every moment a person makes a conscious decision to act and be aware.

These lead to proactive human beings instead of reactive beings whose leaves are blowing in the wind.

One learns over time to be in the center of the hurricane instead of the 150 miles per hour of the winds of the mind.

Our world at large is stressed out. Yet the person who meditates slowly learns to be in the center of the hurricane. Yes, this takes time and effort.

But with the same time and effort it takes to be angry and pissed off in the world is the same time and effort it takes to be a kinder person.

Everything takes time and effort. Mystics have talked about this for thousands of years, ways to go outside of your box. They have talked about the human body is designed to experience God within you.

Many people try to use affirmations to program directly to our subconscious. Only when a person learns how to dive deeper into meditation will this work. Imagine from 0 to 7 years old everything that came before you the good, bad, and ugly was directly stored in your subconscious. Your brain waves were in a theta state.

From seven on the waking state is in beta. Your subconscious is online. Over 90% of your actions are dictated by your subconscious. For so many people on this planet, they are living lives that are stressed out.

Their brain waves are in high beta. No matter what affirmations they say they can't rewire and reprogram their subconscious.

Only by learning how to meditate and learn how to go into more coherent brain waves states can one learn to reprogram the subconscious.

These are exciting times. There is a marriage between science and spirituality. Science is giving direct evidence to help mankind discover his true nature and to discover the quantum field within.

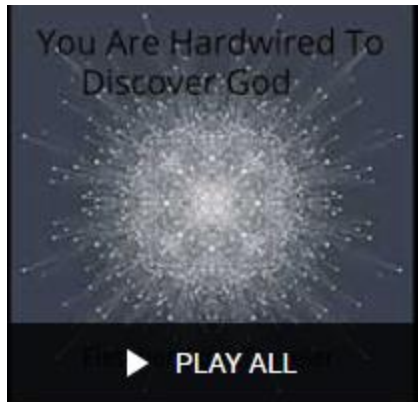
I don't know about you but I'm blown away by the possibility for humanity to change. We are on the journey of going from darkness to light. New tools are coming our way. Just wait and see.

The more a human being embraces his true nature one's imagination becomes larger. The universe starts to give you a different point of view on this journey of life. Ponder this over. Are we living in the matrix and don't realize that we have been asleep?

PDF



YouTube



New Personality



Your personality is driven by your subconscious. Over time one cements into his subconscious all the thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Our daily habits contribute to mostly our subconscious. To change and reprogram ourselves we must be conscious and aware.

We are like the snake shedding a new skin. To change we must develop a new personality. This requires great courage. We are learning how to drop the old and embrace the new. Why do humans resist change? Even if they know it will be beneficial to them

we resist it. We love our comfort zone even if it is making us miserable. Strange isn't it? Many people would rather wallow in their misery than overcome their problems and have a better life.

What kind of personality can I become? At the simplest level how about one who is kind in all circumstances? Amid adversity, one would simply smile. If another person would get angry at you, you would simply smile. It takes two to tango. Kindness will not participate in putting gasoline on the fire.

How about learning to see through the other person's eyes? You could see his point of view. You would listen to what the other person is saying. Most people don't. Most people are thinking about what to say next without actually listening to the other person.

How about loving life? You wake up in the morning and are so excited to be alive. What a glorious day it is. You get up and meditate. You get in tune with the quantum field.

Your mind, body, and soul get filled up with love, kindness, and compassion. You are in sync with the universe. Your will is focused on love. Your mind is your friend. You have sweet thoughts throughout your day. You become a kind human.

Incredible synchronicity occurs daily. Your love humanity. Every moment you are living in harmony.

One loves to be in nature. Gaia (Mother Earth) is by your side. She knows your name and you know that. You are living once again in perfect harmony with her.

Each person discovers his/her gifts to help solve the world's problems. With each problem a solution lies.

One begins to acquire incredible wisdom. This is a part of your true nature. You are in harmony with the universe. Exciting times are ahead of us.

We are becoming a new humans. Humans learn over time to directly reprogram ourselves. We discover we are our genie. In the past, our genie would work behind the scenes and we would be oblivious to it.

Mankind slowly learns that through his will he can learn how to reprogram his life. Someday in the future, this will be taught in schools throughout the world.

Science and religions are merging. Many new fields will open up. The higher our society advances the more harmony will be discovered.

Mankind will discover that war is obsolete. The bickering and fighting will stop when we can directly experience the thread that ties us all together.

We are going from me to we. This is how the world changes when we see the unity of all.

These are incredible times. The news mostly shows chaos. Yet millions of good deeds are happening all around the world.

Yet it takes effort and conviction. But every time you get out of bed it takes effort. Why not just reprogram yourself and discover your true nature? Imagine a hidden gold mine exists inside and we search throughout the four corners of the earth to find it.

One can spend lifetimes trying to discover it. It's a joke when one realizes that it has been there all the time inside of you.

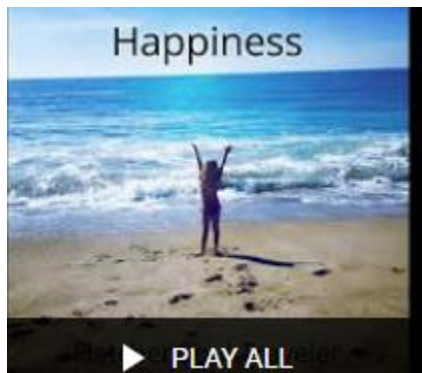
Mystics have been saying that for thousands of years. You are learning to become a mystic. You don't have to give up your life. You must embrace life.

Ponder this over. Exciting times are ahead of us.

PDF



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When one starts to implement new higher emotion, new thoughts, new concepts, new wiring, and new personality then one becomes a new human.

Christ was a perfect example of that. For thousands of years, man has been fighting and involved in wars. It seems quite

barbaric.

The world still fights wars all around the world. Many people say this is man's nature. In reality, it's not. We are going on a journey from darkness to light.

For thousands of years, we have been governed by different shades of darkness and light. Anger and hatred have ruled the land. Man doesn't know how to be civil so we go to war. War is obsolete.

Yet for war to become truly obsolete one must transcend our emotional state of mind. Anger and hatred towards one another must stop. Mankind is presently becoming a butterfly.

We were a worm and now millions of people all around the world are turning into a cocoon. In a matter of time, we will become butterflies. Yes, this will take time but a new human is emerging from the ashes. The greatest transformation is slowly occurring on this planet.

Science and spiritualism are merging. You see each individual is a piece of the grand puzzle.

A new human is born when we embrace God moment by moment in our daily life. It's not just the words but a state of being. The new human will learn how to be conscious of the quantum field 24 hours a day.

This new mindset will radically change the world. It will affect every single aspect of life. We will see through different eyes.

Mankind will become a kind man. We will begin to see the thread of love that ties us all together. We will become one unified mind. Yes, you will still be an individual yet your awareness will be in a state of oneness in life.

You will see that humanity is an extension of yourself. Presently we only see me. We are going on a journey from me to we.

I hope this excites you. This is not a fairy tale. It may take millions of years. You see the sun is rising. There is no doubt about that. Mankind is waking up from his slumber.

I believe that mankind can change for the better. Every day people are waking up. In the past, the mystic path was out of reach for the common person.

Presently people are seeing easy and practical ways to morph and change into a brand new way of seeing life. All the mumbo jumbo is taken out.

This does not change the experience of the quantum field. Nothing is taken away yet people now can practice simple techniques to directly connect to God.

I feel all the help in the universe is there. By our will alone we can ask for help in our daily life. We are not alone. Yet to experience this we must open the door within.

Humanity must learn how to rewire ourselves. Humanity must change and be open to greater adventures in life.

We have seen where man's present state of mind is and the consequences that occur. Just look at politics today. We are divided. Yet the new human will transform and leave all darkness behind.

You see when one embraces the quantum field darkness can't exist. Darkness is the absence of light.

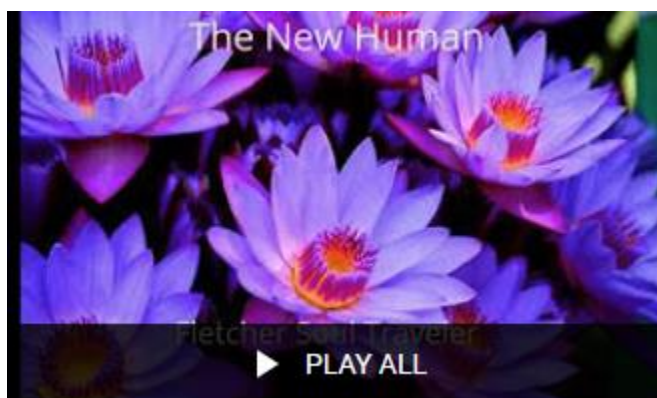
Someday in the future, we will look back at the present and we will say what an incredible roller coaster ride that was. What an incredible journey. This is the greatest story ever told.

We were on the verge of blowing ourselves up through nuclear. The consciousness of man knew deep down inside that we could overcome our petty difference and become united.

Not every civilization ends this way. Some have destroyed themselves. A new dawning is occurring for mankind. Just wait and see.



YouTube



You Are Closer Than You Think



Close your eyes. Focus on gratitude and love. When you feel a small sparkle of love inside you are connected to the quantum field.

Now with your eyes closed focus on kindness. When you feel yourself

experiencing kindness you are connected to the quantum field.

How about peace? Concentrate on peace. When you feel peace inside you are connected to the quantum field.

How about compassion? Concentrate on compassion. When you feel compassion inside of you are connected to the quantum field.

You see you are closer than you think. This is not an abstract object. This is the real you. Yet this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The more you pay attention to something the more aware you become. The more attention you pay to your true nature the more aware you become of it. This is just a simple fact.

We think that love, kindness, and compassion get triggered by external events. These emotions are our true nature. We have just forgotten. At any time we can connect to our true selves.

Meditation is the way to discover our true nature. Imagine in the beginning when you closed your eyes it was like taking a sponge bath.

Imagine in time that by practicing meditation you can jump into the infinite ocean of love, kindness, and compassion. How would that change your outlook on life? All problems that you have would seem so insignificant.

Presently most of us are stressed out. We can hardly wait for the weekend.

Yet imagine that meditation leads one from being stressed out to a place where one loves life. One wakes up every morning and is happy to be alive.

When one truly begins to moment by moment be aware of the quantum field, one's life is transformed. Truly it's impossible to explain it but we keep on trying.

For me, signposts are all around us and inside of us. We live such a busy life that we are oblivious to it. We have all these incredible emotions that are our true nature yet we don't realize how incredible they are. It's like we experience these emotions randomly in our life.

It's like falling in love with someone. We fall in love and think that the other person is responsible for it. As easily we fall in love we fall out of love. Thousands of people get divorced.

Meditation reveals that the infinite ocean of love exists inside of you.

This path reveals your true nature. This path shows you how to be a proactive being. We are not leaves blowing into the wind.

We can be in the center of the hurricane. What does this mean practically? It means that one knows how to live beyond a high beta state of mind. What does that mean?

It means you won't be stressed out. It means that you can laugh at life. It means your adrenaline is not out of control and can't be turned off. It means that you start to live in harmony and your health will increase.

One learns to talk to the body and the body starts talking to you. There is an incredible harmony between the mind, body, and soul. Your mind becomes your friend. In our society millions of people have addictions and the mind causes such pain in people's life.

I believe that the world's problems can be solved when the world at large embraces the quantum field. All practical solutions exist inside of the field. The more humanity will embrace this field (which by the way is our true nature) the faster the world will be a better place.

Isn't it amazing that man has fought for thousands of years? Many people say this is our true nature.

If we are divine beings do you think this is our true nature? It doesn't make sense. Yes, this is a journey of going from darkness to light.

I completely agree with that. I feel that the scientific and religious world is being merged. For the first time, the common man is being shown practical tools to discover the jewel that exists inside. It doesn't matter if you believe in God or not the essence is the same.

So the next time you get stressed out simply close your eyes. Watch your breath. Imagine the peace of mind. Hold onto that. This is your true nature. This is the first step of being conscious and aware of your true nature.

In this manner by experiencing even little peace thousands of incredible chemicals are being released into your body.

Remember each thought you have either positive or destructive chemicals are being released into your body. You are your master chemist. You are in total charge of where you are going in life.

We were never taught this in school. It's so obvious and science has proven that thoughts create chemicals that create emotions. You can't separate the mind from the body.

I don't know about you but I'm completely fascinated by this. I have been meditating for around forty-eight years and I'm still a youngster learning about the mysteries of life. I am completely blown away.

Mindfulness



mind·ful·ness

/ˈmɪn(d)f(ə)lnəs/

noun

1. 1.
the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something.
"their mindfulness of the wider cinematic tradition"
2. 2.
a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique.

I remember in the early 2000's I went to Phoenix Arizona for a business trip. Back then I was working for Charles Schwab. There were probably around a couple of thousands of employees attending the conference.

One day of the conference they had some classes that you could choose to attend. One of them was mindfulness. To be honest, at that time I heard of this Buddhist term yet I never understood its meaning. It was a great lecture. I was amazed that Charles Schwab even would present this topic.

Since then mindfulness has hit the mainstream. It's kind of a buzzword right now. You even see it on commercials on TV for selling products. But what is mindfulness?

According to this dictionary definition

a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique.

Let's break this down a little.

A mental state is achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment.

How do you focus your awareness on the present moment? What is the present moment?

Does mankind ever truly connect to the present moment? Just think in the quantum field it is beyond time and space. Past, present, and future are one. The Buddhists have been studying mindfulness for thousands of years.

They have been known to tap into the quantum field for thousands of years. Mind you they didn't call it the quantum field. They might have called it enlightenment or a state of nirvana.

I remember about 15 years ago I read this incredible Buddhist book called Crystal Clear. This book talked about the various stage of enlightenment. Now, this could be a rumor. I can't prove it but the Buddhists have some doubts about releasing this book to the public.

This was utmost sacred wisdom. They decided to release it because the techniques were so simple. They involved concentrating on your breath. Mind you this is an ancient technique used in mediating practices all around the world.

But have we ever pondered "what is the power behind the breath that is keeping you and the universe alive"? The universe is conscious. I'm sure you think I'm a broken record when I say you are the universe you just don't know it. But that is the truth.

When a person begins to learn how to meditate on his breath transformation start to occur in the mind, body, and soul connection. One is tapping into the quantum field.

Mindfulness is a state of bringing that inner awareness into the present state of mind. It's very subtle in the beginning. Mind you your circuits are slowly being rewired. I often say that in the beginning, you meditate on God. At some point in time, God begins to meditate on you.

You see the more attention you put on something the more attention is focused back on you.

Mindfulness is a state of being in the quantum field moment by moment. There are probably an infinite amount of stages of mindfulness.

Let's dive deeper into this definition.

a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique

Meditation is a stepping stone to calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.

This is where we can truly rewire the body and mind. When one is directly connected to the quantum field one's emotions are bliss, love, kindness, compassion, and gratitude. There are probably an infinite amount of positive emotions that we aren't even aware of.

Just think in this state thousands of positive chemicals are being released into your body. Moment by moment in meditation one has the opportunity to rewire our mind-body connections to be in harmony with the quantum field. Every person on earth is hardwired for this.

For this to happen we must be aware. This is what the whole book is about. Our subconscious is 95% running the show. No wonder we have so many problems in the world today.

Mindfulness is a way out of this situation. You could say a being like Christ or Buddha learned how to be in perfect harmony with the quantum field. Yes, they didn't call it that back then. They used different terminology. The essence is the same. This is just the tip of the iceberg in this discussion. Ponder this over.

People

Jaron Zepel Lanier

Jaron Zepel Lanier (/ˈdʒɛɪrɪn lɪˈniər/, born May 3, 1960) is an American [computer philosophy](#) writer, computer scientist, visual artist, and composer of contemporary classical music. Considered a founder of the field of [virtual reality](#),^[2] Lanier and [Thomas G. Zimmerman](#) left [Atari](#) in 1985 to found [VPL Research](#), Inc., the first company to sell [VR goggles](#) and [gloves](#).

In the late 1990s, Lanier worked on applications for [Internet2](#), and in the 2000s, he was a visiting scholar at [Silicon Graphics](#) and various universities. In 2006 he began to work at Microsoft, and from 2009 has worked at [Microsoft Research](#) as an Interdisciplinary Scientist.^[3]

Lanier has composed contemporary classical music and is a collector of rare instruments (of which he owns one to two thousand^[4]); his acoustic album, *Instruments of Change* (1994) features Asian wind and string instruments such as the [khene](#) mouth organ, the [suling](#) flute, and the [sitar](#)-like [esraj](#). Lanier teamed with Mario Grigorov to compose the soundtrack to the documentary film *The Third Wave* (2007). In 2010, Lanier was nominated in the *TIME 100* list of most influential people.^[5]

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⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaron_Lanier

Jaron Lanier



Jaron Lanier in May 2006

born	Jaron Zepel Lanier May 3, 1960 (age 60) New York City, U.S.
Occupation	Computer scientist, composer, visual artist, author
Employer	Microsoft Research ^[1]
Known for	Virtual reality
Website	www.jaronlanier.com

You may have heard the mournful confessions from the founders of social media empires, which I prefer to call “behavior modification empires.”

9

Jaron Lanier quotes

“Information is alienated experience.”

— **Jaron Lanier**

“Rama’s experiments suggest that some metaphors can be understood as mild forms of synesthesia. In”

— **Jaron Lanier, You Are Not A Gadget**

“Watch a cat circus online, and what’s so touching is that the cats are clearly making their own minds up about whether to do a trick they’ve learned, or to do nothing, or to wander into the audience.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“Siren Servers are narcissists; blind to where value comes from, including the web of global interdependence that is at the core of their own value.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Who Owns the Future?**

“With nothing else to seek but attention, ordinary people tend to become assholes, because the biggest assholes get the most attention. This inherent bias toward assholedom flavors the action of all the other parts of

⁹ https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3010868.Jaron_Lanier?page=5

the BUMMER machine.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“Who cares if I myself am liberal? If you are a principled conservative, do you think you’ve really been well served by BUMMER? My evangelical Christian conservative friends suddenly find themselves wedged into social media communities that support an obscene, cruel philanderer and abuser who made fortunes from gambling and bankruptcies and who has stated, on the record, that he doesn’t need or seek forgiveness from God. 12 Meanwhile my patriotic, hawkish conservative friends now find themselves aligned with a leader who would almost certainly not be in office were it not for cynical, illegal interventions by a hostile foreign power. Look what BUMMER has done to your conservatism.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“The same thing happens to liberals. Remember Bernie Bros? Remember how it became cool in some liberal circles to cruelly ridicule Hillary, as if doing so were a religion? In the age of BUMMER you can’t tell what was organic and what was engineered. 13”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“Not only have consumers prioritized flash and laziness over empowerment, but we have also acquiesced to being spied on all the time.”

— **Jaron Lanier**

“If market pricing is the only legitimate test of quality, why are we still bothering with proven theorems? Why don’t we just have a vote on whether a theorem is true? To make it better we’ll have everyone vote on it, especially the hundreds of millions of people who don’t understand the math. Would that satisfy you?”

— **Jaron Lanier**

“If Twitter ceased operations tomorrow, not only would Trump not be able to tweet, obviously, but also I believe he’d become a nicer, better person at all hours.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“When you use BUMMER, you implicitly accept a new spiritual framework. It is like the EULA agreement—the user agreement—that you clicked “OK” on without reading. You have agreed to change something intimate about your relationship with your soul. If you use BUMMER, you have probably, to some degree, statistically speaking, effectively renounced what you might think is your religion, even if that religion is atheism. You have been inducted into a new spiritual framework.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“Here is yet another statement of the core idea of this book, that data concerning people is best thought of as people in disguise, and they’re usually up to something.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Who Owns the Future?**

“Cuando usamos las redes sociales, recibimos el equivalente tanto de las recompensas como de las descargas eléctricas.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Diez razones para borrar tus redes sociales de inmediato**

“There are almost no investigative local news organizations left in the United States. Our huge nation is only a few organizations away from having no independent newsrooms with resources and clout.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“one might ask why big business data is still so often used on faith, even after it has failed spectacularly. The answer is of course that big business data happens to facilitate superquick and vast near-term accumulations of wealth and influence.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Who Owns the Future?**

“The reason [James Clerk] Maxwell's Demon cannot exist is that it does take resources to perform an act of discrimination. We imagine computation is free, but it never is. The very act of choosing which particle is cold or hot itself becomes an energy drain and a source of waste heat. The principle is also known as "no free lunch.”

We do our best to implement Maxwell's Demon whenever we manipulate reality with our technologies, but we can never do so perfectly; we certainly can't get ahead of the game, which is known as entropy. All the air conditioners in a city emit heat that makes the city hotter overall. While you can implement what seems to be a Maxwell's Demon if you don't look too far or too closely, in the big picture you always lose more than you gain.

Every bit in a computer is a wannabe Maxwell's Demon, separating the state of "one" from the state of "zero" for a while, at a cost. A computer on a network can also act like a wannabe demon if it tries to sort data from networked people into one or the other side of some imaginary door, while pretending there is no cost or risk involved.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Who Owns the Future?**

“Speaking through social media isn't really speaking at all. Context is applied to what you say after you say it, for someone else's purposes and profit.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“Every power-seeking entity in the world, whether it's a government, a business, or an informal group, has gotten wise to the idea that if you can assemble information about other people, that information makes you powerful.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Who Owns the Future?**

“According to reporting by the New York Times, the going rate for fake people on Twitter in early 2018 was \$225 for the first 25,000 fake followers.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“If you are twittering, innovate in order to find a way to describe your internal state instead of trivial external events, to avoid the creeping danger of believing that objectively described events define you, as they would define a machine.”

— **Jaron Lanier, You Are Not a Gadget**

“When machines get incredibly cheap to run, people seem correspondingly expensive.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Who Owns the Future?**

“One good test of whether an economy is humanistic or not is the plausibility of earning the ability to drop out of it for a while without incident or insult.”

— **Jaron Lanier**

“People are clustered into paranoia peer groups because then they can be more easily and predictably swayed.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“Moving in with people might have been for cats what advancing technology has been for people.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“Some have compared social media to the tobacco industry,⁵ but I will not. The better analogy is paint that contains lead. When it became undeniable that lead was harmful, no one declared that houses should never be painted again.

Instead, after pressure and legislation, lead-free paints became the new standard.⁶ Smart people simply waited to buy paint until there was a safe version on sale. Similarly, smart people should delete their accounts until nontoxic varieties are available.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

“You’re wrong, it’s not like I’m from Marin. Those people believe in things without evidence. Like astrology.” “Um, maybe no one told you, but you can’t have sex—ever—if you make fun of astrology around here.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Dawn of the New Everything: Encounters with Reality and Virtual Reality**

“Whatever the motivation, Turing authored the first trope to support the idea that bits can be alive on their own, independent of human observers.”

— **Jaron Lanier, You Are Not a Gadget**

“Trying to create an overly flattened society inevitably and unintentionally creates new centers of power. A revolution might dethrone the old rich, but only at the expense of empaneling an unchallenged communist party, along with a politburo and legions of clever schemers and ass kissers who turn into a new privileged class. The right way to deal with concentrations of power is not to try to vaporize them, but to balance them.”

— **Jaron Lanier**

“What if only humans are real, and information is not?”

— **Jaron Lanier, You Are Not a Gadget**

tags: [humanity](#), [knowledge](#)

“To become a number is to be explicitly subservient to a system. A number is a public verification of reduced freedom, status, and personhood.”

— **Jaron Lanier, Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now**

Chamath Palihapitiya



Here's Chamath Palihapitiya, former vice president of user growth at Facebook:

The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops we've created are destroying how society works.... No civil discourse, no cooperation; misinformation, mistruth.

And it's not an American problem—this is not about Russian ads. This is a global problem.... I feel tremendous guilt. I think we all knew in the back of our minds—even though we feigned this whole line of, like, there probably aren't any bad unintended consequences.

I think in the back, deep, deep recesses of, we kind of knew something bad could happen.... So we are in a really bad state of affairs right now, in my opinion. It is eroding the core foundation of how people behave by and between each other.

And I don't have a good solution. My solution is I just don't use these tools anymore. I haven't for years.¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://gizmodo.com/former-facebook-exec-you-don-t-realize-it-but-you-are-1821181133>

Tristan Harris



Harris authored “A Call to Minimize Distraction & Respect Users’ Attention” and shared the presentation with a handful of his Google coworkers in February 2013. In that presentation, Harris suggested that Google, Apple and Facebook should “feel an enormous responsibility” to make sure humanity doesn’t spend its days buried in a smartphone.^[10]

The 141-slide deck was eventually viewed by tens of thousands of Google employees and sparked conversations about the company’s responsibilities long after he left the company.^{[10][11]} Harris holds several patents from his previous work at Apple, Wikia, Apture, and Google.^[12]

Harris left Google in December 2015 to focus on a nonprofit called [Time Well Spent](#), which he co-founded.^{[1][13]} Through Time Well Spent, Harris hoped to mobilize support for an alternative built around core values at tech corporations, chief of which is helping us spend our time well, instead of demanding more of it. Harris asserts that all human minds can be hijacked and the choices they make are not as free as they think they are. ^[14] [The Atlantic](#) stated in their November 2016 issue that “Harris is the closest thing Silicon Valley has to a conscience.”^[1]

He coined the phrase “human downgrading” to describe the interconnected system of mutually reinforcing harms – addiction, distraction, isolation, polarization, fake news – that weakens human capacity, caused by technology platforms with the extractive business model to capture human attention.^[6] ¹¹

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tristan_Harris

Roger McNamee

Roger McNamee



McNamee performing at his solo acoustic show at the Sweetwater Music Hall in Mill Valley, CA on 16 Sept. 2013.

Born	May 2, 1956 (age 64) ^[1] Albany, New York ^[1]
Nationality	United States
Education	Yale University (BA) ^[2] Dartmouth College (MBA) ^[3]
Occupation	Businessman, venture capitalist, musician
Net worth	1 billion USD (2020)
Spouse(s)	Ann McNamee

Criticism of Facebook

An early investor in Facebook, McNamee became very critical of its impact on society and US democracy, as expressed in his Op-Eds for [USA Today](#) and [The Guardian](#)^{[25][26]} Earlier, on [CNBC](#), he said that he had tried to warn Facebook about the impact of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. elections.^[27]

He has also been interviewed by NPR on the topic.^[28] As part of this effort, McNamee joined [Time Well Spent](#) as a Founding Advisor.^[29] In May 2019, he appeared before the [House of Commons](#) privacy and ethics committee in Ottawa, calling for governments to temporarily shut down Facebook and other social media sites until they reform.^[30] On 25 September 2020, McNamee was¹² named as one of the 25 members of the "[Real Facebook Oversight Board](#)", an independent monitoring group over [Facebook](#).^[31]

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_McNamee

Sean Parker



Sean Parker

American entrepreneur



twitter.com/sparker

Sean Parker is an American entrepreneur and philanthropist, most notable for co-founding the file-sharing computer service Napster, and serving as the first president of the social networking website Facebook. He also co-founded Plaxo, Causes, Airtime.com, and Brigade, an online platform for civic engagement. [Wikipedia](#)

Born: December 3, 1979 (age 40 years), [Herndon, VA](#)

Height: 5' 10"

Net worth: 2.7 billion USD (2020) [Forbes](#)

Spouse: [Alexandra Lenas](#) (m. 2013)

Children: [Zephyr Emerson Parker](#), [Winter Victoria Parker](#)

Education: [Oakton High School](#), [Chantilly High School](#)

Facebook's founders knew they were creating something addictive that exploited "a vulnerability in human psychology" from the outset, according to the company's founding president Sean Parker.

Parker, whose stake in Facebook made him a billionaire, criticized the social networking giant at an [Axios event in Philadelphia this week](#). Now the founder and chair of the Parker Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy, Parker was there to speak about advances in cancer therapies. However, he took the time to provide some insight into the early

thinking at Facebook at a time when social media companies face intense scrutiny from lawmakers over their power and influence.

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Here's Sean Parker, the first president of Facebook:

We need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever.... It's a social-validation feedback loop ... exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology....

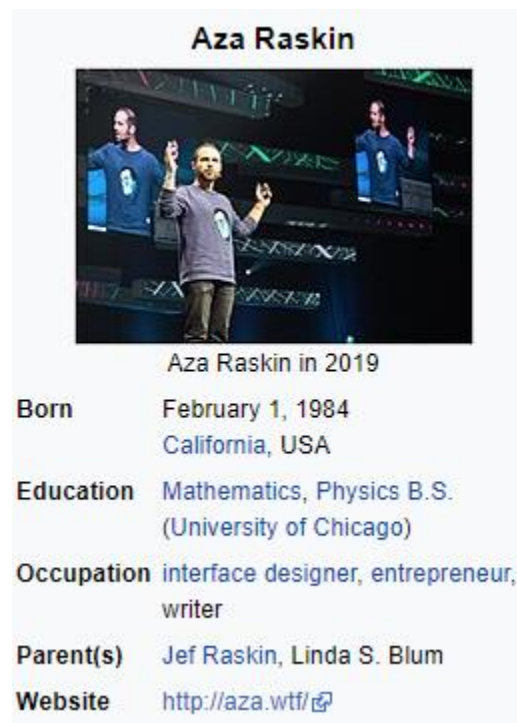
The inventors, creators—it's me, it's Mark [Zuckerberg], it's Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it's all of these people—understood this consciously. And we did it anyway ... it literally changes your relationship with society, with each other.... It probably interferes with productivity in weird ways. God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains.

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¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/nov/09/facebook-sean-parker-vulnerability-brain-psychology>

¹⁴ <https://www.axios.com/sean-parker-unloads-on-facebook-2508036343.html>

Aza Raskin



Aza Raskin (born February 1, 1984) is co-founder of the [Center for Humane Technology](#),^[1] and Earth Species Project.^[2] He is also a writer, entrepreneur, inventor, and [interface](#) designer.^{[3][4][5]} He is the son of [human-computer interface](#) expert and initiator of the Macintosh project at Apple, [Jef Raskin](#).

As an advocate for the ethical use of technology, Raskin is critical of the effects that modern technology has on everyday lives and society.^[6] Along with [Tristan Harris](#), Raskin has extensively talked about the powers and potential dangers that technology poses to modern society in the podcast *Your Undivided Attention*.^[7] In 2019, he became a member of the [World Economic Forum's](#) Global AI Council.^[8]

Raskin also coined the phrase "[freedom of speech](#) is not freedom of reach,"^{[9][10]} which was the title of an article that he wrote with Renee Diresta.^[11] "Freedom of speech is not freedom of reach" has become a defining term to understand the large scale implications of platform amplification and free speech.

The phrase has been publicly quoted by comedian [Sacha Baron Cohen](#) and Twitter CEO [Jack Dorsey](#) when banning political advertisements on [Twitter](#).^{[12][13]}

Raskin has been noted for continuing his father's work in project [Archy](#), for working as head of user experience at [Mozilla Labs](#) and lead designer for [Firefox](#), and for founding various [start-up companies](#). Raskin is also known for inventing the [infinite scroll](#).^[14] More recently, he has collaborated on [virtual reality](#) projects^[15] and [zooming user interface](#) (ZUI).^[16]

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aza_Raskin

Justin Rosenstein

Justin Rosenstein



Rosenstein in 2018

born Justin Michael Rosenstein
May 13, 1983 (age 37)
[Alameda County, California, U.S.](#)^[1]

Alma mater [Stanford University](#)

Occupation Software programmer,
entrepreneur

Known for Co-founder of [Asana](#)

Rosenstein dropped out of a graduate program in [computer science](#) at Stanford in 2004 to join [Google](#) as a [product manager](#).^[6] At Google, Rosenstein led projects in Google's communication and collaboration division.

His projects initially included [Google Page Creator](#), the precursor to [Google Sites](#), and a project internally codenamed "Platypus," which eventually became [Google Drive](#).^[7] He also created and wrote the original prototype for Gmail Chat^[8] and many of the features in Google's rich text editor.

In May 2007, Rosenstein left Google to become an engineering lead at Facebook, working closely with [Mark Zuckerberg](#) and [Dustin Moskovitz](#).^[9] He was technical lead in charge of Facebook's [Pages](#), the [Facebook Like button](#), and [Facebook Beacon](#).

In October 2008, Rosenstein left Facebook to co-found the collaborative software company [Asana](#) along with Moskovitz.^[9] On its website, Asana states its mission is to "help humanity thrive by enabling all teams to work together effortlessly."^[10] He is a frequent speaker on issues of business and technology.^{[11][12][13]}

He has published opinions on building effective collaborative software in Wired,^[14] leadership strategy and enterprise software design in Fast Company,^[15] and entrepreneurship in TechCrunch,^[16] and productivity in TIME.^[17]

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Google, Twitter and Facebook workers who helped make technology so addictive are disconnecting themselves from the internet. Paul Lewis reports on the Silicon Valley refuseniks alarmed by a race for human attention

by Paul Lewis in San Francisco

Fri 6 Oct 2017 01.00 EDT

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Justin Rosenstein had tweaked his laptop's operating system to block Reddit, banned himself from Snapchat, which he compares to heroin, and imposed limits on his use of Facebook. But even that wasn't enough. In August, the 34-year-old tech executive took a more radical step to restrict his use of social media and other addictive technologies.

Rosenstein purchased a new iPhone and instructed his assistant to set up a parental-control feature to prevent him from downloading any apps.

He was particularly aware of the allure of Facebook "likes", which he describes as "bright dings of pseudo-pleasure" that can be as hollow as they are seductive. And Rosenstein should know: he was the Facebook engineer who created the "like" button in the first place.

A decade after he stayed up all night coding a prototype of what was then called an "awesome" button, Rosenstein belongs to a small but growing band of Silicon Valley heretics who complain about the rise of the so-called "attention economy": an internet shaped around the demands of an advertising economy.

These refuseniks are rarely founders or chief executives, who have little incentive to deviate from the mantra that their companies are making the world a better place. Instead, they tend to have worked a rung or two down the corporate ladder: designers, engineers and product managers who, like Rosenstein, several

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justin_Rosenstein

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/05/smartphone-addiction-silicon-valley-dystopia>

years ago put in place the building blocks of a digital world from which they are now trying to disentangle themselves. “

It is very common,” Rosenstein says, “for humans to develop things with the best of intentions and for them to have unintended, negative consequences.”

Rosenstein, who also helped create Gchat during a stint at Google, and now leads a San Francisco-based company that improves office productivity, appears most concerned about the psychological effects on people who, research shows, touch, swipe or tap their phone 2,617 times a day.

There is growing concern that as well as addicting users, technology is contributing toward so-called “continuous partial attention”, severely limiting people’s ability to focus, and possibly lowering IQ.

One recent study showed that the mere presence of smartphones damages cognitive capacity – even when the device is turned off. “Everyone is distracted,” Rosenstein says. “All of the time.”

It is very common for humans to develop things with the best of intentions that have unintended, negative consequences

Justin Rosenstein, creator of the 'like' button

But those concerns are trivial compared with the devastating impact upon the political system that some of Rosenstein’s peers believe can be attributed to the rise of social media and the attention-based market that drives it.

Drawing a straight line between addiction to social media and political earthquakes like Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump, they contend that digital forces have completely upended the political system and, left unchecked, could even render democracy as we know it obsolete.

In 2007, Rosenstein was one of a small group of Facebook employees who decided to create a path of least resistance – a single click – to “send little bits of positivity” across the platform. Facebook’s “like” feature was,

Rosenstein says, “wildly” successful: engagement soared as people enjoyed the short-term boost they got from giving or receiving social affirmation, while

Facebook harvested valuable data about the preferences of users that could be sold to advertisers.

The idea was soon copied by Twitter, with its heart-shaped “likes” (previously star-shaped “favourites”), Instagram, and countless other apps and websites.

It was Rosenstein’s colleague, Leah Pearlman, then a product manager at Facebook and on the team that created the Facebook “like”, who announced the feature in a 2009 blogpost.

Now 35 and an illustrator, Pearlman confirmed via email that she, too, has grown disaffected with Facebook “likes” and other addictive feedback loops. She has installed a web browser plug-in to eradicate her Facebook news feed, and hired a social media manager to monitor her Facebook page so that she doesn’t have to.

“One reason I think it is particularly important for us to talk about this now is that we may be the last generation that can remember life before,” Rosenstein says. It may or may not be relevant that Rosenstein, Pearlman and most of the tech insiders questioning today’s attention economy are in their 30s, members of the last generation that can remember a world in which telephones were plugged into walls.

It is revealing that many of these younger technologists are weaning themselves off their own products, sending their children to elite Silicon Valley schools where iPhones, iPads and even laptops are banned.

They appear to be abiding by a Biggie Smalls lyric from their own youth about the perils of dealing crack cocaine: never get high on your own supply.

One morning in April this year, designers, programmers and tech entrepreneurs from across the world gathered at a conference centre on the shore of the San Francisco Bay.

They had each paid up to \$1,700 to learn how to manipulate people into habitual use of their products, on a course curated by conference organiser Nir Eyal.

Eyal, 39, the author of *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*, has spent several years consulting for the tech industry, teaching techniques he developed by closely studying how the Silicon Valley giants operate.

Are smartphones really making our children sad?

[Read more](#)

“The technologies we use have turned into compulsions, if not full-fledged addictions,” Eyal writes. “It’s the impulse to check a message notification. It’s the pull to visit YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter for just a few minutes, only to find yourself still tapping and scrolling an hour later.” None of this is an accident, he writes. It is all “just as their designers intended”.

He explains the subtle psychological tricks that can be used to make people develop habits, such as varying the rewards people receive to create “a craving”, or exploiting negative emotions that can act as “triggers”. “

Feelings of boredom, loneliness, frustration, confusion and indecisiveness often instigate a slight pain or irritation and prompt an almost instantaneous and often mindless action to quell the negative sensation,” Eyal writes.

Attendees of the 2017 Habit Summit might have been surprised when Eyal walked on stage to announce that this year’s keynote speech was about “something a little different”.

He wanted to address the growing concern that technological manipulation was somehow harmful or immoral. He told his audience that they should be careful not to abuse persuasive design, and wary of crossing a line into coercion.

But he was defensive of the techniques he teaches, and dismissive of those who compare tech addiction to drugs. “We’re not freebasing Facebook and injecting Instagram here,” he said.

He flashed up a slide of a shelf filled with sugary baked goods. “Just as we shouldn’t blame the baker for making such delicious treats, we can’t blame tech makers for making their products so good we want to use them,” he said. “Of course that’s what tech companies will do. And frankly: do we want it any other way?”

We’re not freebasing Facebook and injecting Instagram here

Nir Eyal, tech consultant

Without irony, Eyal finished his talk with some personal tips for resisting the lure of technology.

He told his audience he uses a Chrome extension, called DF YouTube, “which scrubs out a lot of those external triggers” he writes about in his book, and recommended an app called Pocket Points that “rewards you for staying off your phone when you need to focus”.

Finally, Eyal confided the lengths he goes to protect his own family. He has installed in his house an outlet timer connected to a router that cuts off access to the internet at a set time every day. “The idea is to remember that we are not powerless,” he said. “We are in control.”

But are we? If the people who built these technologies are taking such radical steps to wean themselves free, can the rest of us reasonably be expected to exercise our free will?

Not according to Tristan Harris, a 33-year-old former Google employee turned vocal critic of the tech industry. “All of us are jacked into this system,” he says. “All of our minds can be hijacked. Our choices are not as free as we think they are.”

Harris, who has been branded “the closest thing Silicon Valley has to a conscience”, insists that billions of people have little choice over whether they use these now ubiquitous technologies, and are largely unaware of the invisible ways in which a small number of people in Silicon Valley are shaping their lives.

A graduate of Stanford University, Harris studied under BJ Fogg, a behavioural psychologist revered in tech circles for mastering the ways technological design can be used to persuade people.

Many of his students, including Eyal, have gone on to prosperous careers in Silicon Valley.

Tristan Harris, a former Google employee, is now a critic of the tech industry: ‘Our choices are not as free as we think they are.’

Tristan Harris, a former Google employee, is now a critic of the tech industry: ‘Our choices are not as free as we think they are.’ Photograph: Robert Gumpert/The Guardian

Harris is the student who went rogue; a whistleblower of sorts, he is lifting the curtain on the vast powers accumulated by technology companies and the ways they are using that influence. “

A handful of people, working at a handful of technology companies, through their choices will steer what a billion people are thinking today,” he said at a recent TED talk in Vancouver.

“I don’t know a more urgent problem than this,” Harris says. “It’s changing our democracy, and it’s changing our ability to have the conversations and relationships that we want with each other.”

Harris went public – giving talks, writing papers, meeting lawmakers and campaigning for reform after three years struggling to effect change inside Google’s Mountain View headquarters.

It all began in 2013, when he was working as a product manager at Google, and circulated a thought-provoking memo, A Call To Minimise Distraction & Respect Users’ Attention, to 10 close colleagues. It struck a chord, spreading to some 5,000 Google employees, including senior executives who rewarded Harris with an impressive-sounding new job: he was to be Google’s in-house design ethicist and product philosopher.

Looking back, Harris sees that he was promoted into a marginal role. “I didn’t have a social support structure at all,” he says. Still, he adds: “I got to sit in a corner and think and read and understand.”

He explored how LinkedIn exploits a need for social reciprocity to widen its network; how YouTube and Netflix autoplay videos and next episodes, depriving users of a choice about whether or not they want to keep watching; how

Snapchat created its addictive Snapstreaks feature, encouraging near-constant communication between its mostly teenage users.

I have two kids and I regret every minute that I’m not paying attention to them because my smartphone has sucked me in

Loren Brichter, app designer

The techniques these companies use are not always generic: they can be algorithmically tailored to each person.

An internal Facebook report leaked this year, for example, revealed that the company can identify when teens feel “insecure”, “worthless” and “need a confidence boost”. Such granular information, Harris adds, is “a perfect model of what buttons you can push in a particular person”.

Tech companies can exploit such vulnerabilities to keep people hooked; manipulating, for example, when people receive “likes” for their posts, ensuring they arrive when an individual is likely to feel vulnerable, or in need of approval, or maybe just bored.

And the very same techniques can be sold to the highest bidder. “There’s no ethics,” he says. A company paying Facebook to use its levers of persuasion could be a car business targeting tailored advertisements to different types of users who want a new vehicle. Or it could be a Moscow-based troll farm seeking to turn voters in a swing county in Wisconsin.

Harris believes that tech companies never deliberately set out to make their products addictive. They were responding to the incentives of an advertising economy, experimenting with techniques that might capture people’s attention, even stumbling across highly effective design by accident.

A friend at Facebook told Harris that designers initially decided the notification icon, which alerts people to new activity such as “friend requests” or “likes”, should be blue. It fit Facebook’s style and, the thinking went, would appear “subtle and innocuous”. “

But no one used it,” Harris says. “Then they switched it to red and of course everyone used it.”

Facebook’s headquarters in Menlo Park, California. The company’s famous ‘likes’ feature has been described by its creator as ‘bright dings of pseudo-pleasure’.

That red icon is now everywhere. When smartphone users glance at their phones, dozens or hundreds of times a day, they are confronted with small red dots beside their apps, pleading to be tapped. “

Red is a trigger colour,” Harris says. “That’s why it is used as an alarm signal.”

The most seductive design, Harris explains, exploits the same psychological susceptibility that makes gambling so compulsive: variable rewards. When we tap those apps with red icons, we don't know whether we'll discover an interesting email, an avalanche of "likes", or nothing at all. It is the possibility of disappointment that makes it so compulsive.

It's this that explains how the pull-to-refresh mechanism, whereby users swipe down, pause and wait to see what content appears, rapidly became one of the most addictive and ubiquitous design features in modern technology. "

Each time you're swiping down, it's like a slot machine," Harris says. "You don't know what's coming next. Sometimes it's a beautiful photo. Sometimes it's just an ad."

The designer who created the pull-to-refresh mechanism, first used to update Twitter feeds, is Loren Brichter, widely admired in the app-building community for his sleek and intuitive designs.

Now 32, Brichter says he never intended the design to be addictive – but would not dispute the slot machine comparison. "I agree 100%," he says. "I have two kids now and I regret every minute that I'm not paying attention to them because my smartphone has sucked me in."

Brichter created the feature in 2009 for Tweetie, his startup, mainly because he could not find anywhere to fit the "refresh" button on his app. Holding and dragging down the feed to update seemed at the time nothing more than a "cute and clever" fix. Twitter acquired Tweetie the following year, integrating pull-to-refresh into its own app.

Since then the design has become one of the most widely emulated features in apps; the downward-pull action is, for hundreds of millions of people, as intuitive as scratching an itch.

Inside the rehab saving young men from their internet addiction

[Read more](#)

Brichter says he is puzzled by the longevity of the feature. In an era of push notification technology, apps can automatically update content without being nudged by the user. "

It could easily retire,” he says. Instead it appears to serve a psychological function: after all, slot machines would be far less addictive if gamblers didn’t get to pull the lever themselves.

Brichter prefers another comparison: that it is like the redundant “close door” button in some elevators with automatically closing doors. “People just like to push it.”

All of which has left Brichter, who has put his design work on the backburner while he focuses on building a house in New Jersey, questioning his legacy. “I’ve spent many hours and weeks and months and years thinking about whether anything I’ve done has made a net positive impact on society or humanity at all,” he says.

He has blocked certain websites, turned off push notifications, restricted his use of the Telegram app to message only with his wife and two close friends, and tried to wean himself off Twitter. “I still waste time on it,” he confesses, “just reading stupid news I already know about.” He charges his phone in the kitchen, plugging it in at 7pm and not touching it until the next morning.

“Smartphones are useful tools,” he says. “But they’re addictive. Pull-to-refresh is addictive. Twitter is addictive. These are not good things. When I was working on them, it was not something I was mature enough to think about. I’m not saying I’m mature now, but I’m a little bit more mature, and I regret the downsides.”

Not everyone in his field appears racked with guilt. The two inventors listed on Apple’s patent for “managing notification connections and displaying icon badges” are Justin Santamaria and Chris Marcellino.

Both were in their early 20s when they were hired by Apple to work on the iPhone. As engineers, they worked on the behind-the-scenes plumbing for push-notification technology, introduced in 2009 to enable real-time alerts and updates to hundreds of thousands of third-party app developers.

It was a revolutionary change, providing the infrastructure for so many experiences that now form a part of people’s daily lives, from ordering an Uber to making a Skype call to receiving breaking news updates.

Loren Brichter, who in 2009 designed the pull-to-refresh feature now used by many apps, on the site of the home he's building in New Jersey: 'Smartphones are useful tools, but they're addictive ... I regret the downsides.'

But notification technology also enabled a hundred unsolicited interruptions into millions of lives, accelerating the arms race for people's attention. Santamaria, 36, who now runs a startup after a stint as the head of mobile at Airbnb, says the technology he developed at Apple was not "inherently good or bad". "

This is a larger discussion for society," he says. "Is it OK to shut off my phone when I leave work? Is it OK if I don't get right back to you? Is it OK that I'm not 'liking' everything that goes through my Instagram screen?"

His then colleague, Marcellino, agrees. "Honestly, at no point was I sitting there thinking: let's hook people," he says. "It was all about the positives: these apps connect people, they have all these uses – ESPN telling you the game has ended, or WhatsApp giving you a message for free from your family member in Iran who doesn't have a message plan."

A few years ago Marcellino, 33, left the Bay Area, and is now in the final stages of retraining to be a neurosurgeon.

He stresses he is no expert on addiction, but says he has picked up enough in his medical training to know that technologies can affect the same neurological pathways as gambling and drug use. "These are the same circuits that make people seek out food, comfort, heat, sex," he says.

All of it, he says, is reward-based behaviour that activates the brain's dopamine pathways. He sometimes finds himself clicking on the red icons beside his apps "to make them go away", but is conflicted about the ethics of exploiting people's psychological vulnerabilities. "

It is not inherently evil to bring people back to your product," he says. "It's capitalism."

That, perhaps, is the problem. Roger McNamee, a venture capitalist who benefited from hugely profitable investments in Google and Facebook, has grown disenchanted with both companies, arguing that their early missions have been distorted by the fortunes they have been able to earn through advertising.

It's changing our democracy, and it's changing our ability to have the conversations and relationships we want

Tristan Harris, former design ethicist at Google

He identifies the advent of the smartphone as a turning point, raising the stakes in an arms race for people's attention. "Facebook and Google assert with merit that they are giving users what they want," McNamee says. "The same can be said about tobacco companies and drug dealers."

That would be a remarkable assertion for any early investor in Silicon Valley's most profitable behemoths. But McNamee, 61, is more than an arms-length money man.

Once an adviser to Mark Zuckerberg, 10 years ago McNamee introduced the Facebook CEO to his friend, Sheryl Sandberg, then a Google executive who had overseen the company's advertising efforts.

Sandberg, of course, became chief operating officer at Facebook, transforming the social network into another advertising heavyweight.

McNamee chooses his words carefully. "The people who run Facebook and Google are good people, whose well-intentioned strategies have led to horrific unintended consequences," he says. "

The problem is that there is nothing the companies can do to address the harm unless they abandon their current advertising models."

Google's headquarters in Silicon Valley. One venture capitalist believes that, despite an appetite for regulation, some tech companies may already be too big to control: 'The EU recently penalised Google \$2.42bn for anti-monopoly violations, and Google's shareholders just shrugged.'

The EU recently penalised Google \$2.42bn for anti-monopoly violations, and Google's shareholders just shrugged.' Photograph: Ramin Talaie/The Guardian

But how can Google and Facebook be forced to abandon the business models that have transformed them into two of the most profitable companies on the planet?

McNamee believes the companies he invested in should be subjected to greater regulation, including new anti-monopoly rules. In Washington, there is growing

appetite, on both sides of the political divide, to rein in Silicon Valley. But McNamee worries the behemoths he helped build may already be too big to curtail. “The EU recently penalised Google \$2.42bn for anti-monopoly violations, and Google’s shareholders just shrugged,” he says.

Rosenstein, the Facebook “like” co-creator, believes there may be a case for state regulation of “psychologically manipulative advertising”, saying the moral impetus is comparable to taking action against fossil fuel or tobacco companies. “If we only care about profit maximisation,” he says, “we will go rapidly into dystopia.”

Does staring at your phone for hours on end serve any practical purpose?

Read more

James Williams does not believe talk of dystopia is far-fetched. The ex-Google strategist who built the metrics system for the company’s global search advertising business, he has had a front-row view of an industry he describes as the “largest, most standardised and most centralised form of attentional control in human history”.

Williams, 35, left Google last year, and is on the cusp of completing a PhD at Oxford University exploring the ethics of persuasive design. It is a journey that has led him to question whether democracy can survive the new technological age.

He says his epiphany came a few years ago, when he noticed he was surrounded by technology that was inhibiting him from concentrating on the things he wanted to focus on. “

It was that kind of individual, existential realisation: what’s going on?” he says. “Isn’t technology supposed to be doing the complete opposite of this?”

That discomfort was compounded during a moment at work, when he glanced at one of Google’s dashboards, a multicoloured display showing how much of people’s attention the company had commandeered for advertisers. “

I realised: this is literally a million people that we’ve sort of nudged or persuaded to do this thing that they weren’t going to otherwise do,” he recalls.

He embarked on several years of independent research, much of it conducted while working part-time at Google. About 18 months in, he saw the Google memo

circulated by Harris and the pair became allies, struggling to bring about change from within.

It is not inherently evil to bring people back to your product. It's capitalism

Chris Marcellino, former Apple engineer

Williams and Harris left Google around the same time, and co-founded an advocacy group, Time Well Spent, that seeks to build public momentum for a change in the way big tech companies think about design.

Williams finds it hard to comprehend why this issue is not “on the front page of every newspaper every day.

“Eighty-seven percent of people wake up and go to sleep with their smartphones,” he says. The entire world now has a new prism through which to understand politics, and Williams worries the consequences are profound.

The same forces that led tech firms to hook users with design tricks, he says, also encourage those companies to depict the world in a way that makes for compulsive, irresistible viewing. “

The attention economy incentivises the design of technologies that grab our attention,” he says. “In so doing, it privileges our impulses over our intentions.”

That means privileging what is sensational over what is nuanced, appealing to emotion, anger and outrage.

The news media is increasingly working in service to tech companies, Williams adds, and must play by the rules of the attention economy to “sensationalise, bait and entertain in order to survive”.

Tech and the rise of Trump: as the internet designs itself around holding our attention, politics and the media has become increasingly sensational.

Tech and the rise of Trump: as the internet designs itself around holding our attention, politics and the media has become increasingly sensational.

Photograph: John Locher/AP

In the wake of Donald Trump's stunning electoral victory, many were quick to question the role of so-called “fake news” on Facebook, Russian-created Twitter bots or the data-centric targeting efforts that companies such as Cambridge

Analytica used to sway voters. But Williams sees those factors as symptoms of a deeper problem.

It is not just shady or bad actors who were exploiting the internet to change public opinion. The attention economy itself is set up to promote a phenomenon like Trump, who is masterly at grabbing and retaining the attention of supporters and critics alike, often by exploiting or creating outrage.

Williams was making this case before the president was elected. In a blog published a month before the US election, Williams sounded the alarm bell on an issue he argued was a “far more consequential question” than whether Trump reached the White House.

The reality TV star’s campaign, he said, had heralded a watershed in which “the new, digitally supercharged dynamics of the attention economy have finally crossed a threshold and become manifest in the political realm”.

Russia's election ad campaign shows Facebook's biggest problem is Facebook

Julia Carrie Wong

Julia Carrie Wong

[Read more](#)

Williams saw a similar dynamic unfold months earlier, during the Brexit campaign, when the attention economy appeared to him biased in favour of the emotional, identity-based case for the UK leaving the European Union.

He stresses these dynamics are by no means isolated to the political right: they also play a role, he believes, in the unexpected popularity of leftwing politicians such as Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, and the frequent outbreaks of internet outrage over issues that ignite fury among progressives.

All of which, Williams says, is not only distorting the way we view politics but, over time, may be changing the way we think, making us less rational and more impulsive. “We’ve habituated ourselves into a perpetual cognitive style of outrage, by internalising the dynamics of the medium,” he says.

It is against this political backdrop that Williams argues the fixation in recent years with the surveillance state fictionalised by George Orwell may have been misplaced.

It was another English science fiction writer, Aldous Huxley, who provided the more prescient observation when he warned that Orwellian-style coercion was less of a threat to democracy than the more subtle power of psychological manipulation, and “man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions”.

Since the US election, Williams has explored another dimension to today’s brave new world. If the attention economy erodes our ability to remember, to reason, to make decisions for ourselves – faculties that are essential to self-governance – what hope is there for democracy itself?

“The dynamics of the attention economy are structurally set up to undermine the human will,” he says. “If politics is an expression of our human will, on individual and collective levels, then the attention economy is directly undermining the assumptions that democracy rests on.”

If Apple, Facebook, Google, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat are gradually chipping away at our ability to control our own minds, could there come a point, I ask, at which democracy no longer functions?

“Will we be able to recognise it, if and when it happens?” Williams replies. “And if we can’t, then how do we know it hasn’t happened already?”

America has chosen Joe Biden ...

... to be the 46th president of the United States. The American people have disavowed four years of a thuggish presidency. They have chosen decency over dysfunction, fact over fiction, truth over lies, and empathy over cruelty.

They have rejected the last four years of ugliness, divisiveness, racism and sustained assaults on constitutional democracy. And even as Trump plots legal challenges and levies unfounded claims of fraud, it is clear America is moving on.

Now, the real work begins.


Removing Trump from the White House is one thing – fixing America is another. Many of the systemic issues that afflict the country will remain in place once he leaves Pennsylvania Avenue.

Two eight-year Democratic presidencies over the last 30 years have not significantly impacted these issues. A stark racial wealth gap, school segregation, corrosive inequality, a climate crisis and a democratic deficit at the heart of America's electoral college are but some of the issues that confront the new president.

With the Trump administration drawing to a close, we welcome the opportunity to refocus our journalism on the opportunities that lie ahead for America: the opportunity to fix a broken healthcare system, to restore the role of science in government, to repair global alliances, and to address the corrosive racial bias in our schools, criminal justice system and other institutions.

We will report on the massive economic transition needed to stem climate change and we will continue to question the unchecked power of corporations and Big Tech.

But we can't do this on our own. We need your support to carry on this essential work. We rely to an ever greater extent on our readers, both for the moral force to continue doing journalism at a time like this and for the financial strength to facilitate that reporting.

Professor Shoshana Zuboff	
	
Zuboff speaks at the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society in 2019	
Born	1951 (age 68–69)
Title	Charles Edward Wilson Professor Emerita, Harvard Business School
Academic background	
Education	Harvard University, University of Chicago
Thesis	" <i>The Ego at Work</i> " ^[1] (1980)
Doctoral advisor	Professor Herbert Kelman
Academic work	
Discipline	Social Psychology
Sub-discipline	History of work, history of capitalism, adult development, social psychology of technology.
Institutions	Harvard Business School
Website	shoshanazuboff.com ^[2]

Shoshana Zuboff (born 1951)^[1] is an American author, Harvard professor, social psychologist, philosopher, and scholar.

She is the author of the books *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power* and *The Support Economy: Why Corporations Are Failing Individuals and the Next Episode of Capitalism*, co-authored with James Maxmin. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, integrates her lifelong themes: the [digital revolution](#), the evolution of [capitalism](#), the historical emergence of psychological individuality, and the conditions for human development.^[2]

Zuboff's work is the source of many original concepts including '[surveillance capitalism](#)', 'instrumentarian power', 'the division of learning in society', 'economies of action', 'the means of behavior modification', 'information civilization', 'computer-mediated work', the 'automate/[informate](#)' dialectic, 'abstraction of work' and 'individualization of consumption'.¹⁸

Surveillance capitalism

Zuboff's new work explores a novel market form and a specific logic of capitalist accumulation that she named "[surveillance capitalism](#)". She first presented her concept in a 2014 essay, "A Digital Declaration", published in German and English in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.^[4] Her followup 2015 scholarly article in the *Journal of Information Technology* titled "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization"^[5] received the International Conference on Information Systems Scholars' 2016 Best Paper Award.^[6]

Surveillance capitalism and its consequences for twenty-first century society are most fully theorized in her book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Zuboff's scholarship on surveillance capitalism

as a "rogue mutation of capitalism" has become a primary framework for understanding [big data](#) and the larger field of commercial surveillance that she describes as a "surveillance-based economic order". She argues that neither [privacy](#) nor [antitrust](#) laws provide adequate protection from the unprecedented practices of surveillance capitalism. Zuboff describes surveillance capitalism as an

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoshana_Zuboff

economic and social logic. Her book originates the concept of 'instrumentarian power', in contrast to [totalitarian power](#). Instrumentarian power is a consequence of surveillance capitalist operations that threaten individual autonomy and democracy.

Many issues that plague contemporary society including the assault on privacy and the so-called 'privacy paradox', behavioral targeting, [fake news](#), ubiquitous tracking, legislative and regulatory failure, [algorithmic governance](#), [social media addiction](#), abrogation of human rights, democratic destabilization, and more are reinterpreted and explained through the lens of surveillance capitalism's economic and social imperatives.

Jeff Seibert



Jeff Seibert

Born	July 27, 1985 (age 35) Baltimore, MD
Nationality	American
Alma mater	Stanford University
Occupation	Entrepreneur · Startup Founder · Angel Investor
Known for	Startups
Website	jeffseibert.com 



Jeff Seibert ✓ @jeffseibert · Sep 13

...

The film @SocialDilemma_ just scratches the surface of how social media is polarizing the world, and it's time for the tech industry to address this head-on. My thoughts:

The mechanics and psychology behind The Social Dilemma



The mechanics and psychology behind The Social Dilemma
A deep-dive into how social networks work, and the huge, negative impact that's having on the world.
link.medium.com

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¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/jeffseibert/status/1305236177784512512?lang=en>



Research and career

At Stanford University, Lembke runs a dual diagnosis clinic; which supports people with more than one addiction.

These are typically patients who are depressed or anxious and also addicted to substances (drugs, alcohol) or processes (gambling, sex).^[2] Their main treatment involves a four-week abstinence from the addictive behaviour, which she has shown is the minimum amount of time to reset their brain pathways.^[2]

Lembke was one of the first physicians to speak openly about the opioid epidemic.^{[3][4]} She wrote the popular science book, *Drug Dealer, MD*, which resulted in Lembke travelling the [United States](#) and delivering expert testimony to legislators.^[5] She delivered a [TED](#) talk on the [opioid epidemic](#) and pain management at TEDx Stanford.^[6]

Alongside drugs and alcohol, Lembke has studied smartphone and technology addiction.^[2] Smartphones are not only addictive themselves; but exacerbate the problems of other

substance/process addictions, increasing access and social contagion.^[2] Lembke appeared on the [Netflix](#) documentary [The Social Dilemma](#), explaining that "social media is a drug", which exploits the brain's evolutionary need for interpersonal connection.^[7] Not only did Lembke appear on the show, but her children did too, and together they identified that most people significantly underestimate their screen time.²⁰

Q&A: Anna Lembke on smartphone technology addiction ²¹

By Elaine Park on February 22, 2018

Featured in a recent National Public Radio (NPR) article about smartphone usage and addiction, Stanford psychiatrist Anna Lembke M.D. sat down with The Daily to discuss her clinical work and how it relates to the increasing prevalence of technology addiction.

(Courtesy of Anna Lembke)

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Lembke

²¹ <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2018/02/22/qa-anna-lembke-on-smartphone-technology-addiction/>

The Stanford Daily (TSD): Could you describe the type of work you do at Stanford?

Anna Lembke (AL): I went to Stanford Medical School and stayed to do my residency in psychiatry. Out of necessity, I became an expert in addiction, because I was seeing so many patients with a variety of addictions in my clinic.

Now I'm the medical director of addiction medicine at Stanford. I run a dual diagnosis clinic. Dual diagnosis stands for having two or more addictions, meaning patients who have a psychiatric condition like depression, anxiety or schizophrenia and a co-occurring addiction problem, whether it's to drugs and alcohol or to process addiction, like gambling, internet or sex.

Most of my time is taken up teaching, treating patients with addiction and scholarly work on the side, including collaboration with colleagues, research and writing.

TSD: How did you get in touch with NPR?

AL: I get lots of calls from journalists, especially in the last year since the opioid epidemic exploded in the media and since my book, "Drug Dealer M.D.: How Doctors Were Duped, Patients Got Hooked, and Why It's So Hard to Stop," came out. Now I'm on a lot of journalists' shortlists whenever a topic in addiction comes up.

TSD: What's your main method of treatment that you prescribe at the clinic?

AL: The main method is to first recommend four weeks of abstinence from the addictive drug or behavior. Why four weeks? Four weeks is the minimum time people need to reset their brain pathways in order to be able to re-engage in recovery work and reassess their goals.

After four weeks of abstinence, some patients decide they want to continue abstinence and other patients decide they'd like to return to using that substance in moderation. People are variably successful at abstaining and some people with severe addiction are unable to do that on their own, living in their usual environment. Sometimes they have to go to the hospital, a residential treatment setting or sober living environment in order to help them abstain. Also, some forms of withdrawal, especially with drugs and alcohol, are life-threatening so you need medical monitoring for that.

Then, if the goal is continued abstinence, there's a combination of different therapies—group and individual psychotherapy—as well as medications that can help people. Finally, in the recovery phase, we try to help people rebuild their lives and create new habits without using. It's a three-pronged approach.

It's first abstaining to reset the physiology. Then it's setting goals and using medication and psychotherapy to maintain those goals, whether it's moderate re-engagement with or continued abstinence from the substance or behavior.

Finally, the long-term approach to recovery is creating a life worth living. It's not a simple solution. It's a chronic care model. We view addiction as a chronic relapse and remitting problem. It's not something that gets fixed by medicine. Many people need continued intervention and monitoring.

TSD: Between behavior and substance addiction, is one harder to treat?

AL: The natural history or evolution associated with both are very similar. Often times, people start off using to have fun or to solve a problem like insomnia, attention or anxiety. Over time, the drug stops working as well as it used to.

They escalate their use until they build up tolerance and dependence and experience withdrawal. This narrative is about the same so the treatments can be equally challenging and effective. The big difference is that with drug and alcohol addiction, initial withdrawal can be more difficult, because of the way they change the brain. With behavioral addiction, there is a physiological withdrawal but it's much more subtle.

Often, people think addiction is hopeless, but really, there's about a 50% percent response rate for all types of treatment, which is on par with the response rates toward other chronic relapse and remitting illnesses like Type II diabetes or depression.

TSD: Have you done research on the usage of smartphones?

AL: I would say it's naturalistic research by observing the types of problems that my patients have. Problems that are related to behavioral addictions like pornography and gambling are mostly consumed through the Internet.

There's also addiction to the Internet itself, including social media. Very often, the ways people access the Internet is through their smartphone. Also, the smartphone has exacerbated the problems of drug and alcohol addiction, causing heightened access and social contagion. Now you can order drugs like you're ordering a pizza.

Social contagion is a phenomenon in which people go online and learn about other drugs by reading on the Internet or watching Youtube videos of others consuming drugs in certain ways.

TSD: In the article, you mentioned smartphone usage disrupts the creativity flow. Could you elaborate?

AL: This is hypothetical on my part, but I do believe when we're constantly having our train of thought interrupted by checking a message or checking a text, we deprive ourselves of having a sustained flow of thought, which is crucial to creating something.

Yet by constantly checking and responding on the smartphone, we have the sensation of doing or making something. But it's an illusion, because at the end of the day, we haven't created anything. We've only been in response mode.

TSD: As a busy clinical doctor yourself, how do you manage your smartphone usage?

AL: I don't own a smartphone. Smartphones are about ten years old, right? At the time, our eldest was six and we had four kids the age of six and under. My husband and I decided that we didn't want smartphones because it would distract us from our primary task, which was paying attention to these little people.

We had already observed the way it affected people. When they use smartphones, they cease to exist in that place and moment. We wanted to be as present as possible in our family life and be good parents.

We both have excellent fast IT-supported systems at work, so we tried to create boundaries between work and home life. At home we lived off the grid—no TV, computer, Internet, phones—until our oldest daughter started high school. When we came home from work, it was an oasis, and it was very nice.

My husband has much more self-discipline than I do. I'm much more compulsive. If I had a smartphone, it'd be hard not to check it. It's easier for me not to have it than to resist the temptation. Every once in a while, it's a handicap, especially when I travel for work. It's increasingly difficult in some circumstances and eccentric.

But it's a decision I'm still happy about. I personally feel the benefits of not having one outweigh the inconveniences. Now I am worried that we won't have the close communication with our kids when they go off to college, whereas other parents may have that.

Again there are pros and cons. I'd love to be in close communication with them, but if they can't turn to me, it'll force them to figure out for themselves. Maybe that's a good thing.

Jonathan Haidt



Haidt in 2012

Born	Jonathan David Haidt October 19, 1963 (age 57) New York City, New York, U.S.
Education	Yale University (B.A.), University of Pennsylvania (PhD)
Scientific career	
Fields	Social psychology, moral psychology, positive psychology, cultural psychology
Institutions	University of Virginia (1995–2011) Stern School of Business, New York University (current)
Thesis	<i>Moral Judgment, Affect, and Culture, or, Is it Wrong to Eat Your Dog?</i>  (1992)
Doctoral advisor	Jonathan Baron, Alan Fiske
Website	people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/ 

Jonathan David Haidt ([/haɪt/](#); born October 19, 1963) is an American [social psychologist](#), Professor of Ethical Leadership at [New York University Stern School of Business](#),^[1] and author. His main areas of study are the [psychology of morality](#) and [moral emotions](#).

Haidt's main scientific contributions come from the psychological field of [moral foundations theory](#),^[2] which attempts to explain the evolutionary origins of human [moral reasoning](#) on the basis of innate, gut feelings rather than logical reason.^[3] The theory was later extended to explain the different moral reasoning and how they relate to political ideology, with different political orientations prioritizing different sets of morals.^[4] The research served as a foundation for future books on various topics.

Haidt has written three books for general audiences, including: *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (2006) explores the relationship between ancient philosophies and modern science;^[5] *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012) examines how morality is shaped by emotion and intuition more than by reasoning, and why differing political groups have different notions of right and wrong;^[6] and *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (2018), co-written with [Greg Lukianoff](#), explores the rising political polarization and changing culture on college campuses, and its effects on mental health.

Haidt has attracted both support and criticism for his critique of the current state of universities and his interpretation of progressive values.^[7] He has been named one of the "top global thinkers" by *Foreign Policy* magazine, and one of the "top world thinkers" by *Prospect* magazine.^{[8][9]} He is among the most cited researchers in political and moral psychology,

and is considered among the top 25 most influential living psychologists.²²

Research contributions

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Haidt



Haidt speaking at the [Miller Center of Public Affairs](#) in Charlottesville (March 19, 2012).

Haidt's research on morality has led to publications and theoretical advances in four key areas.^[21]

Moral disgust

Main article: [Disgust & Morality](#)

Together with [Paul Rozin](#) and [Clark McCauley](#), Haidt developed the Disgust Scale,^[22] which has been widely used to measure individual differences in sensitivity to [disgust](#). Haidt, Rozin, and McCauley have written on the psychology of disgust as an emotion that began as a guardian of the mouth (against pathogens), but then expanded during biological and cultural evolution to become a guardian of the body more generally, and of the social and moral order.^[23]

Moral elevation

Main article: [Elevation \(emotion\)](#)

With Sara Algoe, Haidt argued that exposure to stories about moral beauty (the opposite of moral disgust) cause a common set of responses, including warm, loving feelings, calmness, and a desire to become a better person.^[24] Haidt called the emotion *moral elevation*,^[25] as a tribute to [Thomas Jefferson](#), who had described the emotion in detail in a letter discussing the benefits of reading great literature.^[26] Feelings of moral elevation cause lactation in breastfeeding mothers,^[27] suggesting the involvement of the hormone [oxytocin](#). There is now a large body of research on elevation and related emotions.

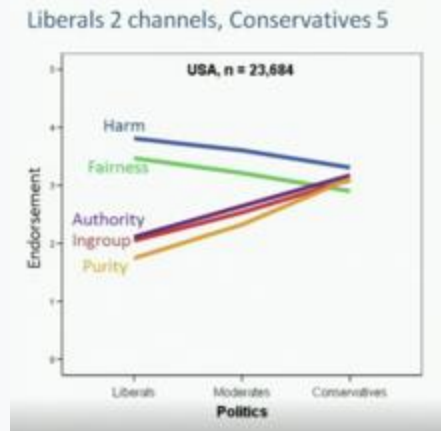
Social intuitionism

Main article: [Social intuitionism](#)

Haidt's principal line of research has been on the nature and mechanisms of moral judgment. In the 1990s, he developed the [social intuitionist](#) model, which posits that moral judgment is mostly based on automatic processes—moral intuitions—rather than on conscious reasoning.^[28] People engage in reasoning largely to find evidence to support their initial intuitions. Haidt's main paper on the social intuitionist model, "The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail", has been cited over 7,800 times.^[29]

Moral foundations theory

Main article: [Moral foundations theory](#)



A simple graphic depicting survey data from the United States intended to support moral foundations theory.

In 2004, Haidt began to extend the social intuitionist model to identify what he considered to be the most important categories of moral intuition.^[30] The resulting [moral foundations theory](#), co-developed with Craig Joseph and Jesse Graham, and based in part on the writings of [Richard Shweder](#), was intended to explain cross-cultural differences in morality.

The theory posited that there are at least five innate moral foundations, upon which cultures develop their various moralities, just as there are five innate [taste receptors](#) on the tongue, which cultures have used to create many different cuisines. The five values are:^[31]

1. *Care/harm*
2. *Fairness/cheating*
3. *Loyalty/betrayal*
4. *Authority/subversion*
5. *Sanctity/degradation.*

Haidt and his collaborators asserted that the theory also works well to explain political differences. According to Haidt, [liberals](#) tend to endorse primarily the care and fairness foundations, whereas conservatives tend to endorse all foundations more equally.^[31] Later, in [The Righteous Mind](#), a sixth foundation, *Liberty/oppression*, was presented.

Non-academic works

Haidt has authored three non-academic books for general audiences, related to various subjects in psychology and politics.

The Happiness Hypothesis

Main article: [The Happiness Hypothesis](#)

The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom (2006) draws on ancient philosophical ideas in light of contemporary scientific research to extract potential lessons and how they may apply to everyday life.^[32] The book poses "ten Great Ideas" on happiness espoused by philosophers and thinkers of the past—[Plato](#), [Marcus Aurelius](#), [Buddha](#), [Jesus](#) and others—and considers what modern scientific research has to say regarding these ideas.^[33]

The Righteous Mind

Main article: [The Righteous Mind](#)

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion (2012) draws on Haidt's previous research on [moral foundations theory](#). It argues that moral judgments arise not from logical reason, but from gut feelings, asserting that liberals, conservatives, and libertarians have different intuitions about right and wrong because they prioritize different values

The Coddling of the American Mind

Main article: [The Coddling of the American Mind](#)

The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure (2018), co-written with [Greg Lukianoff](#), expands on an essay the authors wrote for [The Atlantic](#) in 2015.^[34] The book explores the rising political polarization and changing culture on college campuses and its effects on mental health. It also explore changes in childhood, including the rise of "fearful parenting," the decline of unsupervised play, and the effects of social media in the last decade.^[35]

"The Elephant and the Rider"

One widely-cited metaphor throughout Haidt's books is that of the elephant and the rider. His observations of [social intuitionism](#)—the notion that intuitions come first and rationalization second—led to the metaphor described in his work.^[36] The rider represents consciously controlled processes, and the elephant represents automatic processes. The metaphor corresponds to Systems 1 and 2 described in [Daniel Kahneman's](#) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.^[37] This metaphor is used extensively in both *The Happiness Hypothesis* and *The Righteous Mind*.

Sandy Parakilas



Sandy Parakilas says numerous companies deployed these techniques – likely affecting hundreds of millions of users – and that Facebook looked the other way

Facebook whistleblower gives evidence on Cambridge Analytica row - live

Sandy Parakilas in San Francisco. 'It has been painful watching. Because I know that they could have prevented it.'
Photograph: Robert Gumpert

Hundreds of millions of Facebook users are likely to have had their private information harvested by companies that exploited the same terms as the firm that collected data and passed it on to Cambridge Analytica, according to a new whistleblower.

Sandy Parakilas, the platform operations manager at Facebook responsible for policing data breaches by third-party software developers between 2011 and 2012, told the Guardian he warned senior executives at the company that its lax approach to data protection risked a major breach.

Where's Zuck? Facebook CEO silent as data harvesting scandal unfolds

"My concerns were that all of the data that left Facebook servers to developers could not be monitored by Facebook, so we had no idea what developers were doing with the data," he said.

Parakilas said Facebook had terms of service and settings that "people didn't read or understand" and the company did not use its enforcement mechanisms, including audits of external developers, to ensure data was not being misused.

Parakilas, whose job was to investigate data breaches by developers similar to the one later suspected of Global Science Research, which harvested tens of millions of Facebook profiles and provided the data to Cambridge Analytica, said the slew of recent disclosures had left him disappointed with his superiors for not heeding his warnings.

²³"It has been painful watching," he said, "because I know that they could have prevented it."

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²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/20/facebook-data-cambridge-analytica-sandy-parakilas>

²⁴ <https://www.broadband4europe.com/14267-2/>

If The Social Dilemma Freaked You Out, Here's What To Know

"Social media isn't all bad."

Woman changes privacy settings after watching The Social Dilemma.

FreshSplash/E+/Getty Images

By Kaitlyn Wylde

Sep. 23, 2020

Ironically enough, people have been turning to social media to talk about the bad feeling Netflix's documentary *The Social Dilemma* has left in their stomach. With testimonies from ex-employees of Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and more, the documentary takes a deep dive into social media's impact on mental health, politics, and the economy. But is *The Social Dilemma* accurate, or just entertainment?

"I'm not trying to encourage people to delete social media, as opposed to just be aware of what it's doing and why and how," the film's director, Jeff Orlowski, told *First Showing* back in March. Orlowski added that as soon as some of the first viewers of the 93-minute documentary walked out of the Sundance screening, they shared with him that they planned to change their relationship with their phones.

Though issues like bullying, digital addiction, the spread of fake news, and surveillance are very real, the future of social media might not be as grim as the doc leaves viewers feeling.

"Social media isn't all bad," cybersecurity expert Kristina Podnar tells *Bustle*, explaining that she felt slightly defensive after watching it. "In a time of the pandemic, social media has afforded us connections in ways that we couldn't have done otherwise. We just need to understand the good aspects that come from it, what we are giving up for using the platforms, and how they need to change," she says.

Social Media Has Not Taken On A Life Of Its Own

"As humans, we've almost lost control over these systems. Because they're controlling the information that we see, they're controlling us more than we're controlling them," Sandy Parakilas, a former operations manager at Facebook, says in *The Social Dilemma*.

The documentary makes it seem like social media has run away from its creators, but Podnar says that this theory is "naïve and wrong." To imply that what's become of social media is a surprise, is to imply that the people who made it didn't know what they were doing, she says. "People were getting paid to work at the social media companies — it is a business.

Businesses exist for profit, so of course the platforms were always going to do things beyond connecting people [and] helping individuals find long-lost relatives," Podnar says. She adds that it's the nature of businesses that provide a free service to explore how to monetize your engagement, which has led things like targeted advertising. "

To now say that platforms took on a life of their own is shirking of responsibility by the very architects of the system," she adds.

Podnar explains that though the extent to which some of social media's negative effects have come into play — like the rapid spread of misinformation, cyber bullying that leads to suicide, and data collection that makes users feel unsafe — might have been more impactful than anticipated, each of these effects were in the cards from the get-go.

What's more, Podnar says that this could have been avoided if early developers spent more time mapping out parameters and guardrails for social media in general.

Social Media Is Not Doomed

Just because social media feels like a threat in 2020 doesn't mean all platforms will always be dangerous, according to Podnar. "Social is a bit like the early days of car safety," she says. "Safety belts and horns were not incorporated when the car was developed. It took a lot of issues and harm before we recognized the need for security standards."

People are now starting to understand the impact that social media has on society, which is a good thing. Podnar believes that though the documentary's tone suggested that it's all downhill from here, social media will ultimately become regulated and safer for all. "

There is no focused regulatory body nor enough citizen-driven focus (including financial spend and behavior) to drive the right behavior by the platforms," she says. But that doesn't mean that the regulations won't come.

The film's director acknowledges this nuance. "It's not about technology as a whole, it's about when technology is designed for us versus for somebody else. And there's this new class of technology that is designed for somebody else, and we are the resource that's fueling it," Orlowski told First Showing.

While global regulation programs like General Data Protection Regulations, California Consumer Privacy Act, and Protection of Personal Information Act are helpful in protecting private data collection, Podnar says they are still young programs, and are not as effective as users need them.

Further, data protection regulations only work to address user's privacy, not to patrol the safety of the platforms. "So missing is what is being done in terms of addiction to platforms, manipulation of humans, impersonations and identity hijacking, truth in content, as well as the ethical measures that need to be in place in order for platforms to function with integrity."

People Don't Understand Their Own Privacy

It's true that people don't know enough about what they agree to share when they use an app, or what is at risk by sharing that data, Podnar says. It's important for people to understand that their privacy is not out of their control, and they can limit what they share by being specific about what kind of apps they interact with. "We don't have control of our data on social media today, but we do have control on whether we are on social media and what we share."

To interact with apps without sharing more than you're willing, it requires education. "The documentary rightfully points out that people just don't know what is out there and how platforms are using their data. Everyone should know and have transparency into what is being done to their privacy and data."

If you're concerned about your data, Podnar suggests the following:

Remember that if the service you are using is free, you are the product. "Protecting your privacy and well-being costs money, and if it is free, then that speaks to the value you are getting," Podnar says. Expect limited protections.

Read the privacy policy.

Acquaint yourself with the platform. Go to settings and learn what you have control over. "Limit as much information about you being collected and opt out of as many things as possible," she says.

The People Who Made The Apps Aren't Necessarily The Most Fit To Fix Them

The ex-social media executives interviewed for the documentary couldn't quite come up with a fix for social media's issues. But they did say they felt compelled to be involved in the solution. "We have a moral responsibility, as Google, for solving this problem," Tristan Harris, an ex-design ethicist at Google, said.

But Podnar thinks the issue is much larger than the companies, or even the country. "Having North American and Northwestern Europeans 'rearchitect' platforms for the rest of the global population means that we will still get it wrong," she says. "This issue is a global issue and need to be addressed with global perspective."

Ideally, Podnar says the UN and other NGOs and non-profits would take on this role (as part of the discussion around human rights). At the very least, regulators from around the world should be working on these regulation changes together, says Podnar, not just a tight-knit group of people who are already familiar with the apps.

AI Is Not A Villain

Podnar agrees with the documentary that platforms have more information about us than they should have, and that it is being fed into systems without enough human oversight. "The documentary gets it right that AI and predictive analysis is being widely used, but not just by social media platforms," Podnar says. She explains that AI is used in many fields. AI can detect everything from medical issues in scans to your interests on TikTok.

She adds that it's a very dynamic technology that's not necessarily a bad thing, if proper parameters are in place. Most importantly, AI is not some personification of technology rising up against humanity. "Humans built the logic, and humans can alter the logic that drives the AI," she says.

But the biggest point that Podnar feels the documentary left out was the fact that tech companies can align their business models to use AI and data for good. "You could use data to screen individuals for signs of impending suicide or mental event and prevent that or treat the individual," Podnar lists as an example. "Alignment is needed, rather than an all-or-nothing proposition that the documentary seems to present."

If you can't stop thinking about The Social Dilemma and want to learn more about technology's impact on society, cybersecurity, and the future of connectivity, Podnar suggests queueing up Screenagers, Screenagers 2, The Great Hack, Terms and Conditions May Apply, Lo and Behold, and Algorithms: Secret Rules of Modern Living.

Cathy O'Neil



Cathy O'Neil at Google Cambridge in 2016

Nationality	American
Alma mater	UC Berkeley Harvard University
Awards	Alice T. Schafer Prize in 1993, MAA's Euler Book Prize
Scientific career	
Fields	Mathematics
Institutions	MIT Barnard College D.E. Shaw Columbia University
Thesis	<i>Jacobians of Curves of Genus One</i>
Doctoral	Barry Charles Mazur

9:08 AM

Catherine ("Cathy") Helen O'Neil is an American mathematician, data scientist, and author. She is the founder of the blog mathbabe.org and has written books on data science, including [*Weapons of Math Destruction*](#). She was the former Director of the Lede Program in Data Practices at [Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism](#)'s Tow Center and was employed as [Data Science](#) Consultant^[1] at Johnson Research Labs.

She lives in New York City and was active in the [Occupy](#) movement.²⁵

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathy_O%27Neil

True Confessions But No Real Answers

By Kelvin Childs

“The Social Dilemma,” a Netflix documentary-drama by director Jeff Orlowski, shows the common ground that undergirds a society relentlessly being fractured with each “like,” tweet and click on social media.

Orlowski, 34, is behind such hit nature documentaries as “Chasing Ice” (2012) and “Chasing Coral” (2017).

In “Social,” Orlowski parades numerous former founders, executives and engineers from the likes of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google, Apple, Uber and Firefox as if they are at a confessional — sounding the alarm about the Frankenstein they all had a hand in creating.

Yet, they disingenuously declare that no one’s fingerprints in particular are on the weapons they claim were formed from their work.

Tellingly, “Social” has no current representatives of the companies speaking to how — or, whether — they’ve course-corrected.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg appears in news footage evading congressional questions on his company’s responsibility and asserting that it can set things right with its algorithms.

But these former insiders and some outside critics, in rebuttal to Zuckerberg, say it can’t be done.

“We are allowing the technologists to frame this as a problem they are equipped to solve,” says data scientist Cathy O’Neil. “That’s a lie.”

O’Neil is author of the 2016 book, “Weapons of Math Destruction.”

“People talk about AI as if it will know truth,” she observes. “AI is not gonna solve this problem.

“AI cannot solve the problem of fake news,” O’Neil says.

Algorithms in Control

In their telling, the algorithms that govern these platforms magically operate without human intervention, or human judgment — which can’t be true.

The algorithms are fed by every keystroke users make on their platform of choice, amassing a dossier of interests, search queries and purchases.

“Social” speaks little to the privacy implications of collecting the data, how the companies safeguard it, or how they do or don’t help users limit how their information is applied.

Instead, the talking heads speak at length about how the data is used — all for one, overarching goal: to keep people coming back for more.

The strongest point is made by Jaron Lanier, a computer scientist who coined the term “virtual reality”: Unlike users of Wikipedia, those tapping search engines like Google and platforms like Facebook and Instagram don’t get the same thing.

Links, Images, Friends

They are, instead, fed links and images and videos selected by those algorithms — even shared by friends who are screened by the algorithms, too — all in service of advertisers, Lanier says.

This manipulation has terrible effects on the family in the film's dramatization.

Mom, dad and eldest daughter are concerned about the middle son's and youngest daughter's increasing addiction to their cellphones but cannot stop it.

Mom locks away the phones for an hour during dinner, but the young girl smashes open the glass lockbox, snatches up her cell and sprints to her room.

he son bets his mother that he can stay off his phone for a week but cracks in three days, with help from an element of "AI," played by Vincent Kartheiser of AMC's "Mad Men."

Skyler Gisondo plays a teenager whose addiction to social media leads him down a dangerous path in Netflix's docudrama "The Social Dilemma." Credit: Netflix.

AI's 'Elements'

The three elements of AI, all played by Kartheiser — "Advertising," "Growth," "Revenue" — continuously shoot the boy alerts to get him engaged, caring only about keeping him online to add money to their coffers.

None of AI's actions has any moral underpinning.

Soon, the son has fallen into an echo chamber of propaganda.

"Social" warns that the world is with him — using archival footage of the "Pizzagate" controversy and of violent protests in Berkeley, Calif.; Charlottesville, Va., and Washington — along with scenes of political unrest in the Philippines, Brazil, Myanmar and other countries.

And since social media companies won't apply moral judgment, they themselves are vulnerable to manipulation.

As technology venture capitalist Roger McNamee asserts, Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. elections by cynically using Facebook's tools.

"Manipulation by third parties is not a hack," he says.

However, the solutions offered during the closing credits appear ineffectual.

The contrite advisers recommend limiting screen time, keeping social media from preteens and pressuring companies to change their ways — as if the firms, primarily through federal legislation, will listen to people not using their wares.

"There's no fiscal reason for these companies to change," says Joe Toscano, former Google experience design consultant. "And that is why I think we need regulation."

As a whole, “The Social Dilemma” is about connecting the dots, but it leaves critical elements out of the picture.²⁶

²⁶ <https://digitalprivacy.news/2020/09/25/review-the-social-dilemma/>

Randima Fernando

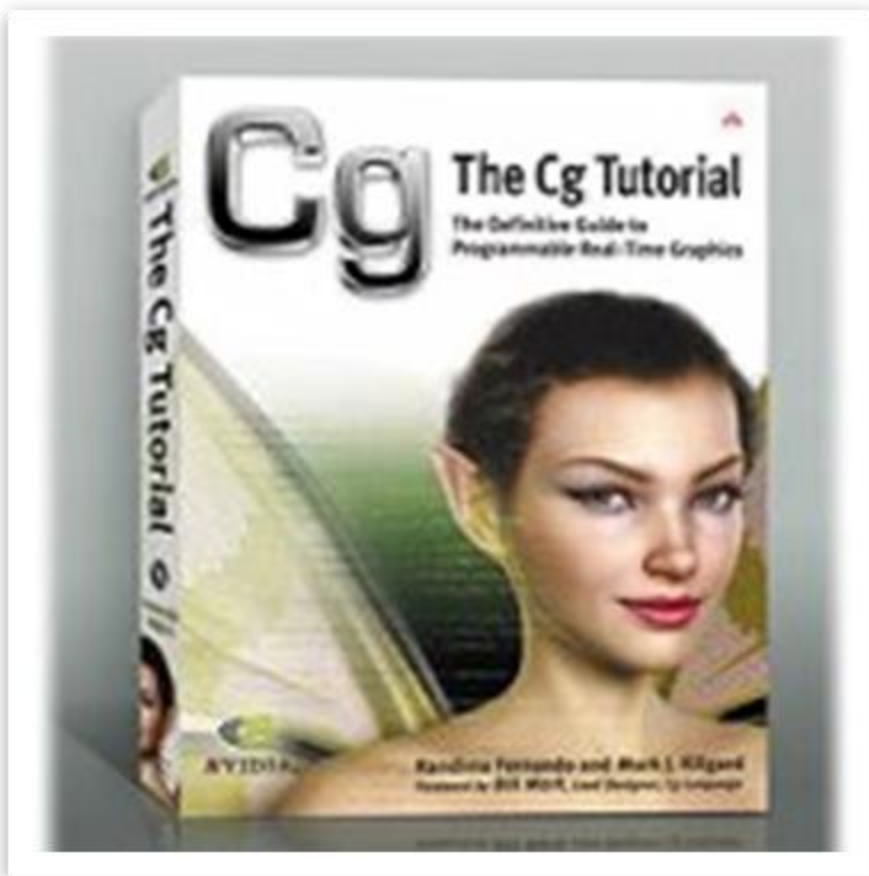
Randima
Fernando



Books: [The Cg Tutorial: The Definitive Guide to Programmable Real-time Graphics](#)

Born in Sri Lanka, I'm grateful to have been introduced to both meditation (by my mother) and programming (by my father) as a child. My fascination with making pretty pictures on the computer led me to study computer graphics at [Cornell](#).²⁷

²⁷ <http://www.randima.com/>



This passion took me to [NVIDIA](#) in Silicon Valley, where I [managed many award-winning projects](#), [authored three #1-ranked books](#) on graphics programming, and received [two patents](#). I was also an inaugural board member of the [NVIDIA Foundation](#).



I then served for 7 years as [founding Executive Director of Mindful Schools](#), a nonprofit that has [taught mindfulness to millions of kids](#) and over 30,000 educators worldwide. Mindful Schools was featured in [TIME magazine's cover story](#) "The Mindful Revolution."



Most recently, I'm [Co-Founder & Executive Director at the Center for Humane Technology](#), a nonprofit addressing the harms of social media. CHT is featured in [The Social Dilemma](#), Netflix's most watched film in Sep. 2020.

I'm a board member of [Spirit Rock Meditation Center](#) and the Buddhist Insight Network. It is a privilege to live with my wonderful wife in the San Francisco Bay Area.



The Social Dilemma: A conversation with Joe Toscano

SEPTEMBER 21, 2020 • 0 COMMENT

What's so wrong with social media?

The irony about social media platforms is that they're needed to help us 'function' in modern-day society, even though they're consistently damaging society by manipulating and changing users' behaviours. While this may be old news for technologists and people working with new media, the new Netflix documentary, 'The Social Dilemma' is positioned as a rough 'wake up call' for those who do not regularly question what happens behind their screens.

Or how our online behaviour and daily interactions on social platforms are being exploited and gamed for financial gain by a handful of companies in Silicon Valley through data mining and surveillance capitalism. We think it's an important film at this particular moment in history, when people are being asked to socially distance – further increasing our dependence on social media platforms for 'human and social interactions'.

About the Conversation

One of the technologists featured in 'The Social Dilemma' is Joe Toscano, a former Google Experience Design Consultant and founder of Better Ethics and Consumer Outcomes Network (BEACON). In this informal chat with our Director Alex Grech, Joe answers the following questions:

Could 'The Social Dilemma' be seen as an education project?

How can the younger generation's attention be captured when they're always in front of a screen?

What can we say to 18-year-olds that will be understood and remembered?

Is social media regulation an issue and is it needed?

How can digital literacy go mainstream?

How do we transition into building ethical online solutions for use by the masses?

What are the possible solutions for combating the dangers of social media platforms?

How can you get involved in this movement?

Key takeaways on 'The Social Dilemma'

Social media platforms are a national security threat because they run sentimental analysis to change users' behaviours.

We are in a transition period of building a future to protect individuals' privacy.

New companies need to be created for the incumbent social media platforms to lose their hold on the market place.

Data and digital literacy are essential components of basic education for citizens.

Resources

'The Social Dilemma' on Netflix

The Guardian's review of 'The Social Dilemma'

BEACON

DEL4ALL

Watch the Video



Watch Joe Toscano explain how the social media game needs to be played in order for it to break in this conversation with Alex Grech.

Jeff Orlowski



Jeff Orlowski

American filmmaker



jefforlowski.com

Jeff Orlowski is an American filmmaker. He is best known for both directing and producing the Emmy Award-winning documentary Chasing Ice and Chasing Coral. [Wikipedia](#)

Born: February 18, 1984 (age 36 years), Staten Island, New York, NY

Nationality: American

Awards: News & Documentary Emmy Award for Outstanding Nature Documentary, [MORE](#)

Nominations: Producers Guild of America Award for Best Documentary Motion Picture, [MORE](#)

Education: Stanford University, Stuyvesant High School

The Stanford alumnus behind Netflix documentary 'The Social Dilemma' wants you to stop scrolling

Jeff Orlowski's must-watch doc is an urgent wakeup call for a nation consumed by technology

by Sarah Klearman / TheSixFifty.com

Uploaded: Fri, Sep 25, 2020, 11:26 am 2

Time to read: about 8 minutes

Netflix's "The Social Dilemma" features key tech innovators, pioneering programmers and former executives from notable Silicon Valley tech companies, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google. Screenshot from "The Social Dilemma" via Netflix.

Director Jeff Orlowski ("Chasing Ice"; "Chasing Coral") spent the better part of his early film career focused on the fossil fuel industry: amazed by the vast power its executives wielded, horrified by the consequences it was wreaking on the planet, stunned by how it had altered the course of human history.

Then came a new fixation for Orlowski — an entity that was somehow more lucrative, just as powerful and every bit as woven into the fabric of modern day society: Silicon Valley.

Documentary filmmaker and Stanford alumnus Jeff Orlowski. Image via Jeff Orlowski.com.

And so the tech industry came to be the focus of "The Social Dilemma," Orlowski's latest documentary, which aired on Netflix earlier this month. The film features key tech innovators, pioneering programmers and former executives from just about every one of Silicon Valley's major players you could name: Facebook. Twitter. YouTube. Google. Instagram. Orlowski's list of sources is long and impressive.

So, too, is the testimony that they provide: "The Social Dilemma" showcases a wealth of insider insight into how these technologies were designed and calibrated to manipulate human psychology. Orlowski's documentary leaves no stone unturned as it dives deep into tech's ugly downside: social media addiction, the spread of misinformation, its negative impact on our mental health (and the mental health of our youth), as well as, according to Orlowski, its potential role in the downfall of democratic institutions.

That's no small thing to say, especially as a high stakes election looms large and a pandemic continues to ravage the globe. And yet social media platforms — even in this critical time — continue to grow, Frankenstein-like, into bad actors with key roles, Orlowski argues: Misinformation and conspiracy theories are spreading through society like wildfire, with social media platforms contributing the fodder and fuel behind them.

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But Orlowski insists he's no pessimist: In fact, he describes himself as a technological optimist. It's still his opinion society could change technology and social media in order to use it humanely, or even for our collective betterment.

e caught up with Orlowski to talk about how we proceed from here, whether Silicon Valley should be allowed to police itself — and about what the future of humane technology might really look like.

You're a Stanford alum — I'm seeing you were there from 2002--2007. Tell me about that time — did you engage at all with the 2000s iteration of Silicon Valley? What do you remember (or not remember) about it?

I mean, I was going down the path of working in technology myself. A number of close friends (from Stanford) and I were building a web design company together. As we were graduating, my friends were building different app companies.

My friend circle was very heavily involved in technology, which is why in 2017 when I started hearing from Tristan (Harris, a former Google executive) and others about this, those are the friends I went to immediately to ask what was going on.

Ironically, the film only really exists because many of those people and I went to Stanford together. I had access to important people in the industry, and that was the only reason why I was able to pursue it like this. There are... I forget the actual count, but there are at least six people in the movie or involved in the movie that were Stanford alum, and probably more. But yeah, in many ways, this is tech that was born out of our school. It's a very ironic full circle.

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Tell me about finding the folks you chose to interview. High caliber executives willing to speak on the culture seems exceptional to me, because we often deal with this insider culture around the tech bubble. Was it the Stanford connection that opened the door?

Yeah, it was. Tristan I knew from Stanford, and Jeff Seibert, too. He and I were close friends (while at Stanford), and he's the Twitter executive who ran product at Twitter. He's the one that when I started learning about all of this from Tristan,

I went to Jeff, and I said what do you think? Give me a fact check on him. Is there legitimacy here? Is this accurate?

Tristan Harris, left, formerly of Google, and Jeff Seibert, right, formerly of Twitter, are two of the film's most compelling interviewees. All three were at Stanford University at the same time, Orlowski said; it was those types of connections that allowed him inside access to technology executives for the film. Screenshots from "The Social Dilemma" via Netflix.

I remember Jeff's response — he was skeptical at first, but the more he thought about it, the more he realized he agreed with Tristan's perspective, and then he revealed more and more. That was just a really interesting process for me, and then it was through them that we kept asking — who else do you know? Who will speak on the record?

We did anonymous interviews and background interviews that we weren't able to use but helped inform our thinking and opened the door for more access to different executives and insiders. Some were really difficult to get. Some were difficult to schedule. Every person that we interviewed, we could then say — we've spoken to all these people, would you consider it?

Bailey Richardson (an early employee at Instagram) was featured in a piece ... I forget which publication, but an article came out about her deleting Instagram, so we hunted her down. It was looking for any possible lead we could find.

Tell me about your own perception of social media as you were making the documentary. Did it change? Were there surprising themes or revelations that surfaced?

Oh, man. I was a huge social media addict. I loved Facebook. I used it all the time. It was the making of the film that made me look at it in a different way. It completely transformed my relationship with social media.

It was understanding what the experts were saying, the engineers were saying, what the critics had to say — that was the way to understand what their business model was and what these companies are actually selling. The experience really, really transformed my perspective on technology.

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Original 650 illustration by Kaz Palladino/Awkward Affections.

Can you speak on the idea of implementing positive change to social media? Does Silicon Valley have a role in making those changes?

Yeah. Let me kick off that answer with an analogy, because I've been thinking through the fossil fuel industry for quite a while, and my background is in climate change films.

When you look at fossil fuel, we discovered oil and suddenly had amazing access to this incredible resource that allowed us to travel farther and fly, and only years later did we recognize that there were consequences. The fossil fuel industry is faced with an opportunity to change itself to become an energy industry that's more sustainable or digging their heels in to maintain their current business model.

That's the exact story I see with technology. It started so innocently. Twitter started off as an art project, fueled by the desire to connect people and share their stories. We now see the business model that got entrenched in these platforms has become so powerful — it's worth more than the fossil fuel industry, it's the richest industry in the history of money.

It's so incredibly powerful that it's really, really difficult to change. Despite good intentions from the people inside these companies, the changes I see happening are Band-Aid solutions. They're not addressing the fundamental problem.

I see the business model as the problem. The business model is misaligned with society, just like burning fossil fuels is misaligned with society. I am hopeful we do make the changes, but I'm skeptical that it's going to happen from within the companies because it requires the same, ground-up rewrite that's needed in the energy industry.

My hope is that there are enough employees who say no, I don't want to be a part of this, I don't want to be a part of the breakdown of democracy, a part of increasing harm around mental health.

There needs to be enough engineers that say, this is code, we can reprogram it. Let's do things differently, let's use a different business model, let's do things with society's interest at heart. That's where my hope exists, but really in many ways I hope the film is a rallying cry for the industry to have this wake up moment.

That we could see leadership within the companies, start seeing changes from within, or we see a lot of pressure that prompts change — whether public or political pressure. That's where my curiosity lies: How can we change to these systems to work in society's interest?

Right. There's that interesting moment in the film where we see (Mark) Zuckerberg testifying that he believes the solution to combating spread of misinformation is more AI — but then your film makes the point that AI can't know what truth is, it just knows how to generate more clicks.

There is a saying — a problem won't be solved by the same thinking that created it. And I do believe this is where greater diversity of perspective, greater diversity of awareness of how society functions and how humanity functions would inform better technology.

This conversation around humane technology, and if you're going to design to be humane — it has to be around human needs and vulnerability. Like the film says, they weren't designed around child psychology or around what improves the emotional growth of my child.

That's what we're really just seeing, that these companies have grown so much bigger than I think they were prepared for, and they have such influence over society that I don't think they were prepared for. We need them to grow really fast. It's no excuse to say, we're in our teen years. We have to work faster.

This has become our public square with no regulatory involvement around the public square. No regulation around what it should look like. Private corporations now control life experience, information and news for 3 billion people.

Original 650 illustration by Kaz Palladino/Awkward Affections.

The film touches upon this — but can you speak at all to why this is particularly important in this moment, where we're facing not only an election but continuing to deal with the pandemic?

We wanted it to be a conversation for the public. Particularly before the election. One of our subjects, Tristan, says that he hopes the film can be a shared truth about the breakdown of shared truth. I've been referencing this other line from Roger McNamee, and I'm paraphrasing, but he basically says — Russia didn't hack Facebook.

They just used it. And that's what we're seeing now, literally Russia and other foreign actors just using it. You don't need ads; the organic content is more effective. Political ads don't matter in the scheme of things, because it's the platform itself that creates these inherent problems.

There's another analogy I've been drawing upon lately: American companies have made a weapon of mass destruction on American soil, deployed on American soil to be used by foreign actors for practically no money. From a security perspective, that's frightening.

Anything else that comes to mind about the film or about technology itself?

I would add that I am very much a technology optimist. I believe in the power of technology. There's a line that got shortened in the film — it's from Jaron Lanier — but he basically says that people would ask him, why are you a pessimist? And he would say — I'm not, I'm an optimist. I believe it can be better. It's those who are complacent, those comfortable with the status quo, who are the pessimists.

That resonated with me, because I believe in the power of tech to serve humanity. I believe it can be a bicycle for the mind, that it can increase our capacity, skills and scale. And I think we entered this generation where the technology is designed for someone else — it's designed for another master. And we are now the unfortunate victims of this platform.

I was going to talk about surveillance capitalism, the idea that if you're not paying for the product, you are the product. We are the raw resource that feeds the machine, our life experiences ... everything we do is being collected and codified, and we're being extracted for this multi-hundred-billion dollar industry.

And so I'm hoping the film can help be a wake-up call, and help us realign technology to serve humanity.

A note on “The Social Dilemma”²⁸



I’ll close this note with something I’ve yet to address: my participation in [The Social Dilemma](#).

In the spring of last year, I was flown out to San Francisco for an interview. The director had been recommended by my college advisor, but I didn’t know exactly what to expect.

When I arrived, I was greeted by three of the most advanced cameras I’d ever seen and a set designed for me—an “Instagrammy” warehouse apartment.

²⁸ <https://gettogether.substack.com/p/a-note-from-people-and-company>





For the next two hours, I answered thoughtful questions about how I felt about social media and [my experience working at Instagram](#) in the early days of the app.

The resulting film is on Netflix, and I just found out it that it is the [second most watched documentary to date](#) on the streaming site. More than 38 Million households viewed it the first 28 days. You'll hear a bit of my voice amidst a cadre of former tech folks and experts in the field.

There's much to be said about the film, including [the casting choices](#). I won't cover everything here.

What I will share with you is what I'm in a unique position to offer: my *why*.

Why did I do this interview?

As you can likely tell, community work isn't just professional for me. It's personal.

Growing up, I witnessed first-hand the pain caused by being excluded or chastised. My brother was left out and teased for his learning disabilities. My mother, one of the first female luggage loaders (that's her below) and pilots for United Airlines, was never welcome at work. Most male pilots didn't want her in the cockpit with them. When she returned home from long trips I witnessed the toll that took on her.



Because of my mother and brother's experiences, I care deeply about how we connect with each other. At P&C, I love researching thriving modern communities in hope of decoding what we can do to build more benevolent connections in our society. What can we learn from the people who are successfully doing this today?

I used to feel proud of the space that Instagram created. I believed that we were a wellspring of benevolent connections. Many of the community leaders in the early days of the platform ("Instagrammers") who set that tone were generous, creative, optimistic spirits who I still call friends.

As the platform has aged, I feel Instagram has let us down with their business and design choices. No one has felt it more than those early community leaders who gave the young app so much. Without these folks, Instagram would've never become what it is today.

By 2018, it was clear to me that the app was taking more from my soul than it was giving. For me personally, Instagram has gone from a place of discovery about other people's lives—something like a live museum—to a mall, where we're selling ourselves to each other constantly.

I quit Instagram two years ago this month. I don't regret it. To quote Man Repeller on Instagram: "we're addicted to a drug that can no longer get us high." I was on that drug, and I had the choice to get off of it. So I did.

I shared my story in the interview for this film in hopes of helping other folks remember that they too have a choice. If being on social media causes you pain, anxiety, or just leaves you with a bitter or empty taste, you don't have to use it anymore.

That message didn't make it to the final cut, but I'm sharing it here.

I have faith that if we can create room in our lives for better spaces to connect they will appear. I believe it's my responsibility to keep speaking up until they do.

Onwards 🖐️

Bailey

Rashida Richardson



29

The only Black person in [Netflix's The Social Dilemma](#), was interviewed for over 4 hours, but in the documentary for 7 seconds. It felt egregious to me. [Not just because of the optics that others have been discussing](#), but because Rashida Richardson is an effing genius and trailblazer who needs to be heard.



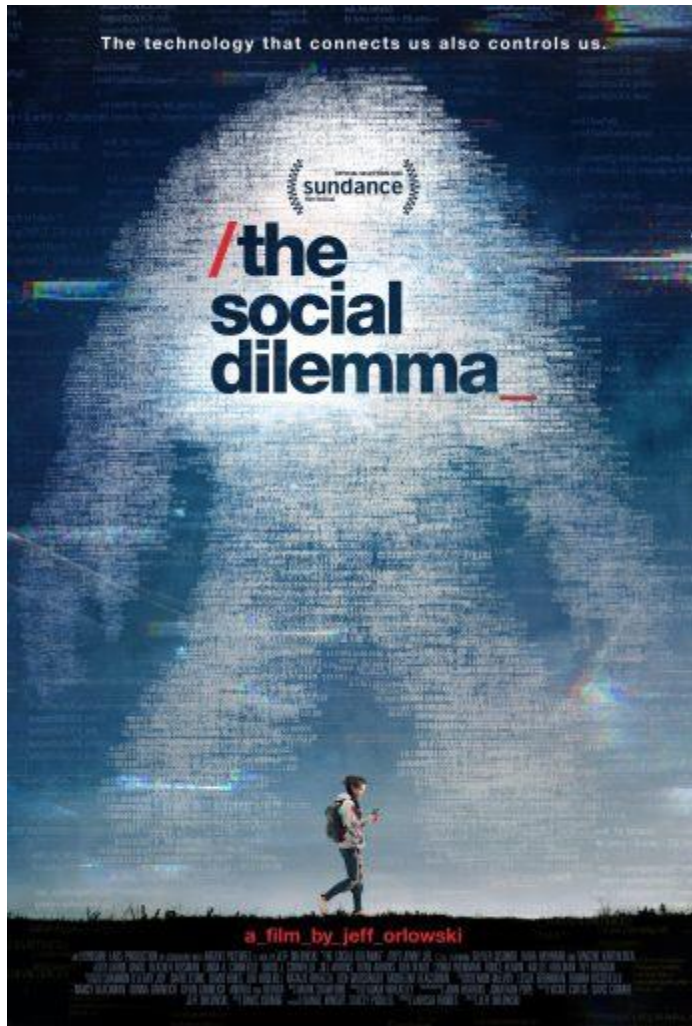
The 2020 Sundance Film Festival, "The Social Dilemma" Premiere

When the film producers from The Social Dilemma reached out to Rashida, a civil rights lawyer who focuses on technology, she was initially hesitant to

²⁹ <https://pyaartothepeople.com/whatthesocialdilemmaleftout/>

participate. Her take was, “I’m not like these other people that you are interviewing. They helped to develop the systems that we now see as a problem and now they conveniently realize there is a problem after they have profited from it”.

But the film producers still wanted (7 seconds of) her after she divulged her concerns.



So, I recently went over to her Brooklyn Brownstone, which her grandparents purchased in the 1940s, to discuss really interesting shit that was left out of the documentary. Of course, Rashida made me a delicious meal, because she is a phenomenal cook, and we talked and laughed for a few hours. Full disclosure:

We met during law school and since that time we have become friends, dance partners, foodie buddies and more.



Rashida and I
at her home

So sit back and get ready for us to discuss why tech is the next big civil rights issue of our time, why Rashida doesn't use social media, how the NYPD and FBI are preventing Brooklyn rappers from coming back to the level of Biggie and Bad Boy, having dinner at Angela Davis's home and the real talk she gives to young Black women who reach out to her for career advice.

What do you do professionally?

I'm a civil rights lawyer that works on tech issues.

I focus on both understanding and addressing problems on how data is used to exclude, criminalize or treat people in a negative and different way based on characteristics on who they are or where they come from.

Do you mean Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

I think AI is a clunky term that doesn't describe *the* thing. It is a categorical term that refers to a suite of technologies and practices and most people don't even define it well. So it remains an esoteric term and people just think of robots. I say 'big data' or 'data driven technologies', which is even more esoteric, but it's accurate.

What compelled you to do this work?

I had been working on a bunch of civil rights issues over the past few years. When I started to focus on tech/privacy/surveillance at the ACLU, I began to clearly see the cross section with technology.

Where do you currently work?

I'm currently a visiting scholar at Rutgers Law School and a Senior Fellow at the German Marshall Fund. I do public and academic research on the social and civil rights implications on big data and data driven technologies like AI and predictive analytics.

I came to this role after being the Director of Policy Research at AI NOW Institute, the first university institute to focus on the social implications of AI. I came to that role from working at the ACLU on privacy/surveillance issues and before that I was at the Center for HIV Law and Policy.



My favorite headshot

of Rashida

I typically joke and say I work on a ton of issues. But, I think my background has provided me with a unique perspective on seeing how all of these issues intersect.

A lot of researchers and advocates fall into the trap where they treat big data as a monolith in itself. But it is actually just a continuation of a lot of the structural problems that have persisted in this country and globally throughout time. This is why my current research is focused on history and the political economy and I'm starting to see the matrix of how all of these things connect.

You were the only Black person in Netflix's 'The Social Dilemma'. Tell us about that.



Cast of The Social Dilemma (Note: I am not including the Black actor or any of the other characters who played the role of a fake family member in the film. I am focusing on the technology experts.)

Yeah. I'm the only Black person and among three people of color. And, I think that is representative of this sector.

But in this convoluted way, if you are actually looking at who is driving the main critiques of big tech or tech generally and who is driving solutions – it is not white men. Yet that is who is (predominantly) represented in the documentary and that is who created the problems.

What did you discuss in the documentary?

Those 7 seconds discuss how people are operating on different sets of facts. When they can filter out what they don't want to hear, it becomes harder for people to reckon with information that doesn't comport with their worldview.

I was discussing this in conjunction with segregation, since it is the same logic. It's easy to other and dehumanize people if you never have to see them or live near them. If the only time you see them is through Fox News, where you see the most stereotypical dramatization of what that group or individual is, misinformation can feel like facts. This is happening throughout social media.

What was missing from 'The Social Dilemma'?

I think they did a good job at communicating the problems with the big tech business model and how that creates problems for everyone.

I think there are a bunch of valid critiques about what and who is missing in the film. But that has to be balanced with the reality that all documentaries have a narrative and they also have to cut tons of stuff.

That is mighty gracious of you. I wish we heard more of your perspective. Can you share?

From my perspective, and the reason why I'm only in it for 7 seconds, is that I don't think they focused on the discrimination aspects or bias concerns enough. To be fair, there could be a whole documentary just on those issues.

The whole reason I got in this documentary is because [I did a U.S. Senate hearing on optimization algorithms in big tech where I discuss how government \(mis\)uses big data.](#)



Rashida (Far Right) testifying at the U.S. Senate hearing on algorithmic transparency

This is not a private or public issue, but a huge grey area. Big tech and the monopoly that these companies have is a result of the government not doing anything for decades. Since the 1980s, we have not had any privacy or tech regulations and most antitrust enforcement and regulations have been watered down over time. This gets us to this current position and those are parts that they didn't cover in the film. The fact that the US government created the foundation for the problems we are dealing with is not as sexy as painting big tech as the villain.

You almost didn't do the documentary. Can you tell us why?

They failed to question the naivete of the white men in the film.

When they asked me to be in it, I blew them off at first. I told them, 'I'm not like these other people that you are interviewing . . . This is problematic since anyone who has been in this industry and *tried* to challenge it has either been pushed out or has had a miserable past decade.

So, a film critique is that all one has to do is get a platform and tell people what the problem is and they become a hero. This erases the structural problems within that industry that are also perpetuated by emerging technologies.

Why don't you use social media?

It's funny doing the film stuff. People can't find me or they ask about my handles. During film Q&A events moderators will ask, "Has your relationship changed with social media since making this movie?"

I answer that I am an anomaly in this film. I am the only one who did not use social media prior to the film and nothing has changed since.

It's not even based on a principled stance. I just don't care. I can do my own self sorting and crowd sourcing of information. I still have Facebook, from freshman year of college, but I haven't checked it in at least 5 years.

Are there challenges to not being on social media in your field?

The downside is that I have to do a lot to get credit for the work I am already doing.

To some people, if you don't have a handle, you don't exist. In some ways that is why I never want to get an account, because of that mentality. Why should I have to have a Twitter handle to be relevant or to get credit for the things I should be getting credit for?

When I was at AI Now, this would happen often. Journalists, publications, scholars, or advocates would credit the organization or its co-founders instead of crediting me as the author or lead.

I see this as a people problem, not a platform problem. Now I ask people to use a hashtag and write my name out in full, #RashidaRichardson.

It seems like a lot of folks in the social justice tech world are building a brand for themselves. How do you feel about this?

I'm reckoning with this now as there is a lot of money in the social justice tech space. It is the next big civil rights issue of our time.

The challenge is who is here for our liberation and who is here for personal gain? There are two camps and most are in the latter. It's fine if we move in the same direction, but then there are personal conflicts that take away from the work. The nonprofit industrial complex is seeping into the space.

Personally, I'm just trying to be heard to focus on the liberation of us. I'm not really interested in personal fame. But there is this tension that white people will just erase you. You have to be vigilant in how to draw that line.

So how do you address this?

I just launched my website, www.rashidarichardson.com.

I only built this site because I felt like I was being erased from the work I did. I thought, 'What happens if this continues for another decade'? So, we have to create space so all the talent doesn't get squandered.

Are you optimistic about the future of tech?

I don't know. 2020 has been such a curveball for society. In some ways, all of the fuckery of this year has helped move things that I thought would take 5-10 years.

It was like pulling teeth to get the NY City Council and the Mayor to support the Bill on public oversight of NYPD surveillance technology. All of a sudden, after the uprisings, they acted and became advocates for the transparency of surveillance technology overnight and the Bill was passed.

In some ways, it has forced the hand of fake progressives. The low hanging fruit have been stagnant, but are now acting.

What are the challenges as a civil rights lawyer in this field?

It is strange that people think tweeting is social change and activism. In some ways it is, I'm not trying to dilute that. #BLM and other groups have used social

media well. But the three Black women who created #BLM were trained in organizing. They use Twitter as a tool, not the primary medium.

So it has been really disorientating to work in this space and work on policy issues with so many people who have no idea how the sausage gets made in policy.

I am doing the work to convince legislators and stakeholders of what they need to do but also trying to keep those I'm in coalitions with in line.

For example, I deal with some academics in data science who think they *know more* than community members and community organizers who are directly engaged with criminal justice issues. I use the “legitimacy” of academia to bolster the work that community members and advocates have already been doing!

That sounds mentally draining

It is a constant struggle to communicate in a way that is disarming. I have to translate racism to white people who don't understand it and are so obsessed with their own view of themselves that seeing the word “racist” is off putting to them.

When writing, I think, ‘How can I get you to read my whole article and get to the end where the main point is said? And how can I do this without sugar coating and not erase the existing problems?’

Do you remember when I came over so you could practice a big talk at a college? I learned so much and it was so fascinating. Can we discuss that work?

OH that was my first keynote! You walked me through my keynote for Wesleyan University that was on predictive policing. That talk was before *Dirty Data Bad Predictions* was published.

It examined how police departments with demonstrated civil rights violations, like Baltimore or NYC, use predictive policing technology. It is now one of the most cited law reviews from last year.

What is Predictive Policing?

It's a computerized information technology that tries to predict where crime may occur in a given window of time and who may be a victim or perpetrator of a crime in that window.

It is very politicized. If a department is trying to say they are targeting property crimes because there is a rise in auto theft, they can act as if this technology is the silver bullet.

But the problem is that most of these systems rely on dirty data.



Rashida giving her keynote on predictive policing

What exactly Is Dirty Data?

It is the term from data mining that extends to include misrepresentations, inaccuracies and other errors in a data set. In the paper, I argue that dirty data also captures or reflects the policy and practices of police themselves.

For example, if you are dealing with NYC, it has had a history of prolific and racist stop and frisk policies. So, you will have police data sets that are overrepresented by Black and Brown people, even though that may not actually represent what the actual crime rate is or who is committing crime.

Another example is that people are less likely to report crimes in communities where there is a greater level of distrust of the police.

So these are all examples of ways that police data doesn't actually show actual crime activity. But these systems are taking in police data as if it's representing that.

Is data ever accurate in these technologies?

All data sets have issues. Period. The problem is that the dirty data aspects will vary based on what the data is used for.

Facial recognition has 2 problems. First, the data sets are usually underrepresented by POC. Those data sets are predominantly white males so they can have almost a 100% accuracy rate in matching a white man's face but not ours.

The other problem is in the databases it's using to do the matches. In the law enforcement context, these databases are overrepresented by POC. So the police are more likely to misidentify people in contexts where it will subject them to more scrutiny.

It doesn't work, probably never will and the few societal benefits are not worth the trade offs to society.

Have there been new concerns due to Covid-19?

Right now, considering the uprisings of earlier this year, my fear is that any type of reform that takes place will be too myopic.

For the past 30 years, when there is an economic crisis, the government turns to private enterprise to help solve the problem. They solve for the symptom, not the cause.

These private firms bring their solutions which optimize for efficiency but don't equate to civil rights or anything that most people care about. These business logics are all tied to the financialization of capitalism.

But you have to question whether the government has even identified the right problem first. That's the problem in policing. If you are saying the problem is property crime in Black communities and not divestment in Black communities, then you are not going to actually solve the structural root cause or problem.
Are there other issues in tech that we should be cautious of?

A major issue is "automation bias" or "tech neutrality", which is a societal problem.

People assume that if something is based on data it is more objective than human judgment, and better. They think predictive policing is better than the beat cop. In reality, these technologies just displace discretion. They are not objective. They are human creations that reflect flaws and problems humans have.

These flaws are easily concealed since most people don't understand how the technology works. The public can't see anything due to trade secrecy and IP rights. The term is "black box", where you don't see or understand what is happening in the system.

What is it like as a Black person in this field? Are there others?

There are other Black people and it's weird as hell for a lot of reasons. We not only deal with the larger white space problem of being an ultra minority in a white and male dominated space, but we also deal with people who have been segregated their whole lives.

They don't know how to deal with difference, and are unaware of how that skews their worldview. This is why it's not shocking that big tech produces the problems we are seeing today.

If you are building tech to solve problems for a world that you think is mostly white and male, then of course it's not going to work for entire parts of the population. I feel like I'm always just hiding a really confused face in conferences and spaces because I think, 'How is it that so many people have operated in the world for so long, yet are so disconnected and don't see that at all?'.

Looking back, what would you have done differently in your career?

Ask for more money. That's my only regret that I have learned over time. Negotiate.

I know young Black women reach out to you. What career advice do you give?

When Black women reach out to me, I tell them I don't define myself by my work. It doesn't consume me. I don't measure my success as a person by career stuff. This separation is important. They have to create healthy boundaries.

I then tell them, 'People are not going to think you are smart. You have to work 3 times as hard for less. Also you are working against people who don't see you as an equal or even human. You have to work in a way that challenges that worldview and proves them wrong.'

I also tell them that my approach can be a benefit and a detriment. [Claudia Rankine describes it about Serena \(Williams\) in Citizen: An American Lyric](#). About not being afraid of your own excellence. When I read it, I was like, 'Oh that's why I scare white people in a lot of spaces!'

I know I'm smarter than them and I'm not afraid to show it off or correct them and say no you are wrong and you don't know what you are talking about.' But in order to do that arrogant stuff, I gotta read a million books. I have to do so much more work. It's the rigor that I apply. This is just how I have to do the work.



If you have not yet read Citizen, you need to.

Seriously, go get it!

How can one prepare now, if they want to work in this field?

Read a lot. The issues are complex and not sectoral. If you are a civil rights attorney interested in fair housing, there is a sector.

We don't have one. You have to understand history, enough about how the tech works, and be ready to do the work I just discussed. This is the brand shit I was talking about. People think you can work like a white person and still achieve the same things. And it's like, 'No! We still live in a double standard'.

Also have your own theory of change. Articulate what you want for the future. This is the problem in tech. We never talk about what it means to create an equitable and safe educational environment and the role of tech in advancing that. Instead it's just like, let's apply tech to do X,Y,Z, and it always assumes an outcome.

Imagination work is the hardest work in this space but it is the work we need to do. For a younger person, this is important. Imagine something different.

Do you ever feel exoticized?

Oh yes. Since I'm Black and there are so few of us, I get invited to so many panels about shit I don't work on.

I know I am The comfortable, convenient Black friend. I have enough markers of prestige. I have the things that are nice to say to white people or look good to power holding people and I'm articulate.

I'm also very unapologetically Black. Folks are like, 'OH she likes being Black and talks about Black stuff'. (Readers: We were laughing our asses off here).



Satirical Siri art exhibit at the New Museum in NYC by American Artist and Rashida Richardson, *Ally AI (still)*, 2019

I check all of the boxes that progressive white people who are looking to virtue signal with the Black friend want. Sometimes there is discomfort because I'm like, 'I've got enough friends. And I especially have enough white friends'.

I love my white friends. *Most* white people don't understand our head space in some ways. I cannot be friends with a white person who I can't talk explicitly about race and gender stuff with.

If you are uncomfortable with that, we are not real friends, just acquaintances. But white people think any POC is a close friend. If they met you twice you are a "close friend". It's like, 'I barely know your last name'.

In tech it's even weirder, because NO one has a Black friend. The stat is that 99% of white people's network is white. Most likely, they have an Indian friend. Maybe a Black person. Maybe a Latino. Definitely not an Indigenous person. But it's like they treat POC like pokemon and don't think we see it.

For me it's always interesting and I see it as research in understanding that psychology.

What psychology?

Like someone who is a card carrying ACLU member, only votes Democrat, but wants to send their kids to private school because they don't want to deal with ~~challenges of public school~~ Black people.

That type of white person really likes me. And I get it. And I have an Arabic name. Like whoa! Brownie points.

I'm this unicorn because I have all of the comforts and markers of what white people associate with whiteness. But it's weird because they don't understand that it's so transparent and I'm just being polite by not saying anything, since I'm just trying to keep my job.

That's the part that is uncomfortable. That proximity thing is uncomfortable too. Like when white people think they see you, so you are friends.

You brought up the ACLU, can we go there?

Oh yes. I wouldn't have been able to do what I do now if I were still at the ACLU because of the racism and hierarchy there. You can quote me on that.

Can you explain what your quips are with the ACLU?

I think you have a problem at the ACLU because it's a predominantly white organization (PWI) that is embedded in ideas of meritocracy. Yet a lot of the people in power have a lot of cognitive dissonance about their own racism.

I think some of the people there genuinely don't think that Black people are as smart as white people. And that's why you have to jump through hurdles to get

a memo read or a project greenlighted. And that was part of the problem of that work. We had to jump through so many hoops just to do the work that this actually deterred from the work that could have been done.

I know a lot of Black people who have worked at the ACLU and have left due to similar experiences. Why do you think this happens?

Well there are two problems. First, people don't want to do the research. They donate to the ACLU because it's the most visible org and they don't do research on local community based organizations.

Second, the history of that org is what sustains it. I don't think most people know the stance that the ACLU took on *Citizens United* and how that relates to political issues of today.

They took an ad out against Trump after the 2016 election so that's the org liberals give to. But they don't look at their website and question, 'Isn't it kind of weird that they don't have many POC or that a bunch of POC left?'



Rashida (2nd from Right) in Vogue Magazine, For the Women of the ACLU, Taking on Trump Is Just Another Day At The Office

Well, all POC have not left the ACLU...

Well at NYCLU (the New York affiliate) yes, most have. Part of this is that it triggers people's complicity and how they are complicit in the larger problems of discrimination and bias.

Is this a nonprofit industrial complex issue or only an ACLU issue?

It's an issue with large legal orgs. The Southern Poverty Law Center got outed .

..

It's a question of who gets outed. I think it's pervasive in the non-profit sector and any PWI.

White liberals holding us hostage from progress!

Yup!

Where does your drive come from?

I feel a lot of issues viscerally. These issues are personal.

I think growing up, my parents have always been very direct. I had a good grasp of racism and sexism in society from a young age and how THAT is the hurdle I have to work against.

What drives me is making incremental change in society so the next young Black girl doesn't have to have all the shitty experiences I had. I think of my little cousin, Kyan.

How can I make sure that she doesn't grow up in a society where she is not underpaid at every job that she's had? Or the hope! For Kyan and Gibran! I want to be that for people, too!

I come across as cynical or realist in a lot of work spaces; But, I just don't think white people grasp how hard it is to operate in a world that's not made for you.

I recognize being a lawyer gives me legitimacy in spaces that another Black person may not have. I understand how that operates in society and I try to use it in a way that is productive towards the ends that I want.

Who are your role models?

Margaret Burnham

Ahhh (laughing), let's talk about Burnham!

I was lucky enough to be mentored and still have a relationship with such an amazing person. I think you and I met when we were both researchers at [The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project \(CRRJ\)](#) in law school.

You are now a Board Member of CRRJ, Right? Tell Us About Burnham and Angela Davis.

Yes, I'm a Board Member. [Margaret Burnham is a law professor at Northeastern Law School](#) and is also Angela Davis's closest childhood friend. She was also Angela's defense attorney during the infamous 1972 trial (they won, obviously).



Defense Attorney

Margaret Burnham and [Angela Davis](#) during a pre-trial hearing in 1972

Tell Us About Having Dinner At Angela Davis's Home! I'll Never Forget Your Text!

I was in Oakland for a CRRJ event that Angela was speaking at. Right before the event, someone secretly handed me a sheet and told me that Angela is inviting us to dinner at her house after this. They said, "This is the address but you have to get rid of the sheet as soon as you get there".

Her house was beautiful, but I can't publicly divulge any more than that.

They had a huge spread and delicious wine from Montecito. Angela is vegan, but they had these amazing filets of salmon. During dinner, Margaret (Burnham) and Angela talked about growing up in the Jim Crow South together. [Their families were friends and they were the same paired age amongst all the kids, so they were especially close.](#)



Angela Davis

and Margaret Burnham

Angela had given me a hug and before I left, she stopped me and said, “You look like you need another hug”. I was like OH MY GOD.

Ok, Back To Role Models

My parents! The benefits and privileges they have provided me while helping me to understand my privilege and how to use it. I have always been hyper aware of this.

They were *very* principled parents. One of my colleagues told me that I’m so principled and it’s so rare. Like, If I don’t believe there is pay equity in the workplace...

I’m gonna do something. I understand that those acts lead me to being ostracized and excluded and understanding that is the trade off is something I choose to make.



Rashida with
her parents

In some way I have abstracted Black leader narratives so it's hard for me to say *this* is the person that inspires me. I stand on the shoulders of my elders, like my grandma.

The cumulative history of understanding of where I came from.
It's almost like a collective responsibility. That's the problem. I don't think white people have that same principle that I think every other non white group does.

Like collective responsibility to your group and society at large. And that's why we are in the shit we are in now.

I wanna talk about joy. You are an amazing cook . . . You dance, party, work hard you have FUN. How?

I'm constantly trying to figure out what gives me joy and I make space for that. Tennis, food, people, doing things, nature, eating . . .



Rashida with

her friend and tennis buddy at the 2019 US Open

I have community that is not tied to work. It's probably why I don't like social media. I know I have friends I can do things with, no matter how bad work is.

Disconnecting is really important. I love hiking and snorkeling and staring at coral in the water. I love to disconnect and be present with those I love.

Where are you happiest?

Preferably a tropical ocean, with others.

During the workweek, couch time with Carl, because we decompress or sleep. On weekends, being around friends, imbibing in fun things, family stuff, watching Naomi Osaka highlight Black Power while winning the US open. I literally told Carl, 'Naomi or Serena has to win or I don't know if I'll make it to election day. We need something.'

Also, seeing little people freeing their mind. Being with little kids who don't know how fucked up the world is.



Rashida post-

hike with her partner, Carl

Do You Have Any Reading Suggestions on Civil Rights and Tech?

Yes, oh my God there are so many . . .

[Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism by Safiya Nobles](#), [Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code by Ruha Benjamin](#), [Anything Dorothy Roberts writes](#).



(L to R) Ruha Benjamin, Rashida Richardson and Katurah Topps at a government and algorithms event

I just read [Ballad of the Bullet: Gangs, Drill Music and the Power of Online Infamy by Forrest Stuart](#). It is about the police targeting of gangs and youth using social media. [It is similar to Desmond Patton's work](#).

I am a big conspiracy theorist because of the work I do. I have always jokingly said that the NYPD and FBI are just trying to stop Brooklyn rappers from ever coming back to the level of Biggie and Bad Boy. [Like when they put Bobby Shmurda away using the NYPD gang database](#).

It's important to understand what the hell is happening now and what happened in the past, so we can understand where we are going in the future.

Thanks Rashida!

P.S. [How Artificial Intelligence Is Disrupting Cyberbanging](#)
AIBOOKSCAREERS



How an ex-YouTube insider investigated its secret algorithm

The methodology Guillaume Chaslot used to detect videos YouTube was recommending during the election – and how the Guardian analysed the data

- [Read the story: how YouTube's algorithm distorts truth](#)
[Paul Lewis](#) and [Erin McCormick](#) in San Francisco
Fri 2 Feb 2018 07.00 EST

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ouTube's recommendation system draws on techniques in [machine](#)

[learning](#) to decide which videos are auto-played or appear “up next”. The precise

³⁰ <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-put-your-phone-down-the-social-dilemma-2020-9#install-a-chrome-extension-that-can-undo-recommendations-on-platforms-said-ex-youtube-engineer-guillaume-chaslot-2>

formula it uses, however, is kept secret. Aggregate data revealing which YouTube videos are heavily promoted by the algorithm, or how many views individual videos receive from “up next” suggestions, is also withheld from the public.

Disclosing that data would enable academic institutions, fact-checkers and regulators (as well as journalists) to assess the type of content [YouTube](#) is most likely to promote.

By keeping the algorithm and its results under wraps, [YouTube](#) ensures that any patterns that indicate unintended biases or distortions associated with its algorithm are concealed from public view.

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By putting a wall around its data, YouTube, which is owned by [Google](#), protects itself from scrutiny. The computer program written by Guillaume Chaslot overcomes that obstacle to force some degree of transparency.

The ex-Google engineer said his method of extracting data from the video-sharing site could not provide a comprehensive or perfectly representative sample of videos that were being recommended.

But it can give a snapshot. He has used his software to detect YouTube recommendations across a range of topics and publishes the results on his website, [algotransparency.org](#).

[How Chaslot’s software works](#)

The program simulates the behaviour of a YouTube user. During the election, it acted as a YouTube user might have if she were interested in either of the two main presidential candidates. It discovered a video through a YouTube search, and then followed a chain of YouTube–recommended titles appearing “up next”.

Chaslot programmed his software to obtain the initial videos through YouTube searches for either “Trump” or “Clinton”, alternating between the two to ensure they were each searched 50% of the time. It then clicked on several search results (usually the top five videos) and captured which videos YouTube was recommending “up next”.

The process was then repeated, this time by selecting a sample of those videos YouTube had just placed “up next”, and identifying which videos the algorithm was, in turn, showcasing beside those.

The process was repeated thousands of times, collating more and more layers of data about the videos YouTube was promoting in its conveyor belt of recommended videos.



'Fiction is outperforming reality': how YouTube's algorithm distorts truth

[Read more](#)

By design, the program operated without a viewing history, ensuring it was capturing generic YouTube recommendations rather than those personalised to individual users.

The data was probably influenced by the topics that happened to be trending on YouTube on the dates he chose to run the program: 22 August; 18 and 26 October; 29-31 October; and 1-7 November.

On most of those dates, the software was programmed to begin with five videos obtained through search, capture the first five recommended videos, and repeat the process five times. But on a handful of dates, Chaslot tweaked his program, starting off with three or four search videos, capturing three or four layers of recommended videos, and repeating the process up to six times in a row.

Whichever combinations of searches, recommendations and repeats Chaslot used, the program was doing the same thing: detecting videos that YouTube was placing “up next” as enticing thumbnails on the right-hand side of the video player.

His program also detected variations in the degree to which YouTube appeared to be pushing content. Some videos, for example, appeared “up next” beside just a handful of other videos. Others appeared “up next” beside hundreds of different videos across multiple dates.

In total, Chaslot’s database recorded 8,052 videos recommended by YouTube. He has made the code behind his program [publicly available here](#). The Guardian has published [the full list of videos in Chaslot’s database here](#).

Content analysis

The Guardian's research included a broad study of all 8,052 videos as well as a more focused content analysis, which assessed 1,000 of the top recommended videos in the database.

The subset was identified by ranking the videos, first by the number of dates they were recommended, and then by the number of times they were detected appearing "up next" beside another video.

We assessed the top 500 videos that were recommended after a search for the term "Trump" and the top 500 videos recommended after a "Clinton" search. Each individual video was scrutinised to determine whether it was obviously partisan and, if so, whether the video favoured the Republican or Democratic presidential campaign. In order to judge this, we watched the content of the videos and considered their titles.

Advertisement

About a third of the videos were deemed to be either unrelated to the election, politically neutral or insufficiently biased to warrant being categorised as favouring either campaign. (An example of a video that was unrelated to the election was one entitled "[10 Intimate Scenes Actors Were Embarrassed to Film](#)"; an example of a video deemed politically neutral or even-handed was [this NBC News broadcast](#) of the second presidential debate.)

Many mainstream news clips, including ones from MSNBC, Fox and CNN, were judged to fall into the "even-handed" category, as were many mainstream comedy clips created by the likes of Saturday Night Live, John Oliver and Stephen Colbert.

Formulating a view on these videos was a subjective process but for the most part it was very obvious which candidate videos benefited. There were a few exceptions. For example, some might consider [this CNN clip](#), in which a Trump supporter forcefully defended his lewd remarks and strongly criticised Hillary Clinton and her husband, to be beneficial to the Republican.

Others might point to the CNN anchor's exasperated response, and argue the video was actually more helpful to Clinton. In the end, this video was too difficult for us to categorise. It is an example of a video listed as not benefiting either candidate.

For two-thirds of the videos, however, the process of judging who the content benefited was relatively uncomplicated. Many videos clearly leaned toward one candidate or the other. For example, [a video of a speech](#) in which Michelle Obama was highly critical of Trump's treatment of women was deemed to have leaned in favour of Clinton. [A video falsely claiming](#) Clinton suffered a mental breakdown was categorised as benefiting the Trump campaign.

We found that most of the videos labeled as benefiting the Trump campaign might be more accurately described as highly critical of Clinton. Many are what might be

described as anti-Clinton conspiracy videos or “fake news”. The database appeared highly skewed toward content critical of the Democratic nominee. But for the purpose of categorisation, these types of videos, such as a video entitled “WHOA! HILLARY THINKS CAMERA’S OFF... SENDS SHOCK MESSAGE TO TRUMP”, were listed as favouring the Trump campaign.

Missing videos and bias

Roughly half of the YouTube-recommended videos in the database have been taken offline or made private since the election, either because they were removed by whoever uploaded them or because they were taken down by YouTube. That might be because of a copyright violation, or because the video contained some other breach of the company’s policies.

We were unable to watch original copies of missing videos. They were therefore excluded from our first round of content analysis, which included only videos we could watch, and concluded that 84% of partisan videos were beneficial to Trump, while only 16% were beneficial to Clinton.

Interestingly, the bias was marginally larger when YouTube recommendations were detected following an initial search for “Clinton” videos. Those resulted in 88% of partisan “Up next” videos being beneficial to Trump.

When Chaslot’s program detected recommended videos after a “Trump” search, in contrast, 81% of partisan videos were favorable to Trump.

That said, the “Up next” videos following from “Clinton” and “Trump” videos often turned out to be the same or very similar titles. The type of content recommended was, in both cases, overwhelmingly beneficial to Trump, with a surprising amount of conspiratorial content and fake news damaging to Clinton.

Supplementary count

After counting only those videos we could watch, we conducted a second analysis to include those missing videos whose titles strongly indicated the content would have been beneficial to one of the campaigns. It was also often possible to find duplicates of these videos.

Two highly recommended videos in the database with one-sided titles were, for example, entitled “This Video Will Get Donald Trump Elected” and “Must Watch!! Hillary Clinton tried to ban this video”. Both of these were categorised, in the second round, as beneficial to the Trump campaign.

When all 1,000 videos were tallied – including the missing videos with very slanted titles – we counted 643 videos had an obvious bias. Of those, 551 videos (86%) favoured the Republican nominee, while only 92 videos (14%) were beneficial to Clinton.

Whether missing videos were included in our tally or not, the conclusion was the same. Partisan videos recommended by YouTube in the database were about six times more likely to favour Trump’s presidential campaign than Clinton’s.

Database analysis

All 8,052 videos were ranked by the number of “recommendations” – that is, the number of times they were detected appearing as “Up next” thumbnails beside other videos. For example, if a video was detected appearing “Up next” beside four other videos, that would be counted as four “recommendations”.

If a video appeared “Up next” beside the same video on, say, three separate dates, that would be counted as three “recommendations”. (Multiple recommendations between the same videos *on the same day* were not counted.)

Here are the 25 most recommended videos, according to the above metric.

1. [Trump supporter leaves CNN anchor speechless](#)
2. [This Video Will Get Donald Trump Elected](#)
3. [Must Watch!! Hillary Clinton tried to ban this video](#)
4. [SR# 1271 NBC Crew – Crooked Hillary’s MASSIVE MELTDOWN at Commander-in-Chief Forum](#)
5. [10 Photos of MELANIA, TRUMP Wishes We’d Forget](#)
6. [Full Interview: Donald Trump, Melania & Family with George Stephanopoulos](#)
7. [Busted! Bill Clinton’s Face When Trump Brings Up The Rape Allegations is Priceless](#)
8. [Donald Trump Has Won The 2016 Presidential Election](#)
9. [Angry Ivanka Trump Walks Out Of Cosmo Interview](#)
10. [TRUMP: the COMING LANDSLIDE ~Ancient Prophecy Documentary of Donald Trump / 2016](#)
11. [ANONYMOUS WATCH - HILLARY CLINTON, YOU ARE FINISHED!](#)
12. [“Obama out!” President Barack Obama’s hilarious final White House correspondents’ dinner speech](#)
13. [Watch Live: The Final Presidential Debate](#)
14. [Can Donald Trump win the presidential election?](#)
15. [Michelle Obama’s EPIC Speech On Trump’s Sexual Behavior \(FULL | HD\)](#)
16. [ALL LEAKED TRUMP FOOTAGE Lewd comments Made on Daughter Ivanka Mini Documentary](#)
17. [Melania Trump - The Woman Behind Donald](#)
18. [BREAKING: VIDEO SHOWING BILL CLINTON RAPING 13 YR-OLD WILL PLUNGE RACE INTO CHAOS](#)
[ANONYMOUS CLAIMS](#)
19. [BREAKING!!! JULIAN ASSANGE “DEAD MAN SWITCH” Goes Off after EXPOSING Hillary Clinton?](#)
20. [Bill Clinton’s Sexual Escapades](#)
21. [Anonymous Release Bone-Chilling video of Huma Abedin every American Needs to See](#)
22. [BREAKING: Michael Moore Admits Trump Is Right](#)
23. [BREAKING: FBI Reopens Hillary Clinton Email Investigation](#)
24. [Full monologue: Donald Trump roasts Hillary Clinton at Al Smith charity dinner](#)
25. [Hillary Cheats AGAIN?? Debate #3 Earphone AND Teleprompter?? BUSTED ON TV!](#)

Chaslot’s database also contained information the YouTube channels used to broadcast videos. (This data was only partial, because it was not possible to identify channels behind missing videos.) Here are the top 10 channels, ranked in order of the number of “recommendations” Chaslot’s program detected.

1. [The Alex Jones Channel](#)
2. [Fox News](#)
3. [DONALD TRUMP SPEECHES & PRESS CONFERENCE](#)
4. [The Young Turks](#)
5. [MSNBC](#)
6. [CBS News](#)

7. [TheRichest](#)
8. [The Next News Network](#)
9. [CNN](#)
10. [Right Side Broadcasting Network](#)

Campaign Speeches

We searched the entire database to identify videos of full campaign speeches by Trump and Clinton, their spouses and other political figures. This was done through searches for the terms “speech” and “rally” in video titles followed by a check, where possible, of the content. Here is a list of the videos of campaign speeches found in the database.

1. **Donald Trump** (382 videos)
2. **Barack Obama** (42 videos)
3. **Mike Pence** (18 videos)
4. **Hillary Clinton** (18 videos)
5. **Melania Trump** (12 videos)
6. **Michelle Obama** (10 videos)
7. **Joe Biden** (42 videos)

Graphika analysis

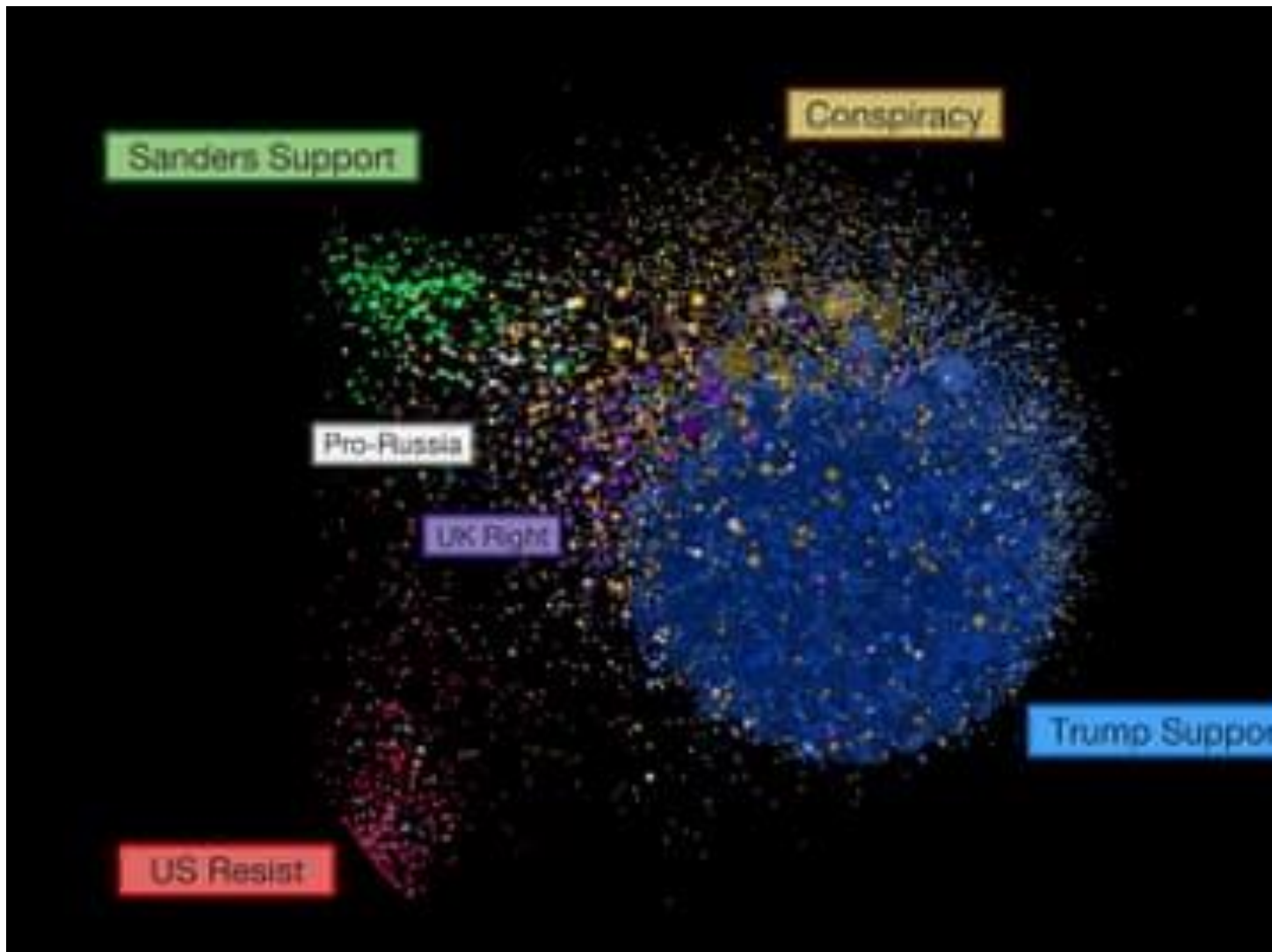
The Guardian shared the entire database with Graphika, a commercial analytics firm that has tracked political disinformation campaigns. The company merged the database of YouTube-recommended videos with its own dataset of Twitter networks that were active during the 2016 election.

The company discovered more than 513,000 Twitter accounts had tweeted links to at least one of the YouTube-recommended videos in the six months leading up to the election.

More than 36,000 accounts tweeted at least one of the videos 10 or more times. The most active 19 of these Twitter accounts cited videos more than 1,000 times – evidence of automated activity.

“Over the months leading up to the election, these videos were clearly boosted by a vigorous, sustained social media campaign involving thousands of accounts controlled by political operatives, including a large number of bots,” said John Kelly, Graphika’s executive director. “

The most numerous and best-connected of these were Twitter accounts supporting President Trump’s campaign, but a very active minority included accounts focused on conspiracy theories, support for WikiLeaks, and official Russian outlets and alleged disinformation sources.”



YT Amplification Photograph: Graphika

Kelly then looked specifically at which Twitter networks were pushing videos that we had categorised as beneficial to Trump or Clinton. “Pro-Trump videos were pushed by a huge network of pro-Trump accounts, assisted by a smaller network of dedicated pro-Bernie and progressive accounts.

Connecting these two groups and also pushing the pro-Trump content were a mix of conspiracy-oriented, ‘Truther’, and pro-Russia accounts,” Kelly concluded. “Pro-Clinton videos were pushed by a much smaller network of accounts that now identify as a ‘resist’ movement.

Far more of the links promoting Trump content were repeat citations by the same accounts, which is characteristic of automated amplification.”

Finally, we shared with Graphika a subset of a dozen videos that were both highly recommended by YouTube, according to the above metrics, and particularly egregious

examples of fake or divisive anti-Clinton video content. Kelly said he found “an unmistakable pattern of coordinated social media amplification” with this subset of videos.

The tweets promoting them almost always began after midnight the day of the video’s appearance on YouTube, typically between 1am and 4am EDT, an odd time of the night for US citizens to be first noticing videos.

The sustained tweeting continued “at a more or less even rate” for days or weeks until election day, Kelly said, when it suddenly stopped. That would indicate “clear evidence of coordinated manipulation”, Kelly added.

YouTube statement

YouTube provided the following response to this research:

“We have a great deal of respect for the Guardian as a news outlet and institution. We strongly disagree, however, with the methodology, data and, most importantly, the conclusions made in their research,” a YouTube spokesperson said. “

The sample of 8,000 videos they evaluated does not paint an accurate picture of what videos were recommended on YouTube over a year ago in the run-up to the US presidential election.”

“Our search and recommendation systems reflect what people search for, the number of videos available, and the videos people choose to watch on YouTube,” the continued. “That’s not a bias towards any particular candidate; that is a reflection of viewer interest.”

The spokesperson added: “Our only conclusion is that the Guardian is attempting to shoehorn research, data, and their incorrect conclusions into a common narrative about the role of technology in last year’s election. The reality of how our systems work, however, simply doesn’t support that premise.”

Last week, it emerged that the Senate intelligence committee wrote to Google demanding to know what the company was doing to prevent a “malign incursion” of YouTube’s recommendation algorithm – which the top-ranking Democrat on the committee had warned was “particularly susceptible to foreign influence”. The following day, YouTube asked to update its statement.

“Throughout 2017 our teams worked to improve how YouTube handles queries and recommendations related to news. We made algorithmic changes to better surface clearly-labeled authoritative news sources in search results, particularly around breaking news events,” the statement said. “We created a ‘Breaking News’ shelf on the YouTube homepage that serves up content from reliable news sources.

When people enter news-related search queries, we prominently display a ‘Top News’ shelf in their search results with relevant YouTube content from authoritative news sources.”

It continued: “We also take a tough stance on videos that do not clearly violate our policies but contain inflammatory religious or supremacist content. These videos are placed behind an warning interstitial, are not monetized, recommended or eligible for comments or user endorsements.”

“We appreciate the Guardian’s work to shine a spotlight on this challenging issue,” YouTube added. “We know there is more to do here and we’re looking forward to making more announcements in the months ahead.”

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(modern)

Install a Chrome extension that can undo recommendations on platforms, said ex-YouTube engineer Guillaume Chaslot.



A man, not Chaslot, is pictured above with a device. Jaap Arriens/NurPhoto via Getty Images

There is a slew of such extensions available, such as [one that blocks](#) recommended videos and comments on YouTube.

The interviewer in the documentary comments that Chaslot is trying to undo something he helped create: Chaslot was a co-creator of YouTube's recommendation algorithm before he left Google in 2013.



“The platforms make it possible to spread manipulative narratives with phenomenal ease, and without very much money.” - *Renée Diresta, research manager of Stanford Internet Observatory, former head of policy at Data for Democracy* ³¹

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Jim: Today’s guest is Renee DiResta. Renee is the technical research manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory, a cross disciplinary program of research, teaching and policy engagement for the study of abuse in current information technology. Renee investigates the spread of malign narratives across social networks, and assists policymakers in devising responses to the problem.

Renee is influence operations, computational propaganda in the context of pseudoscience, conspiracies, terrorist activities, and state sponsored information warfare. She has advised Congress, the State Department and other academics, civil

³¹ <https://www.ensemblemagazine.co.nz/articles/the-social-dilemma-netflix>

³² <https://jimruttsow.blubrry.net/the-jim-rutt-show-transcripts/transcript-of-episode-81-renee-diresta-on-social-media-warfare/>

society and business organizations on these topics. Quite timely to say the very least welcome.

Renee: Thanks for having me, Jim.

Jim: Yeah, and I understand you're a new mother in the same way as people listen. I'm a new granddad. Yeah.

Renee: Yeah, it's exciting. Yay babies.

Jim: Yeah. That's yes to babies gives us a reason to fight for the future, right?

Renee: Exactly.

Jim: Exactly. All right. Before we get going here on the body of the show, let me do a non-ad. The reason I say a non-ad is because nobody's paying me to say this, I like to call out as worth watching, for sure, the new movie, the social dilemma on Netflix.

This documentary drama explores the dangerous human impact of social networking with tech experts setting the alarm on their own creations. My friend Tristan Harris of Humane Tech, and the previous guests on the show has a significant role in the movie. Renee just told me she's in it too. Folks watch it, the Social Dilemma on Netflix. This is important stuff.

Jim: This is a theme we've come back to again and again on the show, previous episodes on the topics we're going to talk about today include Tristan Harris back a ways. Steven Levy, where we talked with him about his great new book about Facebook.

Most recently, Philip Howard, where we dug into the research. He and his people at Oxford have done on paid manipulators of disinformation on the internet. Renee comes to us from the Stanford Internet Observatory, as we mentioned. Let's start with what do you all do over there?

Renee: Yeah. It's a great question. We are a relatively new center within the Cybersecurity Policy Center at Stanford, started by Alex Stamos, who was Facebook's Chief Security Officer.

We have three main areas of work. We look at forensic analysis of attributed influence operations. What that means is, when there is a data set in the world that is linked to a bad actor, and we can talk a little bit about attribution, and what kinds of actors those are when we chat, but we look at what were the tactics, techniques and procedures that that actor used to execute that influence operation? How did they do it? Why did they do it?

What was the goal? How successful was it? We do, basically, the very thorough analysis, and then we release those. Oftentimes, we'll release them with Facebook or

Twitter. They'll do a takedown and then we will be one of the independent researchers that analysis the data set. That's bucket one.

Renee: Bucket two is we develop technology and methodologies for proactive detection campaigns. We believe that finding influence operations after the fact is, while it teaches us a lot about them, we should be taking that learning and transferring it into ways to find and mitigate the operations in the earliest possible stage.

To that end, right now, we're working on a lot of election integrity work, looking specifically at how do we do early detection of narratives related to voter suppression or misleading information about ballots, that sort of thing.

Renee: Then the third bucket is taking all that other research and turning it into something that policymakers can use to better understand how the information ecosystem works, and then how it should work.

If there are gaps there, where we see repeatedly certain types of manipulation or misleading processes, what are the ways that we can implement change to be more preventative so that those things don't happen? Sometimes that's with policymakers, at a state or federal level. Then other times that's actually engaging directly with policy teams at the tech platforms.

One example would be saying something like, "Hey, you guys should really label state media in tweets. That would be a great thing to have done." Just one example of the thing where when you see state media repeatedly being involved in spreading particular types of narrative saying, "Hey, allow them on the platform, but maybe we could do more to ensure that the public is properly informed."

Jim: Yep. State media, talking about people like RT, who are quasi state media. What would you say state media? What do you mean by that?

Renee: Some of our early research on that, that informed the policy was actually looking at China. It was looking at CGTN, trying to Daly, range of China's remarkable state media properties which have very, very many followers, including on western social media platforms.

We look at the relationship between broadcast and social media. That's on the broadcast front, we do kind of include print in there because there's no good way to say. "All media but social." We're looking at the all possible channels and we treat social as yet one more channel.

We're understanding how broadcast media information on the internet is also oftentimes a part of achieving influence. For example, during the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, we began to pay pretty close attention to what Chinese state media on Facebook and Twitter we're saying and contrasting that with not only the secret surreptitious, automated and persona accounts that China was running, but also looking at how the covert side of the operation, and then this very overt attributable state

propaganda operation, work in concert to put out a particular narrative or convey the Chinese point of view on Coronavirus. That's just one example.

Renee: Many different countries have state media. It's not a defacto problematic. It's more a matter of certain state media is oftentimes will be a little bit looser with the truth.

When that's happening repeatedly, just creating a system whereby anybody who encounters this content, at least knows that they're getting information from state media,

I think is a goal that we had towards improving informativeness of the public. It's pretty tough to know the name of an editor of a Chinese state media account on Twitter. When you see that tweet, or you see that content, it's not immediately obvious that that person may have an agenda or an editorial line.

Including a little bit more of a labeling function to let people know that that's happening is something that we thought was a policy worth advancing.

Jim: I have the platform's taking you up on that?

Renee: The platforms didn't make that change, actually. Twitter has a label now that's actually very, very well done. They label not only the state entity itself, but they also label significant employees, meaning the main editors.

Now when you see tweets from a variety of state media, and they're constantly evaluating what entities belong on that list, about right now, you'll see a note that says there's a little label under the account that lets you know that this is attributable to a state entity. It just provides a little bit of extra context.

Jim: It sounds like a good win. You've had some influence. Just curious, do they also tagged, say, something like Voice of America as state media?

Renee: They currently do not? That is a very interesting debate. Right now, the question is, how do you define state media? What they did was there was a focus on independence of editorial standards and funding, very spectrum there. BBC and Voice of America are not currently labeled as state media, because they are editorially independent.

That is something that is, when, when you put out a tweet related to something related to Chinese state media, there will be people who will come and reply to you and tell you that Voice of America should be labeled as well. That is a really an ongoing question. Where, which of these entities should be labeled?

Jim: Interesting. Yeah. It's all these interesting corner cases, we have to think through, right?

Renee: Yep.

Jim: We'll talk about some of them, because that's unfortunately, this whole idea of bad faith, discourse, and vandalism on the internet ends up leading us to a bunch of corona cases damn difficult.

That's where of the art maybe some of the science of this can make life better for people. On your website says among the internet observatories, first policy goals to deliver recommendations and how to jointly protect the 2020 US presidential election, and deliver those to congress and the major technology firms. Obviously, this is top of mind to a lot of people would be all done in this area.

Renee: Yeah. We have an entity called the Election Integrity Project, which has its own website, actually. If you Google for Election Integrity Project, embarrassingly, I don't have the domain off the top of my head. But we have a team of four core research organization.

There's us at Stanford. There's University of Washington, Professor Kate Starbird's team. There is the Digital Forensics Research Lab, DFR Lab out of the Atlantic Council.

Then there is a company called Graphika, which if you spoke with Phil Howard at Oxford, he works very closely with Graphika to do some of his research. Graphika has an excellent team. Researcher Camille François over there working as of four of us have both quantitative and qualitative analysis capabilities.

We've chosen to focus, again, as I said, rather narrowly. We don't want to be the fact checking police anytime, President Trump or Vice President Biden say something about the other that's not true. There are other people who are working on that.

Renee: What we're doing is we're really focusing quite narrowly on misleading information related to the ballots, the process of voting, the rules of voting, so voter suppression narratives. Misleading narratives about ballots.

We're focusing on looking at how those situations, really the mechanics of voting are playing out. What we've done is we've built a broader network outside of just the four research organizations that connects with CISA, Department of Homeland Security.

Some government stakeholders, connection to state and local, secretaries of state, and folks who are responsible for ensuring election integrity in their locales, civil society, which oftentimes are the first to see manipulative information targeting their community.

Variety of, again, this is nonpartisan. Variety of civil society organizations, including some that are seen as more on the left or more on the right. Then let's see. The last stakeholders, of course, are the tech companies. We do work with and communicate with the platforms to ensure that we're able to ... when we see something that merits a second look, communicate that to their teams as well.

Jim: Yeah, by giving you access to their data?

Renee: We use a variety of tools. We have CrowdTangle. Through Facebook, we have various API research access through Twitter, again, the things that any academic can apply for, so nothing.

We're working with them on ... we develop tools using a variety of APIs and ways to ingest data that is accessible to researchers. Then, because there is stuff that we don't have access to because of user privacy and other constraints, that we would take something and then surface it to the platforms and say, "Hey, this merits a second look, with the additional visibility that you may have into what is this account?"

Is this account behaving anomalously in terms of its logins or its device, or is it connected to other accounts in certain ways, as a co-admins of the page?"

Renee: Things that we can't see, but the platforms can see. We have this pipeline where any entity that sees something anomalous can flag it, and a consortium of researchers will look at it and then it will be elevated to the appropriate people both to investigate it in the case of the platforms, or if there's something that needs to be communicated to the public, then it would be communicated to potentially the media, potentially local media, in particular secretaries of state or others who would be able to put out a PSA, again, to mitigate the impact.

Jim: That sounds you guys have a pretty good working relationship. I know in the past, both Tristan Harris and Philip Howard have complained about the inability to get good data from the platform.

Renee: I think, we've made some progress. Phil's team did an analysis of the Russia data set provided to the senate. So did I. When the senate asked for that analysis into the social media data sets back then, that was actually the first time that information was provided to researchers. We weren't in communication with the platforms at all during that process.

It was very much a platforms' provided the data to the senate. The senate asked independent researchers to analyze it. Relationship has really changed quite dramatically, beginning in, I would say, early 2018. For a couple years now, there's been more progress. It's not perfect yet, but it's definitely light years beyond where we were in 2016.

Jim: Wow, that's good. What do you all seeing? Do you have any trends or issues that you're seeing particularly in this narrow era of people trying to do voter suppression or put out misinformation about voting rules, things of that sort?

Renee: Yeah. It's pretty fascinating. The adversaries have evolved since 2016 as well, as one should expect. What we see is there's foreign and domestic misinformation and disinformation.

This is not something that only Russia does. One of the challenges has been, how do we recognize that there are certain types of activities that are okay when Americans do

them, but in authentic when executed by foreign actors? There's always that process of looking for disinformation campaigns executed by manipulative actors.

Renee: Then there's the dynamic of misinformation that goes viral. Somebody's got something wrong, said something wrong, made a claim. Sometimes there's a deliberateness to it, a hoax or dissent.

We use this information to refer to something that's deliberately misleading and misinformation to refer to something that is accidentally misleading. In the case of misinformation, the community continues to spread the story, because they sincerely believe it.

They think that they're altruistically helping their community, whereas the people who are involved in spreading a disinformation campaign in the early stages, know that what they're saying is inauthentic or false or being manipulatively distributed.

Renee: We're looking for both types of activities. Again, either can be executed by a domestic or a foreign actor. We are not really distinguishing along those lines when we're looking at the narratives. But in terms of how the platforms respond to them.

There's a little bit more variability in what kinds of accounts they decide to take down versus what is labeled and continues to stand as a free expression issue. There are certain ... Again, with voting misinformation, the platform's have all recently changed their policies within the last six months, to make it quite stringent, to ensure that even misleading domestic information does come down quite quickly as the fact checked quite quickly.

They've articulated a range of topics and areas that they're going to intervene on, and everything from labeling tweets to throttling virality ways to minimize the spread of the stuff.

Jim: Interesting. You combine, let's say, it's domestic, and let's say, voter suppression, with micro targeting, you got a pretty powerful combination. You target very precisely who you know to be the other side's voters and hit them with voter suppression stories. Is that what you're seeing?

Renee: Well, that's one of the things that we're looking for. That's certainly a possibility. That's where Facebook has been even just last week releasing changes to their ad targeting, what kinds of entities are allowed to run ads? Again, as you mentioned earlier, a lot of the challenges is the edge cases.

A lot of political advertising is quite valuable, particularly if you are a new candidate running in a small local election and, say, you want to take on an incumbent. That's the thing where you wouldn't want to create policies that would prevent somebody from being discovered. Of course, if they're running a local race, they would want to do something like target by zip code.

Renee: However, at the same time, that same something that's a tool in one person's hands can be used as a weapon in another person's hands. A lot of the challenge is how do you set policy in such a way that recognizes that there are these bad actors who can use the same things that you've tried to provide to enable ... something that you envision is enabling democracy, in fact, in the wrong hands can be quite detrimental.

Jim: Yeah. Let's take that case. Interestingly, just, frankly, for shits and grins, when Facebook first announced that you could register as a political advertiser, I did. I went through and went through the minor hoops to get approved to run ads, political ads. I haven't actually run any.

But I do run the occasional ads to promote my podcast episodes, and I have not really looked into are the targeting tools available for the political ads different than they are for the other ads? Do you have anything to say on that?

Renee: I'm also registered to run political ads. Back in 2015, I started a page related to vaccinations, pro-vaccination page just as like a mom activist at the time. Because vaccines are considered a hot button issue, in order to keep the page going, if we wanted to continue to run ads in the future, all of us admins had to get licensed for fill-out-the card that comes in the mail and stuff. I have gone through the process.

Renee: The targeting tools have changed. But particularly since 2015, God. But the targeting tools, some of it is, oftentimes, an investigative journalist will find a loophole or will kind of reveal a way in which manipulation can take place. Then the tool is adjusted after the fact.

With vaccination, running ads related to vaccines back in 2015, if you typed in vaccine, and you wanted to add target based on interests, only anti-vaccine results would appear, which was very interesting. It was because people were ... the tool was drawing on what people were putting into their profiles, what pages very high profile anti-vaccine pages.

Renee: You could add target somebody who had liked the National Vaccine Information Center, which is an anti-vacs organization. But there was no comparable large pro-vaccine organization. This is a problem with social media. There's asymmetry of passion.

You have a lot of the true believer in conspiratorial groups will be far more active, creating far more content growing pages that were far larger. This was a dynamic that we saw even in 2015. Then the ad targeting tool would surface that activity would recognize that this was some distinct interest group and would afford you the ability to target them.

Renee: But if you wanted to target the opposite, there was no similarly passionate group that you could target. What we wound up doing was actually doing that zip code level targeting. Just saying like, okay, we need people calling representatives to advocate for vaccination policy in the following zip code areas. That's how we're going

to run our ads. We're going to abandon interests and just go with zip codes and certain age demographics and stuff. It was always a challenge.

When you are a small entity that has a very limited budget, the value of that targeting is that you can execute activism campaigns with relatively low spend. That's, of course, again, the ideal form of what this allows grassroots organizations to do is for not very much money, grow a movement.

Again, the challenge is at the time, there was a lot of concern about if you were to limit, for example, anti-vaccine groups that would lead to a slippery slope of what group would be limited or banned or prevented from targeting people next.

Renee: The tool has really gone through so many different iterations. What is a political issue has gone through a range of iterations. Now, there's a distinction made for political candidates. That is I'm not a candidate. I can't quite see what that interface looks like. But there's just such a range of changes that are made to on a constant rolling basis as loopholes for misuse become apparent.

Jim: Yeah. It's a classic. When you read a business contract, or we recently bought a real estate property. It was quite funny to see how over the years these purchase and sale contract are five times longer than they were 20 years ago, where every weird corner case, has its own paragraph to do with it.

I'm sure the platform ad policies have to be similar. As a adamant pro-vaxxer, I'd have to ask, are we guys successful in getting your page up and running and getting good followers?

Renee: Interestingly. We were ... Yes. The answer is yes. We started the page, in part because we wanted to pass a very particular law in California in 2015. It was a little bit of a different process. Rather than growing a sustained movement, we set out to pass a particular bill.

That means that it was ... we really organized ourselves more for like the sprint as opposed to the marathon. It's interesting now in the age of Coronavirus, and, again, vaccinations are such a heated topic of conversation right now is the project what am ...

Oh, my God ... was the operation Warp Speed is going on to try to get us a coronavirus vaccine, the strength of the anti-vaccine movement as it's grown over the last four years, five years since we got that law passed.

Renee: A lot of the early learnings that we had as we watched how extraordinarily connected the anti-vaccine movement organizers were, the extent to which platform algorithms were inadvertently amplifying them, the extent to which the real downstream harms, the offline consequences of allowing the anti-vaccine movement to really explode in size and coordination, and as it gradually became quite interlinked with other conspiratorial communities, ways in which that the nascent infrastructure of the networked activist communities that we saw in 2015 continue to grow over the

subsequent five years. Whereas the pro-vaccine side, has had some successes and increasing visibility, particularly as measles was come back in the US and people are concerned.

Renee: At the same time, did not really enjoy that same kind of algorithmic boosting and did not really invest to the same extent in growing a sustained counter-movement. Watching how that's continued to evolve over the last five years, and how that continues to be ... How that community that, again, I got me into a lot of this has continued to be such a core dynamic for understanding how misinformation and disinformation spread on the internet in 2020.

Jim: Yeah, that's interesting, because if you think about it from ... let's call it a biological, evolutionary perspective, the nets are an ecosystem. Mimetics, mean Plexus got clusters of means, evolved to adapt to that ecosystem. Sometimes they're done intentionally.

Sometimes they're not unintentionally. They're essentially more or less accidental theme and variation until something succeeds in the ecosystem. They happen to trigger the repetition. They trigger the recommender on YouTube, for instance, or they used to be the trending topics thing on Facebook. I think they still have it on Twitter. We're essentially looking at a classic both Darwinian and human engineered set of means that are trying to propagate on an ecosystem.

Renee: Yeah. That's very true. I think ... I mean, I love the metaphor of virality is a double entendre in this particular case. But one of the things that's very interesting is watching how just new features or new prioritization of features, shapes, both the engagement with these pages and also how the pages tailor their content and response.

Facebook made some efforts to change how anti vaccine content was surface just to continue using that example. It was conspiracy theories a little bit more writ large, but anti-vaccine health misinformation, in particular, because it was having deleterious effects on public health.

Renee: They began to make these changes. They stopped them, for example, from running ads. They stopped accepting money for pushing out health misinformation, while continuing to allow them to run ads for political advocacy. You can run an ad that says, "I believe that vaccination is vast government overreach." But you can't run an ad that says, "Vaccines cause autism."

There's again, that kind of carve out, how do you preserve free expression, while not allowing factually incorrect health misinformation to put people's health at risk.

Renee: We see those ways in which then you see the anti-vaccine pages, which for years, I've talked about the autism thing, all of a sudden move more into the we're parental rights organizations, we're just a libertarian. We have libertarian sensibilities about this. Now they're running most of their content to stay on the right side of the

algorithm. The core belief is suppressed. The angle that is still palatable for the social media company that is providing them infrastructure is still emphasized, is emphasized instead. We see little shifts like that.

Renee: The other thing is something, okay, now they can't run ads, but they want to continue to grow an audience. Interestingly, they'll run Facebook Lives. Facebook's Watch Tab is increasingly prioritized.

They are using their live video. They want people paying attention to it. When a page is creating live content, that gets bumped up to the top of the feed. Inadvertently, you're surfacing this content, if you're following one of these pages, and they go live, that live engagement, the engagement on the live videos, continues to serve as the content in the feed, even though the anti-vaccine topic itself has been suppressed to a large extent in search and in the recommendation engine.

While they won't recommend the group, the live feed content will still be surfaced. It's almost like a constantly evolving arms race. You fix one problem, and then there's a unintended consequence that comes with a different feature. It's very constantly evolving ...

Jim: Yeah. Whack a mole

Renee: ... ecosystem. Yeah.

Jim: Any evolutionary system is an arms race. That's just goes with the territory. We're going to come back down a little bit later and talk about what I would call wackadoodle conspiracy theories, like anti-vaxxer, and QAnon, et cetera, what are some of the dynamics of that.

But let's go back and talk about the 2020 election. We talked in passing about domestic actors who have good game theoretical reasons for micro targeting, and vote suppression against the people who they believe will vote for their opponent. What about foreign actors? What are you all seeing with respect to foreign actors and folks fresh?

Renee: Yeah. Facebook just took down a collection of pages attributed to the Internet Research Agency just last week, on Thursday, I think it was maybe Tuesday. This was a small website called PACE Data, P-A-C-E Data. It appeared to be targeting the left, just nominally the Bernie Sanders left. An anti-Biden theme, that thing, but also, not pro Trump.

There is definitely demonstrably at this point, attributed activity from a foreign state actor, involving itself in conversations around the election. Of course, they don't limit themselves to conversations about the candidates. They continue to do what they were doing, beginning back in 2014, which is targeting social issues. They insert themselves into the culture wars, and they take, again, the American culture war is doing just fine on

its own. It's go on Twitter. That's the vast majority of, unfortunately, what is hitting trends or these culture war grievances in the France.

Renee: They do take that content. Then in this particular case, they had made a website. They were writing articles. But the advances, the things that we had begun to see Russia testing out, out of the US last year, we're now appearing in the US with this attributed site, and that's hiring local journalists. Hiring real people, real journalists, paying them a couple hundred bucks a piece, they don't know who they're writing for, of course.

They were actually reaching out to laid off journalists and offering them an opportunity to write regular columns, regular short political pieces. Some of these journalists who have now found out that they were inadvertently unwittingly writing for Russian Front have begun to speak out about what the recruitment process was like, basically.

Renee: There is, again, when you are an investigator, and you're looking at one of these sites, and you're seeing real people with bylines, where if I Google this author's name, here's their Twitter account, here's pictures of their family, here's their vacation photos on Instagram.

These are real people. These are not thin front sock puppet personas that are very thinly backstops. This is instead a real person. That franchising, that hiring of real people who are largely unwitting to incorporate them into the operation is something that is happening. They are also I mean ...

They're mixing the real and the fake. There were some fake personas that were the editor of the publication appears to have been a persona, but the journalists writing for it were real. There's that dynamic. Then, of course, again, we see amplification. Clusters of accounts that exist to amplify content, for example, on Twitter, where they'll all post a link to an article that they want someone to see, and they will message it to an Influencer in hopes that the Influencer will see the article and retweet it to their million followers.

Renee: Right now, I would say the two big themes are amplification, again, of existing American grievances, and then this weird hybrid model of trying to have unwitting real people kind of do the dirty work for you. Those are the two themes that we're really looking at with regard to foreign activity.

Jim: Now, how does that actually tied to elections. Strikes me that while permisos, from my point of view is not entirely obvious why that would be illegal or wrong to be stirring up culture wars, for instance. I mean.

Renee: Sure. Yeah. That's one of the really interesting debates is what impact does this have and who should be allowed to do it? If we look at the 2016 model, there were three things that were going on. There were attempts to hack online voting systems. There was the social media operation, the internet research agency activity, and with the social media operation, the infiltration of communities, so trying to turn unwitting

activists into participants in the operation. Then the third piece was the hacking leak. The GRU, which is Russian military intelligence, completely separate organization from the Internet Research Agency, went hacked the Democratic National Committee and began to release the emails, the committee and the Clinton campaign began to release these emails. They were really leaning into releasing these emails to journalists, and then to WikiLeaks.

Renee: A lot of the conversation that we've had, those of us who have investigated ... my team has looked at both the Internet Research Agency data set and the GRU data set. What we find is that the GRU Outreach to journalists that hack and leak operation really had a remarkable impact on changing the American electorates conversation about what topics mattered going into election day.

If you recall, the first tranche of emails was dropped as a distraction from the pussy gate tape coming out. The, "Oh look here," Hillary's emails immediately following the access Hollywood tape, and that changed the conversation. People focus less on this revelation about then candidates, Trump's character and treatment of women and the conversation instead shifted to what was made to sound quite salacious content in these emails.

Some of it was actually interesting. Some of it was, this was where the Pizzagate conspiracy actually originated. Weird interpretation of emails about getting dinner.

Renee: All this is to say, there's different ways, different degrees of impact, depending on what kind of attention you managed to capture, and to what extent you manage to shift the conversation to be focused on the topics that you want the citizens of a country to be talking about.

With the social media operation, the value of continuing to perpetuate and exacerbate the culture wars is, yeah, as we've seen, there are actual in the streets skirmishes, unfortunately, with some regularity happening right now. Protest movements, for example, the protest and the counter protest, the ability to really rile up both sides of a grievance or argument to entice them to go out into the streets and engage in skirmishes is a thing that we saw Russia do.

We saw the internet research agency, goading Americans in 2016 into going and protests literally across the street from each other.

Renee: They made one page for that was pro-Islam and one page that was pro-Texas secessionist. They created two events and had two different groups of people go out to the same street and literally protest across the street from each other one pro-Islam, the other anti-Islam, and police had to come and monitor the situation.

There's YouTube footage of these two different groups of Americans screaming at each other across the street. That's back in 2016. Now, when you have a much more heated, much more volatile environment, this is where you see the amplification of suggestions that violence is imminent, really, in some ways, acting almost as a tinderbox for nudging

it to happen. Does that make sense, Phil? That was a very long winded explanation. I'm sorry for that.

Jim: That look great. That was actually good. That was very rich. I do remember the Russians and the Texas secessionist and the pro-Islam. That was a very dirty trick, though, of course, I have to wonder, don't we do the same thing in Iran? Probably do. I hope we do. Actually, right.

Renee: That's always the question is the US doing it, too. I don't think we do it quite the same way. The mechanics of what US government can, can't do, or quite different. Of course, historically, yes. That was happening.

Jim: Yeah, for sure. Well, let's exit here the 2020 election discussion by ... What is your sense that foreign manipulation will be greater this time or less? We learned enough to down regulate some of this manipulation? Because there's been learning curve on the actor side that it could be great. What's your thoughts?

Renee: Yeah. There are very bright lines around enforcement for foreign actors. The platform's have this idea of integrity. They're called the integrity teams or the teams that are doing this investigation, who kind of constant monitoring of their platforms. The idea of integrity looks at the actors.

Are these accounts what they say they are? You can be a real Texas secessionist. But if you're a Texas secessionist, front persona in Moscow, that's considered an inauthentic, Texas secessionist. There are some funny thought experiments you can go through on what exactly is an authentic Texas secessionist. But there is a belief that a foreign person pretending to be an American is inauthentic and needs to come down.

Renee: Then the other two criteria are really looking at the content. Not from a narrative standpoint, but more from these websites that were created yesterday. Are they blatantly manipulative? Then the other piece is the behavior, the dissemination patterns.

There are some bright lines that say, when this is happening, there are certain types of manipulation that won't stand. The problem is those bright lines don't really exist when it's domestic people. When it's the authentic Texas secessionists, who maybe are coordinating to amplify content, there are some real gray areas around what is acceptable versus unacceptable types of coordination.

Renee: If you tell 30, of your closest friends to all post the same thing at the same time, well, that's a thing that real activists do. You want to achieve a sufficient share voice all at the same time. If you send that out to your mailing list of 30,000 people to all tweet at the same time, again, the question is, where are the lines around, what coordination is acceptable versus what coordination starts to veer into spam or manipulative territory?

That I think is our real challenge, which is, there are clear policies in place that relate to what criteria justify a takedown, or what criteria justify a flag for the domestic stuff.

Renee: What you see instead is anytime the platform makes a determination that some domestic activity is inappropriate, or does violate a policy line, there is a second wave of drama, and activism, honestly, associated whether that platform call was fair or unfair.

Whichever political partisan side feels that it won or lost in that call, this, the idea of working the referee, is going to come out and either vociferously protest that they were censored, or actually potentially try to nudge it even further and say, "Well, the platform didn't go far enough, they should have taken down all of this content, too."

Renee: Unfortunately, what you have is second order domestic battle, taking shape around what the platform should do, whenever the platform does anything. I'm not at a platform. I don't know what the internal dynamics around that are. But this is where you have the sense that everybody feels that they're being censored.

Everybody feels that the platforms are doing a terrible job moderating. Everybody feels that their side's voice isn't being heard. This is where then you start to see prominent lawmakers who are provocateurs who will get in and saber rattle about legislation or penalization, or even the president signing an executive order to defend the freedom of speech of some group of people.

Jim: Yeah. There's no doubt that it's become a very hot button, at least, at parts of both sides, as you point out, are complaining about the platforms themselves being able to put thumbs on the scales.

I actually worked in the Bernie Campaign in 2016. I can say at the end of that campaign, many of the other workers, not necessarily myself, but many others thought that Bernie had been screwed by the platforms. Then the force on the red side, there's a lot of screaming as well.

The platforms are deeply biased. Well, as somebody who helped build some of these current platforms. But earlier generation platforms, I happen to know that, of course, you could put your thumb on the scale if you wanted to. How do we police the platforms, to keep them from becoming biased actors on the political scene?

Renee: Yeah, that's great question, I think. There have been a couple of independent audits. It would be nice to see more of a consistency there, more transparency rather than occasional two year-long audits. There was one looking at conservative bias.

There's one looking at civil rights audit. Again, very different communities that were concerned about how Facebook was treating their content and their community. The platforms do put out these transparency reports where they'll tell you how many reports were filed, how many pieces of content they actioned on. There's not a whole lot of visibility into the specifics there.

Renee: One area where there is a little more visibility into the specifics is actually in DMCA takedowns, as in copyright takedowns, where there's a database that is maintained that lets people have a little more visibility into the specifics of the complaint.

I think it's hard because the other dynamic that's happening here is the privacy dynamic, which is what should the platform's be making public versus what should the platform's, the prevailing sentiment, particularly in Europe, but also in large parts of the US, is that the platform's have too much information about people.

If they were to put out more information about the kinds of takedowns, or specifics or ways that they made a particular call, that might have some potential privacy implications. It's a whole range of challenges.

Renee: I think, ultimately, there is no oversight body for the industry. One of the things I think about a lot is the way the financial industry has these multi-tiered systems of regulation. There's the SEC up at the top, then there's FINRA, and some of the self-regulatory bodies that act as internal industry watchdogs.

Then at the bottom level, the exchanges themselves can set rules and make determinations about how to maintain market integrity on their particular part of the ecosystem. I feel that the tech industry would benefit from a system a little bit more like that, where the platforms have their policies and can do these rapid responses, change their policy in response to some manipulation. You want them to have that ability to act quickly.

Then you have the industry consortiums, particularly on topics terrorism or child exploitation, those networks do exist. Now we have that same body for election integrity. Again, platforms operating in such a way where they're communicating with each other, as opposed to only monitoring what's happening within their own walled garden and not communicating threats or manipulation out to their peers.

Renee: But then there is still that gap up at the top. There's no SEC type entity that's responsible for looking at overall digital information, ecosystem, health, and constructing regulatory policy that would treat this as an ecosystem, which is what it is.

Jim: Yeah. It's an interesting and difficult problem. Because certainly they make mistakes, or at least from a reasonable perspective, seems they mistakes all the time and what they take down. Their appeals processes seem to be nightmares of non-action. One of my good friends who's been on the show twice, Jordan Hall, who's a real serious ...

Renee: Oh, yeah. Yep.

Jim: No one can doubt his good faith and analytical skills. He wrote a very deep article about QAnon on media, and he posted it. They took it down. He goes, "Wah!" He went through the appeals process, and they refused to put it back up.

Renee: Yeah.

Jim: All of our friends of Jordan's said, "What a fuck dude, what's this?" Yet they seem to be incapable of reversing what's clearly erroneous decision?

Renee: Yeah. Hey, I mean, not small amount of that, unfortunately. There's the first tier moderation is some combination of AI and contractors, depending on which platform you're talking about, and what the topic is. The AI will get things wrong. It's really hard to police in context. If you say the word "bitch," you can mean it in quite a nasty way or you can mean it as a term of endearment depending on how you and your friends engage.

Jim: Or you could be a dog breeder.

Renee: Right. That too. There you go. There was I think ... There was a Bush's Baked Beans when the Facebook ads interface, when the ad requirement came in for political ads, they all of a sudden started getting algorithmically flagged for running political content without a permit, because Bush's was in the name, even though this is a bean company.

There's ways in which the AI doesn't behave in the way that it should. That's trainable to an extent, but you'll never have ... for a while, yeah, I don't think we'll see anything close to the level of nuance required. There's those flags that result in ... that comes down because the algorithm made a decision, or there's a content moderator somewhere who, again, maybe doesn't have the cultural fluency or doesn't fully understand what's going on.

They don't take something down, that some group of people think should be down, or they take it down and people feel it was a false positive. You wind up in the queue of emailing, what feels like the robot. Again, it's going into another ticketing system, where somebody is going to spend all of two seconds on it.

Renee: To address this, the platforms you're looking at millions and millions of these things each day, or each week, depending on which platform you're talking about.

There's always going to be some amount of errors. If the error happens to a high profile enough person, or the situation feels particularly ... it really hits the right notes and emotionally resonates with a large audience, then you'll see the algorithm got it wrong, or that the moderator got it wrong, story will go viral. Then the platform will reverse the decision.

Then again, there'll be kind of a second wave of debate about how could they have gotten it wrong and who's running the show over there?

Renee: It's a real challenge to think about how do you have a moderation system that doesn't ... what's the appropriate amount, which side do you err on more, false positives or false negatives?

How do you think about what moderation infrastructure you want, and then how do you think about what appeals process you want. It's a morass at this point. I wish I had something optimistic to say about it. I think Facebook's got this oversight board, which hasn't quite gone. I don't think as ... it's not operational yet. But we're all waiting to see

what that turns into. I think that's supposed to be an independent group of people who weigh in on major moderation decisions, meaning at a policy level, as opposed to edit individual per content piece level.

Jim: Yeah. Of course, per content piece level that people just get totally pissed off. Legitimately so, when a good faith article gets whacked.

Renee: Yeah.

Jim: I have a crazy idea, run by it, tell me what you think, which is that any author should be able to put up a stake of money, any amount they want, up to let's say a million dollars, or as little as, say, \$10. It's an even money bet with the platform that call has to be sent to an objective third party arbitrator, or the American Society of Arbitrators, et cetera.

Whoever wins gets all the money. If you think you've clearly been dealt wrong, it's \$1,000 Facebook, god damn it, and they're required to then send it to the Independent Arbitrator. Whoever gets the call from the arbitrator gets 1,000 bucks from Facebook, or gets 1,000 bucks from the author. That's true. That's an interesting way. It's only the really important things we get pushed that way, but it would kind of make a put up or shut up.

Renee: No, I think, the skin in the game argument.

Jim: Exactly.

Renee: I totally get it. Well, the challenge was Facebook \$1,000 is they're earning that in a microsecond. I think that's one of the challenges. But I do think that the ... how do you ensure that bad actors aren't flooding the moderation appeals line, just to distract people from looking at other things. It's, of course, a tactic that trolls do use.

Jim: Yeah. It's game theory all the way down, unfortunately. It's predictable. I remember in the relatively early days of Reddit ...

Renee: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Jim: ... when Brigading got started, can you believe it when Brigading was brand new, that I think as far as I know, it started on Reddit, because of the fact that in Reddit the up-votes is down, votes are so significant what gets attention, and there were organized armies, and they were very public about it, wasn't even against the rules.

Renee: Oh, totally. Yeah. No. Brigading, we just did this takedown analysis with Facebook took down a set of accounts out of Pakistan, a story came out last week on Tuesday, so first week of September on Tuesday.

This was what they were ... a lot of what they were doing was these were groups of people who were coordinating in Facebook groups to go report accounts that they saw

as being enemies of Islam, or enemies of Pakistan. This is an international phenomenon. That's not a thing that is unique to American trolls or even American culture, is the thing that happens everywhere.

Renee: It's funny hearing you say Brigade, it's a term I use also. I've spoken with a couple folks who cover tech, and I use the word and they're like, "What is that?" It was actually this very, very old thing where you motivate people to go take action against a hated other community.

It's this is human nature on the internet. Brigading is an old, old, old phenomenon. It's just how it manifests depending on which feature set you have, or what algorithm is going to up rank or downvote ... up rank or downright content on Reddit, it's kind of the upvote, downvote phenomenon you mentioned.

Renee: Facebook will actually ... there's debates about whether the sheer number of comments will level up a post, because it's based on engagement, and leaving a lot of comments, or a lot of likes, or a lot of react, or whatever can potentially trigger the algorithm to show something.

You'll see Brigades trying to propel certain things to the top, just by going and you'll see them all eat the same hashtag on the post, that it will also surface high in search results or if somebody is searching for a hashtag on Facebook or Instagram.

Renee: This is really, I think, the big shift of the internet delivered us. It's that people are active participants in the curation process. I feel like that is the one key takeaway for me, as I look at both conspiracy theories state, sponsored trolling, disinformation campaigns. Ultimately, it is all about getting groups of people to feel invested enough to take an action, getting groups of people to feel invested enough to work to shape a conversation.

That is what the internet is really, really good at. Why it's increasingly broken down into the series of factions, where it's one faction battling against the next for attention for the ... to steer algorithmic curation or algorithmic recommendation by providing the signal that the algorithm is going to use to then take that content and propel it even further.

Renee: It's this idea of participatory morality, that's the fundamentally different thing in propaganda and information operations today, that was not there 10 years ago

Jim: Or was there 10 years ago, but it wasn't as widespread. I would say these games were being played on Reddit, 10 years ago, even 15 years ago. But now they're being played at massive scales on Facebook.

Yeah. We get the interaction of a couple of perverse situations, first, particularly once the world goes to advertising based model for services, both the service and the various partisans are all engaged in attention hijacking. I want your attention above all else. Then there's these game theoretic ways to do it. I don't know if you've ever heard of Campbell's Law and Goodhart's Law. These are really interesting concepts. Basically,

Goodhart's Law was the original, which is that in business, once you start measuring something, it's going to get gains, essentially.

Jim: Campbell's Law was an extension of that, and things like social media, once some set of behaviors produces, from the agents perspective, beneficial outcomes, for instance, everybody putting their same hash tag on i.e., our favorite post gets more attention, and hence wins the attention, the economy game, then those algorithms will become subverted by agentic, game theoretic behavior. We're caught in this amazing rat race.

It's hard to see what the bottom of it. I've been helping build the online world since 1980, believe it or not, when I went to work for the Source, which was the very first consumer online service.

Jim: I actually designed our second generation email forum system. I've been thinking about this stuff for a long time. I think back on how naive we were, even in 1990, when the EFF started rolling out, and then the mantra was tools, not rules.

We thought that we could develop good enough tools to have emergent good behavior. But god damn it, it turned out that you add Campbell's Law to Game Theory, tools themselves, at least so far, those will be able to get the job though.

Renee: It's interesting because a few years back, Reddit had a terrible reputation as being this massive hive of trolling and brigading, and outrageous behavior, and so on and so forth. One of the things that their moderation framework has now is it really puts a lot of power in the hands of mods at a local level, which is interesting, because it's something that Facebook and Twitter can't do.

You have this interesting framework on Reddit, where there's varying degrees of tolerance within a community, and people who were choosing to participate at a smaller size, versus Facebook, which has to make things palatable for a much larger audience size, and same with Twitter.

Renee: The distinction between how Reddit operates now, or there's the top level mods, the site wide people who are responsible for making sure that nothing outrageous or egregious is happening. Then the lower level, smaller community mods who do more to like set culture and norms within a community and intercede it at a lower level.

There's even some really basic ones like subreddits for dogs standing on their hind legs, I think, or maybe it's cat standing on their hind legs and trying to ... I've seen both, where the rule is, you can only post pictures that are that one thing. If you were to come in and post a picture of something that was totally different, your post would be deleted. Eventually, you'd be maybe kicked out or prevented from posting.

Renee: There's an interesting dynamic there where the rules are much more specific to local communities. That's something that you don't see as much on Facebook or places

that have to be more broadly appealing, or places where a more one-size-fits all rule set.

Jim: Though, that's changing on Facebook, more and more of the traffic is going to private groups or to public groups, for that matter. There, you do have curation power. I am a lead mod on to pair fairly large Facebook groups. We have very powerful tools.

We can take anybody off we want. We can ban them for a while. We can make ... Who gets in decisions. We have all kinds of interesting little tools. The Facebook group space is actually forming up to be quite similar, in some sense, to the old subreddit space.

Renee: I'm happy to hear they've improved the mod tools. I'm not a moderator of any Facebook groups, member of many mod is zero. But I know that that's been a thing that a lot of moderators have been asking for, to what extent can you have that. But, again, it's an interesting dynamic outside of the view of the public, the secret groups, or sometimes it's hard to get a sense of what kinds of behaviors are happening and some of the secret groups and how the platform should handle that, from an abuse standpoint.

There's also this move, of course, towards nudging people towards even smaller groups. WhatsApp groups or group chat dynamics that is yet another increasingly private space, where people gather outside of the oversight of the algorithm at all if they're encrypted. A lot of changing dynamics around how people organize their ... where do you put your factions? Where does your faction live?

Jim: Yep, interesting. You have to make hygiene, for instance, in my two groups we make and I've actually fought for the maintenance of this standard, is that while you have to be admitted to the group, it's world readable. Because I believe that hiding in a secret group is bad for the hygiene of the group.

Renee: Yeah.

Jim: If you're not prepared to have the world read what you wrote, you shouldn't write, god damn. For certainly there's some cases where that is not the case, domestic violence, or people who have embarrassing illnesses or something. But I would suggest that one should be somewhat suspicious of secret groups, unless there's a damn good reason for them.

That's just my own personal bias. I've actually gotten two big fights in my group, if you want to think of private. I said, "Oh, secret, I should say, make the distinction, ain't happening. That one was only that and you want to vote me out, put somebody else in, fine, but for the time being, and that's how it's going to stay?" Well, that's all very interesting.

Jim: Get a little short on time here. Let's move to another topic, which you've written about. When I was very, very interested in still am, and that's Deepfakes.

Renee: Yeah.

Jim: Could you tell people what Deepfakes are and what the state of play is there?

Renee: Yeah, sure. Deepfakes, it's a term that refers ... it was originally a term that refer to generated video, so algorithmically generated video. This is not video that is produced and then edited in a manipulative way. This is video that is generated from whole cloth by an AI. In video ...

Let's use the example of a speech by the president. If you were to take footage of Barack Obama, you could of course using various image editing and video editing tools, potentially splice in different audio or something along those lines, but there would be a video to go back to. There's something where you can look at it and see forensically, that this video has been edited or altered.

Renee: In generated video, the AI is producing it. The original output is this video of purportedly the president speaking. There is nothing that you can check it against. It's just a video that's produced entirely by the AI.

Originally, it started off ... Deepfakes was ... because some of the first application was porn, actually, some of the early work was looking at adult content and having superimposing or having a version made with somebody else's face on it. That was where the Deepfakes really took off. Then now, of course, in addition to generating video, you can have AI generated audio, text, and still images as well. It's come to be a catch all term for this generated content.

Renee: Now, I think we're at the point where there have been a number of ways in which the technology has become democratized or ordinary people can use primitive generators, primitive versions. There's a website called thispersondoesnotexist.com.

They just constantly are putting out AI generated faces. Essentially, it's for educational purposes to show people what the technology can do. But then you also see manipulative actors going and taking those faces, and using them as their social media profile pictures, because, again, you can't reverse image search and see that, "Oh, this was a stock photo that was cropped, or an Instagram picture that was flipped." Instead, it's just a face that exists nowhere else.

You might be more inclined to think that it's a real person, because there's no immediately accessible way of disproving that.

Renee: Then with text, the most recent iteration is this tool called GPT 3, and that is AI generated text. You feed it a prompt, and you give it a degree, it's called temperature, a degree that of creativity. It produces text for you in response to the prompt.

If you were to prompt it with the start of a news article, for example, it could generate the remainder of a news article, or it could if you give it a prompt of a couple of tweets, it'll generate you more tweets. It in tweets based on the format of the prompt, or the

instructions that you give it, what textual output you want to see. Now there's this whole world of AI generated text, again, that is unique and not repurposed or plagiarized, and reshuffled but isn't said something generated by the AI.

Jim: Yeah. It's quite interesting. When the Deepfakes videos came out, I was very concerned that this could cause some form of information apocalypse. But it's interesting that it didn't, at least not in the west. I can't think of a single really major exploit that was done with video Deepfakes.

Renee: I think there's a couple of reasons for that. I think, first, just the regular edited videos are still quite effective. The one of slow down Nancy Pelosi's speech and she sounds drunk, right, was, you didn't need a sophisticated AI generated Nancy Pelosi video to do that, somebody just kind of slowed down selective parts and rereleased it and like, boom, you had a viral video.

But the other thing that I think is interesting, and my work, my thinking has gone on the AI generated the risk, relative risks, is that when somebody makes a video, you're going to achieve a ... it's going to create a short-term sensational moment, everybody is going to be talking about it.

Renee: But when you have that dynamic of that short-term, sensational footage, this moment, tons of investigative journalists go and begin to dig in, tons of researchers begin to go and dig in, authenticating it or trying to figure out where it came from, who made.

It really draws a lot of attention to the content of the video itself, but also to who would have put it out and how it got amplified. It's one of these things where it's not something that you're surreptitiously and subtly influencing over a long period of time, the way that you could do with generative text.

Renee: With generative text, you could just have tons and tons of generated content posted as comments that would be undetectable. Or the ability to have a bunch of Twitter accounts that are tweeting out generated text. Again, this is a thing that state sponsored actors do.

They usually have humans running it. But here's an opportunity to just reduce the cost of doing that, again, reduces the discoverability because you're no longer plagiarizing. That's a very subtle, slow thing that happens over time. A little bit of a different strategy. Influence in a more of a slow burn long game approach, as opposed to the sensationalism of a viral scandalous video.

Renee: I think it'll be interesting to see. I've been curious if there'll be some sort of October surprise leaked audio of some sort. We've seen particularly in American politics, how many times as a politician been undone by some ... it was Mitt Romney's, gosh ... he gave that speech.

Jim: That makers are the takers. Yeah.

Renee: Yeah. There have been a couple of these ... the leaked audio comes out. It'd be interesting to see if there's fake leaked audio. There's a lot of ways that you can do this. But again, that'll be a very scandalous, sensational moment, and a lot of people will begin to go and investigate. It'll be interesting to see how these things are used when they're used.

Jim: Interesting. Yeah. With respect to the Deep videos, and if you actually hit on something here without quite naming it, which is that we developed a social immune system, combining people who will dig into and find out where this thing came from, and also, we probably now have, most of us at least, some reasonable amount of context in which we would look at a video,

I suppose we saw a video of Hillary and Bill Clinton telling racist jokes, for instance, while there's probably some people, most would say, that's bullshit to me, and probably one of those Deepfakes. In both the feasibility domain and in the fact that you point out that there could be rapid forensic investigation, the deep fake video thing did not seem to happen anywhere nearly as much as the alarms that were being wrong about two years ago.

Renee: I think there's also a lot of public service announcements about it, in a sense. It's one of the few technologies that as it was developing, researchers, civil society, academics, were both developing countermeasures, and, detection methodologies, and even Facebook, Google, range of different tech companies began to put money and resources behind detection competitions and things like this.

As the threat was emerging, there's always any new technology favors the aggressor in the beginning, but until the countermeasure or policy or rules were put in place.

Renee: In this particular case, you had that dynamic happening concurrently with the improvements and developments to the technology. The public became aware of the fact that these things existed also. That creates an interesting dynamic too, which is that the ... it actually became potentially ... what you started to see Adobe Voco, Adobe had this product called Voco, which was going to be an audio generator.

When it was announced, the early beta, early announcements of the product, unlike 2017, I think, what you started to see was actually, in some of the president's surrogates, Jacob Wall in particular, publicly speculating that maybe the access Hollywood tape had, in fact, been faked and was a Deepfake audio generated with Adobe Voco.

Renee: The mere existence of the technology led to certain people insinuating that the technology had been used, even in cases where it hadn't. One of the interesting dynamics was it kind of creates just a skepticism, almost like, unfortunately, a cynicism.

Among people were the belief in the video or belief in any video, whether real or not real, increasingly became like a tribal Rorschach test. Is this a thing that I'm inclined to believe? Well, how do I feel about the person in it as opposed to waiting for an

investigation or assessment or take on it? That's a weird place for us to be now I think, too. The idea that even real video is impugned by high partisans, real audio impugned by hyper partisans, because the mere existence of the technology to fake it is known to the public.

Jim: That's interesting. I call epistemic question. Where reality itself may be assumed to be fake, because we know that it's possible to fake, which can essentially highlight with some of us call information nihilism, where we say we can't believe anything. I think is a wrong statement.

But nonetheless, are people falling into that. But as you point out the applications for GPT three, four, or five, six, et cetera are perhaps more insidious and maybe more difficult to detect, though, I do understand that there are adversarial networks already being developed to detect at least in some context, GPT three. I've actually played with GPT three some, and it's good, way good, but it's out pretty quick.

Renee: Yeah. No. I've mastered that for the last couple of weeks, too, or on a variety of different projects. I'm fascinated by the ... I mean, my job is always, what are the ways that this will be misused? Yeah.

Jim: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's your job.

Renee: We have a researcher account, and I looked at it from the standpoint of, is this more effective for long-form versus short-form generation? How much human curation is required? The sense I came away with is, yes, there is ... it does tend to go off the rails and ramble as you get towards long form.

Then, of course, depending on how much freedom you give it, you get better or worse outputs. But I felt that the thing I'm interested in is to what extent does it reduce the cost to produce a unit of misinformation, so to speak, where it's still better to hire an army of trolls to write independent content, or does this just ... do you just generate it with the AI and give it to your one curatorial agent who then populates the Twitter account, and is that the dynamic that starts to take shape?

There's a lot of interesting things, I think that will come out of GPT three?

Jim: Yeah, that makes sense. As long as you keep it short, and as long as you don't try to write an 800 word op ed or something, but for a tweet response is be good? Probable.

Renee: Yeah, I think so.

Jim: Yeah. All right. Let's see what else we want to talk about here in our remaining time. You guys had a very interesting bit of work that you did on the virality project, about COVID-19 pandemic, this information, in particular, the look quite deeply into that Wackadoodle video pandemic and how it spread around the world. Would you tell our audience a little bit about that?

Renee: The reality project is a project that we've had now, since about March. But we've been looking at is the phenomenon of COVID-19 and how different state actors and different the information environment in particular countries are reacting to coronavirus.

There have been so many different conspiratorial angles related to everything from where the disease originated, what drugs or treatments work, there's a lot of politicization, because of the impact that the disease has taken on certain populations.

There's been a lot of unrest and discontent with government responses that has led to interesting narratives emerging as well.

Renee: The goal of the Morality Project was to say, we're in a unique environment in which nearly every single country is talking about the same thing. How can we look at how these narratives are taking shape in different parts of the world and on different types of channels?

We've been looking at everything from, again, over to covert is one angle, which countries are using state media to shape narratives, which countries are reverting to troll armies and bot farms. We're looking at which countries are using COVID offensively, so to speak, meaning using it as a way to disparage geopolitical rivals in service to advancing inflating their own perception or attacking opposition of some sort.

Then we've also looked at how they're handling these narratives internally. Are they using the opportunity to blame an adversary for coronavirus? How are they messaging information about cures to their people?

Renee: We've looked at everything from Chinese state media and what they've had to say about it, to conspiracy theorists in the US, and the propaganda they've produced and assessed. What spreads? What goes viral?

What hops from country-to-country versus staying confined within a country? How are different social platforms handling these information outbreaks on a policy level? It's been a really interesting ongoing research project for us. It's been fascinating to have this opportunity to realize that the entire world is talking about the same thing and to really watch how those narratives spread internationally and across platforms.

Jim: What did you find out?

Renee: Yeah. We'll be doing a writeup, I think, in the next month and a half. I'm on maternity leave. But as soon as I'm back, that's my ... in two weeks that's my main project.

What we've been seeing is a lot of use of available broadcast channels. There's a huge focus on social media, Coronavirus Misinformation, and what social platforms should be doing about it, particularly in the US. But what we see is the ways in which state regimes are using all of the information channels at their disposal. What you'll see is

Iranian state media, putting out particular narratives to advance the idea that COVID was a bio-weapon created by the US. Then social media accounts may echo that, but it's a very top down, narrative spreads through what we call blue check influencers, regime leaders, and regime mouthpieces, and state media mouthpieces.

Renee: One thing we see is when state media from an ally ... from one country put something out, oftentimes, other state media from countries that they'll have a close relationship with will pick it up and amplify it. We see our T putting out commentary talking about, “

Well, the Iranians are saying that the US created coronavirus.” It allows them to amplify the narrative without taking it on as their own. They're constantly saying, “Well, these other guys over here are saying it.” But they're still using the opportunity to put it out to their audience. A report by another state media organization becomes “newsworthy,” and is used to continue to spread the narrative.

Renee: With China, we've seen a lot of ... they rely heavily on censorship within their own media ecosystem. But they don't allow Facebook or Twitter their citizens to use these platforms. But they themselves, the government, blue checks, and state media are using them to put out the Chinese party line.

They're running ads actually to push out content related to their perception of their handling of the coronavirus and the story that they want to tell about how China saved the world from a much worse pandemic by acting very early. They'll put out articles on that. Then they'll use Facebook to boost the posts to ensure that that content is seen very much outside of their borders.

Renee: You see this within the US, you see conspiratorial communities. Again, the Voice of America wasn't really doing very much on coronavirus. We have a compare and contrast post looking at how VOA was talking about it at the same time that Chinese state media was talking about it.

You didn't really see that conspiratorial ... those conspiratorial tactics from Voice of America. You didn't see them amplifying other state media. The Russians are saying, the Chinese are saying et cetera, et cetera. They were just covering the story as it was emerging largely quite neutrally.

Renee: In the US what we saw was much more activity from bottom up accounts, groups that were pushing along QR conspiracy theories was really what was taking hold and receiving a lot of attention. Insinuations that our own government had created coronavirus, we're also taking hold, interestingly.

Rather than insinuating that it was a bio-weapon created by others, our conspiracy theorists said that it was a bio-weapon created by us, this idea of vast cover-ups in the vaccine program, concealing the fact that the coronavirus was a disease that was spread through vaccines and a range of these kind of outlandish conspiracies.

Renee: Basically, it was a huge range of conspiracy theories that were alternately spread in some countries by blue check influencer accounts, in other countries, much more of a grassroots phenomenon, ways in which these narratives were used both to bolster regimes popularity internally by saying the virus was caused by outsiders, or the regime communicating to outsiders, that it had behaved responsibly.

A lot of this multifaceted analysis looking at over to covert broadcast to social and top-down and bottom-up.

Jim: Okay. Well, thanks. That's very, very interesting. This actually is a good chance to pivot to it, which I guess will be our last topic, because we're getting late here on time, which is, as we talked about earlier, there's good game theory, bad faith competition reasons why the state actors or maybe even corrupt business interests, what acted bad faith and spread bad ideas.

But maybe what's even scarier is the fact that there's an awful lot of good faith crazy shit out there that's spreading like crazy. You've talked about the anti-vaxxers. What the hell is wrong with people? If you look at the numbers, a hundred Americans died from vaccines since 1950. \$no doubt, millions have been saved. I mean, it's not even a closed question.

The 9/11 truth is, they seem to be over now. But that was a crazy ass thing on the internet. The crazy thing of the moment is QAnon.

Renee: Yeah.

Jim: I know, you've got a little research. I know, you've talked to some psychologists. What is it about really batshit crazy stuff that gets so heavily up regulated on our networks from time-to time?

Renee: I think what we started to see was, first, you mentioned groups. There's been a significant growth of prioritization of groups by Facebook and others, where people are nudged into like-minded communities. This is a normal human behavior thing that's existed since the internet.

But then it's really been much more of a focus of the platform to push people into those communities. What we started to see in 2015, was the conspiracy correlation matrix taking hold, which was that if you joined an anti-vaccine group, the recommendation engine, would promote a Pizzagate group to you and then as QAnon began to emerge, would promote a QAnon group to you.

Renee: Even if you had never typed the word Pizzagate, or QAnon in, the algorithm rightly recognized that the greatest predictor of belief in a conspiracy theory is belief in another conspiracy theory, because it's more indicative of a particular alignment around trust.

If you distrust the government, if you believe that they're concealing that vaccines cause autism, maybe it's not that much of a stretch to believe that there's these vast pedophilia rings that Trump is fighting, or that Pizzagate is a thing.

Renee: There's this phenomenon by which conspiracy theorists were pushed into other conspiracy theory groups. I think that was where you started to see the groundwork really being laid for the interlinking of these communities.

QAnon in particular, really became an omni-conspiracy theory where it as it grew in popularity, there were so many ways to read into the "secret knowledge" of cue drops, that as various investigators participated in unraveling the secret hidden meaning behind these communications, they would bring in their read. If the group was populated by people who had been referred in through the recommendation engine, because of their anti-vaccine proclivities, naturally, some of that read would be incorporated into the body of knowledge that began to constitute the QAnon canon.

Again, expand that out to a whole range 9/11 Truth, there's chem trailers, anti-government, you name it. It all got read into this massive omni-conspiracy, became this umbrella group for it.

Renee: That's how you have the interesting community and mythology development, then you just have the online factional dynamics, which is the people who are true believers are very, very inclined to be incredibly passionate about this stuff. They go to Twitter. Actively are in they're constantly engaging, because they believe that they're fighting a war.

They're soldiers in this war for truth. They're engaging constantly, and pushing this content out. Unfortunately, at times resorting to tactics, like harassment of celebrities and things like that, who get caught up into the mythology. Then media, of course, plays an amplifier role as well and covering it. The challenge for mainstream press is always what do you call attention to versus where do you employ and selective silence?

Renee: In the early days of QAnon, when there was coverage, it was almost gawking. But then as QAnon began to become increasingly tied up in the Trump wing of the party kind of dynamics with a number of candidates who really used QAnon supporters in their primaries as a source of support, it became increasingly something that was part of the American political ecosystem, where House of Representative candidates were winning their primaries on this energy.

That's where you started to see more and more coverage of it in the last couple months, which is again, then it's the question becomes, how do you cover it in such a way that explains the zeitgeist and explains the dynamics, while at the same time not inadvertently pushing people into it in some way.

That's how ... You've seen this mainstreaming of the topic, where increasing numbers of people have heard of it. Then again, the question becomes by informing the public,

do you inoculate them or do you potentially make them more susceptible to participation in the group themselves?

Jim: Yeah. That's, of course, a moral question. I mean, these people are allegedly adults. They are constitutionally allowed to believe any kind of nonsense they want.

Renee: Yep.

Jim: As a confirmed atheist, I frankly have the same view about organized religion. Just fucking compounded nonsense. But yet it hangs in for a long period of time. It isn't anybody's job to say that you should not be QAnon leader. Interesting question.

Renee: That's where the ... Some of the dynamics around where is the line between conspiracy and cult, is an interesting question. Particularly when that online factional dynamic, that community participation, where the orientation is around everybody is a member of this thing because of the shared belief system.

Are we going to see more of this decentralized cult dynamics, as various people come to participate in online groups aligned around various weird things that are released onto the internet, claims that people make or whatever that inspire curiosity and then adherence?

Jim: Yep. As we talked about earlier, then that's provide an evolutionary construct in which those crazy theories that stick get up regulated, and they get modified, the more sticky. We should expect more of this, I suspect.

Renee: I think that's true.

Jim: Okay. Final exit question, what can individuals do to make themselves less susceptible to all these various kinds of exploits? I'll say one thing people can do, but most people won't, is every year, I take a six month break from Facebook and Twitter. I'm on month two, just about the end of month two of my six month break, just clear your head of that shit.

But most people don't seem to want it ... don't seem to want to do that. Of course, when I come back, I find same shit different day hasn't changed. Literally, I mean, did I miss anything at all in six months? That's usually my response. When I come back is "No."

Let's assume people aren't willing to be that extreme. What can people do to have a more valuable positive experience from their use of social media?

Renee: I think one thing is recognizing. There's an interesting dynamic, how do you step outside yourself and understand that you've just seen content that's designed to rile you up?

What is your first inclination when you see something that you think is outrageous? Is it to re-tweet it, to DM it to your 10 closest friends? Do you feed the outrage cycle, or do

you recognize it for what it is? I think that's the thing that I personally have gotten a little bit more, maybe jaded, because I look at this stuff all day long at this point for years now.

Renee: But the question of do I need to weigh in on this outrage at this moment? Who benefits from me continuing to forward along that outrage article? Is there ways to make people think about their role as active participants in the transmission process of this stuff?

That I think is a worthwhile effort in some way. Maybe we teach that alongside media literacy. It's not just checking your source. It's also what is the purpose of this is for to create content, so that people like you forwarded along. Are you helping somebody by forwarding this along or are you just feeding a culture or narrative that keeps people perpetually riled up and angry?

I think that self-inventory is a place that I ... that's what I tried to do now, at this point. Do I need to weigh in on this? No. Does the world need my hot take? Nope.

Jim: That alone would make a big difference, wouldn't it? If we all said, is the world going to be a better place if I respond to this? The answer more often than not, is indeed that. Well, thank you, Renee, for a very wonderful passionate deep dive into what's going on on the net.

Renee: Thank you.

Production services and audio editing by Jared Janes Consulting, Music by Tom Muller at modernspacemusic.com.

The most hair-raising quotes from Netflix doco The Social Dilemma

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The Social Dilemma is the latest Netflix documentary that everyone is talking about. Essentially an exposé on social media and technology from director Jeff Orlowski, it features interviews with some of the tech geniuses who helped develop the platforms we know so well (think Google, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, etc.) and paints a clear picture on how these businesses have evolved from something positive into a testing lab on the human brain and money making machines.

It's a reminder of the power these platforms have over our lives, with some pretty eye-opening insights and statistics. Here, a few of the quotes that stood out to us - plus, some tips to help you navigate the digital sphere in a more positive way.

- "We're the product. Our attention is the product being sold to advertisers." - *Justin Rosenstein, former engineer Facebook and Google, co-founder of Asana*
- "It's the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behaviour and perception that is the product." - *Jaron Lainer, founding father of Virtual Reality Computer Scientist*
- "It's a marketplace that trades exclusively in human futures." - *Shoshana Zuboff, Harvard University professor*
- "We've created a world in which online connection has become primary. Especially for younger generations. And yet, in that world, anytime two people connect, the only way it's financed is through a sneaky third person whose paying to manipulate those two people. So we've created an entire global generation of people who were raised within a context with the very meaning of communication, the very meaning of culture, is manipulation." - *Jaron Lainer, founding father of Virtual Reality Computer Scientist*
- "If something is a tool, it genuinely is just sitting there, waiting patiently. If something is not a tool it's demanding things from you. It's seducing you, it's manipulating you, it wants things from you. We've moved away from a tools based technology environment, to an addiction and manipulation used technology environment. Social media isn't a tool waiting to be used. It has its own goals, and it has its own means of pursuing them by using your psychology against you." - *Tristan Harris, former design ethicist at Google and co-founder of Centre for Humane Technologies*
- "We're training and conditioning a whole new generation of people that when we are uncomfortable or lonely or uncertain or afraid, we have a digital pacifier for ourselves. That is kind of atrophying our own ability to deal with that." - *Tristan Harris, former design ethicist at Google and co-founder of Centre for Humane Technologies*

³³ <https://www.ensemblmagazine.co.nz/articles/the-social-dilemma-netflix>

“There are only two industries that call their customers ‘users’:
illegal drugs and software.”

Edward Tufte

- “I like to say that algorithms are opinions embedded in code. And that algorithms are not objective. Algorithms are optimised to some definition of success. So if you can imagine, if a commercial enterprise builds an algorithm, to their definition of success, it's a commercial interest. It's usually profit.” - *Cathy O'Neil, data scientist*

- “There's only a handful of people at these companies who understand how these [algorithm] systems work, and even they don't necessarily fully understand what's going to happen with a particular piece of content. So as humans we've almost lost control over these systems. Because they're controlling the information that we see, they're controlling us more than we're controlling them.” - *Sandy Parakilas, former operations manager at Facebook, former product manager at Uber*

- “The way to think about it is as 2.5 billion Truman Shows. Each person has their own reality with their own facts. Over time you have the false sense that everyone agrees with you because everyone in your news feed sounds just like you. Once you're in that state, it turns out you're easily manipulated.” - *Roger McNamee, Early investor venture capitalist in Facebook*

- “The platforms make it possible to spread manipulative narratives with phenomenal ease, and without very much money.” - *Renée Diresta, research manager of Stanford Internet Observatory, former head of policy at Data for Democracy*

- “When we were making the like button, our entire motivation was ‘can we spread positivity and love in the world?’ The idea that fast forward to today and teens would be getting depressed when they don't have enough likes or it could be leading to political polarisation was nowhere on our radar.” - *Justin Rosenstein, former engineer at Facebook and Google, co-founder of Asana*

Feeling overwhelmed by all of that? Here are a few tips from the film to help navigate the social media space:

- “Never accept a video recommended to you on YouTube. Always choose. That's another way to fight.” - *Jaron Lanier, founding father of Virtual Reality Computer Scientist*

- “Before you share, fact check. Consider the source. Do that extra Google. If it seems like it’s designed to push your emotional buttons, it probably is.” - *Renée Diresta, research manager of Stanford Internet Observatory, former head of policy at Data for Democracy*

- “I’ve uninstalled a ton of apps from my phone that I felt were wasting my time. All the social media apps, all the news apps and I’ve turned off notifications on anything that was vibrating my leg with information that wasn’t timely and important to me right now. It’s for the same reason that I don’t keep cookies in my pocket.” - *Justin Rosenstein, former engineer at Facebook and Google, co-founder of Asana*



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The Social Dilemma And The Human Rights Risks Of Big Tech

October 7, 2020 [Sian Jones](#)

The Social Dilemma, a recently released Netflix documentary, alerts viewers to the societal and psychological problems arising from the products and practices of big tech companies through testimonials, dramatised scenes of family life ruined by social media, and data on matters such as mental health and suicide rates. The film features interviews with former big tech executives and employees including Tristan Harris, former Design Ethicist for Google; Tim Kendal, former Facebook executive and former President of Pinterest; Aza Raskin, former Firefox & Mozilla Labs employee and inventor of the infinite scroll; and a host of others including former YouTube and Twitter engineers.

The majority of these individuals state that they left their previous jobs in big tech companies due to ethical concerns. They all use their role in the documentary to express such concerns, which centre around the ethics of the persuasive technology used by their former employers to keep users active on their sites for as long as possible in order to sell more advertisements. The effects of such practices range from damage to users' mental health, social media addiction, and over-exposure to photoshopped and filtered images warping users' self-image; to the spread of disinformation and fake news, threats to democracy, and extreme political divisiveness and polarisation.

³⁴ <https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/the-social-dilemma-and-the-human-rights-risks-of-big-tech>

ISSUES RAISED

The documentary reveals the algorithms designed to keep users engaged on sites for as long as possible, often by recommending content which will hold their attention or cause them to comment, share, and repost. The most effective sort of content for this purpose is particularly shocking, divisive, idealised, or untrue.

According to an MIT study cited in the documentary, fake news spreads six times faster than truthful content on [Twitter](#). Therefore, it is in the financial interests of companies like Twitter and Facebook to promote this kind of unregulated content to users to keep them engaged on the site, so that they see more advertisements and make the companies more money.

An internal Facebook report in 2018 found that 64% of the people who joined extremist groups on Facebook did so because its algorithms steered them [there](#). As Roger McNamee, an early Facebook investor, points out, “if everyone's entitled to their own facts, there's really no need for compromise, no need for people to come together - we need to have some shared understanding of [reality](#)”. This shared understanding of reality is currently under threat as Facebook and Twitter feeds, and even Google searches, are heavily tailored according to the interests, political leanings, and personal information of whoever is searching or scrolling.

Another related issue briefly raised in *The Social Dilemma* is Facebook's deal with telecommunication companies in developing countries to allow individuals buying a new phone (which comes with Facebook already installed) to use Facebook for free, without paying for the data it would normally [require](#). Facebook Inc. carry out these deals under an arm of their company they profess to be a charitable, development-focussed venture, with the aims of bringing internet access to more people, called [internet.org](#).

The problem here is that users are not gaining access to the free internet, but rather a filtered version through Facebook's corporate lens. In fact, they are not being granted the freedoms and information that the internet can provide, but rather they are simply being granted the freedom to use Facebook and become a unit of engagement for monetisation on its [site](#).

HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

In her interview for the documentary, Cynthia M Wong, former senior internet researcher for Human Rights Watch, highlights the case of Myanmar and the use of Facebook by the military and other bad actors to incite hate speech towards the [Rohingya](#). This case is a clear example of how unregulated social media can be used by government actors to legitimise and incite gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity – in this case, [genocide](#).

Further, the issues raised in *The Social Dilemma* can be seen as slow violence inflicted on the mental health of its users, on democracy, and on the notions of truth and unity within our societies – for the sake of tech companies’ profit margins. Slow violence encapsulates actions wherein acts of violence, for example environmental degradation, take place very gradually over time but ultimately have largely violent consequences - in contrast to the kinds of explosive, attention-grabbing violence which dominates the front page of [newspapers](#).

Whilst the behaviour and business models of large tech companies are not necessarily forms of direct violence, they are just as powerful and dangerous as their effects largely go unseen or underdiscussed in our society. In this case, it is our mental health, democracy, and human rights being damaged. This can be seen, for example, in the prevalence of gendered hate speech on platforms like Twitter leading to the erosion of the freedom of speech and expression of many [women](#).

This kind of problem demands regulation which is grounded in internationally recognised principles of human rights, and which offers protection against abuses of power by governments who may regulate to limit their [citizens](#)’ freedom of speech.

ISSUES WITH THE DOCUMENTARY

Whilst *The Social Dilemma* brings the issues around big tech further into public view, particularly providing an “insider” perspective on the workings of Facebook, Twitter, and Google, it may be criticised for focusing too intently on the perspectives of those who had a large part in causing these problems in the first place.

Maria Farrell highlights the issue of focussing on the voices of the former inventors of the [dangerous](#) technology. She states that doing so will stop us from getting “to the bottom of how and why we got here” and “artificially narrow the possibilities for where we go next”. She also

emphasises the problem with turning to these figures and listening when they speak, but not uplifting the voices of activists who have campaigned on these issues for years without ever having been a key part of the problem.

This issue can be seen in some of the recommendations for change made by the former tech execs in *The Social Dilemma*. Can keeping your device out of the bedroom and turning off your notifications really do anything to stop the political polarisation and threats of civil war that these very individuals just described as the risks and effects of their own creations?

Perhaps these small changes can momentarily address the mental health damage for individuals. However, it does nothing to make the tech itself less addictive and manipulative, and less prone to spreading disinformation and encouraging political polarisation.

Whilst the documentary does point out that it cannot be up to the companies to regulate themselves, it seems to make a glaring omission of how ineffective it may be for users to self-regulate their social media use. The likes of Tristan Harris spend the documentary explaining just how manipulative and addictive this technology is, only to turn around and encourage the user to outsmart the tech by turning off notifications.

This suggestion relies on users becoming aware of these issues and self-regulating, and completely overlooks those unaware or still truly addicted to their feeds. Of the two main problems highlighted - the individual harms and the societal harms of this tech – the film only presents some potential solutions to the former and next to none for the latter.

Whilst *The Social Dilemma* does feature a number of experts and academics who allude to other solutions such as regulation and removing the companies from existence all together, it serves somewhat as an example of the problems that come with centring tech industry insiders in the development of solutions to the problems caused by their own creations.

The path to a solution cannot be paved through the tech itself, nor can it focus on repairing only the harms to individuals through their own self-control. As this documentary has compellingly highlighted, this is an issue that goes beyond individuals and into the very fabric of our society. What

is needed here is regulation which centres internationally recognised human rights principles and protects against abuses of power.

Joe Dispenza



Joe Dispenza

Neuroscientist



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drjoedispenza.com

Available on



Apple Music



Deezer

Born: March 24, 1962 (age 58 years)

Record label: [Encephalon, LLC](#)

Education: [Life University](#), [The Evergreen State College](#)

The Pineal Gland

(Explained by science)



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The Four Pillars of Healing

Posted by [Dr. Joe Dispenza](#) on Jun 10, 2019 4:45:00 PM ³⁵

It became clear to me, after years of interviewing people who had experienced spontaneous remissions and healings, that most of these individuals had four specific qualities in common. They had experienced the same coincidences.

Before I describe the four qualities common to these cases, I would like to note some of the factors that were not consistent among the people I studied. Not all practiced the same religion; several had no religious affiliation. Not many had a background as a priest, rabbi, minister, nun, or other spiritual profession.

These individuals were not all New Agers. Only some prayed to a specific religious being or charismatic leader. They varied by age, gender, race, creed, culture, educational status, profession, and tax bracket. Only a few exercised daily, and they did not all follow the same dietary regimen.

They were of varying body types and fitness levels. They varied in their habits pertaining to alcohol, cigarettes, television, and other media. Not all were heterosexual; not all were sexually active. My interviewees had no external situation in common that appeared to have caused the measurable changes in their health status.

Coincidence #1: An Innate Higher Intelligence Gives Us Life and Can Heal the Body

The people I spoke with who experienced a spontaneous remission believed that a higher order or intelligence lived within him or her. Whether they called it their divine, spiritual, or subconscious mind, they accepted that an inner power was giving them life every moment, and that it knew more than they, as humans, could ever know. Furthermore, if they could just tap into this intelligence, they could direct it to start working for them.

I have come to realize that there is nothing mystical about this greater mind. It is the same intelligence that organizes and regulates all the functions of the body. This power keeps our heart beating without interruption more than 100,000 times per day, without our ever stopping to think about it.

³⁵ <https://blog.drjoedispenza.com/the-four-pillars-of-healing>

That adds up to more than 40 million heartbeats per year, nearly three billion pulsations over a lifetime of 70 to 80 years. All this happens automatically, without care or cleaning, repair or replacement. An elevated consciousness is evidencing a will that is much greater than our will.

Likewise, we give no thought to what our heart is pumping: two gallons of blood per minute, well over 100 gallons per hour, through a system of vascular channels about 60,000 miles in length, or twice the circumference of the earth.

Yet the circulatory system makes up only about 3 percent of our body mass. (1) Every 20 to 60 seconds, each blood cell makes a complete circuit through the body, and every red blood cell makes anywhere between 75,000 and 250,000 round trips in its lifetime. (By the way, if all of the red blood cells in your bloodstream were lined up end to end, they would reach 31,000 miles into the heavens.)

In the second it takes you to inhale, you lose three million red blood cells, and in the next second, the same number will be replaced. How long would we live if we had to focus on making all this happen? Some greater (more expanded) mind must be orchestrating all of this for us.

Please stop reading for one second. Just now, some 100,000 chemical reactions took place in every single one of your cells. Now multiply 100,000 chemical reactions by the 70 to 100 trillion cells that make up your body. The answer has more zeros than most calculators can display, yet every second, that mind-boggling number of chemical reactions takes place inside of you. Do you have to think to perform even one of those reactions?

Many of us can't even balance our checkbooks or remember more than seven items from our shopping lists, so it's fortunate for us that some intelligence smarter than our conscious mind is running the show.

In that same second, 10 million of your cells died, and in the next instant, almost 10 million new cells took their place. (2) The pancreas itself regenerates almost all its cells in one day. Yet we give not a moment's thought to the disposal of those dead cells, or to all of the necessary functions that go into mitosis, the process that gives rise to the production of new cells for tissue repair and growth.

Recent calculations estimate that the communication between cells actually travels faster than the speed of light. At the moment, you are probably giving some thought to your body. Yet something other than your conscious mind is causing the secretion of enzymes in exact amounts to digest the food you consumed into its component nutrients. Some mechanism of a higher order is filtering liters of blood through your kidneys every hour to make urine and eliminate wastes. (In one hour, the most advanced kidney dialysis machines can only filter 15 to 20 percent of the

body's wastes from the blood.) This superior mind precisely maintains the 66 functions of the liver, although most people would never guess that this organ performs so many tasks.

And lastly, if you committed to not arising to face the day until you actually felt like that new ideal, you would also be conditioning the body to finally work together with your new mind. Actually, your thoughts condition your mind and your feelings condition your body. And when you have mind and body working together, you have the power of the universe behind you.

When you walk through your life that day, maintaining this modified state, something should be different in your world as a result of your effort. No one is excluded from this phenomenon.

The same intelligence can direct tiny proteins to read the sophisticated sequence of the DNA helix better than any current technology. That's some feat, considering that if we could unravel the DNA from all the cells of our body and stretch it out end to end, it would reach to the sun and back 150 times! (3) Somehow, our greater mind orchestrates tiny protein enzymes that constantly zip through the 3.2 billion nucleic acid sequences that are the genes in every cell, checking for mutations.

Our own inner version of Homeland Security knows how to fight off thousands of bacteria and viruses without our ever needing to realize that we are under attack. It even memorizes those invaders so that if they enter us again, the immune system is better prepared.

Most marvelous of all, this life force knows how to start from just two cells, a sperm and an egg, and create our almost 100 trillion specialized cells. Having given us life, it then continually regenerates that life and regulates an incredible number of processes. We may not notice our higher mind at work, but the moment we die, the body starts to break down because this inner power has left.

Like the people I interviewed, I have had to acknowledge that some intelligence is at work in us that far exceeds our conscious abilities. It animates our body every single moment, and it's incredibly complex workings take place virtually behind our back.

We're conscious beings, but typically, we pay attention only to events that we think are important to us. Those 100,000 chemical reactions every second in our 100 trillion cells are a miraculous expression of the life force. Yet the only time they become significant to the conscious mind is when something goes wrong.

This aspect of the self is objective and unconditional. If we are alive, this life force is expressing itself through us. We all share this innate order, independent of gender, age, and genetics. This intelligence transcends race, culture, social standing, economic status, and religious beliefs. It

gives life to everyone, whether we think about it or not, whether we are awake or asleep, whether we are happy or sad. A deeper mind permits us to believe whatever we want, to have likes and dislikes, to be allowing or judgmental. This giver of life lends power to whatever we are being; it bestows on us the power to express life in whatever way we choose.

This intelligence knows how to maintain order among all of the cells, tissues, organs, and systems of the body because it created the body from two individual cells. Again, the power that made the body is the power that maintains and heals the body.

My subjects' illnesses signified that, to some extent, they had gotten out of touch or distanced themselves from part of their connection with this higher order. Maybe their own thinking had somehow directed this intelligence toward illness and away from health.

But they came to understand that if they tapped into this intelligence and used their thoughts to direct it, it would know how to heal their bodies for them. Their greater mind already knew how to take care of business, if they could only make contact with it.

The abilities of this innate intelligence, subconscious mind, or spiritual nature are far greater than any pill, therapy, or treatment, and it is only waiting for our permission to willfully act. We are riding on the back of a giant, and we're getting a free ride.

Coincidence #2: Thoughts Are Real; Thoughts Directly Affect the Body

The way we think affects our body as well as our life. You may have heard this concept expressed before in various ways—for example, in that phrase “mind over matter.” The people I interviewed not only shared this belief but also used it as a basis for making conscious changes in their own mind, body, and personal life.

To understand how they accomplished this, I began to study the growing body of research on the relationship between thought and the physical body.

There is an emerging field of science called psychoneuroimmunology that has demonstrated the connection between the mind and the body. I can describe what I learned in these simplistic terms:

Your every thought produces a biochemical reaction in the brain. The brain then releases chemical signals that are transmitted to the body, where they act as the messengers of the thought. The thoughts that produce the chemicals in the brain allow your body to feel exactly the way you were just thinking. So every thought produces a chemical that is matched by a feeling in your body.

Essentially, when you think happy, inspiring, or positive thoughts, your brain manufactures chemicals that make you feel joyful, inspired, or uplifted. For example, when you anticipate an experience that is pleasurable, the brain immediately makes a chemical neurotransmitter called dopamine, which turns the brain and body on in anticipation of that experience and causes you to begin to feel excited.

If you have hateful, angry, or self-deprecating thoughts, the brain also produces chemicals called neuropeptides that the body responds to in a comparable way. You feel hateful, angry, or unworthy. You see, your thoughts immediately do become matter.

When the body responds to a thought by having a feeling, this initiates a response in the brain. The brain, which constantly monitors and evaluates the status of the body, notices that the body is feeling a certain way.

In response to that bodily feeling, the brain generates thoughts that produce corresponding chemical messengers; you begin to think the way you are feeling. Thinking creates feeling, and then feeling creates thinking, in a continuous cycle.

This loop eventually creates a particular state in the body that determines the general nature of how we feel and behave. We will call this a state of being. For example, suppose a person lives much of her life in a repeating cycle of thoughts and feelings related to insecurity. The moment she has a thought about not being good enough or smart enough or enough of anything, her brain releases chemicals that produce a feeling of insecurity.

Now she is feeling the way she was just thinking. Once she is feeling insecure, she then will begin to think the way she was just feeling. In other words, her body is now causing her to think.

This thought leads to more feelings of insecurity, and so the cycle perpetuates itself. If this person's thoughts and feelings continue, year after year, to generate the same biological feedback loop between her brain and her body, she will exist in a state of being that is called "insecure."

The more we think the same thoughts, which then produce the same chemicals, which cause the body to have the same feelings, the more we physically become modified by our thoughts. In this way, depending on what we are thinking and feeling, we create our state of being.

What we think about and the energy or intensity of these thoughts directly influences our health, the choices we make, and, ultimately, our quality of life.

Applying this reasoning to their own lives, many interviewees understood that many of their thoughts not only did not serve their health, but also might be the reason their unhappy or unhealthy conditions developed in the first place. Many of them had spent nearly every day for

decades in internal states of anxiety, worry, sadness, jealousy, anger, or some other form of emotional pain. Thinking and feeling, feeling and thinking like that for so long, they said, is what had manifested their conditions.

Here's an example: Developing one digestive ailment after another and living with constant pain in his spine finally prompted Tom to examine his life. Upon self-reflection, he realized that he had been suppressing feelings of desperation caused by the stress of staying in a job that made him miserable.

He had spent two decades being angry and frustrated with his employer, coworkers, and family. Other people often experienced Tom's short temper, but for all that time, his secret thoughts had revolved around self-pity and victimization. Repeatedly experiencing these rigid patterns of thinking, believing, feeling, and living amounted to toxic attitudes that Tom's body just "couldn't stomach."

His healing began, Tom told me, when he recognized that his unconscious attitudes were the basis for his state of being-for the person he had become. Most of those whose case histories I studied reached conclusions similar to Tom's.

To begin changing their attitudes, these individuals began to pay constant attention to their thoughts. In particular, they made a conscious effort to observe their automatic thought processes, especially the harmful ones.

To their surprise, they found that most of their persistent, negative inner statements were not true. In other words, just because we have a thought does not necessarily mean that we have to believe it is true. As a matter of fact, most thoughts are ideas that we make up and then come to believe.

Believing merely becomes a habit. For example, Sheila, with all her digestive disorders, noticed how often she thought of herself as a victim without the capacity to change her life. She saw that these thoughts had triggered feelings of helplessness. Questioning this belief enabled her to admit that her hardworking mother had done nothing to prevent or dissuade Sheila from going after her dreams.

Some of my subjects likened their repetitive thoughts to computer programs running all day, every day, in the background of their lives. Since these people were the ones operating these programs, they could elect to change or even delete them.

This was a crucial insight. At some point, all those I interviewed had to fight against the notion that one's thoughts are uncontrollable. Instead, they had to choose to be free and to take control

of their thinking. Everyone had resolved to interrupt habitual negative thought processes before they could produce painful chemical reactions in their body. These individuals were determined to manage their thoughts and eliminate ways of thinking that did not serve them.

Conscious thoughts, repeated often enough, become unconscious thinking. In a common example of this, we must consciously think about our every action while we are learning to drive.

After much practice, we can drive 100 miles from point A to point B and not remember any part of the trip, because our subconscious mind is typically at the wheel. We've all experienced being in an unaware state during a routine drive, only to feel our conscious mind reengaging in response to an unusual engine sound or the rhythmic thump of a flat tire.

So if we continually entertain the same thoughts, they'll start off as conscious ones, but they'll ultimately become unconscious, automatic thought programs. There is a sound explanation in neuroscience for how this happens. You'll understand how this happens from a scientific standpoint by the time you finish reading this book.

These unconscious ways of thinking become our unconscious ways of being. And they directly affect our lives just as conscious thoughts do. Just as all thoughts set off biochemical reactions that lead to behavior, our repetitive, unconscious thoughts produce automatic, acquired patterns of behavior that are almost involuntary. These behavioral patterns are habits and most surely, they become neurologically hardwired in the brain.

It takes awareness and effort to break the cycle of a thinking process that has become unconscious. First, we need to step out of our routines so we can look at our lives. Through contemplation and self-reflection, we can become aware of our unconscious scripts. Then, we must observe these thoughts without responding to them, so that they no longer initiate the automatic chemical responses that produce habitual behavior.

Within all of us, we possess a level of self-awareness that can observe our thinking. We must learn how to be separate from these programs and when we do, we can willfully have dominion over them. Ultimately, we can exercise control over our thoughts. In doing so, we are neurologically breaking apart thoughts that have become hardwired in our brain.

Since we know from neuroscience that thoughts produce chemical reactions in the brain, it would make sense, then, that our thoughts would have some effect on our physical body by changing our internal state.

Not only do our thoughts matter in how we live out our life, but our thoughts become matter right within our own body. Thoughts . . . matter.

Out of their belief that thoughts are real, and that the way people think directly impacts their health and their lives, these individuals saw that their own thinking processes were what had gotten them into trouble.

They began to examine their life analytically. When they became inspired and diligent about changing their thinking, they were able to revitalize their health. A new attitude can become a new habit.

Coincidence #3: We Can Reinvent Ourselves

Motivated as they were by serious illnesses both physical and mental, the people I interviewed realized that in thinking new thoughts, they had to go all the way. To become a changed person, they would have to rethink themselves into a new life. All of those who restored their health to normal did so after making a conscious decision to reinvent themselves.

Breaking away often from daily routines, they spent time alone, thinking and contemplating, examining and speculating about what kind of people they wanted to become. They asked questions that challenged their most deeply held assumptions about who they were. “What if” questions were vital to this process:

What if I stop being an unhappy, self-centered, suffering person, and how can I change? What if I no longer worry or feel guilty or hold grudges?

What if I begin to tell the truth to myself and to others? Those “what ifs” led them to other questions: Which people do I know who are usually happy, and how do they behave? Which historical figures do I admire as noble and unique?

How could I be like them? What would I have to say, do, think, and act like in order to present myself differently to the world? What do I want to change about myself?

Gathering information was another important step on the path to reinvention. Those I interviewed had to take what they knew about themselves, and then reformat their thinking to develop new ideas of who they wanted to become.

Everyone started with ideas from their own life experiences. They also delved into books and movies about people they respected. Piecing together some of the merits and viewpoints of these figures, along with other qualities they were contemplating, they used all this as raw material to start building a new representation of how they wanted to express themselves.

As these individuals explored possibilities for a better way of being, they also learned new modes of thinking. They interrupted the flow of repetitive thoughts that had occupied most of their waking moments.

Letting go of these familiar, comfortable habits of thought, they assembled a more evolved concept of whom they could become, replacing an old idea of themselves with a new, greater ideal. They took time daily to mentally rehearse what this new person would be like. As discussed in chapter 1, mental rehearsal stimulates the brain to grow new neural circuits and changes the way the brain and mind work.

In 1995, in the *Journal of Neurophysiology*, an article was published demonstrating the effects that mental rehearsal alone had on developing neural networks in the brain.⁶ Neural networks are individual clusters of neurons (or nerve cells) that work together and independently in a functioning brain. Neural nets, as we will affectionately call them, are the latest model in neuroscience to explain how we learn and how we remember.

They can also be used to explain how the brain changes with each new experience, how different types of memories are formed, how skills develop, how conscious and unconscious actions and behaviors are demonstrated, and even how all forms of sensory information are processed.

Neural networks are the current understanding in neuroscience that explains how we change on a cellular level. In this particular research, four groups of individuals were asked to participate in a five-day study that involved practicing the piano, in order to measure the changes that might take place in the brain.

The first group of volunteers learned and memorized a specific one-handed, five-finger sequence that they physically practiced every day for two hours during that five-day period.

The second group of individuals was asked to play the piano without any instruction or knowledge of any specific sequence. They played randomly for two hours every day for five days without learning any sequence of notes.

The third group of people never even touched the piano, but were given the opportunity to observe what was taught to the first group until they knew it by memory in their minds. Then they mentally rehearsed their exercises by imagining themselves in the experience for the same length of time per day as the participants in the first group.

The fourth group was the control group; they did nothing at all. They never learned or practiced anything in this particular experiment. They never even showed up.

At the end of the five-day study, the experimenters used a technique called transcranial magnetic stimulation along with a few other sophisticated gadgets, in order to measure any changes that took place in the brain.

To their surprise, the group that only rehearsed mentally showed almost the same changes, involving expansion and development of neural networks in the same specific area of their brain, as the participants who physically practiced the sequences on the piano.

The second group, which learned no piano sequences at all, showed very little change in their brain, since they did not play the same series of exercises over and over each day. The randomness of their activity never stimulated the same neural circuits on a repetitive basis, and thus did not strengthen any additional nerve cell connections. The control group, the ones who never showed up, evidenced no change at all.

How did the third group produce the same brain changes as the first group without ever touching the keyboard? Through mental focusing, the third group of participants repeatedly fired specific neural networks in particular areas of their brain.

As a result, they wired those nerve cells together in greater measure. This concept in neuroscience is called Hebbian learning. (7) The idea is simple: Nerve cells that fire together, wire together. Therefore, when gangs of neurons are repeatedly stimulated, they will build stronger, more enriched connections between each other.

According to the functional brain scans in this particular experiment, the subjects that were mentally rehearsing were activating their brain in the same way as if they were actually performing the endeavor.

The repetitive firing of the neurons shaped and developed a cluster of neurons in a specific part of the brain, which now supported the pattern of conscious intent. At will, their thoughts became mapped and plotted in the brain.

Interestingly, the circuits strengthened and developed in the absolute same area of the brain as the group that physically practiced. They grew and changed their brain just by thinking. With the proper mental effort, the brain does not know the difference between mental or physical effort.

Sheila's experience of curing her digestive illness illustrates this process of reinvention. Sheila had resolved that she would no longer revisit memories of her past and the associated attitudes that had defined her as a victim.

Having identified the habitual thought processes she wanted to release, she cultivated a level of awareness where she had enough control to interrupt her unconscious thoughts. She therefore no

longer fired the same associated neural networks on a daily basis. Once Shelia gained dominion over those old thought patterns and no longer fired those neurological habits of thinking, her brain began pruning away those unused circuits.

This is another, related aspect of Hebbian learning that we can sum up as follows: Nerve cells that no longer fire together, no longer wire together. This is the universal law of “use it or lose it” in action, and it can work wonders in changing old paradigms of thought about ourselves. Over time, Sheila shed the burden of old, limited thoughts that had been coloring her life.

Now it became easier for Sheila to imagine the person she wanted to be. She explored possibilities that she had never considered before. For weeks on end, she focused on how she would think and act as this new, unknown person.

She constantly reviewed these new ideas about herself so that she could remember who she was going to be that day. Eventually, she turned herself into a person who was healthy, happy, and enthusiastic about her future.

She grew new brain circuits, just like the piano players have done. It is interesting to note here that most people I interviewed never felt like they had to discipline themselves to do this. Instead, they loved mentally practicing who they wanted to become.

Like Sheila, all the people who shared their case histories with me succeeded in reinventing themselves. They persisted in attending to their new ideal until it became their familiar way of being. They became someone else, and that new person had new habits. They broke the habit of being themselves. How they accomplished this brings us to the fourth credo shared by those who experienced physical healings.

Like Sheila, all the people who shared their case histories with me succeeded in reinventing themselves. They persisted in attending to their new ideal until it became their familiar way of being. They became someone else, and that new person had new habits. They broke the habit of being themselves. How they accomplished this brings us to the fourth credo shared by those who experienced physical healings.

Coincidence #4: We Are Capable of Paying Attention So Well That We Can Lose Track of Relative Space and Time

The people I interviewed knew that others before them had cured their own diseases, so they believed that healing was possible for them too. But they did not leave their healing up to chance. Hoping and wishing would not do the trick. Merely knowing what they had to do was not enough. Healing required these rare individuals to change their mind permanently and

intentionally create the outcomes they desired. Each person had to reach a state of absolute decision, utter will, inner passion, and complete focus. As Dean put it, “You just have to make up your mind!”

This approach requires great effort. The first step for all of them was the decision to make this process the most important thing in their life. That meant breaking away from their customary schedules, social activities, television viewing habits, and so on.

Had they continued to follow their habitual routines, they would have continued being the same person who had manifested illness. To change, to cease being the person they had been, they could no longer do the things they had typically done.

Instead, these mavericks sat down every day and began to reinvent themselves. They made this more important than doing anything else, devoting every moment of their spare time to this effort. Everyone practiced becoming an objective observer of his or her old familiar thoughts.

They refused to allow anything but their intentions to occupy their mind. You may be thinking, “That’s pretty easy to do when faced with a serious health crisis. After all, my own life is in my hands. “Well, aren’t most of us suffering from some affliction-physical, emotional, or spiritual-that affects the quality of our life? Don’t those ailments deserve the same kind of focused attention?

Certainly, these folks had to wrestle with limiting beliefs, self-doubt, and fears. They had to deny both their familiar internal voices and the external voices of other people, especially when these voices urged them to worry and to focus on the predicted clinical outcome of their condition.

Nearly everyone commented that this level of mind is not easy to attain. They had never realized how much chatter occupies the untrained mind. At first they wondered what would happen if they began to fall into habitual thought patterns. Would they have the strength to stop themselves from going back to their old ways?

Could they maintain awareness of their thoughts throughout their day? But with experience, they found that whenever they reverted to being their former self, they could detect this and interrupt that program. The more they practiced paying attention to their thoughts, the easier this process became, and the better they felt about their future. Feeling peaceful and calm, soothed by a sense of clarity, a new self-emerged.

Interestingly, all the subjects reported experiencing a phenomenon that became part of their new life. During extended periods of introspection on reinventing themselves, they became so involved in focusing on the present moment and on their intent that something remarkable

happened. They completely lost track of their body, time, and space. Nothing was real to them except their thoughts.

Let me put this in perspective. Our everyday, conscious awareness is typically involved with three things:

First, we are aware of being in a body. Our brain receives feedback on what is happening within the body and what stimuli it is receiving from our environment, and we describe what the body feels in terms of physical sensations

Second, we are aware of our environment. The space around us is our connection to external reality; we pay attention to the things, objects, people, and places in our surroundings.

Third, we have a sense of time passing; we structure our life within the concept of time.

However, when people inwardly focus through serious self-reflective contemplation, when they are mentally rehearsing new possibilities of who they could become, they are capable of becoming so immersed in what they are thinking about that, at times, their attention is completely detached from their body and their environment; these seem to fade away or disappear.

Even the concept of time vanishes. Not that they are thinking about time, but after such periods, when they open their eyes, they expect to find that just a minute or two has elapsed, only to discover that hours have gone by.

At these moments, we don't worry about problems, nor do we feel pain. We disassociate from the sensations of our body and the associations to everything in our environment. We can get so involved in the creative process that we forget about ourselves.

When this phenomenon occurs, these individuals are aware of nothing but their thoughts. In other words, the only thing that is real to them is the awareness of what they are thinking. Nearly all have expressed this in similar words. "I would go to this other place in my mind," one subject said, "where there were no distractions, there was no time,

I had no body, there was no thing-nothing" except my thoughts." In effect, they became a no-body, a no-thing, in no-time. They left their present association with being a somebody, the "you," or "self," and they became a nobody.

In this state, as I was to learn, these individuals could begin to become exactly what they were imagining. The human brain, through the frontal lobe, has the ability to lower the volume to, or even shut out, the stimuli from the body and the environment, as well as the awareness of time.

The latest research in functional brain scan technology has proven that when people are truly focused and concentrating, the brain circuits associated with time, space and the feelings/movements/sensory perceptions of the body literally quiet down.⁸ As human beings, we have the privilege to make our thoughts more real than anything else, and when we do, the brain records those impressions in the deep folds of its tissues. Mastering this skill is what allows us to begin to rewire our brains and change our lives.

Bruce Lipton



Bruce Lipton

American biologist



bruce-lipton.com

Available on



YouTube



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YouTube Music



More music services

Bruce Harold Lipton, is an American developmental biologist notable for his views on epigenetics. In his book *The Biology of Belief*, he claims that beliefs control human biology rather than DNA and inheritance. Lipton's extraordinary claims have not received attention from mainstream science. [Wikipedia](#)

Born: October 21, 1944 (age 76 years), Mount Kisco, NY

Spouse: [Margaret Horton](#)

Movies: [Heal](#), [The Living Matrix](#)

Albums: [Bruce Lipton's Music For A Shift In Consciousness](#)

Education: [University of Virginia](#), [LIU Post](#)

The Wisdom of Your Cells is a new biology that will profoundly change civilization and the world we live in. This new biology takes us from the belief that we are victims of our genes, that we are biochemical machines, that life is out of our control, into another reality, a reality where our thoughts, beliefs and mind control our genes, our behavior and the life we experience. This biology is based on current, modern science with some new perceptions added.

The new science takes us from victim to creator; we are very powerful in creating and unfolding the lives that we lead. This is actually knowledge of self and if we understand the old axiom, "Knowledge is power," then what we are really beginning to understand is the knowledge of self-power. This is what I think we will get from understanding the new biology.

Flying Into Inner Space

My first introduction to biology was in second grade. The teacher brought in a microscope to show us cells and I remember how exciting it was. At the university I graduated from conventional microscopes into electron microscopy and had a further opportunity to look into the lives of cells. The lessons I learned profoundly changed my life and gave me insights about the world we live in that I would like to share with you.

Using electron microscopy, not only did I see the cells from the outside but I was able to go through the cell's anatomy and understand the nature of its organization, its structures and its functions. As much as people talk about flying into outer space, I was flying into inner space and seeing new vistas, starting to

³⁶ <https://www.brucelipton.com/resource/article/the-wisdom-your-cells>

have greater appreciation of the nature of life, the nature of cells and our involvement with our own cells.

At this time I also started training in cell culturing. In about 1968 I started cloning stem cells, doing my first cloning experiments under the guidance of Dr. Irv Konigsberg, a brilliant scientist who created the first stem cell cultures. The stem cells I was working with were called myoblasts.

Myo means muscle; blast means progenitor. When I put my cells in the culture dishes with the conditions that support muscle growth, the muscle cells evolved and I would end up with giant contractile muscles.

However, if I changed the environmental situation, the fate of the cells would be altered. I would start off with my same muscle precursors but in an altered environment they would actually start to form bone cells. If I further altered the conditions, those cells became adipose or fat cells.

The results of these experiments were very exciting because while every one of the cells was genetically identical, the fate of the cells was controlled by the environment in which I placed them.

While I was doing these experiments I also started teaching students at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine the conventional understanding that genes controlled the fate of cells.

Yet in my experiments it was clearly revealed that the fate of cells was more or less controlled by the environment. My colleagues, of course, were upset with my work. Everyone was then on the bandwagon for the human genome project and in support of the “genes-control-life” story.

When my work revealed how the environment would alter the cells, they talked about it as an exception to the rule.

You Are a Community of 50 Trillion Living Cells

Now I have a completely new understanding of life and that has led to a new way to teach people about cells. When you look at yourself you see an individual person.

But if you understand the nature of who you are, you realize that you are actually a community of about 50 trillion living cells. Each cell is a living individual, a sentient being that has its own life and functions but interacts with other cells in the nature of a community.

If I could reduce you to the size of a cell and drop you inside your own body, you would see a very busy metropolis of trillions of individuals living within one skin.

This becomes relevant when we understand that health is when there is harmony in the community and dis-ease is when there is a disharmony that tends to fracture the community relationships. So, number one, we are a community.

Fact number two: There is not one function in the human body that is not already present in every single cell. For example, you have various systems: digestive, respiratory, excretory, musculoskeletal, endocrine, reproductive, a nervous system and an immune system but every one of those functions exists in every one of your cells.

In fact we are made in the image of a cell. This is very helpful for biologists because we can do research on cells and then apply that information to understanding the nature of the human body.

I was teaching what is called the medical model, the perception that human biology represents a biological machine comprised of biochemicals and controlled by genes.

Therefore when a patient comes in to see a doctor, the belief system is that the patient has something wrong with their biochemistry or genes, which can be adjusted and can lead them to health.

At some point I realized that I had to leave the university because I found great conflict in teaching the students about what controls the cell and yet getting a completely different understanding from the cells in my cultures.

A New Understanding of Science

When I was outside the university I had a chance to read into physics. Again I found information that did not conform to the science I had been teaching. In the world of new physics, quantum physics, the mechanisms that are described completely collide with the mechanisms we were teaching, which were based on the old Newtonian physics.

The new physics currently is still not introduced in medical schools. Before conventional science, science was the province of the church. It was called natural theology and was infused with the spiritual domain, teaching that God's hand was directly involved in the unfoldment and maintenance of the world, that God's image was expressed through the nature we live in.

Natural theology had a mission statement: to understand the nature of the environment so we could learn to live in harmony with it. Basically this meant learning how to live in harmony with God, considering that nature and God were so well connected.

However, through the abuses of the church, their insistence on absolute knowledge and their efforts of suppressing new knowledge, there was what is called the Reformation. The Reformation, precipitated by Martin Luther, was a challenge to the church's authority.

After the Reformation, when there was an opportunity to question beliefs about the universe, science became what was called modern science. Isaac Newton, the physicist whose primary studies were on the nature of gravity and the movement of the planets, provided the foundation for modern science. He invented a new mathematics called differential calculus in order to create an equation to predict the movements of the solar system. Science identified truths as things that were predictable.

Newtonian physics perceives the universe as a machine made out of matter; it says that if you can understand the nature of the matter that comprises the machine, then you will understand nature itself. Therefore the mission of science

was to control and dominate nature, which was completely different than the former mission of science under natural theology, which was to live in harmony with nature.

The issue of control in regard to biology becomes a very important point. What is it that controls the traits that we express? According to Newtonian physics life forms represent machines made out of matter and if you want to understand those machines you take them apart, a process called reductionism.

You study the individual pieces and see how they work and when you put all the pieces together again, you have an understanding of the whole. Charles Darwin said that the traits an individual expresses are connected to the parents.

The sperm and egg that come together and result in the formation of a new individual must be carrying something that controls the traits in the offspring. Studies of dividing cells began in the early 1900s and they saw string-like structures that were present in cells that were beginning to divide. These string-like structures were called chromosomes.

Interestingly enough, while chromosomes were identified around 1900, it was only in 1944 that we actually identified which of their components carried the genetic traits. The world got very excited.

They said, oh, my goodness, after all these years we finally have gotten down to identifying the genetically controlling material; it appears to be the DNA. In 1953 the work of James Watson and Francis Crick revealed that each strand of DNA contained a sequence of genes.

The genes are the blueprints for each of the over 100,000 different kinds of proteins that are the building blocks for making a human body. A headline announcing Watson and Crick's discovery appeared in a New York paper: "Secret of Life Discovered" and from that point on biology has been wrapped up in the genes.

Scientists saw that by understanding the genetic code we could change the characters of organisms and therefore there was a big, headlong rush into the human genome project to try to understand the nature of the genes.

At first they thought these genes only controlled the physical form, but the more they started to manipulate genes, they saw that there were also influences on behavior and emotion. Suddenly, the genes took on more profound meaning because all the characters and traits of a human were apparently controlled by these genes.

Are We Victims of Heredity?

Yet there was one last question: what is it that controls the DNA? That would be going up the last rung of the ladder to find out what is ultimately in control. They did an experiment and it revealed that DNA was responsible for copying itself! DNA controls the protein and the protein represents our bodies.

Basically it says that life is controlled by DNA. That is the Central Dogma. It supports a concept called “the primacy of DNA” that says who and what we are and the fate of the lives we lead are already preprogrammed in the DNA that we received at conception.

What is the consequence of this? That the character and fate of your life reflects the heredity you were born into; you are actually a victim of heredity.

For example, scientists looked at a group of people, scored them on the basis of happiness and tried to find out whether there was a gene that was associated with happy people that was not active in unhappy people. Sure enough, they found a particular gene that seems to be more active in happy people.

Then they immediately put out a big media blip on “gene for happiness discovered.” You could say, “Well, wait a minute. If I got a sucky happy gene, then my whole life is going to be predetermined. I’m a victim of my heredity.” This is exactly what we teach in school and this is what I had also been teaching—that people are powerless over their own lives because they can’t change their genes. But when people recognize the nature of being powerless, they also start to

become irresponsible. “Well, look, Boss, you’re calling me lazy but I just want you to know my father was lazy. What can you expect from me? I mean, my genes made me lazy. I can’t do anything about it.”

Recently in Newsweek they wrote about how fat cells are waging war on our health. It’s interesting because in an epidemic of obesity science stands back and says: it’s your fat cells that are waging war in your life.

The Human Genome Project

To come and save us, the human genome project entered our world. The idea of the project was to identify all the genes that make up a human. It would offer the future opportunity of genetic engineering to correct the ills and problems that face humans in this world.

I thought the project was a humanitarian effort but it was interesting later to find out from Paul Silverman, one of the principal architects of the human genome project, what it was actually about.

It was simply this: It was estimated that there were going to be over 100,000 genes in the human genome because there are over 100,000 different proteins in our bodies; plus there were also genes that didn’t make proteins but controlled the other genes.

The project was actually designed by venture capitalists; they figured that since there were over 100,000 genes, by identifying these genes and then patenting the gene sequences, they could sell the gene patents to the drug industry and the drug industry would use the genes in creating health products. In fact, the program was not actually for advancing the human state as much as it was for making a lot of money.

Here is the fun part. Scientists knew that as you go up the evolutionary scale, simple organisms have less DNA and when you get to the level of humans, with the complexity of our physiology and our behavior, we have a lot more DNA.

They thought that primitive organisms would have maybe a few thousand genes but humans were going to have approximately 150,000 genes, which meant 150,000 new drugs.

The project began in 1987 and just showed again that when humans really put their heads together they can create miracles. In only about fourteen years we actually had the results of the human genome. It also was what I call a cosmic joke.

To begin the human genome project they first studied a primitive organism, a miniature worm that is barely visible with your eye. These worms had been an experimental animal for geneticists because they reproduce very quickly and in very large numbers and thereby express traits that you can study.

They found that this small animal had a genome of about 24,000 genes. Then they decided to do one more genetic model before doing the human and that was with the fruit fly because of the large amount of information already available on the genetics and behavior of fruit flies.

The fruit fly genome turned out to have only about 18,000 genes. The primitive worm had 24,000 genes and this flying machine had only 18,000 genes! They didn't understand what that meant but put it on the back burner and started the work on the human genome project.

The results came in 2001 and were a major shock: in the human genome there are only about 25,000 genes; they expected nearly 150,000 genes and there were only about 25,000! It was such a shock that people actually didn't talk about it.

While there was a lot of hoopla about completing the human genome project, no one talked about the 100,000 missing genes. There was complete lack of discussion in the scientific journals about it.

When they realized there were not enough genes to account for human complexity, it shook the foundation of biology

Why is it so important? If a science is based on the way life really works, that science would be good for use in medical practice. But if you base your science on wrong information, then that science could be detrimental to medical practice. It is now a recognized fact that conventional allopathic medicine, the primary medicine we use in Western civilization, is a leading cause of death in the United States.

It is also responsible for one out of five deaths in Australia. In the Journal of the American Medical Association Dr. Barbara Starfield wrote an article revealing that from conservative estimates, the practice of medicine is the third leading cause of death in the United States.

However, there is a more recent study by Gary Null (see Death by Medicine at: www.garynull.com(link is external)). He found that rather than being the third leading cause of death, it is the first leading cause with over three-quarters of a million people dying from medical treatment each year. If medicine actually knew what it was doing, it wouldn't be that lethal.

I left the university in 1980, seven years before the human genome project was started because I already was aware that genes didn't control life. I was aware that the environment was influential but my colleagues looked at me as not just being a radical but a heretic because I was conflicting with the dogma; therefore this became a religious argument.

At some point the religiosity of where I was led me to resign my position. That's when I started to advance into understanding about brain function and neuroscience. What I was really trying to find out is if it's not the DNA that controls cells, then where is the "brain" of the cell?

The Computer Within

The new biology revealed that the brain of the cell is its skin, the mem-brane, the interface of the interior of the cell and the ever-changing world we live in. It is the functional element that controls life. This is important because understanding its function reveals that we are not victims of our genes. Through the action of the

cell membrane we can actually control our genes, our biology and our life and we have been doing it all along although we have been laboring under the belief that we are victims.

I started to realize that the cell was a chip and that the nucleus was a hard disk with programs. The genes were programs. As I was typing this on my computer one day I realized that my computer was like a cell.

It had programs built into it but what was expressed by the computer was not determined by the programs. It was determined by the information that I, as the environment, was typing onto the keyboard. Suddenly all the pieces fell into place: the cell membrane is actually an information-processing computer chip.

The cell's genes are the hard drive with all the potentials. That is why every cell in your body can form any kind of cell because every nucleus has all the genes that make up a human. But why should one cell be skin and another cell be bone or eye?

The answer is not because of the gene programs but because of the feedback of information from the environment. All of a sudden the bigger thing hit me: what makes us different from each other is the presence of a set of unique identifying protein keys (receptors) comprising the keyboard on the surface of our cells. The identity keys on the cell membrane respond to environmental information.

The biggest "Aha!" was this: that our identity is actually an environmental signal that is playing through the keyboard on the surface of our cells and engaging our genetic programs; you are not inside your cell, you are playing through your cell using the keyboard as an interface. You are an identity derived from the environment.

In my younger days, I didn't see that religion was offering me truth. I went away from spirit and ended up in science. Realizing that my identity was something from the environment playing through my cells was the greatest shock to my world because I was completely thrown from a non-spiritual reality into the requirement of a spiritual existence.

My cells were like little television sets with antennas and I was the broadcast that controlled the readout of the genes. I was actually programming my cells.

I realized that if the cell died, it did not necessarily mean the loss of the broadcast-that the broadcast is out there whether the cell is here or not. All of a sudden it hit me with such profound awe.

What I realized was that survival was not that important because of my eternal character was derived from some broadcast in the field. The fear of mortality disappeared. That was about twenty-five years ago and it was one of the most wonderful, liberating experiences I ever had.

Perception: The Power of the New Biology

We perceive the environment and adjust our biology, but not all of our perceptions are accurate. If we are laboring under misperceptions, then those misperceptions provide for a mis-adjustment of our biology.

When our perceptions are inaccurate we can actually destroy our biology. When we understand that genes are just respondents to the environment from the perceptions handled by the cell membrane, then we can realize that if life isn't going well, what we have to do is not change our genes but change our perceptions.

That is much easier to do than physically altering the body. In fact, this is the power of the new biology: we can control our lives by controlling our perceptions.

We are holding "truths" about science that are actually untruth, they are actually "assumptions," and false assumptions at that. Until we correct them, we are misunderstanding our relationship to the planet, to nature and the environment. As a result we are destroying that which has provided us life, the environment.

False assumption number one is that the universe is made of matter and its understanding can be attained by studying matter Our perception of a material-only biology and environment is no longer scientifically accurate. Another

assumption is that genes control life. It is actually our perceptions that control life and by changing our perceptions we can get control over our lives. I will discuss more about this later.

Assumption number three is a very dangerous assumption: that we arrived at this point in our evolution using the mechanisms of Darwinian theory, which may be summed up as “the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence.” It turns out in the new biology that evolution is based on cooperation.

Until we understand that, we keep competing with each other, struggling and destroying the planet without recognizing that our survival is in cooperation and that our continued competition is the death knell of human civilization.

The Future of Medicine

Everything in the universe is now understood to be made out of energy; to our perception it appears physical and solid, yet in reality it is all energy and energies interact.

When you interact in your environment you are both absorbing and sending energy at the same time. You are probably more familiar with terms such as “good vibes” and “bad vibes.” Those are the waves at which we are all vibrating.

We are all energy. The energy in your body is reflecting the energy around you because the atoms in your body are not only giving off energy, they are absorbing energy. Every living organism communicates with these vibrations. Animals communicate with plants; they communicate with other animals. Shamans talk to plants with vibrations.

If you are sensitive to the differences between “good” and “bad” vibrations, you would always be leading yourself to places that would encourage your survival, your growth, your love, et cetera, and staying away from situations and places that would take advantage of you or cancel who you are.

When we are not paying attention to our vibrational energies, we are missing the most important readouts from our environment. Understanding of the new physics says that all energies are entangled and interact with each other. Therefore, you must pay attention to these invisible forces that are involved with

what's going on in your life. While medicine does not train its doctors to recognize that energy is part of the system, they very easily adapted to using the new scan systems to determine what is going on inside the body. It is humorous that they read their scans as "maps," but do not have the fundamental understanding that their maps are direct readouts of the energy present in the body.

For example, in a mammogram revealing a cancer, one is you are visualizing a characteristic emission of energy distinctive of a cancer. Rather than cutting out the cancer, what if you applied an energy that, through interference patterns, would change the energy of those cancer cells and bring them back to a normal energy?

Presumably you would get a healing effect. This would make sense out of thousands of years of what is called "hands-on healing." The recipient is getting an energy that is interacting with their body through interference and through that interference, changing the character of the energy reflected in the physical matter because the matter is the energy. This is the future of medicine although we are not there with it right now.

Quantum physicists reveal that underneath apparent physical structure there is nothing more than energy, that we are energy beings. That means that we interact with everything in the field.

This has an important impact on health care. Quantum physics reveals that energies are always entangled with each other. In an energy universe, waves are always flowing through and interacting with all other waves.

We can never separate someone fully from the environment they live in. Quantum physics says the invisible energy is one hundred times more efficient in conveying information than are material signals (e.g., drugs). What we are beginning to recognize is that there is an invisible world that we have not dealt with in regard to understanding the nature of our health.

In other words, rather than focusing on matter, in a quantum world we focus on energy. In the mechanical world we said we can understand everything by reductionism.

But in the newer quantum understanding of the universe we have to understand holism: you cannot separate one energy vibration from another energy vibration. We have to recognize that in the world we live in we are entangled in an unfathomable number of energy vibrations and we are connected to all of them!

Here is my definition of the environment: it is everything from the core of your being to the edge of the universe. It includes everything in close proximity to you as well as the planets and the sun and what is going on in the entire solar system.

We are part of this entire field. To summarize the significance of this let me give you a quote from Albert Einstein: "The field is the sole governing agency of the particle." What he says is this: the field, the invisible energy, is the sole governing agency of the physical reality

© 2007 by Bruce Lipton. This article is Part One of a three-part presentation derived from *The Wisdom of Your Cells, How Your Beliefs Control Your Biology*, published by Sounds True as an Audio Listening Course on eight CDs, www.soundstrue.com(link is external). Watch for Part Two and Three of Dr. Lipton's presentation in the Summer and Autumn 2007 issues of *Light of Consciousness*.

11 things you can do to stop being manipulated by your phone

37

11 things you can do to stop being manipulated by your phone, according to the tech experts on Netflix's 'The Social Dilemma'

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Netflix's "The Social Dilemma." Netflix

- Netflix's "The Social Dilemma" explores our deeply-entrenched societal addiction to social media and what large tech firms stand to gain from our engagement on the platforms.
- The film has been among the most-watched programs since it was released on the service on September 9 and features commentary from top industry figures and critics.
- The docudrama is sobering to watch, but the credit reel features tips and tricks on how to cut down on phone use.

³⁷ <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-put-your-phone-down-the-social-dilemma-2020-9#deleting-your-social-media-account-can-lead-to-progress-lanier-said-11>

- The suggestions include refusing to click on recommended posts and videos while surfing the web and uninstalling apps that you feel are wasting your time.
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Experts have long discussed how we have become [addicted to social media](#), and that addiction [has only been inflamed in recent years](#).

A new Netflix documentary paints an alarming and sobering picture of the extent of that addiction and how social networks have capitalized on it, catapulting tech companies into global powerhouses in the process. "[The Social Dilemma](#)" explores different aspects and effects of the online world, including the lucrative attention-economy, addictive recommendation algorithms, misinformation, political polarization, and more.

[The doc features](#) ex-Google design ethicist and president of The Center For Humane Technology Tristan Harris, computer scientist Jaron Lanier, author Shoshana Zuboff, ex-Facebook director of monetization Tim Kendall, data scientist and author Cathy O'Neil, Asana co-founder and ex-Facebook engineering lead Justin Rosenstein, early Facebook investor Roger McNamee, and many others.

You might want to throw your phone across the room by the end of the hour-and-a-half-long docudrama. But fret not! The last five minutes is actually semi-uplifting as the industry experts dole out steps you can take to limit how much you use your phone and the addicting technology that lives in it.

We've rounded them up below — take a look:

Don't click on videos or posts that are recommended to you.



Jaron Lanier in New York City in 2019. Mike Coppola/Getty Images for Tribeca Film Festival

Recommendation algorithms have become somewhat of a secret sauce for tech platforms. They are what keep users engaged on the apps, queuing up related content for when you finish reading a post or watching a video. For example, the recommendation algorithm for TikTok — the uber-popular video-sharing app that's [currently embroiled in a standoff](#) with the Trump administration — [is the shining jewel of the service](#) that has captivated millions of young users.

[Author and computer scientist Jaron Lanier](#), who has come to be known as the founding father of virtual reality, said that instead of letting the algorithms guide you, it's better to search for the next video you want to watch.

"Always choose," he says in the documentary. "That's another way to fight."

Install a Chrome extension that can undo recommendations on platforms, said ex-YouTube engineer Guillaume Chaslot.



A man, not Chaslot, is pictured above with a device. Jaap Arriens/NurPhoto via Getty Images

There is a slew of such extensions available, such as [one that blocks](#) recommended videos and comments on YouTube.

The interviewer in the documentary comments that Chaslot is trying to undo something he helped create: Chaslot was a co-creator of YouTube's recommendation algorithm before he left Google in 2013.

Turn off notifications on apps that aren't pinging you with important or timely information.



Tristan Harris at Collision in New Orleans in 2018. Stephen McCarthy/Sportsfile via Getty Images

This is a good way to set boundaries between you and the social networks beckoning to you from inside your phone, documentary subjects agreed, including Harris, ex-Facebook operations manager Sandy Parakilas, ex-head of user experience at Mozilla Aza Raskin, and Rosenstein.

Uninstall apps that you don't use or that you feel are wasting your time.



Asana co-founder Justin Rosenstein in Dublin in 2014. Stephen McCarthy / SPORTSFILE via Getty Images

Rosenstein said he does that with social media and news apps.

Don't use Google: Use an alternative search engine.



The French service was the default search engine on Huawei P40 devices in Europe. Esra Hacıoglu/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Chaslot said he [uses Qwant](#) since it "doesn't store your search history."

Before you share a piece of content online, "fact-check, consider the source, do that extra Google."

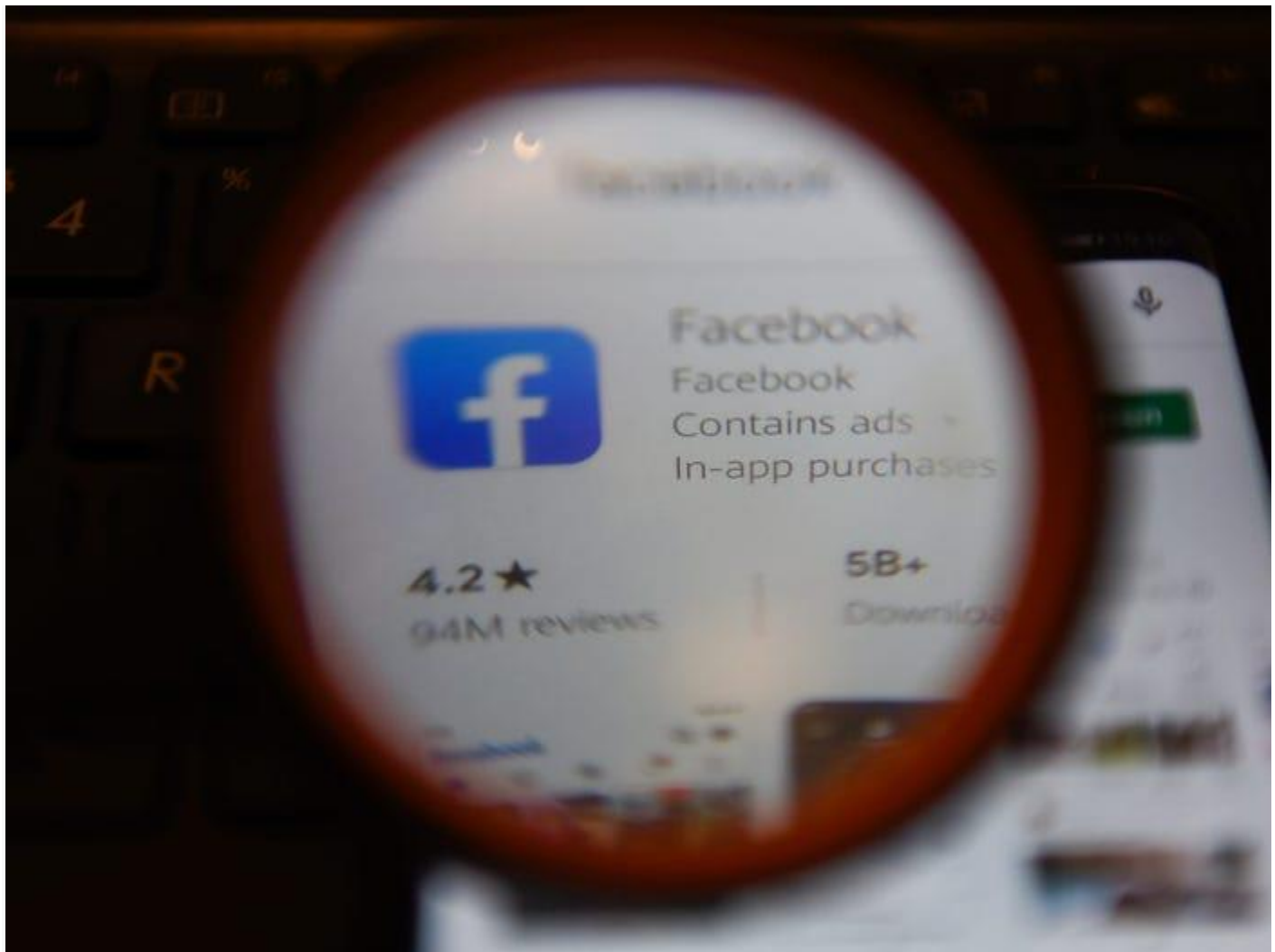


Renee DiResta during a Senate hearing in 2018. Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call/Getty Images

Renee DiResta, research manager at Stanford Internet Observatory, said that if something seems like it's solely trying to "push your emotional buttons, it probably is."

This tip perhaps carries even more weight leading up to the upcoming 2020 presidential election, as tech firms scramble to [police misinformation](#) on their platforms.

Don't click on clickbait.



Omar Marques/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

When you click on "[clickbait](#)" — or stories with incendiary headlines that falsely advertise the true content of the article — you're feeding an existing, broken system, according to Rosenstein. News publishers have been forced to adapt to these tech platforms' algorithms, he said, changing the kinds of stories they run based on what gets the most eyeballs online.

Follow people on social media that you don't agree with, said data scientist and author Cathy O'Neil.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/AFP via Getty Images

Some experts say social media has exacerbated political polarization, another adverse side effect caused by tech platforms, according to the documentary.

Another school of thought is that though social media sites can be polarizing, it's not entirely their fault: US politics were already polarized, as [The Verge's Casey Newton](#) reported.

Contrary to O'Neil's advice, [a 2018 study](#) provided evidence that following those with opposing views online can actually increase political polarization, though the study did have several limitations.

Don't let your kids use social media.



A teenage girl is depicted in "The Social Dilemma." Netflix

Several of the technologists featured in the documentary stood firmly by this rule. Alex Roetter, a former senior vice president of engineering at Twitter, said his kids don't use social media at all. "It's a rule," he said. Ex-Facebook director of monetization Tim Kendall also said he is adamant about it: "We don't let our kids have really any screen time," he said.

Jonathan Haidt, a New York University social psychologist and author, said if you are going to let your kids sign onto social media, wait until high school. "Middle school's hard enough," he said in the program.

Teen phone addiction is represented in a startling scene during the dramatized portion of "The Social Dilemma." At one point, the young daughter is visibly craving her phone after her mother locks each family member's device in a glass case during dinner. The

daughter sneaks away from the table and wacks the case with a wrench, cracking it open to hungrily retrieve it, much to the horror of her mother.

[Leave all of your devices outside of the bedroom at a fixed time each night.](#)



Neil Godwin/Future via Getty Images

Haidt laid this tip out as a way for families to set boundaries for phone use in the house. He suggested that at a fixed time — perhaps half an hour before you go to sleep — you should leave your phone somewhere else in your home.

Deleting your social media account can lead to progress, Lanier said.



Demonstrators on the east lawn of the Capitol ahead of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's testimony before a hearing on the protection of user data on April 10, 2018. Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call/Getty Images

He acknowledged it was unrealistic to expect everyone to do so, but he advised that even some people deleting their accounts and freeing themselves of the "manipulation engines" could help start a societal dialogue around the topic.

These are merely tips for cutting down on using your phone and the addictive technology and social media apps therein, but a whole slew of factors will need to work in tandem before we see any real change, such as massive public pressure and a desire from within these tech companies to reform, according to the technologists and experts in "The Social Dilemma."

The docudrama is now streaming on Netflix.

Disclosure: Mathias Döpfner, CEO of Business Insider's parent company, Axel Springer, is a Netflix board member.

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<https://www.pdfdrive.com/ten-arguments-for-deleting-your-social-media-accounts-right-now-e157128182.html>

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new search engine

<https://about.qwant.com/fr/legal/confidentialite/>

11-06-2022

Since I wrote this book, this is where we are in a rabbit hole.

