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WHAT DOES BODY POSITIVITY MEAN TO YOU?

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"THINSPIRATION"—SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS UNDENIABLE IMPACT ON EATING DISORDERS

BY ISABELLA MA

TW: This piece includes discussion and images related to eating disorders, specifically mentions of calories, anorexia, bulimia, and extreme diets.

The "Corpse Bride" diet, rapid weight-loss challenges, "what I eat in a day" videos that encourage extreme caloric deficits—these are just a few examples of the promotion of disordered eating that has become the new norm on social media. "Thinspiration" or "Thinspo," defined as something or someone that serves as motivation for people to lose weight or adopt disordered eating practises, has run amok on various media platforms. Although naturally thin bodies are not inherently unhealthy, it becomes an issue when one specific mould is forced upon all body types, ignoring the existence of genetic differences between people. Tiktok has been one of the main perpetrators of this widespread pandemic of glamourized eating disorders (EDs), trendy diets, and downright unhealthy advice.

The 2010s

Before discussing Tiktok, let's look into how the pro-ed community and social media first crossed paths. One word: Tumblr. Founded in 2007, this new, trendy, and hipster blog platform was inundated by thousands of teens and young adults. Used to share

22ND FEB 2012 | 3 NOTES

LENT

There is a reason I love lent, no one questions why you don't eat crap, **40 days of bliss.**

Image via The Atlantic

snippets of the user's daily life—from shopping to hanging out with friends to studying—Tumblr appeared to be your average trendy online platform. However, hidden underneath this innocent facade of friendly blogging, hundreds of small communities began to form. This didn't seem like a big deal until people began looking further into the content promoted by these communities. Pro-anorexia, pro-bulimia, pro-starvation, pro-self harm—everything in a parent's worst nightmare was found on Tumblr. As teens pushed these harmful and self-destructive practises onto other teens, Tumblr became a breeding ground for eating disorders and mental illness.
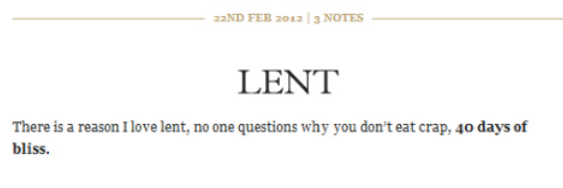

#anorexic
N/A posts

Content Advisory
Please be advised: These posts may contain graphic content.
For information and support with eating disorders please tap on learn more.
Learn more

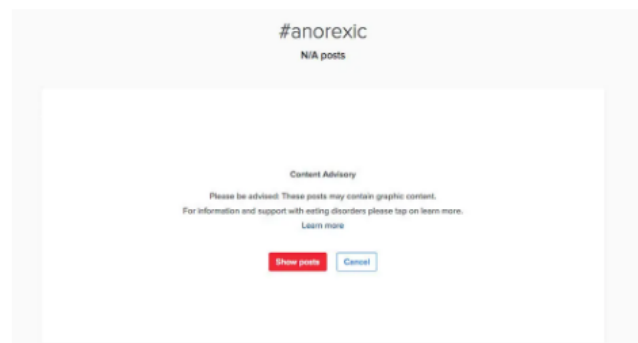Show posts   Cancel

Image via BuzzFeedNews

Although the pro-ed community had already marked their presence online through platforms such as Myspace (2003) and Geocities (1994), Tumblr ultimately blew it up. With an abundance of these toxic online communities, disordered eating easily became normalized. With advice on how to secretly not eat, how to binge and purge, and how to avoid being caught,

these communities grew like wildfire, even spreading to other social media platforms like Instagram. On Instagram, their attempt to extinguish this ever-growing pro-ED community by making certain hashtags such as "thigh gap" and "anorexia" unsearchable proved to be futile.

Georgia Technology Institute published a study showing just how difficult it is for media companies to eliminate these dangerous posts. Studying Instagram posts between 2011 and 2014, the researchers realized that each banned hashtag had morphed into approximately 40 different variants (i.e. there were 99 variations of anorexia). From this point on, the situation continued to worsen. Sharing images of emaciated models on Twitter, filming Youtube videos on tips and tricks to lose 10 pounds in a week, forming group chats on Snapchat to compare weights—all social media outlets were plagued with uncontrollable extreme online pro-ed communities.

Tiktok and its problems

Being the newest viral social media platform, Tiktok has garnered the attention of almost 1 billion users. Launched in 2016, Tiktok began to gain popularity in the West in 2019 and 2020, partially due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Packed with an endless supply of dance trends, easy food recipes, illogical stunts, political advocacy, makeup tutorials, and lifestyle content, users are able to scroll mindlessly for hours on end. However, unlike any other platform, Tiktok is uniquely problematic due to its video format that promotes effortless watching, and a powerful algorithm that easily identifies a user's interests in just a few videos. Driven by these two

Image via Yahoo! News
(Emily, The Corpse Bride)

major factors, Tiktok has become a haven for pro-ED communities. An investigation done by The Wall Street Journal found that simply re-watching or engaging with weight loss-related videos prompted Tiktok's algorithm to speedily inundate the user with more of the same fitness-oriented content, even when not intentionally searched. Throughout
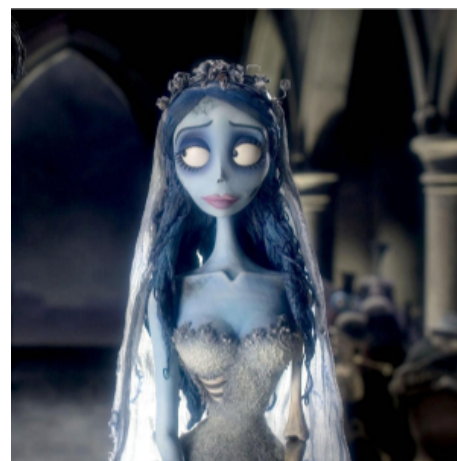

Image via The Wall Street Journal
(Texts promoting disordered eating. Mentions of numbers have been censored.)

October to December, the Journal was presented with more than 32,000 videos that encouraged weight loss, ranging from tips to burn belly fat to extreme detox programs. As teen users were sucked deeper into this rabbit hole, the content took an even darker turn when their feeds became flooded with thousands of videos openly romanticizing and encouraging life-threatening thinness. These videos promoted taking laxatives to prevent weight gain, pressured others to take part in the "Corpse Bride Diet," where participants aimed to look like Emily from *The Corpse Bride*, and shamed those who didn't want to get thinner.

On October 26, 2021, executives from Youtube, Snapchat, and Tiktok testified before the US senate about the influence of their platforms on children following the earlier Facebook controversy that exposed the company for being fully aware of Instagram's harmful effects on young users. Although all executives distanced themselves from Facebook and stated that safety was their first priority, the believability of their testimonies was still questionable. As suggested by Senator Richard Blumenthal, "Big Tech exploiting these powerful algorithms and design features is reckless and heedless, and needs to change. They seize on the insecurities of children, including eating disorders, simply to make more money." Here lies the problem: How are these social media companies supposed to sort out the bad from the good? What if a creator insists that their video is not promoting disordered eating, and argues that they're simply documenting their life? If cosmetic and appearance-based trends (i.e. "glow up" trend) are considered catalysts for EDs, should they too be banned? Will videos of people going through recovery be taken down? How will platforms determine whether the content is glamourizing eating disorders or educating others on the consequences of malnourishment?

Solutions?

Seeing that certain content can trigger one person but not another, there is a huge gray area in determining whether or not a video should be taken down. To moderate this, American experts from the National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA) suggest that a heavy crackdown on content that explicitly promotes eating disorders and increased accessibility to help is needed. On Tiktok, they have worked to remove videos that violate their guidelines (81, 518, 334 videos), banned hashtags such as "anorexia," and provided support and resources in place of those hashtags, all with the help of artificial intelligence. Canadian users who get pro-ED content on their Tiktok feeds may begin seeing ads for the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC). However, despite their efforts, Tiktok still struggles to differentiate between personal experience and harmful content, allowing thousands of pro-ed videos to continue to freely roam their platform without repercussions.

Conclusion

Is there a solution? Not exactly, but there are glimmers of hope in this demoralising situation. Creators who focus on spreading body positivity, online communities who collaborate by reporting harmful videos, and increased representation of all body types in media are all small factors that act as support pillars for the recovering and the suffering. In the end, there is no cure-all solution, however, spreading awareness, helping struggling friends, and breaking the stereotype that there is one "ideal" body will bring us closer to the ultimate goal of valuing health over appearance.

If you or a loved one is struggling with an eating disorder, contact the National Eating Disorder Information Centre or their helpline at 1-866-633-4220.

THE UGLY TRUTH BEHIND BEAUTY PAGEANTS

BY MICA LORICO

Beauty contests are notable for granting women worldwide a platform to showcase their talent, realise their inner self, and open doors to new opportunities. Despite the claims that these pageants are designed to empower women, they are also entrenched with unrealistic beauty standards, and other harmful factors that are detrimental to the competitors themselves and to the broader audience.

The requirement to adhere to specific (often unrealistic) body types, or the inclusion of absurd elements, such as the swimsuit competition, aren't just ways of measuring and comparing women's beauty (which is problematic in and of itself). They're also a way of putting on display sexualized versions of women for the male gaze, all in the name of "celebrating

Image via BBC

women's beauty." These contestants are also preferred to be soft-spoken and have an innocent demeanour, perpetuating what a patriarchal culture regards as ideal characteristics of a woman. Therefore, do these all comply with the claims that beauty pageants aim to represent independent and empowered women?

Unhealthy and idealistic notions of beauty and physicality have been at the centre of pageants for years. These notions promote body dysmorphia to the general public and competitors, and raise several psychological concerns that can haunt contestants

Image via BBC

throughout their lives. According to a study conducted in 2005, adults who participated in beauty pageants as children had a higher prevalence of disordered eating and mental illness. When young women are encouraged to focus on their appearance, they are more likely to develop eating problems and low self-esteem in adulthood. At a young age, they face the pressure of having to live up to these unreasonable expectations, and are told that the only opinion that matters is one of a random judge, who crowns only one participant as "most beautiful."

One of the most globally renowned beauty pageants, Miss Universe, has several contentious entry requirements. First, there is an age range of 18-28 years old; second, that they must not be wed (or previously wed); and third, have no children. A contestant can be disqualified or have their titles taken away if it is discovered they have children or have had an abortion. The formal justification for this is so that the "Miss Universe" can commit to the schedule demanded of her after the win (i.e. events, social work,

photoshoots, etc.). However, these strictly enforced qualities reinforce the old trope that mothers are unfit employees, which is a battle women are confronted with even in the modern world. Again, one questions how this can be described as a display of empowerment, when it perpetuates detrimental stereotypes.

Although the negative aspects of the culture that has developed around it far outweigh the benefits, there is still some positivity around the industry. Several contestants have commented about how pageantry helped them deal with body image issues and how the competition appeals to them emotionally, in addition to the money and potential career opportunities. While the fundamental objective of this article is to prove the harm that pageants can cause to one's body image, it's paradoxical to see how various contestants claim that it has done the opposite for them and has actually improved their body image issues. Some have also applauded pageants for recently moving away from focusing primarily on beauty and appearances and instead considering contestants' abilities, support for social causes, and intelligence. Despite this supposed evolution, the principle rooted in the pageants remains the same, and there are still many reminders of how far we still have to go.

LOSING WEIGHT IN 10 EASY STEPS: A SHORT STORY

BY ANONYMOUS

CW // Eating Disorder

Step One: Recognize That You're the Fat Friend.

Throughout primary school, you've always been bigger than all of your classmates. Though you've never seen it as an issue, your sixth-grade friends don't seem to share the same opinion as you.

Step Two: Workout.

You aimlessly scroll through Instagram, admiring all of the beautiful women with size 24 waists. For once, you want to look pretty too. You find a YouTube video titled "10 Minute Ab Workout for a Flat Stomach" and get to work.

Step Three: Diet.

You've been secretly exercising in your bedroom every night for four months. You've lost a few pounds, but nothing substantial—let's try a different approach. After eliminating sugar, chips, and carbs from your diet, you begin to wonder what it would be like to be a vegetarian. You cut your meals in half, sometimes skipping lunch entirely. Your mom is ecstatic about your new health phase, and you're just happy that she's proud of you.

Step Four: Reap the Reward.

For the first time in your life, random people compliment you. They call *you* pretty. You ride that high, until one day, you start gaining weight again. You don't understand why, as you've already sacrificed all your favourite snacks, and you're only eating during breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You can't go back to the judgement and ridicule, so you want *NEED* to feel beautiful again.

Step Five: Habits Lead to Results.

You've been living off rice and apples for years. The growl from your stomach keeps you company each night. You forget what it's like to be full, as perpetual hunger has become your default state. You notice that you're a lot paler, your hair is falling out, and you're feeling a lot more tired. But hey, look on the bright side—you can finally fit into those Zara jeans.

Step Six: Your Stomach Hurts... A Lot.

You're such a baby. Why are you skipping school for a stomach ache? Drink some water and walk it off.

Step Seven: Visit the Doctor.

You go to the doctor; they tell you that your body does not have enough nutrients to sustain itself. You ignore everything they say after that. They prescribe you medication. You feel like throwing up, but physically cannot.

Step Eight: Realize You're Not Alone.

It's the middle of a pandemic. You can't hide behind school as the reason that you starve yourself. You start eating regularly and gain weight like crazy. You scour the internet and find people who have similar stories as you, and after a while, you can finally admit it: You have an eating disorder.

Step Nine: Cry.

You're in the middle of Ikea, and your dad cracks a joke about your weight. It takes you back to the sixth grade. You can't stop crying.

Step Ten: Have a Sandwich.

You shut yourself away in your room. It's now 12 a.m., and hunger has crept up on you; a sensation to which you've become so accustomed, its familiarity is almost comforting. As your stomach growls, you walk into the kitchen and make yourself a sandwich.

If you or a loved one is struggling with an eating disorder, contact the National Eating Disorder Information Centre or their helpline at 1-866-633-4220.

JOAN DIDION: BEYOND CORVETTES, SUNGLASSES AND CIGARETTES

BY ANASTASIJA PETROVIC

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live."
— Joan Didion, The White Album: Essays

The 60s brought us a lot: peace signs, Jesus sandals and the genius of Joan Didion's writing. With, of course, the latter being my favourite. When I think of Joan Didion, I picture a 4" 9 woman leaning against a corvette, cigarette in hand and black Ray-Bans covering her confident gaze. However, Joan's writing was bigger than life.

For those of us who have yet to sample Didion's writing, put simply, she was a master of argument through style. She rarely built out a formal thesis and supporting points but instead put her ideas across through anecdotes. She never had to say everything, just what was needed. Today, I bow down to the masterful Didion for her take on everything from counterculture to the disintegration of a person's life. The author passed away on December 23rd. Although we may not see any new pieces attributed to her, Didion's past writing still protrudes as an aide-mémoire to early counterculture and a foretelling of our social future.

What is it that forms and drives our "moral behaviours"? Are we born with a basic sense of morality, or do we develop a set of moral "social codes" to keep society from falling into anarchy? In her 1965 essay, "On Morality," she dissects what lies beneath the surface of humanity's morality. By recounting several stories and historical events, she shows that morality at its most primitive is nothing more than loyalty; everything is subjective.

Her claim is that morality is a sense of "loyalty" to one another, which we learn from our loved ones. She implies that we stay with our loved ones through thick and thin, in illness and health, in good times and bad; we don't abandon our dead because we don't want someone to abandon us. She maintains that morality is doing what we believe is right, even if it means sacrificing ourselves to satisfy our "basic loyalties" of caring for our loved ones.

We may assume our actions are good and decent, but Didion's article forces us to question our motivations and morality. Didion's razor-sharp language demonstrates how our "moral rules" are frequently subjective, erroneous and how we explain and rationalize our behaviour to fit our covert motives. Our "loyalty to those we love" is the

only genuine morality we have. Our families, then our communities, states, countries, and finally, our global communities are formed by this "loyalty to people we love." Without these moral norms, anarchy and mayhem would reign. Yes, Joan Didion made all of these observations, while looking like the coolest philosophical icon of our time.

Want more of Joan Didion? Read:

Slouching Towards Bethlehem (1968)
The Year of Magical Thinking (2005)
Play It as It Lays (1970)
The White Album (1979)
Blue Nights (2011)

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM WITH NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

BY RAPHAEL BAUTISTA

When February comes around every year, the same two things start to happen: The cold starts to go away, making room for the springtime, and people also start to abandon their New Year's resolutions. It seems like they have been gradually falling out of style, and I for one won't miss them. People often say, "new year, new me" but end up squandering their chance to make real improvements to their lives during the first month of the new year.

Gyms are a notorious example of this phenomenon. Every January, there is always the wave of new people who show up for the first month, only for the numbers to dwindle down as time passes. Unfortunately, I am also guilty of abandoning my New Year's goals. Last year, I made the resolution to become more productive, and that didn't turn out that well. This leads to the question of why people don't have the willpower to follow through with their New Year's resolutions. However, this is the wrong question to be asking: The fundamental problem lies in the concept of the New Year's resolution itself.

This tradition of starting afresh at the turn of the year actually had its roots in ancient Babylonian culture about 4,000 years ago. Their goal was usually to repay the Gods by returning borrowed farm equipment and paying off their debt. Hopefully they were more successful than we are, because the modern population has an embarrassing track record. Typically, only 19% of people actually achieve their New Year's goals. Why is this? The problem is evident when looking at it from a logical point of view. Why do people have to start self-improvement on the first day of the year? It seems illogical to wait for such an arbitrary date. The concept of a New Year's resolution brings two key problems to the table.

Firstly, it enables people to live irresponsibly right before the new year. Since people plan to make the big change on January 1st, the last few weeks before then are usually full of awful decisions and laziness. But it's fine, because they'll change, right? The other consequence is that it doesn't prepare people for what they are trying to achieve. Changing your life doesn't happen in an instant, it happens in small increments. If somebody wanted to become more conscious with their diet, starting with super healthy meals on January 1st after eating unhealthily for an extended period of time would not last for long. This feeling can be compared to a sort of withdrawal.

The solution to this problem is to simply start self-improvement whenever you feel the urge to do so. Not only does this remove the pressure of drastic change right away, but it is also more forgiving if you fail. When you mess up, you can just keep going — no reason to wait for the next year. Essentially, it removes all of the arbitrary restrictions that the New Year's resolution puts on the average person. This helped me with my personal ambitions. My goal of becoming more efficient with my time started when I got

my first IB math and chemistry tests back. It was evident to me that my newly acquired 61 and 56 percent grades wouldn't get better unless I changed something about my time management. Ever since that day, I started slowly improving my work habits and adopting new strategies for doing homework. Past me would have never anticipated to see me of the future with a calendar on my wall, an app for noting down tasks, and a new sense of motivation to finish my work on time.

There is no guarantee that you will magically become the best version of yourself if you follow this advice, but it'll help you more than any New Year's resolution ever will. If there's something you want to do, a new habit you want to form, or a hobby you want to start, do it now. The only things stopping you are a few arbitrary rules and your own lack of conviction. The fundamental problem with the New Year's resolution is in the name. Why not improve yourself anytime you want? Go start something, and even if you fail, you can just try again and again. No matter how many times you mess up, you will find yourself in a better place than when you first started, and even that is a small success on its own, isn't it?

New Year's - Traditions, Resolutions & Date - HISTORY
This Is Why Most New Year's Resolutions Fail | Psychology Today Canada

THE METAVERSE: THE FUTURE OF SPORTS?

BY YVONNE LLAO

Imagine that you are watching a boxing match. The stadium goes dark; a stunning visual display lights up around you in all directions, announcing the first round. You hear the bell; punches fly, the crowd roars, the energy in the room intensifies. You can feel the excitement and tension in the atmosphere, like you are part of the action — even though you're sitting in your room at home. With the Metaverse, integrating fans into sporting events as if they were there live has already become a reality.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg described the Metaverse as "a virtual environment where you can be present with people in digital spaces." In early January 2022, the United Battle League (UBL) formed as "the first Martial Arts Competition in the Metaverse," where real Taekwondo athletes fight in a virtual ring using the magic of greenscreen. But is the Metaverse a viable platform for future sports? Though it allows for a new mode of interconnection between fans and sports, our sports culture will inevitably take time to adjust to a virtual world.

What is the United Battle League?

The UBL defines itself as "a new and disruptive martial arts experience": it blends WT sport Taekwondo with virtual reality to make martial arts almost video game-like. Its innovative fighting style turns traditional Taekwondo on its head using 2020 Armor, an interactive chestguard fully integrated into the Metaverse. While traditional electronic chestguards use force sensors to detect hits—one kick to the chest equals 2 points, and one kick to the head equals 3 points—2020 Armor vests measure the pressure inflicted onto the chestguard to determine the strength of the kick. An LED "health bar" is displayed both on the chestguards and above the athletes in the virtual arena, which decreases based on the strength of their opponents' kicks (like in Street Fighter).

Created by the founder of 2020 Armor, the UBL itself takes place in the dystopian virtual city of Heemang. The UBL describes Heemang as "a place in the future where new things become possible and everything we know from movies like Matrix or games like Cyberpunk will become a reality." Here, sci-fi storylines merge with modern martial arts to create a brand-new sport culture. The UBL's first two teams, the Heemang Dragons and Gen Town Thunder, turn real world-class Taekwondo athletes into sci-fi game fighters — Damian Villa (Supervilla), Yunus Sari (TurkishTornado) and Camila Rodriguez (C-Ro) are all members of these elite teams.

How will the Metaverse impact the future of Spectator sports?

In the near future, the Metaverse will mostly impact sports through viewing rather than playing. Fans will be able to view sporting events from a wide variety of angles, as if they were in the stands. This can aid in dissolving geographic barriers as well as venue capacity restrictions put in place due to the pandemic. Innovations such as Metacast, a new 3D sport and entertainment platform, use 3D volumetric capture to help viewers seamlessly move around virtual environments without loss to detail. Its creator, Unity Technologies, has partnered with the UFC to explore the possibility of hosting fights with virtual backgrounds later this year.

However, future developments in VR and the Metaverse have the potential to revolutionise sports entertainment; we could progress from watching live games on virtual backgrounds to participating in fully-integrated VR sports. Companies such as GreenPark already use VR to allow fans to compete in online games as members of renowned sports teams. By virtually integrating viewers into games, viewer engagement can be augmented — fans not only watch, but they experience the game for themselves. Perhaps we will soon be able to play on the court alongside Serena Williams, or skate with hockey teams such as the Maple Leafs or the Bruins. As for athletes, technological developments could enable them to implement VR-based training. 2020 Armor is selling their chest-guards online, which may entice Taekwondo athletes to try Metaverse-integrated UBL-style sparring as opposed to Olympic WT sparring. But the Metaverse's biggest impact on sports will be through business: merchandisers on VR sports viewing platforms can sell both physical and virtual products, such as team jerseys and NFT equivalents. As well, sports platforms can have viewers purchase interactive virtual games during breaks in game action, making the viewing experience even more memorable.

Despite a wide variety of future possibilities, the Metaverse presents several limitations. For one, it relies on high-speed connectivity; any lag will disrupt the viewing experience, and at worst, can cause future VR viewers to feel physically disoriented. As well, 3D spatial audio is required to fully immerse the viewer, and implementing such systems can be costly and therefore inaccessible to many. Lastly, increased advertising for physical and digital products could be distracting to viewers, and impair the viewing experience overall. Questions surrounding the energy consumption of VR platforms and NFT blockchains remain unanswered, but could potentially affect the availability of declining energy sources, and by extension climate change.

Final Verdict

Evidently, the UBL is literally and figuratively game-changing — and its integration of sport technology into the Metaverse has opened up a new world of possibilities for sports. While modern sport Taekwondo has been criticised for its reliance on speed and lack of application to real-world fights, 2020 Armor paves the way for the return of traditional Taekwondo styles that place equal emphasis on strength, speed, and agility. As a Taekwondo instructor and former competitive athlete, I foresee that the Metaverse will rise in popularity as a platform for viewing sports, particularly for martial arts, but in-person matches will remain the norm. The risk of connectivity issues disrupting the viewing experience runs high, and sport organisations would have to adjust their entire system of rules to accommodate changes in technology. As well, though viewers may be immersed visually and through sound, they lack the other sensory and emotional elements that make a live match truly exciting. At sporting events, the atmosphere is lively, charged with energy and passion — and attempting to emulate that through a screen can only yield a fraction of the desired effect. There is no doubt that VR and the Metaverse will be part of our future, but in the end, human connection outweighs the need for technological integration.

CRYPTO, AND ITS IMPACT ON OUR ENVIRONMENT

BY ANTHONY TIMOFFEE

While cryptocurrency has been pretty big for a while now, the last two years have been massive for the crypto scene's evolution. After its short fad in 2018 with Bitcoin, crypto had somewhat faded from the public consciousness. In early 2020, quarantine led to a huge spike in young people looking to invest, and by the end of the year, Bitcoin had surpassed its peak numbers from 2018 as more cryptocurrencies like Ethereum and DogeCoin (we don't talk about that, though) started to take off as well. This leads us to the present state of crypto. The top two, Bitcoin and Ethereum, are both correcting following a late 2021 spike, while still maintaining steady competitive values

Okay, but what actually is crypto?

Most people who have heard about cryptocurrency, and even some people who actively invest in it, have no idea what it really is or how it works. To sum it up without getting too technical, cryptocurrencies -- like Bitcoin -- operate on a system called a blockchain. A blockchain is a massive series of blocks (who would've thought) that records and validates each individual coin and all transactions using whatever crypto asset it's tracking. For example, with Bitcoin, each block contains information from both parties to properly record the amount of bitcoin transferred within the chain (note that bitcoin isn't capitalised here in order to differentiate the individual coins from the entity Bitcoin). This blockchain system is very efficient at keeping track of how much currency is going in and out of the system with each transaction.

Crypto mining is the process of solving puzzles put up by the blockchain in order to validate a set of transactions. The first miner to solve this numerical puzzle is rewarded with a new bitcoin, which is created in the process, hence the term 'mining.'In order to process these puzzles, miners require some serious hardware, and as the competition gets higher, the necessary computation to keep up also increases. Essentially, crypto is a system of recording and validating transactions, and they get their value from their efficiency in handling transactions. By helping the system validate transactions, miners are able to make a profit, and the market grows.

What about NFTs?

NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, are the latest fad in the crypto world. Since mid 2021, they've been causing quite the stir online. An NFT is typically an auctioned digital work of art whose ownership is determined using Ethereum's blockchain. Now I know what you're thinking, none of those words are in the bible. To put it in more layman terms, artists sell a unique, non-fungible – which is to say not identical or exchangeable with others like it – set of numbers in exchange for Ethereum and the buyer receives this 'key,' which is embedded in Ethereum's blockchain as proof of ownership of the piece.

Like cryptocurrency, there is no real-world asset in an NFT, you don't get a real painting when you buy one, just lines of codes saying you have. However, this hasn't stopped them from gaining immense popularity. NFTs like Yuga Labs' Bored Ape NFT series, or even former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey's first tweet have sold for millions of dollars. Can you just take a screenshot? Right click possibly? Yes, yes you can. Despite that, NFTs have a surprisingly passionate (albeit sometimes crazy) community of collectors.

Image via Bored Ape Yacht Club.

As you may have guessed, NFTs are no better for the environment than any other kinds of crypto. NFTs run on Ethereum, and their transactions use just as much, if not more, energy than average transactions on Ethereum. This, combined with the fact that many people find NFTs straight up stupid due to their incredibly lucrative nature, has led to NFTs and those involved with them facing a lot of scrutiny. Almost anytime a major entity announces any sort of involvement with NFTs, you can bet there will be an army of disappointed fans (and haters) showing zero mercy in the replies. However, NFTs are consistently selling for tens of millions of dollars. There is a market for them, and they will probably be here to stay for the foreseeable future.

Crypto, Mining, and the Environment

The real question is, what does all this have to do with the environment? Well, computers take energy, and as is the case with many industries on the same scale, 'going green' isn't exactly the crypto industry's main priority. Furthermore, an estimated 60% of energy consumed for Bitcoin mining in 2020 was in China, where coal burning is heavily relied on. Keeping these blockchains up and processing transactions on crypto takes up a lot of energy. In the case of Ethereum, one of the most popular cryptocurrencies right now, research from **The Digiconomist** shows that one

Image via CNBC.

transaction uses ~243kWh of electrical power—the equivalent of the average US household's consumption in 8 days. Yearly, Ethereum leaves a carbon footprint of over 50 megatons of CO2, comparable to the footprint of all of Sweden. These numbers are from just one type of crypto. Bitcoin is estimated to consume ~11 times more than Ethereum! What's even more concerning is that due

to the competitive and expansive nature of mining crypto, miners are constantly upping their computation to keep up. There are even crypto mining facilities, which are entire warehouses packed to the brim with graphics cards and other computing hardware. Just the numbers alone make it clear how terrifying rigs like these are in terms of carbon emissions. The issue of crypto's hefty energy consumption and carbon footprint has been a topic of discourse for many years now, but as the scene grows bigger, the problem seems to grow with it.

An Outlook on Crypto's Future and Potential Solutions

The spotlight on crypto's ugly environmental impact only grows bigger as time goes on, leaving the question: what are we going to do about this? It's clear that having digital entities consuming more energy than whole countries is an issue, so are crypto companies really doing nothing about it? Ethereum was a target of much of the backlash from environmentalists for its hefty power consumption. In response, they have been working to release Ethereum 2.0 this year. By switching how their network functions from a proof-of-work system to a proof-of-stake system (I'm not even going to try to explain what that entails), Ethereum is hoping to reduce their energy usage by up to 99.5% (reported by them, of course). Which is admittedly impressive if they really follow through, a complete rework of their computing system is a very high hurdle to overcome. In other news, last June, a forum called the Bitcoin Mining Council was formed by major companies in the industry and other prominent people, such as Tesla CEO Elon Musk, in order to "promote transparency, share best practices, and educate the public on the benefits of Bitcoin and Bitcoin mining," as stated on their website. In all honesty, this vague description of their goal doesn't really seem to address many of the public's concern with bitcoin mining, and seems to be more focused on growing the industry. To turn the attention to some better news, early January of this year, the Chinese central bank banned all transactions on cryptocurrencies as part of a nationwide campaign against cryptocurrency which also included the banning of mining, in an effort to reach carbon emission goals. While this is definitely good news for the reduction of crypto's environmental impact, the banning of cryptocurrency in China and many other countries seems to be more of a crackdown than an actual change to cryptocurrency itself.

Final Words

The issue with crypto and its impact on the environment is one that keeps growing alongside the industry, and it seems that if changes aren't made soon we could see it become something seriously out of control. While talk of change being in the works and national policies do leave room for some kind of hope, the nature of crypto and virtual currency as a very non-centralized industry may be a challenge for global progress on the issue. But hey, maybe Ethereum will live up to their promise and set an industry standard, if not we may just have to leave it to Elon Musk and his band of Bitcoin Bureaucrats.

SINGLE-SERVING COMFORT FOODS
BY YVONNE ILAO

These classic comfort foods are the perfect companion for a night of binge-watching your favourite shows and ignoring your insecurities.

Chocolate Chip Mug Cookie for One

2 tbsp butter
2 tbsp milk

½ tsp vanilla extract
¼ cup brown sugar
¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 pinch salt
2-4 tbsp chocolate chips
flakey salt (optional)

1. Microwave butter and milk for 30 seconds or until melted. Whisk with a fork to incorporate.
2. Stir in vanilla and brown sugar.
3. Stir in flour and salt until a batter forms. Carefully fold in chocolate chips, making sure that they don't melt.
4. Microwave for 1 min on high. If desired, top with a pinch of flakey salt (trust me, salting chocolate chip cookies is life-changing). Allow to cool for 2 minutes and serve.

Mac and Cheese for One

½ cup grated parmesan and other cheeses of your choice (you can definitely add more, this is a guideline)
1 tbsp butter
1 tbsp flour
½ cup milk of choice
½ cup dried elbow macaroni
salt
pepper
garlic powder
Italian seasoning
paprika, cumin, or other seasonings of choice

1. Grate cheeses into a small bowl.
2. Bring a medium pot of water to a boil. Add a small handful of salt into the water. Once the pot has returned to a boil, add macaroni and boil for 3-5 mins or until cooked. Reserve a small cup of pasta water and drain the rest of the pot.
3. Meanwhile, melt butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add flour to make a roux. Whisk to incorporate the flour. Cook for 1 min or until roux has turned fragrant and golden.
4. Pour milk into the roux and whisk until thickened. This is called a béchamel, a type of sauce used as the base for cheese sauces. Remove from heat and whisk in cheeses until melted and smooth. Whisk in salt, pepper, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, and other seasonings of your choice; however, as both the pasta and the parmesan are already salty, **do not add too much salt to your sauce**.
5. Add the macaroni to the sauce and mix until coated. Serve warm.

Easy Nutella Hot Chocolate

1 cup milk or plant-based milk
2 tbsp Nutella or other chocolate hazelnut butter

optional:
¼ tsp ground cinnamon
¼ tsp ground nutmeg
⅛ tsp ground cloves
⅛ tsp ground allspice

1. Scald milk in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Bubbles should just begin to form around the edges. Do not bring to a boil.
2. Whisk in Nutella until smooth. Remove from heat. If desired, whisk in spices for extra warmth and depth of flavour.
3. Optional: aerate hot chocolate by straining it into a mug. Otherwise, pour into a mug and serve.

RICH WHITE PEOPLE

BY ISABELLA MCDONELL

Gossip Girl, Dynasty, Downton Abbey and *Succession*—television watchers love rich white people. HBO's satirical dramedy, *Succession*, has been the latest television craze falling into this category, and gaining the internet's rapt attention. It centres around the Roy family, and their insufferable selfishness and greed. Headed by patriarch Logan Roy, the family operates the fictional media conglomerate Waystar Royco. With a perfect balance of absurdity, familial conflict, and lavish wealth, great television is born.

Although *Succession* is a comedy, it is firstly a drama. As seasons unfold, viewers grow closer to the Roys. Sibling rivalries, drug problems, and mental illness are apparent by the first episode. This conflict is what makes a hit show. It is disgusting how we watch objectively bad people be horrible to everyone around them, but somehow end up rooting for them. Attachment to these masterfully crafted individuals has exploded online. *Succession* is constantly trailed by articles from trendy news sites, like The Cut, with titles reading , "Shiv Roy's Turtleneck Will Destroy You" and "Kendall Roy: Hat Boy." Jeremy Strong, who plays a Roy sibling, recently did a New Yorker profile that painted him as pretentious and pathetic. By the next week, seemingly every major entertainment news site had a response.

Succession bewitches viewers with its absurdity (it is a satire, after all), but it is not so far off from reality. Although the show's creator, Jesse Armstrong, has repeatedly distanced his show from the real-life Murdoch family, there are many unmistakeable similarities to the media tycoons. The Murdoch family, who own Fox News, are infamous for their family feuds and public scandals. Although we can see Page Six detailing Murdoch or Getty public breakdowns, *Succession* gives us a more transparent perspective.

What is most compelling, though, is the empathy watchers feel for these billionaires. Social media, Covid-19, and extreme wealth destroy working class communities.The Great Resignation, along with other socio-political movements, have turned the spotlight onto the economy and the super rich. But how does Succession, a series which openly depicts the horrors of extreme wealth, create a bond between proletariat viewers and the uber rich? Watching HBO's emmy-award winning series emulates the shock and revulsion of watching Ivy Getty do TikTok dances to her meagre 50,000 followers. Watchers navigate a juxtaposition of humaneness and disgust, masterfully navigated by some of the most impressive screenwriting television has seen in years.

EUPHORIA AND SAM LEVINSON'S LACK OF PERSPECTIVE

BY ELIZABETH MERINUK

Since its 2019 debut, the HBO show, directed by Sam Levinson, has become an international sensation. If you're on any social media platform, you've probably come across *Euphoria*-related discourse at one point or another. The reason that so many people, whether they love it or hate it, are talking about it, is because there isn't anything else like it out on TV right now. What truly sets it apart is that it focuses on the aspects of adolescence that are often avoided on television, and it does so without censorship. Some praise Levinson for the realism of the show, but for others, the explicitness of some storylines and scenes crosses lines. I personally think that there's nothing wrong with realism; my problem with Levinson's portrayal of the teenage lifestyle is that it often borders on being exploitative.

Before anything else, *Euphoria* is a show about teenagers. It is more graphic than most teen dramas, and it has a rating of 18+, but it's still a show about high school students. This means that this show is mainly going to attract viewers that are of high school age. This is something that Levinson failed to realise when he wrote *Euphoria*.

By making a show about teenagers marketed towards adults, he's created a dangerous atmosphere. His graphic depiction of drug abuse and addiction, sexual discovery and violence isn't suited for younger viewers who may not have the critical analysis skills to distinguish a cautionary tale from glorification. However, in trying to exclude younger viewers from his target audience, Levinson has created an environment where adults can freely watch the oversexualization of teenagers for the sake of "realism." Throughout the entire show, there is frequent and explicit nudity, and although the actors are adults, the characters are still children. The characters are children, just like younger viewers who are seemingly not mature enough to be watching. The 18+ rating not allowing younger viewers to watch their own sexualization in *Euphoria* is a way to show that teenage sexuality is not the property of teenagers.

If it's not appropriate to be watched by them, then this exploration of teenage sexuality is for the benefit of adults, not teenagers. It's just showing them that their own sexuality doesn't belong to them. This show has a massive influence on an impressionable young generation, and whether intentional or not, the messages Levinson is sending have the potential to be extremely harmful.

Levinson's lack of understanding doesn't just apply to his audience, but to many of his characters as well. *Euphoria* is not as diverse as the real world but compared to other teen dramas, having trans, plus-sized, lesbian and black representation makes it a stellar example for other shows to follow. However, not all of this representation is necessarily good representation. It's great that Levinson includes these characters, but because he doesn't understand their experiences, their storylines often become stereotypical, and these diverse characters are reduced to tools for the development of others.

The most apparent examples of this are the characters Kat (Barbie Ferreira) and McKay (Algee Smith). Kat is the only plus-sized character on the show, and her character, like many before her, fits right into the stereotype of the fat girl who hates herself. In later episodes, the way that she manages to gain more self-confidence is by performing pornographic acts for middle-aged men online in exchange for money. Her self-worth becomes completely reliant on adult men sexualizing her 16-year-old body. With McKay, one of two black characters in the main cast, he was reduced to a prop in his white girlfriend's life. In one scene, he's with his girlfriend Cassie, when a group of his teammates break into his dorm room and sexually assault him. The trauma he endures from this experience is completely ignored, with the event only used as a way to further Cassie's development. Many viewers didn't even realize that he was sexually assaulted because of how poorly it was acknowledged in the show. His trauma was simply a plot device used to garner pity for the white woman. The struggles of both Kat and McKay were used as nothing but a way to benefit others.

The problematic nature of these characters and their storylines did not go unacknowledged. The actors for Kat and McKay voiced their concerns to Levinson, but instead of listening, Levinson reduced Kat to a side character and McKay to basically nothing. In spite of this, Levinson has accepted input from other actors in the past, as we've seen with the character Jules, whose storyline was co-written by Hunter Schafer, the actress behind her character. With Schafer's perspective taken into account, Jules's experience with her gender and sexuality was well developed, and didn't fall into any stereotypes of what people think the trans experience should be. If he could do it for Jules, he could've done it for Kat and McKay. We know that the problem isn't that he doesn't know how to incorporate other perspectives in his writing, it's that he refuses to do so.

None of this is to say that I think *Euphoria* is a bad show. I tune in to watch it at 6 every Sunday night. I follow the cast on Instagram. The acting, cinematography, character dynamics, costumes, hair and makeup are all incredible. The two special episodes about Rue and Jules that aired between the seasons were two of the most beautiful episodes of any show that I have ever watched on television. It's a good show that would be drastically improved if Sam Levinson was willing to see it from a perspective other than his own.

SHAM'S LATEST LISTENS: *DAWN FM* BY THE WEEKND

BY SHAMIKH RAHIM

Kicking off the new year with his 5th studio album, the Weeknd brings back some familiar sounds with *Dawn FM*. Arguably much more reliant on 1980s-inspired synths and instrumentals than his previous album *After Hours*, the Weeknd isn't afraid to explore the pop side of his impressive decade-long career in this latest release. The end result sounds more light-hearted and funky than his earlier projects. Much like *After Hours*, this project continues the emphasis on a certain theme: With mindless hedonism being a definition of his earlier discography, his 5th album takes a new direction by focusing on legacy and life after death. If I had to

Image from theweeknd.com

choose a single word to describe this album's theme, "Purgatory" would be my choice. The peculiar album cover showcases this in an interesting way, as a mysterious light shines behind the Weeknd, whose overly aged appearance is all thanks to prosthetics and makeup. As if it weren't obvious from the title, *Dawn FM* utilises a radio aesthetic, featuring guest narrations from comedian Jim Carrey, who acts as a radio host. Although presented like a soft-spoken jockey, Carrey's narrations are full of allusions to Heaven, which keeps up with the theme of the afterlife. The structural choices essentially render *Dawn FM* as a radio show to entertain an individual during their journey to Purgatory. Alongside these Canadian artists, other features include Grammy Award-winning rappers Lil Wayne and Tyler, the Creator. Some tracks worthy of mention are "How Do I Make You Love Me?," "Sacrifice," "Is There Someone Else?" and "Less Than Zero." One particular track I found to be unusually mesmerising was "Here We Go... Again" featuring Tyler, the Creator, where both artists are able to balance their contrasting voices, accompanied by sombre instrumentation, rendering this one of the Weeknd's more unique songs. While it may sound upbeat and overly positive, fans will appreciate the subject matters of heartbreak and personal growth, which have popularised the artist to where he is today. Ultimately, the Weeknd's *Dawn FM* serves an enjoyable and exciting musical experience, filled with 80s style music and impressive vocals that are sure to provide a fun listen this New Year.

MAKING A BALACLAVA: WORTH IT OR UNBEARABLY PAINFUL?

BY AMY VURDELA

Recently, trends of balaclavas have swarmed the internet; filled with colours, patterns, and textures, they encapsulate the lively fun we've recently been missing. By using both crochet and knitting, people have been making balaclavas. Fashion naturally evolves, however because of an increase in accessibility, people are able to control and affect that change. Recreated with animal ears and vivacious colours, they have eccentric pizazz. Some of the clothing trends that gain popularity seem more straightforward than they actually are, which inspired the objective of this article: discovering whether crocheting a balaclava is not only possible, but fun.

When trying out trendy apparel, it is always important to know its history. Learning the origins of popular articles of clothing is not only fascinating, but also helps increase responsible consumption. The balaclava, not to be mistaken with baklava (a type of pastry), is typically defined as a piece of cloth headgear. This extended chapeau got its name from The Battle of Balaclava, which was set in a Ukrainian port town, and was part of the Crimean War. British women created these for the soldiers.

To make the balaclava, I started by finding a simple crochet tutorial with the same shape and style that I was looking for. Using YouTube as a guide for shorthand and stitches, the process began. There were also simple knitting tutorials, but crochet was the easier option for me. I made two balaclavas in different colours and cuts. The process was simple, essentially varying between crocheting in a circle and a straight line repeatedly. It is important to note that I made sure to check my progress to ensure the different parts were lining up with my face.

Making something from scratch can be much more expensive, and for some, not an option. However, putting care into the creation of more sustainable fashion is good progress. It is a pleasant change of pace to see comprehensive guides for more ethical fashion consumption. Go buy some yarn and a hook, and get crocheting. Even if balaclavas do not speak to you, the possibilities for other projects are endless.

A MESSAGE FROM THE STUDENT PRESS

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