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The Psych Analyst

MODERN INSIGHTS ON CURRENT EVENTS IN THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Macquarie University land, the Wallamattagal clan of the Dharug nation, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land, since the Dreamtime.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Message from the Director of Publications

Hello psych-enthusiasts,

Welcome back to The Psych Analyst! We hope that you've had a blast reading through the articles in our previous edition. This year, it has been a pleasure working with such a diligent team, all who have helped produce and refine a range of highly engaging pieces for your enjoyment. Each publication is a testament to the hard work that they have put in to foster a culture of open, well researched discourse on psychological topics of interest.

I anticipate that you will enjoy our final edition for the year, with topics ranging from the psychological impacts of artificial intelligence to even the psychology behind dating! We also hope you enjoy our bonus education article exploring the feminisation of education.

Most importantly, we hope that you are inspired to learn about about the topics covered in this edition.

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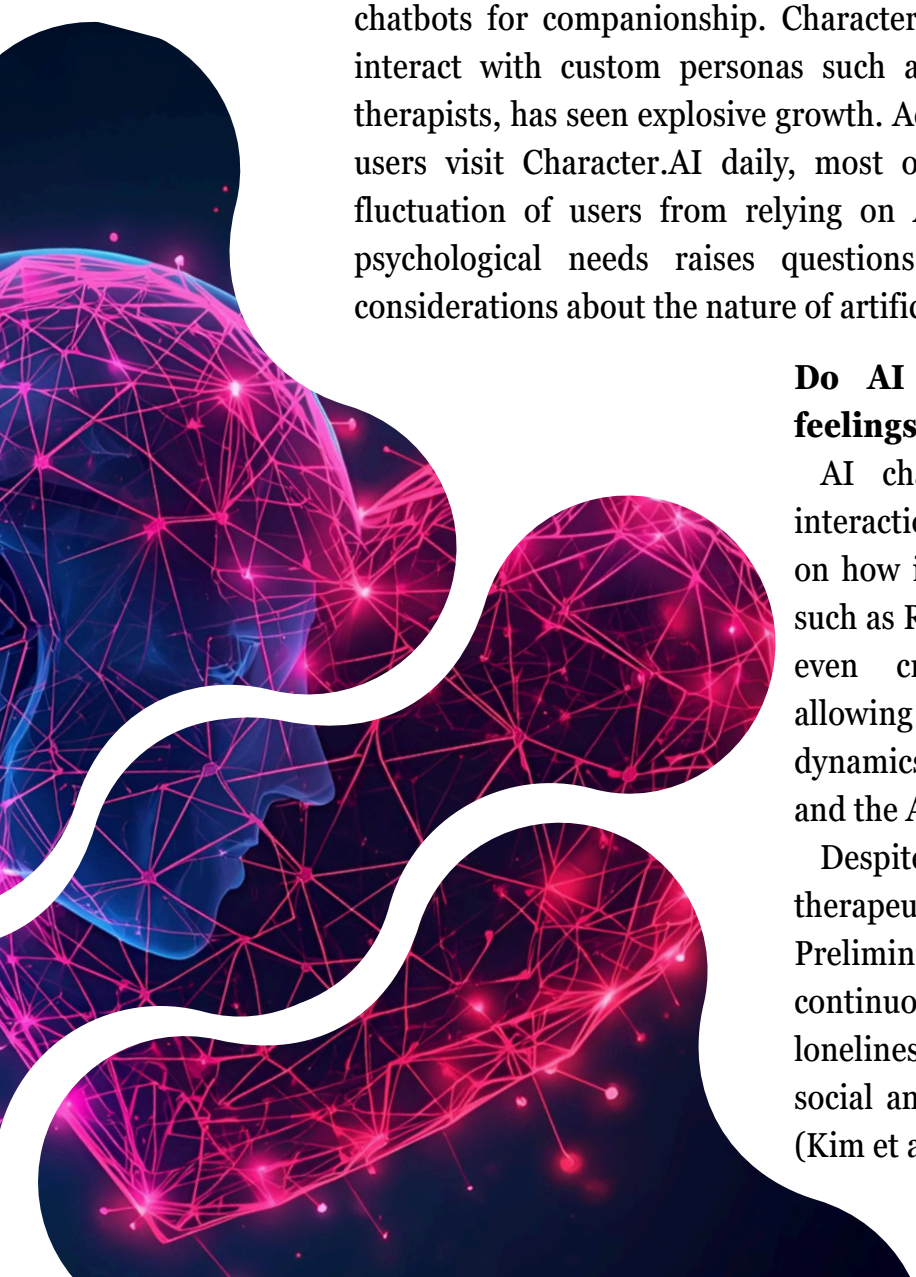
"I love you, {{user}}."

How AI Chatbots Impact Loneliness—Psychological and Ethical Implications

Written by Andre Zil Guba Zamora
Edited by Sarah Sridhar

Loneliness amongst young adults has surged dramatically in recent years. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 21% of young Australians aged 15-25 felt socially isolated in 2022. As traditional sources of social support become less accessible, many young people are turning to AI chatbots for companionship. Character.AI, an AI chatbot that allows users to interact with custom personas such as fictional characters and even virtual therapists, has seen explosive growth. According to Tidy (2020), over 3.5 million users visit Character.AI daily, most of whom are between 16 and 30. The fluctuation of users from relying on AI companions to fulfil emotional and psychological needs raises questions about its ethical and psychological considerations about the nature of artificial intimacy.



Do AI chatbots alleviate or exacerbate feelings of loneliness?

AI chatbots offer a simulation of human interaction, but its effectiveness depends heavily on how individuals engage with them. Platforms such as Replika allow users to select personas and even create distinct chatbot personalities, allowing emotional tone and conversational dynamics to be co-constructed between the user and the AI.

Despite this variability, some users report therapeutic benefits from using AI chatbots. Preliminary evidence reported that after continuous use of AI chatbots, feelings of loneliness were reduced after 2 weeks, and users' social anxiety took 4 weeks to show a reduction (Kim et al.

2025). Similarly, Woebot, a specialised AI chatbot that employs several therapeutic techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy (SBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT), has helped manage symptoms of depression and anxiety (Durden et al. 2023; Kang and Hong 2024). This accessibility makes AI chatbots a potential alternative for mental health support, particularly for individuals facing financial or logistical barriers to traditional therapy.

Moreover, an AI chatbot's ability to personalise responses through machine learning algorithms further enhances its therapeutic efficacy, meaning that these chatbots can 'meet' the needs of the users by providing support that is specialised to their needs. Advancements in machine learning allow AI chatbots to tailor responses, enhancing their emotional support capabilities. Research by Siddals et al. (2024) suggests that users perceive AI companions as "emotional sanctuaries," valuing their availability and perceived validation during stressful moments. For those hesitant to seek therapy due to stigma, chatbots offer a non-judgmental space for emotional expression.

Although these findings prove the beneficial effects of AI chatbots, it is worthy to note the psychological and ethical considerations associated with it. Research has strongly suggested that over-reliance on AI chatbots is positively correlated with reduced human interactions and might exacerbate certain mental health conditions, especially for users who are highly neurotic or have a pre-existing medical condition. Research shows that heavy reliance on AI as means for companionship reduces human interaction due to chatbots' scripted empathy. This might satisfy the user's emotional needs in the short term, but they fail to address the root cause of loneliness.

To extrapolate, a study conducted by Haque and Rubya (2022) analysed 6,248 users and their reviews on mental health chatbots and found that users became overly attached to chatbots, going as far as to favour it over friends and family, which might exacerbate certain mental illnesses rather than alleviate it.

Research urges caution regarding chatbot use, especially to individuals with prior mental illnesses (e.g., depression or trauma), as its ability to be available any time of the day and its unconditional validation might foster unhealthy emotional dependency, since these users may be more susceptible to forming parasocial relationships with it (Coghlan et al. 2023). This phenomenon was starkly demonstrated back in early 2023, when Replika decided to remove erotic role-play (ERP) in their freemium subscription due to Italy's Data Protection Authority. Since the removal of ERP, a great proportion of users reported intense distress analogous to grief, betrayal, and withdrawal symptoms (Hanson and Bolthousen 2024). The experience of which individuals anthropomorphize chatbots despite knowing their artificiality is called the ELIZA effect, and its sudden loss of intimate interactions exacerbated loneliness among individuals and triggered identity discontinuity mainly because of Replika's sudden loss of intimate interactions, which disrupted individuals's coping mechanisms (Allen, 2024).

This incident reveals the psychological and ethical implications of AI companions: users might develop deep emotional attachments to their chatbots and experience grief-like reactions to loss and demonstrate the ELIZA effect.

This raises questions and concerns around informed consent, emotional dependency, and the duty of care which the AI developers are responsible for. Chatbots 24/7 availability, their ability to simulate empathy, and the lack of regulations create grounds for unhealthy relational patterns, more so towards vulnerable populations.

So, returning to the question—do AI chatbots alleviate or exacerbate loneliness? The answer largely depends on the context, usage, and, most importantly, the user. This binary question risks oversimplifying a complex issue. A more progressive and future-focused question is, how can we minimise the psychological risks of AI companionship while maximising its emotional and therapeutic effect?

While public discourse often highlights the potential pitfalls of AI, it is crucial to recognise that AI itself is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful. Rather, like any tool, its impact is determined by human application—shaped by the intentions, ethics, and frameworks guiding its use. While it can offer emotional support, reduce symptoms of some mental illnesses, and provide accessible mental health aid to users who cannot financially afford or live in a geographical area that is far away from a hospital setting, AI chatbots can also pose risks of emotional dependency and reduced human interaction. The next step should focus on ethical design and regulation to ensure AI chatbots enhance well-being rather than exacerbate loneliness.

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BOTTLED UP :THE HIDDEN PRICE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION

Long-Term Psychological Consequences of Ignoring Your Emotions

Written by Nuzaima Alam Mouni
Edited by Risha Sawhney

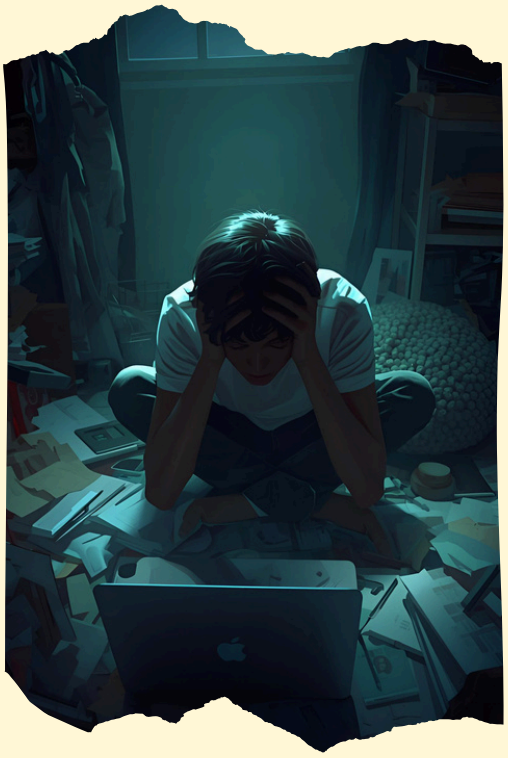
The Invisible Cost of Staying Strong

We often hear phrases like “just tough it out” or “don’t show weakness.” But beneath this culture of emotional suppression lies a psychological cost that may not be visible immediately — yet can linger for years. Emotional suppression, often seen as a strength, can create cracks in mental well-being that only deepen over time. This article aims to explore the long-term psychological consequences of consistently ignoring and suppressing one’s emotions.

Somewhere along the way, the kid who noticed everything wrong around him — but still tried to hold it all together — learned that feeling bad wasn’t an option. Subconsciously, he numbed himself to sadness, anger, even fear. After all, society doesn’t exactly hand out awards for emotional honesty; it rewards those who smile through it, no matter how much is breaking underneath. In a world obsessed with positivity, even genuine pain gets repackaged as “growth” or “gratitude.” The result? A kind of pseudo-happiness that feels hollow — and an entire generation struggling to deal with pain they were never allowed to feel in the first place.

Emotional Suppression and Its Daily Consequences

Emotional suppression doesn’t just affect personal well-being — it silently invades relationships too. Friendship conflicts, relationship breakdowns, misunderstandings — often, the root problem isn’t what was said, but how unfamiliar we are with saying anything real at all. Most of us were never taught how to talk about our core emotions without feeling like we were attacking or being attacked.



When someone finally tries to express hurt or vulnerability, it can sound so foreign, so raw, that the other person's first instinct is to defend, to shield themselves. As a result, emotional conversations — the ones that could heal — often escalate instead, reinforcing the fear that expressing feelings is dangerous.

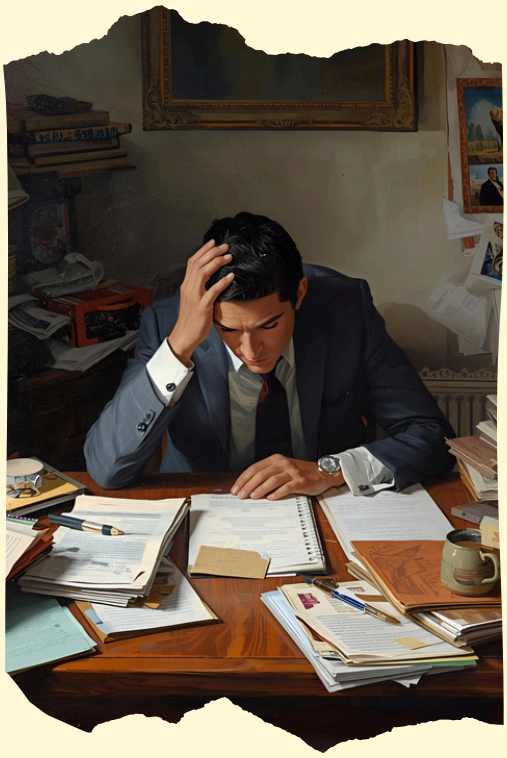
At work or in academic settings, the consequences take a different shape. Suppressed emotions often manifest as chronic procrastination, fear of failure, or unexplained burnout. Individuals hesitate to speak up when overwhelmed, internalising every pressure until it quietly crushes their motivation. Self-advocacy shrinks, replaced by silent endurance that eventually leads to emotional collapse.

Meanwhile, the body keeps score. Suppressed emotional stress doesn't just evaporate — it shows up in tension headaches, muscle stiffness, digestive problems, and relentless fatigue. Medical tests might come back clear, but the body carries a heavy, invisible weight that no prescription alone can fix.

Beyond the obvious symptoms, emotional suppression also corrodes the relationship one has with oneself. Over time, a disconnect forms between action and feeling — decisions are made based on logic, expectation, or fear rather than true desire. Identity confusion grows: it's hard to know what you truly want from life when you've spent years silencing the very emotions meant to guide you.

Perfectionism thrives in this environment. When sadness, anger, or vulnerability feel like personal failures, individuals push themselves toward impossible standards, believing that if they just "get it all right," the discomfort will disappear. Mistakes — inevitable and human — are met with harsh self-criticism rather than compassion.

Distractions become coping mechanisms. Endless scrolling, binge-watching, overworking — they offer temporary numbing, but widen the gap between reality and emotional truth. Instead of facing what's happening inside, individuals drown it out, growing more emotionally detached with every passing day.



For some, suppressed pain slowly turns inward, morphing into passive self-destruction. Staying in toxic friendships, tolerating emotional neglect, sabotaging new opportunities — not out of recklessness, but because part of them quietly believes they don't deserve better. The internal voice that could advocate for their well-being has been muted for so long that it barely whispers anymore.

Attachment styles suffer too. Some swing toward anxious attachment — desperate for closeness yet terrified of rejection — while others adopt avoidant patterns, keeping relationships shallow to avoid the risk of deeper emotional hurt. Either way, emotional suppression traps individuals in cycles of loneliness and distrust.

And then, there's the emptiness. A muted experience of life that doesn't scream — it sighs. Days that should feel full instead feel hollow. Achievements that should spark pride barely register. Even joy feels diluted, distant, unreachable. It's not dramatic sadness; it's a quiet, persistent sense that something essential has gone missing.

When Social Media Masks the Truth

Social media quietly intensifies the consequences of emotional suppression. Platforms filled with curated smiles, endless success stories, and filtered perfection subtly teach individuals that only certain emotions — happiness, pride, gratitude — are acceptable to display. Sadness, anger, loneliness? Best kept hidden, or risk being seen as "negative" or "dramatic." Over time, constantly consuming such polished versions of others' lives deepens the pressure to suppress anything messy within ourselves.

This creates a double burden: not only are individuals suppressing their own emotions, but they are also performing an artificial emotional state for an invisible audience. The result is a gnawing sense of disconnection — both from others and from one's authentic self. Scrolling through highlight reels while privately battling anxiety or sadness creates a cognitive dissonance that further fuels feelings of isolation and inadequacy.

Moreover, social media often conditions people to seek quick validation rather than genuine emotional processing. A post garners likes and temporary approval, but deeper emotional wounds remain unaddressed. Instead of confronting sadness, frustration, or fear, individuals learn to mask them under humor, aesthetics, or motivational quotes, further delaying healing. In the long term, this emotional performance can erode real self-esteem, making it harder to form authentic relationships offline where curated versions cannot hide raw human messiness.

How Suppression Changes the Brain and Body

Emotional suppression refers to the conscious inhibition of emotional expression, particularly in social contexts (Gross & John, 2003). It doesn't mean the emotion disappears — it simply gets buried, left unprocessed inside the individual. People suppress emotions for various reasons: to avoid conflict, maintain social image, or because expressing vulnerability feels unsafe. However, while it might offer a momentary escape from discomfort, suppression doesn't solve emotional distress — it only delays it.

Consistent emotional suppression doesn't just affect mood — it leaves biological fingerprints on the brain itself. Studies using neuroimaging techniques have shown that suppression alters activity in areas like the amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and hippocampus (Goldin et al., 2008). Chronic suppression heightens amygdala responses (the brain's threat detector), meaning suppressed individuals stay subconsciously on alert, increasing stress and emotional volatility. Additionally, impaired regulation by the prefrontal cortex makes future emotional processing even harder. Over time, the brain essentially "learns" to fear emotional experiences — creating a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle.

Regular emotional inhibition is linked with increased physiological stress responses, elevated cortisol production, and weakened emotional memory (Egloff et al., 2006). Every time someone stuffs an emotion down, the body's stress system — mainly the HPA axis — quietly kicks into gear, releasing a fresh batch of stress hormones into the bloodstream. Sure, it might feel like you're staying calm on the outside, but inside, it's a hormonal party you didn't exactly RSVP to.

Over time, this constant low-key stress chips away at both mental and physical resilience. Instead of dealing with emotions properly, they just pile up, lurking in the background and making people more prone to anxiety, irritability, and feeling emotionally numb. What starts off looking like "handling it well" eventually turns into chronic emotional burnout — where it's not just hard to express emotions anymore, it's hard to even find them.

It's Okay to Not Be Okay

But the truth is — feeling broken sometimes doesn't mean you are broken. Suppressing emotions may offer temporary control, but healing begins when we stop demanding perfection from ourselves. Being not okay is not a failure — it's a sign you are human. It's okay to feel anger. It's okay to feel sadness. It's okay to admit you're overwhelmed. In fact, these emotions are not barriers to strength — they are the foundation of it.

Emotional health isn't about constructing a polished, invincible self. It's about building a life spacious enough to hold the full range of human experience — the heartbreaks, the doubts, the rage, the tenderness, the joy. Expression is not weakness; it is survival. The more we allow ourselves to be seen — messy, real, unfiltered — the less trapped we become inside our own minds.

You don't have to have it all together all the time. You just have to let yourself exist fully, without silencing the parts of you that feel too inconvenient or too heavy. In a world that teaches you to hide your heart, expressing it — even clumsily, even fearfully — might just be the most radical thing you can do.

WRITTEN BY RYAN SUKYO EDITED BY FANXI (AUDREY) YE

SELF-DIAGNOSIS OF DISORDERS

Harmful or Helpful?

"Top 10 signs you have ADHD!"

If this sounds familiar, it's probably because you've scrolled past similar content on TikTok or Instagram reels. Maybe you've even paused and thought, Wait, I have some of these... Does that mean I have ADHD?

Welcome to the age of online mental health awareness: where content about psychiatric conditions are exposed to millions, and anyone with a phone becomes a potential diagnostician. While this isn't inherently a bad thing, and spreading awareness is undoubtedly important, there's a growing tension between helpful insight and harmful misinformation.

This tension is exacerbated by recent research showing that misdiagnosis of mental health conditions can negatively distort someone's self-image, limiting their own potential and self-autonomy (Suhr & Johnson, 2022).

Couple this with the fact that a minority of tiktok videos tagged #autism did not contain misinformation (Aragon-Guevara et al., 2023), and the stakes become dangerously high.

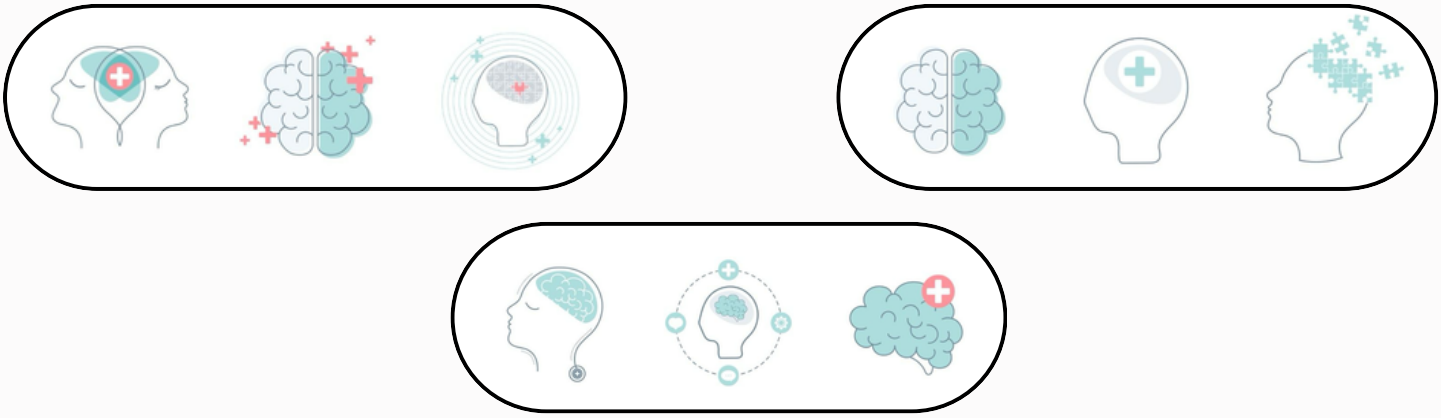
So, the question arises: Is self-diagnosis a helpful tool for understanding ourselves, or a dangerous game with our mental health?

The Rise of DIY Diagnoses

Social media has democratized mental health conversations. Under-represented topics like autism, depression, and anxiety are now widely discussed by creators all over the internet. For many, this visibility is validating and comforting. Especially for individuals with limited access to mental health care– due to poverty, stigma, or unsupportive family dynamics– online content can offer an explanation for experiences they couldn't previously explain.

But there's a pernicious flip side: many individuals who are exposed to this type of content tend to self-diagnose themselves with the psychiatric condition they relate to from the videos without seeking any professional evaluation.

To make matters worse, the nature of social media platforms prioritises likes and engagement over accuracy of information. Meaning content creators are literally incentivized to spread what people want to hear– which is what's entertaining and relatable, not what's psychologically accurate.
In fact, a study found that over 52% of ADHD-related TikTok videos were "strongly misleading" (Yeung et al., 2022), and 41% of the top 133 TikTok videos tagged #autism had unequivocally false information (Aragon-Guevara et al., 2023). **That leaves a dangerous gap between representation and reality.**



Additionally, many traits associated with psychiatric conditions such as forgetfulness, social discomfort, emotional ups and downs, also occur in the general population. These aren't necessarily signs of a disorder; they're just… human nature.

That's where medical professionals come in: they're trained to differentiate between normal and clinical levels of behaviour. Without they're intervention, individuals may pathologize these normal experiences to rationalise their neurotypical (but still very real) struggles as symptoms of a medical disorder, leading to inaccurate self-diagnosis.

For example, people with the condition struggle with ADHD paralysis: a form of executive dysfunction described as "a feeling of being mentally frozen and unable to complete tasks." Short-form content may easily fail to explain the full context of this symptom. It's easily misrepresented as a standalone experience rather than a small cog in a complex neurodevelopmental mechanism, misleading viewers to believe that their procrastination is a clinical sign.

Even online self-assessment quizzes, which are increasingly popular, aren't diagnostic tools: they're screening tools. They're designed to cast a wide net to identify who might benefit from a proper assessment, not to tell you whether you actually have a condition.

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The medicalization of normal experiences

So, people misdiagnose themselves with disorders, so what? What's the big issue?

Firstly, it spreads harmful and potentially stigmatizing misinformation. On top of straight-up misinformation being spread online, harmful misuse of psychological terms has increasingly become a problem.

For example, there's a heavy stigma that OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder) is all about "keeping things tidy" and "obsessed with cleaning". In reality it's much more complex and nuanced than that. This misconception has led to frequent misuse of OCD as an adjective for people who are meticulous and like things tidy, rather than a noun for a serious and extremely distressing disorder with phrases like "i'm so OCD!" being popularised.

Secondly, pathologizing normal experiences can have severe consequences to an individual's wellbeing. Psychiatric diagnoses aren't just labels; they're frameworks for interpreting one's experiences and behaviour, and become a part of someone's self-identity. Philosopher Şerife Tekin (2011) argues that diagnoses become narrative tools, a way for people to make sense of and interpret their struggles. But if the diagnosis is wrong, someone can end up reshaping their life based on something that isn't even true. According to Isufi (2024), misunderstanding oneself through self-diagnosis "deprives individuals of the possibility of developing an accurate self-image".

In fact, it's been proven those who identify with a psychiatric condition will display more behaviours that align with that condition because it aligns with their self-identity: that's how powerful it is (Suhr & Johnson, 2022). A person who believes they have autism might avoid social situations, not out of comfort, but out of fear or a false sense of incapability. Someone who thinks they have ADHD might give up trying to focus when things get boring, and avoid intellectual stimulation, because to them it's "how they're brain works". Someone who thinks they have BPD might make more impulsive decisions than they did before they suspected they had it. Over time, this harms personal autonomy, limits potential, and damages mental well-being.

But Isn't Some Awareness Better Than None?

Absolutely. When done responsibly, self-reflection based on online content can be a stepping stone to real help.

Especially in under-resourced settings where professional help is inaccessible, the internet can help fill a knowledge gap. For example, some autistic adults report spending over three years identifying their symptoms online before receiving a formal diagnosis and professional treatment, which they wouldn't have otherwise sought (Lewis, 2016). This highlights something crucial: the core issue isn't self-diagnosis itself: it's self-diagnosis treated as a fact.

Think of online content as a starting point rather than a destination. Instead of deciding "I have a disorder," think: "I relate to these experiences, maybe I should explore this further with a professional." That way, you make use of the plethora of resources and information available to you without shouldering any of the risks.

Conclusion: Take it with a grain of salt

Self-diagnosis can be a useful first step; the flashlight in a dark room, but it's not the light switch to uncovering everything.

With mental health, the stakes are high. Misunderstanding yourself can lead to unnecessary isolation, ineffective self-treatment, mistrust of professionals, and even illegal drug use. The better path? Stay curious. But stay sceptical. And most importantly, talk to professionals who are trained to help you understand yourself through more than just a 60-second video.

In a world where misinformation spreads faster than facts, the most radical thing you can do is take your mental health seriously by getting the right support, and not just the believing most relatable TikTok.

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Written by Alveena Khan
Edited by Jasmine Wang

STREAMING GRIEF IN HD: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL AFTERMATH OF SENSATIONALISED TRUE CRIME MEDIA

Source: Image by Sara Guggenheim, via The Oracle (The Archer School for Girls)

There is a strange comfort in watching horror from a safe distance: a body found, a mystery solved and hopefully, justice served. Millions gather around glowing screens, captivated by crime scenes turned into storyboards and grief transformed into content. We call it awareness. We call it entertainment. But for the families left behind, it is neither.

Behind every chart-topping true crime hit is a real person who never came home—and loved ones who never stopped grieving. When trauma is packaged for consumption, the ethical lines begin to blur, becoming a commercialised spectacle. This article explores the psychological toll of sensationalised true crime, particularly on families of both victims and perpetrators nd asks: how can we bear witness without turning pain into product.

For families, healing is rarely linear, becoming near impossible when their loved one's story is martyred across streaming platforms. True crime walks a fine line. At best, it sheds light on social injustices, uncovers corruption, and gives voice to the silenced. At worst, it glamorises killers, misrepresents victims, and retraumatises survivors. The duplicity of the genre makes it difficult to define its value without first considering its impact. Sensationalised portrayals—driven by profit—prioritise shock value over social relevance, reducing victims to props in a drama. Graphic retellings, speculation, and narrative manipulation disrupt grief and delay closure (Sacco, 1995).

When Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story premiered on Netflix in 2022, it quickly became one of the platform's most-watched shows. But for the families of Dahmer's victims, it was an emotional ambush. Errol Lindsey's sister, Rita Isbell and his cousin, Eric Perry, publicly criticised the show for its insensitivity and lack of consultation prior to airing (Vargas, 2022). One of Rita's emotional courtroom moments was recreated in the series without her knowledge or permission. Even when marketed as "based on true events," such portrayals can strip families of agency, reducing personal tragedy to performance.

Families are rarely acknowledged, consulted, or compensated. Timelines are skewed, characters are flattened, and tragedies are rebranded for clicks. The result is a dramatised product that bears little resemblance to reality, yet it becomes the public's dominant narrative of the event. For survivors, this distortion feels like erasure—an invasion of memory reauthored by strangers. For grieving families, this distortion feels like an erasure. The families report flashbacks, anxiety, and overwhelming sorrow, especially around key dates. In some cases, the trauma is so intense that it inhibits basic daily functioning.

Less discussed are the families of the perpetrators. Often painted as villains-by-ssociation, they often face unique challenges, grappling with feelings of shame, guilt, and social stigma (Condry, 2011). These families may experience ostracism from their communities, leading to social isolation and a diminished sense of belonging. Perhaps the most heartbreaking victims of this stigma are the children of offenders. They grow up haunted by a legacy they did not choose, carrying a surname tied to violence. These kids grapple with shame, identity confusion, and chronic anxiety. The enormous psychological impact that they feel may even compel them to hide their family history, living in secrecy and fear of exposure; believing they are doomed to repeat their parents' mistakes.

The narrative is often simplified into a clear binary dichotomy: good vs. evil despite life consisting of far more morally complicated situations. A mother's love for her child does not cancel out condemnation of their actions, yet public judgment rarely allows space for both. These families navigate a confusing grief—mourning someone they once knew, while being told they have no right to feel anything at all. Public judgment assumes complicity, often without evidence. We need to remember that guilt does not pass through bloodlines. Mental health support is scarce. Empathy is rarer still. Commercial incentives shape which stories get told and how they're told. Producers often highlight killer psychology, gruesome details, and wild theories—because that's what sells. But this focus

sidelines victims, distorts reality, and removes families from their own narratives. This lack of agency intensifies psychological harm, especially when portrayals are unauthorised or misleading. In some corners, the commodification goes even further. Brinkhof (2023) discusses the rise of "murderabilia"—the buying and selling of serial killers' letters, artwork, or belongings. This transforms tragedy into fetishised merchandise, stripping stories of humanity. A world where someone can auction off a killer's drawing while a victim's family battles PTSD is more than exploitative—it's grotesque.

Families report feeling trapped in a loop, re-traumatised each time the story resurfaces. The grief never fades when the internet won't let it. Each "based on a true story" retelling chips away at closure, especially when the details are wrong, the tone is insensitive, or the context is missing. Meanwhile, perpetrators' families are caught between personal loyalty and public condemnation. This type of mourning resembles what Boss (1999) describes as "ambiguous loss," where emotional closure is impossible due to the unresolved or socially unacknowledged nature of the grief. Their pain is complex and largely invisible. Without support or recognition, they're left to suffer in silence, navigating emotional terrain no one wants to talk about.

The thirst for content has driven the genre into disturbing territory. Creator Stephanie Soo, once criticised for pairing murder stories with mukbangs, eventually shifted her approach after criticism—now focusing on research-based reporting. Her evolution highlights a key point: creators have immense power. They influence how audiences perceive stories, how families are remembered, and how victims are honoured. This is not to say that all true crime is inherently exploitative—well-researched, consent-based storytelling can spotlight injustice and prompt reform. But without careful framing, even well-intentioned content becomes exploitative.

Chadee et al. (2019) found that frequent exposure to true crime media can distort public perception—cultivating exaggerated fear of crime, mistrust, and even support for harsher criminal policies. Meanwhile, romanticised portrayals of figures like Ted

Bundy—whose media depictions have rendered him a near-icon—risk shifting public empathy toward the perpetrator rather than the victim (Moore, 2019). This is more than bad taste. It is a narrative imbalance that reinforces fear, desensitises audiences, and erodes empathy for real people.

True crime isn't inherently harmful. It can educate, memorialise, and even drive reform. But when it prioritises profit over people, it veers into exploitation. Consent isn't just a legal formality—it's a moral one. Before clicking "play" or sharing a trending story, ask: was this told with care? Did the people who lived this tragedy agree to relive it publicly? If not, what are we endorsing?

True crime does not end when the credits roll. For some, it never ends. It echoes: across headlines, across years, across generations. We owe it to the grieving, the forgotten, the shamed, and the silenced to consume more consciously. Listen more carefully. Speak more gently. And above all, do no harm.

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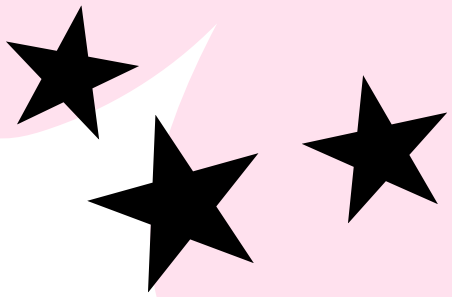
Perfectionism and Anxiety

The Hidden Cost of "Almost Perfect"

Written by Gia Linh Hoang
Edited by Gabrielle Morgan



Do you recognize these well-meaning encouragements?

"Just keep going, you're so close" Or perhaps: "Everyone else can do this, surely you can too."

We constantly encounter these motivational nudges toward excellence. But what happens when these encouragements transform into expectation? In this article, we'll unpack the mechanism of perfectionism and see whether this trait genuinely enhances human performance and wellbeing, or if it might be holding us back in the ways we've never imagined.

Perfectionism has been increasingly viewed as a common personality trait that manifests both individually and socially. According to Antony et al. (1998,) perfectionism means having the drive to achieve a goal in the highest possible standard, and excessively harsh self-criticism regarding one's performance. Perfectionists are those who believe that they must achieve perfect performance regardless of their unrealistic standard, and for them, anything short of excellence is considered inadequate, and that they pay more attention to things that suggest their failure of meeting the standards (Antony et al., 1998.)

Perfectionism has a deep philosophical root (Bradford and G., 2015.) he grandfather of perfectionism, Aristotle, suggested that each person has their own virtue or excellence (arete) that is closely connected to our human nature, and that fulfillment depends on cultivating flourishing (eudaimonia) and and improving things that are going to be our distinctive excellences. In Aristotle's view, striving for perfection also means striving to thrive, to maximize our potential and live our life to the fullest, and this view contributes to building a large part of our current societal expectations.

Saboonchi and Lundh (1997) has classified perfectionism into self-oriented perfectionism and socially perceived perfectionism. Socially prescribed perfectionism, however, have twice of the effect more than self-oriented perfectionism, which the pressure comes from people in the society as a whole, or individuals around the perfectionists, ranging from friends, family, to seniors at schools, or a prodigy influencer we never meet on Instagram. Socially prescribed perfectionists believe that the society always demands expectations of perfection upon them in various fields or areas. This external pressure to be flawless extends beyond achievement contexts, encompassing to be an ongoing burden.

Perfectionism can be caused by various factors. One leading theory by Hassan et al. (2012),

suggested that this trait develops in individuals who are sensitive and fearful to signals of punishment and non-reward. Hassan et al. (2012)'s research examined perfectionism among students has revealed that those in collectivist cultures often strive to conform to societal norms and gain acceptance by meeting the communal standards and expectations. This pattern extends to parental relationships as well, with students pursuing academic excellence and achievements based on their belief that such success represents a form of repayment to their parents (Hassan et al., 2012.) Through this psychological process, uncomfortable feelings of panic become triggered and anxiety symptoms become more apparent. Additionally, the cognitive theories of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) also provide insight into how perfectionism develops through self-focused and compulsive tendencies (Antony et al., 1998.) Research has shown that perfectionism levels are notably elevated among OCD patients, primarily due to persistent "concern over mistakes" and "doubts about actions." These tendencies manifest in repetitive behaviors aimed at addressing specific obsessions (e.g. uncertainty about proper task completion) and compulsivity (e.g. continuing to wash until it feels "just right") (Antony et al., 1998).

From a societal perspective, perfectionists are frequently held up as models for society. People with dedication to heightened ambition and those who seek better performances to meet higher standards are highly valued, especially in today's performance-focused society. Rice andPreusser (2002) has investigated perfectionists' different problem solving approaches, and they have concluded that there are two types of approaches. Those with a more positive approach and the goal of earning higher life satisfaction using active coping styles and perceived social support are called adaptive or normal perfectionism (Rice and Preusser., 2002.) This coping style lowers levels of external control, depression, suicidal ideation, self-blame, and perceived hassles.

On the other hand, people who practice maladaptive or neurotic perfectionism perceive pressure from others to be perfect as a motivation (Rice and Preusser., 2002.) People with this trait tend to have more negative reactions to perceived failures and misgivings about performance abilities. This approach is linked with multiple psychopathological conditions, including state and trait anxiety (Flett et al., 2004.) In several clinical samples, students, especially in ego-involving situations as well as with a host of rumination and irrational fears are the most prevalent group that showed a highly significant correlation to socially prescribed perfectionism (Rice and Preusser., 2002; Flett et al., 2004.) Several studies reported perfectionism to be correlated with patients who have panic disorder or panic disorder with agoraphobia (Flett et al., 2004;) and people with perfectionism often have social anxiety, which symptoms consist of concerns over mistakes, doubts about action, and parental expectation and criticism (Antony et al., 1998.)

While society continues to celebrate the perfectionistic drive that pushes innovation and excellence, we must recognize how damaging and harmful this pursuit can take. The most valuable thing is not whether perfectionism is inherently "good" or "bad," but rather how we use perfectionism as a healthy motivation for success. The next time you hear those “toxic-positivity” encouragements, consider what these expectations truly serve. The most efficient human functioning may not come from perfect performance, but from compassion over criticism, and eudaimonia, the fulfillment of embracing growth and self-improvement despite our imperfections.

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THE DEVIL WEARS RETINOL

HOW HOLLYWOOD'S ANTI-AGING OBSESSION WARPS OUR VIEW OF GROWING OLDER

Written by Siena Maselli *Edited* by Tayla Silverthorne

"Have you ever dreamt of a better version of yourself? Younger, more beautiful, more perfect?" If you've seen 'The Substance' (2024), this haunting question might sound familiar. But beyond the screen, what does this ideal reveal about our cultural discomfort with aging? This article explores how Hollywood's obsession with youth and perfection reinforces society's unease with aging and perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards through celebrity influence. In a world dominated by media and popular culture, understanding how these cultural attitudes shape individual body image is crucial to addressing the stigma surrounding aging.

In the twenty-first century, youthfulness has remained the epitome of beauty, fostering an obsession with appearing younger and reinforcing the stigmatisation of aging, especially for women, as youthful appearances are considered a "permanent influential component of facial attractiveness". Historical roots of beauty can be traced back to ancient civilisations, as demonstrated in Egypt and Greece, where appearance was linked to divinity, social status and identity. These ideals evolved to reflect changing values and attitudes, notably in the post-war era of the 1940s and 1950s. During this period, Hollywood stars served as the foundation for style and beauty, characterised by glamour and sophistication, with figures like Marilyn Monroe and Audrey Hepburn (Figure 1.1). This has intensified pressure on women to maintain youthfulness, as societal attitudes often equate aging with diminished value in society; consequently, "women are likely to have greater concerns about growing older and hold more negative views of aging." This contrasts with their male Hollywood counterparts, as female actors "over 40 [lose] access to 75% of leading roles, while male actors' careers continue into their 40s and beyond." This disparity highlights the societal demand for women to maintain youthful vitality to remain relevant in Hollywood, while men continue to benefit from professional longevity and desirability, regardless of age. The narrative of 'looking younger' is highly prominent in, and exacerbated

by contemporary Hollywood, mainstream media and the rise of cosmetic procedures. The emergence of Hollywood movie stars and fashion models in film, television, and the print media creates 'ideal' images accessible to wider society, and collectively uphold unrealistic beauty norms for women. Hollywood increasingly emphasised cosmetic procedures, with aging actors turning to appearance-enhancing methods to maintain relevance in a youth-driven industry. This signifies the pervasive influence of anti-aging values that compel celebrities to undergo body modification procedures beyond traditional makeup and styling. Feminist media scholar Michelle Meagher notes that for women, "the maintenance of the [body's] youthful appearance has become a lifelong project that requires increasing levels of work." The social acceptance and normalisation of youthfulness has made cosmetic procedures widespread among celebrities, including facelifts, lip enhancements and injections such as Botox (Botulinum Toxin), as well as dermal fillers, chemical peels and laser resurfacing to achieve a socially acceptable appearance. Actress Courteney Cox, known for her role in Friends, has openly reflected on her experience with cosmetic procedures, expressing regret for using facial fillers and having them dissolved. She called it her "biggest beauty regret" and admitted, "I wish I hadn't caved into the pressure" (Figure 1.2). This underscores the persistent pressure in Hollywood to resist aging, often driving women to pursue treatments to maintain relevance and appeal in contemporary beauty culture.

Figure 1.2 Actress Courteney Cox before and after undergoing cosmetic procedures

The globalisation of communication technologies, particularly social media, has amplified youth-centric ideals by fostering an environment in which celebrities are held accountable or scrutinised for how they present themselves, as the dynamic interaction between media and consumers reinforces societal pressures and public criticism. The evolving relationship between "artist, fan, fandom and online audience," highlights how users now position themselves as public narrators and active participants in online discourse. This shift has contributed to phenomena such as cancel culture, where online communities play a central role in upholding social norms and expectations surrounding celebrity aging. For instance, public criticism directed at figures like actress Millie Bobby Brown, who has been condemned for 'looking older', reveals how digital platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, contribute to a culture which enforces unrealistic expectations of youthfulness. This phenomenon disproportionately affects women, reinforcing age-based beauty standards in the digital age. Undeniably, beauty standards rooted in Hollywood's portrayal of youth are increasingly infiltrating broader society, normalising anti-aging practices and shaping individuals' self perception. Unrealistic depictions of women in film and media distort perception-

s of beauty and identity, with the idolisation of 'ageless' celebrities reinforcing unattainable ideals. Parasocial relationships, whereby an individual feels intimately connected to a public figure who remains unaware of their existence, can compromise identity development, as individuals internalise the values projected by celebrities who seemingly defy natural aging. This exerts a significant psychological impact on the well-being of broader society. Constant exposure to high-profile celebrities who portray themselves as 'ageless' creates powerful visual standards; as one scholar notes, "such images permits perception of beauty based on that visualised experience." This redefinition of beauty fosters feelings of anxiety, shame and inadequacy associated with the aging of one's own body. According to a 2023 study published in the Journal of Technology in Behavioural Science, 70% of women aged 18-29 reported that they had, or would consider cosmetic procedures, illustrating how an appearance-oriented society inextricably links self-worth to physical youthfulness and one's conformity to unattainable ideals.

In summary, the cultural idealisation of youth in Hollywood and popular culture has profoundly influenced how aging is both perceived and experienced. The perpetuation of celebrity beauty standards continue to be reinforced through the role of cosmetic procedures, digital media and parasocial relationships. These ideals have played a critical role in shaping broader societal attitudes, as well as individual self-perception. While some changes toward inclusivity and authenticity have begun to emerge, the pressure to maintain a youthful appearance persists across both celebrities and individuals spheres. Therefore, recognising these patterns is essential to understanding the broader psychological impact of age-related beauty standards in contemporary society.

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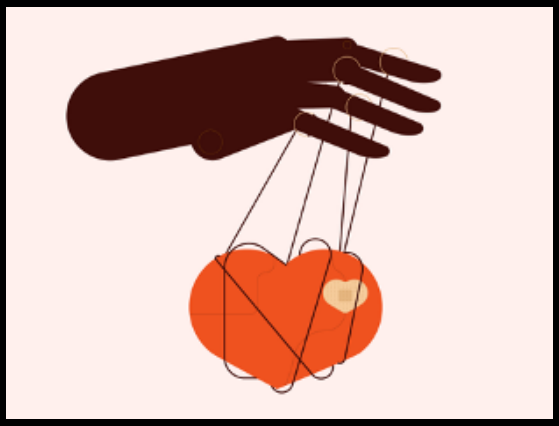
GHOSTED AND BOMBED

THE DARK PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND MODERN DATING GAMES

LOVE BOMBING ISN'T JUST INTENSE FLIRTING; IT'S MANIPULATION DRESSED UP AS A ROMANCE.

WRITTEN BY RHEA BHATTI
EDITED BY FANXI (AUDREY) YE



It is defined as excessive attention, flattery, and affection during the early stages of a relationship, often utilised to overwhelm someone emotionally and create fast-tracked intimacy (Cleveland Clinic, n.d.). While it can feel flattering at first, constant texts, big compliments, and over-the-top declarations, psychologists warn that it is red flags, not a fairytale beginning. Research shows that love bombing is commonly linked to narcissistic personality traits. Narcissists may use this tactic to seek admiration and self-assurance (Miller, 2018). A recent study found that childhood emotional abuse and neglect can increase the risk of love addiction, especially in people with vulnerable narcissism traits (Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 2024). For university students, this can feel like a whirlwind romance that suddenly flips.

You're constantly validated, only to later realise the attention was more about control than care. This manipulation can chip away at your self-efficacy in relationships, leaving you second-guessing your instincts and boundaries (Investigation of the Relationship Between University Students' Love Bombing and Ghosting Experiences, 2024). At Macquarie, I've heard peers quietly admit how hard it is to tell when affection turns toxic. That's what makes love bombing so dangerous; it hides behind charm.

And in an age where validation comes in pings and hearts, it's easy to mistake intensity for intimacy. But when someone ignores your discomfort or pushes past your boundaries after youspeak up, that's not passion. That's control. Ghosting is one of the most emotionally jarring experiences in modern dating. One moment, someone is texting you goodnight: the next, they're gone, no explanation, no closure, just digital silence. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, ghosting is "a way of ending a relationship with someone suddenly by stopping all communication with them." It might sound like a passive way to cut ties, but the psychological toll can be intense. A study by Navarro et al. (2020) found that ghosting often leads to increased feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and lower life satisfaction. While some individuals eventually recover, especially when the event occurred long ago,

repeated experiences of ghosting can compound emotional damage and foster maladaptive coping strategies. Ghosting is often used in short-term or low-commitment relationships, but its impact can extend far beyond the relationship itself. In fact, more than 47% of ghosting events reported in one study happened in relationships lasting over five years, challenging the idea that ghosting only happens in casual flings (Ghosting: Social Rejection Without Explanation, 2024). Because ghosting lacks communication, it creates an ambiguous space that ghostees are left to fill with self-blame and confusion. This lack of closure can lead to a drop in self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and in some cases, even physiological responses like lowered heart rate and increased blood pressure (Where Did You Go? The Psychological and Physiological Consequences of Ghosting in Romantic Relationships, 2024). Without feedback or explanation, ghosting doesn't just end a relationship, it erases it, leaving the ghostee to grieve someone who's still technically alive but emotionally absent.

So, how can we protect ourselves from getting ghosted or love-bombed in the first place? The first step is learning to recognise the red flags early. In the case of love bombing, it can look like a fairytale romance at first, with constant texting, over-the-top compliments, and rushing intimacy. But as clinical psychologist Dr. Tiani from the Cleveland Clinic explains, if someone reacts poorly

to your boundaries or quickly becomes manipulative when things don't go their way, it's no longer romantic, it's controlling. Similarly, with ghosting, while not always predictable, patterns can emerge. If someone avoids conflict, doesn't take emotional accountability, or struggles with communication, they might be more likely to disappear when things get real. The good news is that coping with these experiences is possible. Reflective practices like journaling or writing about the relationship can help regulate emotions and rebuild self-esteem after ghosting (Miller, 2018). Therapy can also be a powerful tool, especially if someone is dealing with repeated patterns of unhealthy attachment. For more chronic situations like love addiction or being stuck in a cycle of intense highs and painful drop-offs, treatments such as cognitive-behavioural therapy or group psychodrama therapy have shown promise (Carnes et al., 2018). The goal isn't to stop dating altogether, but to slow down, communicate clearly, and notice how someone responds when you express your needs. Healthy love is steady, respectful, and mutual. Spotting those early signs of imbalance might just save you from heartbreak later.

Remember that story I opened with? My friend never got an explanation, just silence, but she learned something powerful: her worth isn't defined by someone else's inconsistency. Ghosting and love bombing might be part of today's dating culture, but they shouldn't be normalised. Recognising red flags and setting healthy boundaries is not just self-protection, it's self-respect. In a world full of digital illusions, we all deserve real connection, honesty, and care. So, if you've been ghosted, bombed, or both, know this: love isn't meant to confuse, manipulate, or hurt. It's meant to feel safe. And you deserve that, always.

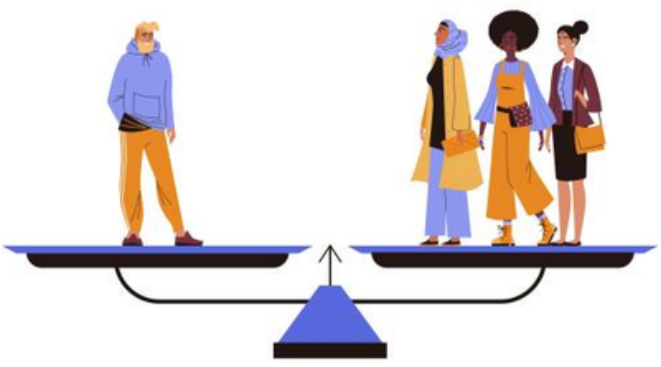
Recognising the Gap in Psychological Diagnosis and Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Females

Written by Gabrielle Morgan
Edited by Gia Linh Hoang

Approximately 80% of females with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) remain undiagnosed or misdiagnosed at 18 years of age (Riches & North, 2024). The difficulty that females face in getting a diagnosis or receiving the correct diagnosis of ASD is an uphill battle.

But what is driving this? Is it because ASD varies significantly based on gender? Is it because Autism can mask itself in young, high-functioning women? Or, can we shift the blame to practitioners, who are biased against diagnosing females? Recent psychological research devastatingly reveals that for those with ASD, females experience much higher suicide rates, compared to males (Hutson & Hutson, 2023). Therefore, whatever the barriers may be, we must address them now, because young women need to obtain an adequate, timely diagnosis and intervention before it is too late. The gap in the diagnosis of ASD across genders is pervasive, with males being three to four times more likely to receive a diagnosis than females (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

ASD is a complex mental disorder that is best understood by reviewing the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). The key diagnostic features include:“persistent impairment in reciprocal social communication and interaction,” (Criterion A) and “restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities,” (Criterion B) (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). The final criteria (C and D), state that these symptoms must occur from early childhood and adversely impact daily functioning. Notably, presentations of ASD vary significantly based on developmental status, age, gender and severity (ranging across three levels with different support needs) – thus accounting for the term Spectrum (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Furthermore, ASD symptoms may be “masked,” meaning, the individual may use coping strategies or compensatory mechanisms, such as mirroring a certain social behaviour, to disguise their psychosocial impairment. Masking is more readily observed in autistic females than autistic males, due to variation in the presentation of ASD symptoms. For example, Autistic females exhibit a heightened ability to disguise social confusion and to mirror reciprocal social interactions, after observing others actions, emotional state or mannerisms (Simcoe et al., 2022). Therefore, in a clinical assessment for Autism, masking can obscure social impairments in females, despite the significant difficulties that they have engaging in genuine social interactions, or regulating emotions and routines, which requires specialised support and interventions (Hutson and Hutson, 2023). Furthermore, the misdiagnosis of females with this condition is evidenced by the finding that approximately 47% of Autistic females (compared to 32% of males), received a preceding diagnosis (for a different mental disorder) that was no longer present post-ASD diagnosis (Martini et al., 2025). Ultimately, there needs to be greater awareness within the psychological community of the variations in clinical presentation of ASD, because young women depend on timely intervention and treatment to relieve the burden of masking and improve quality of life.



Gender bias in ASD diagnosis stems from outdated psychological research, and subsequent societal expectations, which prevents females from obtaining a critical diagnosis, especially as young adults. Thompson et al. (2003) echoes this notion in concluding that "most of what we believe we know about autism is actually about males with autism" (p. 351). In their review of studies from 1990-2002, on average, approximately 80% of all Autism study samples were male (Thompson et al., 2003). Furthermore, between 2000 and 2002, only 2% of Autism studies measured gender differences through the analysis of dependent variables for males and females (Haney, 2016). This staggering gender bias in research samples has resulted in females being placed at a

disproportionately higher risk of not receiving a clinical diagnosis (with a ratio of approximately 3:1), even if they meet the criteria for ASD (Loomes, Hull and Mandy, 2017). One potential explanation for this gender discrepancy could stem from societal expectations or stereotypes of Autism within the psychological profession and broader community. Clinicians (psychiatrists, psychologists etc.) and other professionals like teachers often possess gender stereotypes that Autism is strictly a disorder affecting males (Loomes, Hull and Mandy, 2017). Furthermore, male clinicians may expect females to present with "typical" (i.e. male) Autism traits, thereby fostering a further lack of awareness of the condition in females (Hutson and Hutson, 2023). Evidently, if the psychological profession is plagued with ASD stereotypes, it will affect the clinician's diagnostic ability to detect the condition, especially, the lesser known female Autism phenotype that was identified in 1992, for those with 'normal intelligence' and mild Autism severity (Haney, 2016).

ASD doesn't present itself as a static stereotypical condition, it's positioned on a spectrum. Therefore, the absence, delay and misdiagnosis of Autism in females isn't just a failure of scientific research samples or diagnostic frameworks, it's a failure with fatal consequences for young girls and women living with the burden of an untreated condition. This article will raise awareness for the psychological community and broader public, for the reasons behind this gender discrepancy – such as the biological sex differences in the clinical presentation of ASD, the outdated, male-dominanted study samples and the male-oriented stereotypes. Ultimately, there is an urgent need to raise awareness of this gender gap in ASD diagnosis and clinicians must work relentlessly to mitigate it.

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The Feminisation of Education

Why some degrees are considered "worse"

BONUS EDUCATION ARTICLE

Written by Jasmine Wang **Edited by Alveena Khan**

Why are STEM degrees highly regarded while ones in Arts and Humanities are treated as a consolation prize? The answer might have less to do with job prospects—and more to do with gender. As university students increasingly face pressure to choose "employable" degrees, understanding the social and economic biases behind how we rank fields of study is more relevant than ever. The feminisation of career pathways intersects education, gender, and class—relating to students, educators, and policymakers alike given the upcoming cuts in financing MQ courses. Challenging these perceptions can pave the way for greater equity in both academic and professional environments.

The perceived value of university degrees is often influenced by misogynistic stereotypes, particularly how female-dominated degrees are considered “easier” or “silly” whereas male-dominated degrees like engineering, finance, and IT are perceived to be harder and contribute more to society. A main reason for this is the historical and sociological roots of "feminised" fields and their devaluation as a result.

The historical and sociological roots of feminised fields, and their persistent devaluation, can be traced through a complex web of gendered assumptions, capitalist labor structures, and academic hierarchies that have long prioritised male-dominated disciplines.

Source: The MET Museum Free Public Domain image for Personal and Business use

From the Enlightenment era onward, as feminist thought began to interrogate the gendered distribution of power and knowledge, it became increasingly evident that certain types of work, particularly those involving care, communication, and education—were not just associated with women, but actively devalued because of their association with femininity (Kumar, 2023). In the modern university system, this manifests as a stark contrast in the perceived value of degrees: while STEM subjects are hailed as prestigious and economically "rational" choices, fields such as education, humanities, and the arts are dismissed as indulgent or secondary. This is not merely a reflection of labor market realities, but a product of deep-rooted gender biases that shape both cultural narratives and funding decisions.

Historically, the division of labor under industrial capitalism entrenched the separation between public and private spheres—men were positioned in the public sphere of paid work and politics, while women were relegated to the private domain of unpaid care and domesticity (Kumar, 2023). As women entered the workforce, they were often funneled into roles that mirrored their traditional caregiving duties—teaching, nursing, social work—jobs that were essential to society but structurally undervalued. According to UNESCO (2021), women remain overrepresented in fields such as teaching, caregiving, and the humanities across the globe. These areas are consistently underfunded, and their societal contributions are marginalised in public discourse and policy. The feminisation of these fields is not just a demographic pattern; it is causally linked to their diminished status and wage outcomes. UNESCO highlights how this contributes to persistent gender wage gaps and reinforces broader societal undervaluing of care work—an issue not only of economic disparity but of systemic gender injustice.

The Grattan Institute (2020) supports this analysis in the Australian context, showing that degrees in health and education—fields where women are the overwhelming majority—lead to consistently lower average salaries and are perceived as less prestigious, regardless of job satisfaction or societal importance. This contradiction reveals a disjunction between social value and economic value, one that is fundamentally gendered. Despite the crucial roles these professions play in public health and knowledge formation, they are treated as "soft" disciplines. The consequence is a policy landscape where funding cuts disproportionately affect feminised fields, such as those recently proposed at Macquarie University, thus exacerbating inequalities in access to education and narrowing the range of legitimate academic inquiry.

The devaluation of feminised fields also intersects with class, race, and other markers of social stratification. As the Evolution of Feminist Thought and Tracing Feminism's Roots articles argue, the rise of feminist sociology has consistently challenged the male-centric model of knowledge production, pushing back against assumptions that objectivity, rationality, and technological mastery are the highest forms of intellectual achievement (Kumar, 2023). Feminist scholars have long critiqued how power and legitimacy in academia are distributed along gendered lines, privileging fields that align with capitalist productivity over those that

center relational, emotional, and ethical dimensions of human experience. These critiques are not merely academic; they illuminate how structural inequalities are reproduced through educational institutions and cultural hierarchies.

This gendered hierarchy is also internal to disciplines themselves. For instance, in the arts, as Vara (2015) explores in Feminization of Art Education, the field has shifted toward a more inclusive and collaborative model under the influence of feminist pedagogy. However, this transformation has also made it vulnerable to further marginalisation, as the field becomes seen as "soft" and less intellectually rigorous.

Similarly, the increasing presence of women in sociology, as discussed in Sociology as a Female Preserve, has coincided with a redirection of the discipline toward feminist perspectives. Yet this feminisation, while intellectually enriching, has paradoxically been accompanied by diminished institutional support and prestige (Bucior and Sica, 2018).

Thus, the feminisation and devaluation of certain academic fields are not coincidental but reflect long standing social hierarchies embedded within our economic, educational, and cultural systems. Understanding these dynamics is crucial at a time when students are urged to pursue "employable" degrees and universities face cuts that disproportionately affect already undervalued disciplines.

To reimagine a more equitable academic landscape, it is essential to challenge the gendered logic that underpins the ranking of disciplines—not just for the sake of academic diversity, but to dismantle broader patterns of inequality that extend far beyond the classroom.

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